PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1994–95

COMPRISING PERIOD
20 March—5 April 1995

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THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY–FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY–FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 257

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1994–95

House of Commons

Monday 20 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

1. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps have been taken by his Department to ensure that up-to-date information is supplied by his Department's local offices to local authorities and to claimants, with particular respect to housing benefit claimants. [12988]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): We have introduced agreements between local authorities and Benefits Agency offices setting out the service to be delivered. Such agreements now exist in all Benefits Agency offices. Additionally, as part of a special exercise, seven local authorities now have direct computer access to income support information via a Benefits Agency operator. The results of this have been very encouraging.

Mr. Hughes: I am sure that that is helpful progress. Does the Minister agree that it is unhelpful when inaccurate or outdated information is either held by the DSS or sent by it to local authorities because such information often prejudices the rights of tenants who may be shown as being in arrears and thus prevented from having a transfer or disadvantaged in other ways? Will the Minister look at that to make sure that the incidence of such happenings is reduced as far as possible or eliminated altogether?

Mr. Evans: Clearly, the issuing of outdated or otherwise inaccurate information is a serious matter which can indeed prejudice claimants and we always bear in mind the need to prevent it as far as possible.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that housing benefit currently costs the taxpayer £10 billion and that it is one of the most rapidly growing social security benefits? Will he also confirm that in the London borough of Barnet people can receive £250 a week or £13,000 a year in housing benefit? That distorts the housing market, is a disincentive for people to work and may well be given to tenants who pay no rent at all, thus denying the landlord that benefit.

Mr. Evans: The answer to my hon. Friend's first proposition is yes. He gives the example of rents in Barnet being met by the taxpayer at the rate of £250 per week in housing benefit. That is why we seek to introduce a reasonable limit in the case of above-average rents.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Minister not realise that it is the landlord and not the tenant who gets all this money? The Minister might ask himself why rents have gone up to such an extent that we have to pay so much housing benefit.

Mr. Evans: Of course it is the landlord who gets the money. No doubt the hon. Gentleman would agree that the right to what is, in effect, an open-ended commitment to private landlords—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You did it.

Mr. Evans: The system has been extremely successful in promoting the private sector, but there must be some limit to it. That is why we are introducing these proposals.

3. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are eligible for housing benefit. [12990]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Some 4,667,000 people were receiving housing benefit in August 1994. The latest estimate of take-up was in 1992 when, of those who from the family expenditure survey data appeared to be entitled to claim housing benefit, between 88 and 93 per cent. were doing so.

Mr. Cunningham: Is the Minister aware that he has not given the most up-to-date estimate of people taking up housing benefit? Is he aware that in Coventry a combination of reductions in housing benefit and the jobseeker's allowance can cost many people up to £100 a week in lost income?

Mr. Lilley: I am not quite sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. I have given the most recent figure—the figure at the middle of last year—for the number of people receiving housing benefit. Large numbers receive it, but a few do not claim it although they appear to have entitlement and are able to do so if they wish. None of the changes that we are making would prevent them from doing that. We are ensuring that those who choose to occupy properties with above-average rents for such properties in a particular area make some contribution to the rent or, alternatively, occupy less expensive property or negotiate a lower rent with the landlord.

Mr. Brazier: What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that councils weed out illegal immigrants from among those to whom they pay housing benefit? Has he seen the recent story in *Private Eye* about Hackney council and the supposed allocation of many council properties to illegal immigrants to whom, if the story is true, the taxpayer is presumably paying housing benefit?

Mr. Lilley: Illegal immigrants are not entitled to benefits, in or out of *Private Eye*. We expect local authorities to investigate and to pursue vigorously cases of fraud and not to facilitate it. As of last year, persons from abroad, as they are known in the lugubrious language of my Department—that is, those who enter this country legally, but on condition that they are not a burden on public funds—are no longer entitled to claim housing benefit.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State agree that the best way to reduce the cost of housing benefit would be to bring back rent controls and to stop the millionaires making a killing out of housing benefit, misery and poverty?

Mr. Lilley: That would only transfer subsidy from people in need to bricks and mortar indiscriminately. At the same time, it would destroy the private rented sector because it costs money to have low rents in publicly funded housing. If one destroys the private rented sector, one does not have a private rented sector. One of the successes of our policy in recent years has been to reverse the long-term decline of the private rented sector, which was smaller in this country than in any of our European Community partner countries.

Family Benefits

4. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receive family credit; and how many received family income supplement in 1978-79. [12991]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): In July 1994, some 572,000 families were receiving family credit compared with some 78,000 receiving family income supplement in March 1979.

Mr. Sims: Are those figures not a striking demonstration of the success of the Government's policy of directing money to those most in need? My hon. Friend will be aware of my correspondence with his office about a recent decision by a social security commissioner which has had the effect of depriving certain school workers, who work limited hours, of family credit. My constituent was not entitled to income support either. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to change the law to correct that anomaly? If so, how soon will the law be changed and will it be retrospective? Can he assure me that people like my constituent will not be out of pocket at the end of the day?

Mr. Burt: To answer the last part of the question first, the original policy intention was that school workers should have their pay averaged over a term rather than over 52 weeks, for obvious reasons. The commissioner's decision put that interpretation at risk. Accordingly, we have already laid regulations, which will take effect on 11 April, giving effect to the original policy intention so that school ancillary workers will not be disadvantaged. The law cannot be retrospective, so it will apply from that date, but the regulations should help my hon. Friend's constituent and others in the future.

On my hon. Friend's first point, the figures are a vindication of our policy of trying to improve the situation for people getting back into work. That is most important and it is one of the reasons why this country has the most successful policies on getting back into work compared with all our European neighbours.

Dr. Godman: Family credit is a social welfare subsidy for those who are paid disgracefully low wages, often by unscrupulous employers. May I urge on the Minister the need to ensure that such credit is paid quickly when claimants make a successful application for it? Too many of my constituents have had to wait far too long for that credit to be paid to them.

Mr. Burt: On the latter point, the present fast-track family credit procedure helps about 75,000 claims a year to be processed very quickly. We are introducing a pilot project intended, over a period, to deal with some 400,000 cases a year in which we expect to see family credit claims cleared extremely quickly. That will help to cover the situation that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, a report in January 1995 from the Institute for Employment Research said that the availability of family credit had no effect whatever on the wages being offered. Family credit is a supplement for those who need it and an encouragement for people to get back into work. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman and I would share the view that that was an important objective for us all.

Mr. Rowe: Can my hon. Friend give us an idea how much has been spent in total on family credit? From the evidence of my postbag, the number of people who complain that it is not worth their while to get back to work has fallen off very sharply and I seldom receive such letters now. Will my hon. Friend continue to press policy in the direction of eradicating the differential between benefits which are too high and wages which encourage people to go back to work?

Mr. Burt: The total amount of money paid through the family credit policy since 1988 is some £4.5 billion. That reflects payment of some 5.7 million awards as time has gone on. It has been a successful policy. We have increased the number of hours people are able to work. By adding the child care disregard recently, we have further added to the policy.

On my hon. Friend's second question, the whole point is that the best relief of all for poverty is ensuring that people are in employment. Anything which can be done to encourage and support that should be done. The present Government have seen some 600,000 come off the unemployment register in the past two years and family credit has certainly played its part in that.

Habitual Residence Test

5. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reports he has received about British citizens being denied benefits under the habitual residence test. [12992]

Mr. Lilley: I have received correspondence on this matter both from hon. Members and from other individuals and organisations.

Mr. Madden: Does the Secretary of State agree that when the test was introduced the House never envisaged that it would be applied to British citizens? Does he realise that many British citizens who originate from overseas perceive the test as part of this country's immigration controls? Will he address his reply to the question that I have asked about British citizens and not to Canadian backpackers with British citizens as grandparents?

Mr. Lilley: The regulation was always intended to apply to anyone who was not habitually resident in this country, who had severed his connections with this country and chosen to live elsewhere or who had been born and brought up elsewhere. That includes people who—technically—have British citizenship because they have British grandparents, but who may have been born and bred in Canada, who come here on working holidays, as the hon. Member kindly reminded us, and expect the British taxpayer to pay for their benefit. Surely the hon. Gentleman or, indeed, any hon. Member cannot believe that that is right. The extraordinary thing is that the Labour party opposes every measure that we introduce to stop abuse of the benefits system and then tries to get us to amend the measures in ways which are incompatible with the European Community law, to which it normally wishes to make us subservient.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that many of the so-called British citizens who are denied benefit under the habitual residence test have very little connection with the United Kingdom and that some have never visited this country before? Does he agree that we should limit benefits to those people who have demonstrated a commitment to this country?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that my hon. Friend's view will be widely supported in the country. People believe that benefits should be available primarily for those who live and have their residence in this country and who contribute through the tax system directly and indirectly to the cost of welfare, and that benefit should not be available to those who have chosen to live elsewhere, to pay taxes to other people and to be dependent on benefits there.

Ms Lynne: Following the woefully inadequate reply to the question asked by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), does the Secretary of State accept that, although we all want to stamp out benefit tourism, British citizens are being caught in the net? Those who go away to work for a couple of years or who go to live abroad with their husbands and come back to this country because their marriages have broken down face destitution. Will the Secretary of State at least guarantee to look at the legislation again and take into account those particular British citizens who are suffering?

Mr. Lilley: On the hon. Lady's second point, as with all new measures, we are committed to keep this measure under close review to see how it works in practice. I assure her, however, that the vast majority of those affected are not British citizens. As for those who are technically British citizens, they are rarely in the circumstances that the hon. Lady described. Nevertheless, we shall of course keep the regulations under review.

Mr. Congdon: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the changes simply bring us into line with other European countries where it is not possible for foreigners to claim benefits as of right? Is it not entirely right to put the interests of the British taxpayer before the interests of those people?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right in that most continental countries have a residence system and only people with residence permits in those countries are entitled to the equivalent of income support there. No country in the European Community is entitled to discriminate on the basis of nationality, as the Opposition appear to wish us to do.

Mr. Bradley: When will the Secretary of State answer two simple questions which he has so far failed to answer on the Floor of the House or in parliamentary replies? How many British citizens have won their appeals against the decision to deny benefit under the habitual residence test and what reasons were given for their winning those appeals? If the Secretary of State is so sure that it is simply a matter of benefit tourism, will he give those answers today—or will the deafening silence continue, with many claimants being denied benefit and suffering severe hardship as a consequence?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member will know that I cannot, off the cuff, give the result of every appeal and the reasons for it, but I will respond to questions tabled by the hon. Gentleman as soon as the information becomes available. He would not expect me to do otherwise. There is an appeals system and it is right that there should be one. If people disagree with the judgment, they can take the matter to appeal. That would merely be a measure of how successful the appeal system is.

Private Pension Funds

6. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount of funds in

private pension provision in the United Kingdom; and what is the equivalent figure for the two next largest European Union countries. [12993]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. James Arbuthnot): In 1992, the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom was around £500 billion. That is more than three times the amount in any other European Union country.

Mrs. Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. This is an area in which we appear to be doing much better than our European partners. Can my hon. Friend confirm that more than 65 per cent. of people retiring now have occupational pensions, and that the Pensions Bill will mean greater confidence in occupational schemes so that personal schemes will be more attractive to many people, thus improving financial security in old age?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can indeed confirm that. My hon. Friend is quite right. This is an area in which European and other countries are looking to us to take the lead. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that recently retired pensioners have been retiring with an occupational pension of around £100 a week on top of their state retirement pension.

Mr. Fraser: Is there not something seriously wrong when the initial charge on a pension contribution is equivalent to the first two years' yield on that contribution and when, in addition, the annual management charges take a substantial part of the yield? Are not a few people making a lot of money out of millions of pensioners?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government have made it plain that people must be able to judge for themselves which pension to take out. That is why we introduced, from 1 January this year, the requirement that there should be full disclosure of the amount of charges so that people can make their own choices.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Recognising the United Kingdom's excellent record in respect of occupational pensions compared with its European counterparts, does my hon. Friend agree that one reason why in the past 15 years pensioners in this country have seen their incomes rise on average by 50 per cent. compared with an average of 30 per cent. is precisely because so many of them have made provision for their retirement through an occupational pension?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The additional flexibility that we are providing, partly in the Pensions Bill, and which we have been providing over the years, has attracted people to providing for themselves in old age. That has never proved attractive to the Labour party.

Mr. Ingram: When Ministers talk about personal pensions, they sound like seedy street traders saying, "Never mind the quality, feel the width." Why do the Government continue to over-promote the benefits of personal pensions when it is known that an estimated 1.5 million people have been wrongly advised to leave their occupational pension scheme and up to 2.5 million low-paid workers have been wrongly advised to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in favour of a personal pension plan? Given the nature and extent of the scandal, why have the Government introduced further measures in the Pensions Bill actively to encourage even more people into personal pensions and away from well-run and well-funded occupational schemes?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I did not realise that I sounded like a street trader. The Securities and Investments Board has identified a problem and has made sure that it will not recur. We believe that it is right that those who are found to have suffered from mis-selling should be given redress. Appropriate personal pensions are right for some people. In many cases, they are the only thing for people. That is one of the reasons why we want to give more people more flexibility and more choice.

Low-income Households

8. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the bottom decile of income distribution had (a) a fridge-freezer, (b) a car and (c) a video recorder in 1979; and how many have them currently. [12995]

Mr. Burt: Ninety-eight per cent. of households in the bottom decile of income have a fridge or fridge-freezer now, compared with 88 per cent. in 1979; 53 per cent. now have a car, compared with 40 per cent. in 1979; and 65 per cent. have video recorders, which very few possessed in 1979.

Mr. Arnold: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who was not here to ask Question 7, had been present in the Chamber he would have learnt a great deal from the answer that the Minister has just given, which spoke for itself about the average income of people in that decile? Will my hon. Friend inform the House what has happened to the average incomes of people in that decile and what proportion of that decile is made up of pensioners?

Mr. Burt: There are a couple of important things about the bottom decile of income. It is always there: there is always a bottom 10 per cent. of income, no matter when or where we are. What matters is its composition. Since 1979, pensioners as a group have tended to come out of that decile, partly due to the increased amount of benefit from pensions and what has been achieved in that respect. For the bottom decile as a whole, housing costs have been at a standstill in relation to income. As we all know, the bottom decile is not always the same people. The Rowntree report showed that a third of those in the bottom decile in 1990 had moved up to the next decile or even the decile above that within two years.

Mr. Battle: It is tempting to ask the Minister to spell out how many fridge-freezers, cars and videos the top 10 per cent. have each. Is not the truth of the matter that under the Government the incomes of the bottom decile have fallen by 17 per cent. while those of the top 10 per cent. have increased by 63 per cent.? Where is the social justice in that? Would it not be better to give people real job opportunities rather than leave them to waste?

Mr. Burt: I do not think that there is any argument between the two of us or within the House on the last point. The importance of having jobs in the economy and the fact that jobs help those in poverty is paramount. I wish that, instead of just saying that, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends would support some of the measures that we have taken over the years to increase the opportunity of jobs for everyone rather than carping about them, as they have so often done.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware that more than half of those who declare no income at all spend above the average for all other income groups? Does that not prove that there is a lot of nonsense in some of the low income statistics?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. Some 750,000 of the bottom income decile group report nil or negative incomes; yet half of them spend more than the average for the population as a whole. The whole set of statistics is capable of a variety of interpretations. The important point for the House is that there is no fixed group which always stays in the same place. People move throughout the income deciles according to what is happening in their lives. For the Government, the important thing is to make sure that the work that we do to increase the availability of jobs is successful. The fact that Britain has the most successful record in the European Community in terms of getting people back into work in the past couple of years is one that we should all welcome.

Homelessness

9. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's assistance by way of benefits for the homeless. [12996]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): A wide range of benefits, including income support, is available to homeless people, and housing benefit is available to help meet reasonable rents when accommodation has been found.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that changes in housing benefit due to come into effect in October are a source of worry to people involved with the needs of homeless people in Leicester and, I am sure, the rest of the country? Is he aware that the changes are regarded as inadequate and likely to make it more difficult for people to come into affordable housing, and that they will increase the already awful of burden of homelessness in this country? Will the Minister therefore reconsider those changes?

Mr. Hague: No. The changes to housing benefit concern above-average rents for an area, and are most unlikely to have an impact on the homeless. Homeless people are assisted by a wide range of benefits, including income support, and housing benefit will continue to be available to help meet reasonable rents. Community care grants and loans from the discretionary social fund are also available to help meet specific expenses, and the jobseeker's allowance is available to unemployed people—including the homeless—who satisfy the entitlement conditions.

Mr. David Nicholson: Does my hon. Friend accept that the number of people who are seen begging in the streets causes not only distress but great offence? Will he continue to work with other Departments to deal with the problem, which is often caused by drugs and alcoholism as well as by genuine homelessness? Does my hon. Friend agree that parents have a role to play? Does he further agree that if the rackets that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned earlier were dealt with effectively, more money would be available to deal with those who are genuinely homeless?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is quite right to refer to the important role which can be played by parents. He is also right to draw attention to the initiatives of other Departments. My colleagues at the Departments of the Environment and of Health have introduced initiatives to reduce the number of rough sleepers which have met with considerable success. The good news is that the third quarter of last year—the last for which figures are available—showed the tenth successive quarterly reduction in the number of homeless acceptances by local authorities, and the eighth successive quarterly reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Residential Care

10. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding preserved income support payments to residents in care and nursing homes. [12997]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have received some representations recently, both from individuals and from representative bodies, about the income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware of the real difficulties facing many of the 80,000 mainly elderly people whose weekly incomes, including DSS benefits, do not enable them to meet the weekly fees of their care or nursing homes and that many of them end up in local authority care homes due to inability to meet their private care costs? Is it not disgraceful that the Government, having privatised the care of the elderly with such worrying human consequences, are now proposing to remove a vital safety net by taking away from local authorities the duty to provide their own direct part III accommodation for the care of the elderly?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's last point does not follow at all. The private sector can provide the service better and more effectively. The 80,000 cases to which he referred are preserved rights cases.

Mr. Hinchliffe *indicated assent.*

Mr. Evans: I see that the hon. Gentleman nods. Those people were in residential care nursing homes as at 31 March 1993. Local authorities have the power to deal with the situation when such persons face eviction, or have their home closed. In the circumstances with which we are dealing, it is surely not reasonable to expect the public to pay fees at just any rate at all, as some can run to £1,000 a week or more.

Compensation Recovery Unit

11. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had about the operation of the compensation recovery unit; and if he will make a statement. [12998]

Mr. Roger Evans: A number of representations have been received.

Mr. O'Hara: Whether the Minister views the CRU from the conceptual, legal or moral point of view, he will find that its whole basis is fraudulent, that it represents a breach of the national insurance contract with the electorate and that it is one of the meanest contrivances of a mean-minded Government. Will he therefore give a commitment at least to review the many anomalies in a system which impacts so acutely on damaged lives?

Mr. Evans: That is a grossly over-exaggerated statement. The existing system was simply unacceptable and arbitrary and that is why the Public Accounts Committee condemned it. It was a subsidy out of public funds to the negligent and the partly negligent. In the case of disabled people in receipt of mobility or attendance allowance, it was also a system that allowed the whole sum to be deducted in full without any future limit whatsoever. The Government's proposals are an improvement on the existing system. Of course, we will consider the report by the Select Committee on Social Security in due time.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my hon. Friend agree that negligent employers and their insurers should fulfil their responsibilities, rather than pass them on to the taxpayer?

Mr. Evans: Yes.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister confirm that the average sum recovered in the 60,821 cases dealt with between April 1994 and the end of February 1995 was more than £15,000? Even if there is a case for recovery where wage loss is included in the settlement, how can he defend a situation in which the compensation for pain, suffering and loss of facility is clawed back by the Treasury? Is that not indefensible?

Mr. Evans: No. The average sum recovered during the operation of the scheme is a modest £2,200 per case. On the disaggregation of the award or settlement, only a small fraction of the cases are ever fully and properly determined by a judge. That is highly desirable because it saves money for everyone involved and speeds up the settlement process. Any attempt to disaggregate a settlement that was entered into freely is impractical to organise without considerable expense and would not be as satisfactory as a trial in every case, which would be unthinkable.

Post Office Payment System

12. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress of introducing new technology for the delivery of benefits through the post office network. [12999]

Mr. Lilley: Five companies have been selected by Post Office Counters Ltd. and my Department, as potential prime contractors to automate the payment of benefits. Discussions are now taking place with each of the suppliers. In the next few months, consultations will be held with sub-postmasters and organisations representing benefit customers. It is expected that phased installation of equipment in post offices will begin in the spring of next year.

Mr. Bruce: May I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and the good news that the system is moving ahead rapidly, because it will be good for post office viability and the reduction of fraud? Can he assure the House that, before moving to wide-scale use of information technology, the initial installations will be fully trialled and checked out, so that we do not get to the point when information technology delays rather than improves matters, as unfortunately happened with the Child Support Agency and invalidity benefit?

Mr. Lilley: It is expected that, when we put out a contract, there will be a piloting process and a gradual roll out of the facilities through post offices. Post offices are very eager for them to be installed as soon as possible. I agree that it is sensible to learn from initial experience and ensure that we do not run before we can walk.

Mr. Barry Jones: What did the right hon. Gentleman mean by the "lugubrious language of my Department"?

Mr. Lilley: That was on an earlier question, but I was referring to the phrase "persons from abroad" which is used in my Department. It simply means those who come to this country on the strict understanding that they will not be a burden on the public fund.

Benefit Expenditure

14. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure on social security benefits in 1979, 1992 and 1994, at constant prices. [13001]

Mr. Lilley: At today's prices, the figures for total expenditure on social security benefits in 1979, 1992 and 1994 are £47 billion, £79 billion and £85 billion.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures show the Government's commitment to the less well-off members of society? Does he also accept that the lot of the less well-off provides no grounds for complacency?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The figures refute two frequent assertions: first, that we have been cutting back on social security, which we manifestly have not; and, secondly, that there has been no growth in benefits. When one considers where the growth has been coming from and sets aside all benefits to unemployed people, one sees that other benefits, particularly pensions and benefits for the disabled, have still grown. That means that, since 1979, all other benefits have been growing at 3 per cent. a year faster than inflation. We are, however, carrying out a long-term review to ensure that that huge sum of money is focused on those in greatest need and that, in future, growth does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State admit that those figures would show a different basis of comparison, had unemployment remained constant at the figure that the Government inherited in 1979 and had the Government not entered the exchange rate mechanism at the wrong rate and caused a massive increase in unemployment?

Mr. Lilley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman listened to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox). I pointed out that, even if all benefits to unemployed people had been set aside, or held constant at the 1979 level, all the other expenditure on social security—eight ninths of the total—has grown at 3 per cent. a year faster than inflation. That is because of the growing number of retired and elderly people but also because of the increased and new benefits going to disabled people, as well as the growth in invalidity benefit, which, together with housing benefit and benefits to lone parents, is an area that we are tackling.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Racial Offences

30. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions citing a racial element have been brought since the introduction of the Public Order Act 1986. [12978]

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): I have consented to 15 prosecutions for offences under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 since the Act came into force.

Ms Lynne: Given that racially motivated attacks are on the increase, does the Attorney-General accept that, notwithstanding changes to section 5 of the Public Order Act, more prosecutions should be made under section 18, or a new crime of racial harassment introduced, so that the perpetrators of those crimes do not get away with just a fine?

The Attorney-General: Part III of the Act provides a comprehensive selection of offences, which are well placed to cover the events that concern the whole House. The problem in those cases is invariably one of evidence. Provided that the evidence can be obtained—the House will recognise the difficulties—I assure the hon. Lady that there is a strong willingness to prosecute.

Crown Prosecution Service

31. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the prosecution policy of the Crown Prosecution Service. [12979]

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): It is the policy of the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute all offences where the evidence provides a realistic prospect of conviction and it is in the public interest to do so.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister agree that the service provided by the Crown Prosecution Service to carry out those prosecutions is paid for by the state? Does he accept that my constituent, Mr. Allan Green, who has been granted permission to appeal against a previous conviction, has been denied solicitor services and the facilities of a Queen's counsel? Those services will be provided for the Crown Prosecution Service and, therefore, my constituent is at a disadvantage because of the Government's policies on the Crown Prosecution Service and legal aid for those who appeal. Does the Minister agree that there is a bias in favour of the Crown Prosecution Service? Will he take action to ensure that fairness applies in administrating justice and will be seen to apply in the case of Mr. Allan Green?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman has been misinformed about the circumstances surrounding Mr. Green's case. At first instance, Mr. Green had a certificate for two counsel under the legal aid provisions. He could have had a Queen's counsel and a junior, or two juniors; he chose two juniors. When he appealed to the Court of Appeal, the court granted him a certificate for junior counsel. If junior counsel sees fit to write a letter to the Court of Appeal showing that a solicitor's services are necessary for the conduct of the appeal, which is unusual but sometimes necessary, the Court of Appeal has the power to extend the certificate to include the services of a solicitor. Furthermore, if junior counsel writes an opinion saying that the case is one of exceptional difficulty, gravity or complexity, the Court of Appeal has power to extend the legal aid certificate to include the services of Queen's counsel. In that way, the machinery allows absolute equity of representation between the CPS and Mr. Green.

Mr. Batiste: Can my hon. and learned Friend confirm that the CPS is seeking extended rights of audience for its employees in the courts? Does he share the view of many hon. Members and others outside the House that that would be quite wrong in principle?

The Solicitor-General: The matter is being considered at the moment by the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee, chaired by Lord Steyn, who will in due course make the committee's recommendation. That recommendation will then be considered by the designated judges. That machinery has been set up by the House under the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Did the Solicitor-General note the reference in last week's annual report of the Law Commission to the valiant but failed efforts of the Crown Prosecution Service to adapt the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 to the modern world? In particular, did he note the Law Commission's criticism of the waste of time and money of the CPS, practitioners and judges on "obscure and antique Acts"? Surely now is the time for the House and the Government to respond positively to those criticisms of the Law Commission and to simplify the law. Why not begin with the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and the recommendations of the Law Commission?

The Solicitor-General: I read the Law Commission report with great interest having had reason to deal with the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 on many occasions over the years. It is a matter for obvious comment that the language in which it is couched is not the language that people use nowadays. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will also read that report with great interest and will consider whether he should bring proposals to the House for an updating of the law.

War Crimes Act 1991

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to be able to make a statement about progress under the War Crimes Act 1991. [12981]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has referred the cases of seven potential defendants to Treasury counsel for advice. That advice has now been delivered. It is being considered with great care by the CPS and by my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General and myself. I cannot, at this stage, predict whether or when any prosecution will be initiated.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it is high time that decisions were made on those cases? The 1991 Act was passed by the House with a large majority several years ago and it is high time that those cases were brought to trial before the witnesses to those awful offences may die.

The Attorney-General: I quite understand the need for expedition. The evidence and all relevant surrounding circumstances will be examined scrupulously in the light, first, of the expressed will of Parliament and secondly—the House will regard this as being of great importance—in conformity with the proper and necessary requirements of justice.

Mrs. Dunwoody: No one doubts that the Attorney-General is correct to demand proper performances of justice, but he will understand that genocide is not something to be treated lightly; nor can it be ignored. I must ask him to try to expedite the hearings, because, after all these years, speed is the very least that we can offer those who suffered in a way that many of us find inconceivable.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Lady and the House will realise that the police, having been charged with the burden, have carried out a careful examination, which is now being looked at by senior lawyers. The outcome of that examination must then be considered by the CPS, in consultation with my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General and myself. That is the stage that has been reached. There will be no dilly-dallying in the matter, but equally it must be looked at extremely carefully.

Criminal Law Enforcement

35. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General in what ways he discharges his specific responsibilities for the enforcement of the criminal law. [12983]

The Solicitor-General: In discharging our responsibilities for the enforcement of the criminal law in specific cases the Attorney-General and myself act wholly independent of Government.

Mr. Mackinlay: What is the hon. and learned Gentleman going to do about the widespread public perception that white-collar crime is easy to get away with in this country; that there are very few prosecutions and, when there are prosecutions, sentences are wholly inadequate? Is it not an opinion that has some validity that, if one commits a mega-big white-collar crime, one gets away with it whereas, if one is a minnow, one gets prosecuted?

The Solicitor-General: That view is totally misconceived. The Serious Fraud Office deals with a number of cases—approximately 50 at any one time—that formerly were not prosecuted. Very recently, increased power to refer unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal was assigned to my right hon. and learned Friend, so that he can now refer unduly lenient sentences in cases of serious and complex fraud.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Social Development Summit

40. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will take following the world summit for social development in Copenhagen. [13018]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): We are considering the summit's conclusions. We shall study them carefully. We shall continue to have a large aid programme, the object of which is poverty reduction through sustainable development.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Minister accept that one of the recommendations of the summit was to encourage Governments to accept the 20:20 principle? Do he and the Government accept that principle, whereby 20 per cent. of the aid should be spent on social programmes specifically targeted to help, not only the poorest countries, but the poorest people? Does he also accept that there should be a reduction in the percentage of our bilateral aid that is tied from more than two thirds of our aid programme to about a third, which is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average, and which will also help to target aid towards alleviation of poverty?

Mr. Baldry: Our aid programme is poverty-focused. Nine of the 10 largest recipients of our bilateral aid are low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

However, those so-called definitions—20:20 definitions or other definitions of what contributes to poverty reduction—are meaningless unless one understands what is behind them. If there were parts of the hon. Gentleman's constituency that were regularly without electricity or did not have any electricity supply, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would feel that that was a matter of considerable deprivation, but in overseas development terms, projects to enable areas to have secure supplies of power are not within the 20:20 definition. Therefore, unless those definitions are clear, they are meaningless.

The important thing is that we have an aid programme that is essentially focused on relieving poverty and ensuring sustainable development.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend share my worry about whether the multi-million pound jamboree in Copenhagen should have taken place? Does he agree that the money would have been better spent on tackling poverty rather than talking about it?

Mr. Baldry: The facts are that, prior to the Copenhagen summit, Britain had the sixth largest aid budget in the world; after the Copenhagen summit, Britain continues to have the sixth largest aid budget in the world; year on year, an aid budget that is due to grow at a time when many countries, including the United States, Canada and Sweden, are reducing their aid budgets.

One is compelled to ask what has been added to the sum of human knowledge by that summit, which cost $30 million—$30 million that, one suspects, the United Nations could have spent better elsewhere directly on aid.

Miss Lestor: First, before we call what took place in Copenhagen a jamboree, may I draw the attention of the hon. Gentleman to the fact that one of the problems that confronted us in Copenhagen was that we did not send our Prime Minister there, as more than 100 other countries did? In the eyes of many people representing the developing world and other parts of the world, that was regarded as us trying to downgrade the whole position—especially as we sent as our representative the Minister responsible for overseas aid which, however competent that person may be, gave the impression that poverty and social exclusion were nothing whatever to do with this country.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in dismissing the invitation to hold a full-scale debate on the summit, we have opted out of the global perspectives of the summit; we have opted out of trying to consider those matters from a worldwide point of view, not only from a very narrow perspective?

Mr. Baldry: Of all the 118 representatives at the summit, only my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey had the perspicacity to make it clear that free trade is the key to global prosperity, that the full implementation of a general agreement on tariffs and trade is likely to generate more jobs worldwide than any other single international development and that prosperity created by free trade is the key that opens the door to higher social standards. That is why open access to markets is important for all products. My right hon. and noble Friend made it clear that the overriding goal of our aid programme is poverty reduction through sustainable development. I have no doubt that my right hon. and noble Friend's words made a telling contribution towards ensuring that the summit maintained a degree of perspective on what is in the interests of developing countries.

Sierra Leone

41. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian and diplomatic efforts are being made to bring peace to Sierra Leone. [13020]

Mr. Baldry: We have given our strong support to the good offices of the United Nations Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretary-General. We have also allocated more than £0.5 million to the international humanitarian relief effort this financial year.

Mr. Worthington: Just before the tragedies in Rwanda and Burundi, the Foreign Office said that it was not getting too involved with those areas because they were not within Britain's traditional sphere of influence. There is no doubt that Sierra Leone is within Britain's traditional sphere of influence as it is a former British colony. Does the Minister accept responsibility for giving a lead at the United Nations Security Council to ensure that the already deteriorating position, with thousands upon thousands of refugees, does not get worse? Does he accept the responsibility for giving a lead at the UN Security Council?

Mr. Baldry: It may be of interest to the House to know that last Friday we were able to speak by radio to all the British hostages in Sierra Leone and to confirm that they are alive and well. That is the first confirmed proof that all our hostages are alive and is an encouraging sign. We hope to secure their release soon. There is no need for exhortation in the UN Security Council because the UN Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretary-General are both actively engaged in seeking to facilitate progress in Sierra Leone towards peace negotiations. Both the UN Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretary-General have our full support in those initiatives. We are working to bring greater attention to the conflict in Sierra Leone, which we want to see peacefully resolved as quickly as possible. We want the safe release of United Kingdom and other hostages as speedily as possible.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is not the particular tragedy of Africa that far more damage is done by civil war and internecine strife than occurs as a result of natural phenomena?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes a good point. That conflict alone has caused the displacement of more than half a million people and the deaths of 20,000 people. Last Friday the director of Oxfam said:

> "Africans are now more likely to die as a result of internecine wars than at any other time in their long history. These complex emergencies are the result of violent conflicts not natural disasters."

That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is correct to promote in the UN more peacekeeping initiatives in Africa to try to ensure that there are mechanisms to enable African countries to have the capacity to deploy peacekeeping forces quickly and effectively.

Poverty Reduction

42. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase the proportion of overseas aid targeted on poverty reduction. [13021]

Mr. Baldry: All priority objectives for the aid programme are concerned, directly or indirectly, with poverty reduction through sustainable development.

Mr. Wicks: Does the Minister accept that much aid policy, which is reinforced by other policies in the fields of trade and finance, reinforces dependence on aid? Will he consider new aid policy initiatives which attack the causes of poverty?

Mr. Baldry: That is why we are very keen to ensure that all countries have access to free trade and sustainable development. If countries are to come out of poverty, they will need to trade freely and to sell their goods and services on the world market. That is why Britain, and my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker in particular, must be congratulated on making it clear at the Copenhagen summit that many developing countries need free trade in order to lessen their dependence on aid.

Dr. Spink: What is the Overseas Development Administration doing to focus aid to South Africa on the very poor people in that country, particularly as we are currently experiencing a wonderful royal visit to that country?

Mr. Baldry: As the House knows, we have an aid package to South Africa of some £100 million which is focused primarily on support for education and other initiatives such as rural development programmes, youth enterprise development and support for small businesses, many of which are emerging in the townships.

Bearing in mind the remarks that were made earlier, it is worth remembering that much of that aid to South Africa would not qualify according to some of the definitions of poverty which were bandied around at the summit and elsewhere under the 20:20 definition. I hope that the whole House supports the substantial aid package that we are giving to South Africa.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, of which I have given notice both to you and to the Minister of State, Home Office. Six weeks ago, I tabled a question for written answer in the following terms:

> "To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the conclusions of any studies available to him as to the effectiveness of boot camp prisons in the United States of America."

That question was due for answer on 15 February, but it was not answered until last Friday, 17 March, following a telephone call from my office to the Minister. The answer that I received from the Minister of State read:

> "Copies of the readily available published reports have been placed in the Library."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. *764*.]

The answer contains no reference whatever to any other reports—the identity of which I was seeking—that his officials may have made available to him.

On Friday I received a copy of a Home Office report entitled "Boot Camps: Report of a Visit to the United States, May 1994". I can well understand why the Minister and the Home Secretary may have evaded mentioning that report as, from the mouths of their own officials, it blows apart the case for boot camp prisons quite comprehensively.

I wish to put three questions to you on this point of order, Madam Speaker. First, is it in order for Ministers to fail to answer a simple parliamentary question, which was put down for answer on 15 February and of which due notice was given, until 17 March—more than four weeks later? Secondly, is it in order for Ministers to fail even to acknowledge the existence of a report, albeit they may wish not to make the report public? Thirdly, in the light of the report—which is now a public document—has the Home Secretary indicated to you that he intends to make a statement to the House abandoning any idea of pursuing a policy of establishing boot camp prisons in the United Kingdom?

Madam Speaker: First, let me say to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that, although he apparently indicated his intention of raising a point of order today, he gave me no details about it. About five minutes ago he gave a little indication to my staff of what his point of order might be about.

Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman knows, Ministers are responsible for the answers that they give to parliamentary questions; that is not my responsibility. If the Minister's answer was dilatory—I think that the Department may have been in this case—I will seek to speed up that process. The hon. Gentleman asks me whether the Minister is about to make, or is considering making, a statement about the issue that he has raised. I have been given no indication at this stage that the Government will make a statement on those matters.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I point out to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that, according to the conventions that apply in the House, advice to Ministers is not disclosed. The report that the hon. Gentleman has—I have no idea how it came into his possession—has not been published. It is a report by officials within the Prison Service, which comprises advice to Ministers in considering policy options in this area.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that we are still considering a regime for young offenders, which will be tough and rigorous. We plan to make a statement about it. Rather than misleading the press and others about the perfectly proper answer that he received, the hon. Gentleman would have done better to prevent his colleagues from objecting to the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), which sought to impose penalties on those who abscond while on prison leave.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the presence—

Madam Speaker: Order. Is this a completely different point of order? I will not allow a debate on the matter that has been raised.

Mr. Marshall: I would not dream of it, Madam Speaker.

In view of the presence of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, I wondered whether he had asked your permission to make a statement on electoral registration, following allegations in the *Daily Mail* that the electoral register in Birmingham is merely a work of fiction.

Madam Speaker: I think I have said to the House before that, if any statements are to be made, they will be on the Annunciator screen so that we are all informed of them.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is the authority of the House affected by the fact that an ex-permanent secretary, soon after leaving office, has described the policy for which he was responsible, with his Secretary of State, as a mess? He said that on television. Surely it is for the people responsible—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I may have authority over the House—indeed, I do—but what ex-Ministers say on television is none of my concern.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Civil servants.

Madam Speaker: Civil servants, Ministers—whoever they are, I cannot spend my day watching television.

Orders of the Day

Child Support Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

[Relevant documents: The Third Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of Session 1994-95 on the Child Support Agency (House of Commons Paper No. 199) and the Memorandum submitted to the Social Security Committee by the Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency (HC 303).]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The background to the Bill is well known to right hon. and hon. Members. In 1991, Parliament passed the Child Support Act to ensure that parents who lived apart supported their children themselves, to the extent that they could afford to do so. The whole House supported that principle, but rapidly became concerned about how it was working in practice; so I introduced some early changes in February last year. I promised to keep the system under close review, I promised a positive response to the Select Committee's investigation and I published the White Paper "Improving Child Support" this February.

The White Paper promised major changes, to be introduced in two stages. Those which could be made by means of regulations would be introduced as soon as possible—and I duly published regulations on 16 March, which will come into force in April. They will improve the formula by setting a ceiling on assessments of 30 per cent. of net income, or the minimum of £2.30 per week; making a broad-brush allowance for property transfers made before April 1993, when the agency became responsible for setting child support; making an allowance for travel-to-work costs for those living more than 15 miles from their place of employment; and allowing an absent parent to deduct all reasonable costs of housing his new partner or stepchildren. They will also limit the maximum payable above basic maintenance.

The other half of the changes announced in the White Paper require primary legislation—hence the Bill.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): First, what action does the Secretary of State intend to take in the case of a parent who is living in the same household as his or her family and maintaining that family, but is classed as an absent parent? That has happened since the establishment of the agency. Secondly, does the White Paper include any provision to take account of the stress, strain and hurt caused to families by the existing legislation?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman's first question struck me as complex; I should like to consider it in detail. I do not think that the Bill refers to it specifically, but we may wish to consider it further in the light of representations or any specific cases that the hon. Gentleman can cite. He may have already discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State.

On the second point, the main purpose of the Bill is to improve the system of child support so that it has greater acceptability and works better, to streamline the operations and to encourage greater compliance. That means that the problems that we have seen, which we all acknowledge and regret, will be less frequent in future than they were in the past and will gradually disappear as the situation improves. There is not a specific proposal of the sort that the hon. Gentleman suggested, but we are introducing a limitation on the arrears that can accrue where the fault is that of the agency, and I think that that is one of the major complaints and sources of distress that people have. In general, when it is the fault of the agency, the maximum arrears will be six months, assuming that there is agreement with the absent parent.

The changes will enable the agency or an appeal tribunal to depart from the amount that has been assessed under the formula to take account of exceptional expenses or past property settlements. The Bill will also defer indefinitely take-on by the Child Support Agency of non-benefit cases where parents had a maintenance agreement before the agency began its work. It will introduce a child maintenance bonus. It provides for compensation for parents on family credit or disability working allowance whose maintenance income is cut by the other policy changes.

The proposals that I announced in the White Paper have already been widely welcomed. They encompass and in some respects go further than the Select Committee's report, and they meet nearly all the main concerns that have arisen since the CSA began its work.

There is no doubt that the two features of CSA assessments that have given rise to most concern over the past year or two have been: first, the treatment of past property settlements; and secondly, the inability to take account of special factors that are not reflected in the formula. I concluded that no reform could command widespread support unless it addressed both those issues. Yet, unfortunately, neither could be satisfactorily addressed simply by adjusting the formula—something that we can do by changing regulations.

From April, the regulations will introduce an allowance into the formula for past property settlements. But the way in which the formula works means that the recognition of past property settlements can be only broad brush. It will be satisfactory for many couples, but some may feel that it does not reflect the true trade-off that was made between property transferred and child maintenance obligations.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If the Secretary of State is successful today with the Bill, is it his intention to send it to a Special Standing Committee, as is allowed under the Standing Orders of the House? Does he agree that such a procedure would vastly benefit those assigned to sit on that Standing Committee, as they could take evidence from those who are familiar with our system and with comparable systems elsewhere?

Mr. Lilley: That matter is not for me alone, but for the usual channels in the House. The hon. Gentleman might care to raise it with the Leader of the House on a Thursday. I want to ensure that we get the Bill through in time to introduce the changes. I am grateful for the promise given by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) to ensure that there is no trench

[Mr. Lilley]

warfare on the Bill, that it does not get bogged down and so on. I would not want to undertake any procedure that prolonged the process of consideration.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I commend the point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). It is crucial that this time we get it right, and if that means taking evidence via the special procedure, let us look at that.

Mr. Lilley: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's point about the importance of getting it right. I assure him that I have a vested interest in that. I think that we all do, and I want to make sure that, whatever the procedures, the Bill is given proper consideration and that we take into account all appropriate factors and likely outcomes. None the less, we have an obligation to everybody to ensure that we make as speedy progress as possible consistent with proper scrutiny, so that we can introduce the changes, for which there is considerable demand. We should also bear it in mind that there is little understanding in the country at large about the time taken by our normal procedures, even in the happiest of circumstances.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lilley: Perhaps the hon. Lady will allow me to make a little more progress. I shall try to give way to her later.

As I said, some changes have been introduced by regulations that affect property settlements. Likewise, we are introducing a broad-brush allowance in the formula to help those who commute long distances.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I interrupt the Minister because he is moving to a subject that I should like to raise. Of course, I understand the argument that persuaded the Minister to deal merely with pre-April 1993 property settlements. However, in the interests of the children, there is quite a strong social argument for trying to encourage the transfer of the matrimonial home to the parent with care. The fact that there is no provision for future capital or property settlements, as there is under some other systems, is a matter of some concern. Did the Minister consider that?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, that matter was one of the few that were specifically considered, and it is mentioned in the Opposition's reasoned amendment. Paradoxically, that does not look back to past property settlements, but forward to future ones. The matter is for choice and negotiation between the parties concerned. As long as they meet the maintenance obligations of the formula, the issue of how they deal with asset transfers is broader, as it has been in the past.

I was moving to other changes that can be introduced in the formula to deal with exceptional cases. We cannot specify all expenses that might prove onerous because that would overload the formula and would mean seeking an immense amount of extra information from all absent parents, although the bulk of them would not qualify for any changes as a result. The only way to make satisfactory allowance for individuals with exceptional expenses or past property settlements that are not correctly reflected in the broad-brush formula changes is to allow them some flexibility. Therefore, the Bill introduces powers to depart from the formula assessment in certain circumstances.

It may helpful for me to spell out how we envisage the new departure system working. After the assessment has been made, either parent may seek a departure from the formula. That will include parents who had an assessment before the departure system was set up but, of course, no departure would be backdated to earlier than the start of the departure system or when the claim was made.

In the first instance, the agency can consider requests to depart from the formula. There is no need to go through a formal appeal to an independent tribunal system, although either parent could subsequently appeal if he or she was not satisfied with the way in which the agency used or refused to use its discretion to depart from the formula in response to a claim. It would be wrong to allow a departure request to become an excuse for delaying payment. Therefore, the absent parent may be required to pay either the full maintenance assessment that he had had until then or a safe rate, which reflected what might be assessed if the departure application were to succeed.

If there were no grounds for departure or if the resulting reduction in maintenance would be very small, the agency could refuse to look at the case and, of course, there would be an automatic right of appeal to an independent appeals tribunal if the parent did not agree with the assessment.

A number of grounds for departure are specified in new schedule 4B. They include unavoidable costs of travel to work if the broad-brush allowance in the formula is very different from the actual costs that a parent incurs. High travel-to-work costs to maintain contact with the child are an important issue. A number of hon. Members have raised it and we do not think that it can be handled by a formula element.

Another ground for departure is extra costs arising from the long-term illness or disability of the applicant or a dependant. Another is, in exceptional cases, the costs of stepchildren, for example when their own parent has died. Others are some debts arising from the previous relationship and property transfers for which a more exact calculation is needed of the amount to be allowed against maintenance. The details of all those grounds for departure from the formula will be set out in regulations. The Bill gives powers to include additional grounds through secondary legislation, should that be found necessary.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): My right hon. Friend has not mentioned specifically the problem that many families have with loans, taken out for house improvements, motor cars or whatever, which were entered into in good faith before they became aware of their responsibilities. Is that part of my right hon. Friend's consideration under the heading of departure direction?

Mr. Lilley: That is a potential ground for departure, which comes under the heading of debts arising from the previous relationship prior to the assessment being made. A departure can be made only if it will be just and equitable, taking account of the circumstances of both parties, the welfare of the child and the interests of the taxpayer.

Ms Lynne: Does not the Secretary of State realise that the Bill is just tinkering at the edges of the Child Support Act 1991? It does not go nearly far enough and it does not have the support of the parent with care or the so-called "absent parent". Is not it about time that the right hon. Gentleman decided to repeal the Act and to start from the very beginning?

Mr. Lilley: What an opportunist change of tune. How typical it is of the Liberal Democrats to try simultaneously to offer a complete let-off for absent parents from any requirement to pay and to offer the moon and moonshine to the lone parent and the parent with care. I shall come to the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), which was not selected, in due course. It is, I am afraid, as insubstantial as the hon. Lady's intervention.

When departures are allowed, special costs will be treated like other allowable expenses and will be deducted from the parent's income before maintenance is assessed. If, however, an allowance is made for a property transfer, it can be deducted directly from the maintenance assessment itself. Although it is generally more likely that it will be the absent parent rather than the parent with care who will apply for a departure from the formula assessment, either parent will be able to apply if it is appropriate in their circumstances. A parent with care who earns enough to contribute to maintenance, for example, may have high travel-to-work costs and could appeal on that ground.

I also intend to introduce some grounds for departures that will be especially relevant to parents with care. Examples are cases in which they believe that the other parent's standard of living is higher than the declared income would suggest, cases in which housing costs are unduly high or should be met by a new partner and cases in which the broad-brush formula allowance towards the other parent's travel-to work costs is unreasonable. Again, those grounds for departure will also be available to absent parents if the circumstances are appropriate.

When maintenance is reduced as a result of policy changes, parents with care on income support will not lose money because income support is adjusted immediately. However, awards of family credit and disability working allowance are set for six months ahead. For those whose maintenance assessment drops because of the changes, I intend to provide some compensation until the end of the award period.

The Bill also makes provision for overpaid maintenance. If there is an overpayment, the absent parent's maintenance assessment is usually reduced until it has been cleared. That will continue to be the way in which most overpayments are dealt with, but in some cases, a reduction in maintenance may not be possible or it may not be possible to clear the overpayment in a reasonable time. The maintenance liability may, for example, be about to cease because the child is leaving school soon. The Bill will, therefore, introduce a provision allowing consideration to be given to reimbursing absent parents in such cases. Those changes and others to which I shall come in a moment will improve the perceived fairness of the level of assessments.

It is also vital to continue to improve the operations of the agency. There is no doubt that administrative problems have caused genuine grievance and aggravated the concerns of many people. The report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration highlights those issues, many of which we have already taken steps to address. We have, for example, already announced a range of administrative and regulatory measures to improve the organisational efficiency of the CSA.

Some of the changes necessary to improve operations require primary legislation. At present, if a parent seeks a review of his assessment because his circumstances have changed, the agency is obliged to review every item of the existing assessment. Such a review can be immensely time consuming. Clause 12 will mean that the agency can consider just the specific circumstances that have changed and amend the assessment accordingly.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Secretary of State aware that many of the difficulties with the Child Support Agency arose specifically from the direction given by Ministers that the people taken on should not be members of the civil service? Many of the women who are now doing the job—I can say this from personal experience—are not only very low-paid civil servants, but very young and have little experience in what they are required to do. Is he aware, for example, that many of those women are expected to counsel people who genuinely say such things as, "When I put the phone down, I am going to commit suicide"? No civil servant should be put in such a situation. Will the right hon. Gentleman take responsibility for ensuring that those women, many of whom are in an intolerable situation, are given support, understanding and proper training before they are exposed to such pressures?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about the sensitivity of much of the work. I do not think, however, that we can say that all civil servants have sensitivity and those taken on from the private sector lack it. Training is necessary. At a very early stage, before the agency was ever established, we set up courses with the help of Relate, formerly the Marriage Guidance Council, to help those dealing with women who had difficulties with whether to name the parent of their child when they originally received the maintenance application form. There was a widespread welcome for the sensitivity with which that was handled and for the training and preparation that went into it. The head of the agency is looking at some of the specific points that the hon. Lady mentions, to ensure that they are always dealt with sensitively. I entirely agree with her that that is necessary.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): My right hon. Friend will know that right hon. and hon. Members receive, as I do, four, five, six, seven or eight CSA cases in every surgery. [HON. MEMBERS: "No they do not."] Well, I certainly do. One of the matters that comes to my attention time and again, which I have raised with my right hon. Friend, is that often people know that the agency is acting on wrong information, because that information is often fraudulent. They complain that benefits are being given fraudulently, that they have no control over the investigation of fraud and that they are never told of the results of the investigation.

The agency simply has to go on what it receives, yet it knows that the information is wrong; that—possibly—the wife or the husband is living with someone, and it is not being given that information. The agency knows that it is wrong and people know that they are paying too much, yet the agency insists on continuing to take the same amount.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right to say that many people believe that the other parent is giving false information to the agency and want to make it clear to the agency. I have emphasised to the CSA and the Benefits

[Mr. Lilley]

Agency, partly in response to my hon. Friend, but partly in response to the experience of other hon. Members, that any such allegations should be pursued. Allegations are, of course, pursued by the Benefits Agency, as it is usually its role to do so. The difficulty is that it is not possible for the Benefits Agency to report the outcome of its investigation to someone who has made an allegation about fraud. It would not be right to have a sort of snoopers charter, so that one could make an allegation about somebody and get a report on the precise circumstances of that person once the investigation had been carried out. I assure my hon. Friend that those allegations are pursued, and that point will be re-emphasised by the record of this exchange in *Hansard*. That will stress the importance that is attached to the matter by everyone in the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Ashby: My specific point relates to the appeals procedure. With regard to that procedure, will what both parties are alleging be transparent? The appeals procedure should be able to decide that a wrong amount has been paid because the facts are clear, for example, the documentation exists to show that a woman is living with another man, or there is photographic evidence. Will such evidence be produced in the appeals procedure to show that someone should not be paying quite so much?

Mr. Lilley: The frauds involved will sometimes not influence the amount that the absent parent is required to pay. If there is doubt about the factual amounts, that can be dealt with by the existing appeals procedure, which is an assessment of the amounts and the accuracy with which they are calculated.

With regard to the changes introduced by the Bill, under the current rules, when an absent parent is late in paying maintenance, interest is charged. That has proved difficult to implement and immensely complex. It will be removed and replaced by a set penalty.

To limit the additional pressures on the agency, I propose to defer the take-on of cases of parents with care who have a court order or written agreement made before April 1993, but who are not on benefit. They will retain the right to use the courts if they wish to seek a variation in the amount of maintenance. I shall also offer them the opportunity to use the agency's collection and enforcement service for a fee.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Secretary of State keeps using the word "deferral". What is the time scale? When will those mothers, many of whom are working to keep their families, receive the help from the agency that they were promised in the original legislation?

Mr. Lilley: None of the people affected is dependent on benefit. Nothing is set down in the Bill as to when the deferred decision would be made. However, it would be made only by, and with the approval of, the House.

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State cannot give those answers and, from the Dispatch Box, also say that the Bill is not about saving the Treasury money. We are now talking about mothers, many of whom have been deserted, who are working and who, to their credit, are not on benefit, but who are being deserted by the Secretary of State's decision. The Secretary of State still will not give the House, and more importantly those mothers, a date when they can expect help from the CSA.

Mr. Lilley: We are talking about couples who reached an agreement, before the agency was set up, which had no direct implications for the taxpayer. It seems to me that the agency's priority should be to deal with those who involve the taxpayer in their arrangements—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because we have an obligation to the taxpayer. I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referring to us saving money for the Treasury. The Treasury does not have money; it is taxpayers' money—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, but I want to make progress after I have given way.

Mr. Nicholson: I very much welcome the changes that my right hon. Friend is outlining and the Department's serious response to the serious report by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, of which I am a member, into maladministration. In response to the points made by the hon. Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), will my right hon. Friend stress the CSA's limited success in doing what all hon. Members expected it to do when it was set up, that is, pursuing those who had disappeared and abdicated their responsibilities?

Mr. Lilley: I assure the House and my hon. Friend that that is a prime priority of the agency and that it is increasingly successful. Very large numbers of absent parents who had absconded, in the sense that they had broken off all contact with their children and the mothers looking after their children, have been traced and identified and are being pursued by the agency for maintenance. Some 77 per cent. of those tackled so far had not been paying any maintenance whatever. In 96 per cent. of cases, even if the father was paying some maintenance, the mother and child were dependent on benefit.

After a slow start, the agency is now improving its performance month by month. The amount of maintenance collected by the agency this year is likely to be five times that which it collected last year. The amount is set to double again next year. In addition to the amount of maintenance that it collects, the agency arranges even more maintenance, which is paid direct by the absent parent to the parent with care.

Next year the agency expects to collect or arrange a total of some £300 million of maintenance. The total savings, including those from people who are discouraged from claiming benefit or who leave benefit as a result, are expected to amount to £540 million next year.

The Opposition parties have tabled reasoned amendments. Labour's amendment welcomes the new departure system and makes it clear that its only specific area of disagreement has narrowed to its proposal that we should ignore some maintenance when calculating income support. But the amendment is characteristically vague about how large the disregard of maintenance should be, how much it would cost and how the Labour party would pay for it.

The fact is that Labour's original proposal of a disregard of £8 per week of maintenance would cost £165 million a year. Moreover, such a disregard would make it harder for a parent with care to improve her standard of living by returning to work. It would be unfair to widows and lone parents whose former husbands were unable to pay maintenance and who therefore relied solely on income support. It would also be unfair to families who did not split up, but who had to pay through their taxes to support the children of people who did, some of whom were better off than they were.

I remind the Opposition that the total cost of supporting lone parents in Britain is £8.5 billion a year. That has to be paid by taxes levelled on, among others, two-parent families. It is equivalent to £1,400 per couple to support the children of lone parents. In effect, taxes on couples with children who stay together have to be on average £1,400 a year higher to support lone parents.

We accept that there must be help for lone parents in the interests of their children, but, unlike the Labour party, we are not in the business of piling yet higher burdens on those who stick together to provide double compensation for those who, sadly, split up. We believe that maintenance should be a stepping stone for lone parents to self-help, not a trap in dependency. All the surveys show that most lone parents want to get back to work. So we have put a disregard into the in-work benefits, not the out-of-work benefits. We have put a £15 a week disregard into family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

On top of that disregard, we now propose a child maintenance bonus. That will give lone parents an interest in receiving maintenance. It is worth some £5 per week, which they can accumulate up to £1,000. It is cashable when they return to work. So it gives them both an incentive and help when they return to work, as many wish to do.

Whereas the Labour party specifically welcomes the new discretionary departures, the Liberal party's sole objection to the Bill is that it is not sufficiently flexible. We heard that from the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) just now. Of course, the Liberals would like every policy to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the mutually contradictory promises that they are in the habit of making to the electorate. They want to be able to promise mothers that they will receive more and fathers that they will pay less. The Liberals do not spell out in their amendment how they would make the system more flexible. We look forward to concrete proposals from the Liberal Democrats. But experience shows that if those who determine maintenance are given open-ended flexibility, they will invariably transfer most of the cost of support back to the taxpayer.

The old court system resulted in fewer and fewer parents every year receiving maintenance, awards that in general were inadequate and dramatically inconsistent and a situation where even the cost of pet food took priority over the cost of supporting one's own child. Is that the sort of thing to which the Liberal Democrat party wishes to return?

Ms Lynne: The Secretary of State does not seem to appreciate that we would put in place of the current proposals a far fairer system than the one that he is suggesting. I shall spell out that system when I make my speech, if the right hon. Gentleman will be patient.

Mr. Lilley: We look forward with interest to that speech from the lone Liberal.

One thing that I hope neither Opposition party, nor any of us, will do today is indulge in rewriting history with the benefit of hindsight. All of us—the Government most of all, but also Parliament, Opposition parties, civil servants and the media—have a lot to learn from the experience of the Child Support Act. Not only was the Act passed with general acclaim, but the bulk of the criticism and concerns expressed at the time were almost the exact opposite of the complaints that emerged after it was implemented.

Almost all the complaints assumed that the Bill did not go far enough to help women and anticipated criticisms from them. I looked up the Labour party's reasoned amendment on Second Reading. Every single item in the amendment asserted that the Bill did not go far enough to help women, whereas not a single reference was made to anticipating complaints from absent fathers.

The Trades Union Congress, in its contribution to the consultation process that preceded the Bill, criticised our proposals as letting off middle-class fathers too lightly. It argued for a higher marginal rate of contribution from fathers who had met their basic maintenance requirement. The TUC's plea was endorsed by Labour during the Second Reading debate.

At no point in the Second or Third Reading debates did Opposition Front-Bench Members call for a discretionary departure system or a recognition of past property settlements, which we are introducing in this Bill.

The media also focused almost exclusively on the feminist critique of the original Bill, largely ignoring at that stage the potential criticisms from absent fathers. I am not trying to transfer responsibility on to the Opposition or anyone else. The Government have the main responsibility to foresee problems, since the Government have the lead role. Government propose, Opposition oppose, Parliament disposes and the media expose. But it has to be said that, with the distinguished exception of the Select Committee, few of those whose job it was to check and criticise the Executive can claim to have had better foresight than the Government. So I hope that we shall not have too much 20:20 hindsight vision from Opposition Members today.

Every country that has introduced a child support agency has been through a similar process to that which we have experienced. There have been immense operational problems in establishing an entirely new method of handling maintenance, with resistance coming from many absent parents. Reforms have been needed in the light of practical experience. After a time, those reforms have led to a greater acceptance, and I believe that our reforms will do the same.

We should not imagine that an issue as sensitive as child maintenance will cease to arouse strong emotions. Australia's Child Support Agency—even after six years of operation—still generates a great deal of constituency correspondence and heated political interest. However good the system—we are determined that ours should improve in every respect—a child support agency is like a lightning conductor in a thunderstorm. It is bound to attract highly charged attention. None the less, the policy and operational changes that we are introducing will firmly establish the child support arrangements that we have in place for the future.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My right hon. Friend mentioned Australia, and he will know that the Select Committee looked at the Australian experience. Is he

[Mr. David Shaw]

aware that one of the interesting aspects of the criticism of child support operations in Australia is that many people there want to have a system that operates in a similar way to ours?

Mr. Lilley: That is certainly the case. When I met the directors general of the Australian and the New Zealand systems, they told me that they had found that there was a great similarity between our systems, but that in some respects ours was superior in meeting directly a number of costs that they had ignored in their rather broad-brush approach. None the less, the changes that we are introducing take advantage of some of their experience and introduce some features that are similar to theirs, so ~~that~~ we shall get the best of both worlds.

The Bill will give relief to hard cases, allay the resentment felt by many of those who transferred property in lieu of maintenance, streamline operations and give mothers a stake in receiving maintenance and help in returning to work. After the changes are enacted, no one will realistically be able to refuse to pay maintenance. As a result, more children should receive more maintenance more regularly, and I commend the Bill to the House.

4.15 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

> "That this House insists that the Child Support Bill in the form proposed is unacceptable because although the introduction of an element of discretion to depart from the financial formula and the overdue recognition that clean-break settlements must be taken into account are welcome, the current proposals do not adequately address the problems that have undermined public confidence in the Child Support Agency, nor do they end a system under which children living in the poorest households are the least likely to benefit from increased maintenance payments; indeed the majority of those dependent on Income Support are left not one penny better off."

The Secretary of State properly asked us not to rewrite history, but proceeded to do so in a remarkably selective passage with his account of what happened when the Bill was first produced in 1991. We have stoutly maintained our support for the principle behind the Bill, but consistently argued from the beginning that there were some difficulties—sadly, in the event, some of those arguments have been justified. A squabble about history is not necessarily the best way of looking to the future, but, in view of what the Secretary of State said, I am bound to point that out.

I think that we can all agree that the Child Support Agency started out with admirable aims and sensible objectives. It was launched with social purpose and was designed to improve on a court system that was demonstrably unsatisfactory. The Secretary of State referred to the agency having a slow start. To use a word that was used earlier, that is not so much a lugubrious as an insanely bullish interpretation of what happened during the first year of the new system.

I hope that no one will accuse me of overstating the case, but it has been a bruising and bad experience and, at times, has looked little short of a disaster area. Although there have been some improvements in performance, until now the system has failed to deliver its financial targets, has bred a great deal of mistrust and bitterness and arguably and, most sadly of all, has put at risk the very principles that it was brought into being to defend.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I shall not give way, as I want to make a little progress.

Everyone in the House has been taken aback by the system's unpopularity and I agree that none of us anticipated that at the beginning. There are many causes. Perhaps I am being severe, but it is true to say that one has been Ministers' failure to recognise the scale of the problems and the depth of perceived injustice—the anger that led to non-co-operation, which in turn led to ever-increasing and destructive inefficiency—and, above all, to react to those problems in time.

The Bill represents limited progress, and I would be ungracious if I did not say so. I recognised that fact in the reasoned amendment. The Bill forms part of the implementation of the proposals in the White Paper "Improving Child Support". We contend that it is incomplete, however, and we tabled the reasoned amendment on that basis.

The main provisions of the Bill represent a retreat by Ministers. As the Secretary of State will remember, Opposition Members have long pushed and pressed the virtues of having some form of redress that would allow a departure from the financial formula in special and hard cases. We were repeatedly told that that form of discretion was impossible because it would open the floodgates, and I am grateful that the Secretary of State has accepted that he was wrong to take that attitude and that he has decided to move on that point.

Mr. Lilley: Can the hon. Gentleman find a quotation in which I repudiate the idea completely? I said that we must not have an open-ended system and we have been careful to ensure that these proposals are not open-ended.

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State is optimistic about his attitudes. Once he finally reaches the right decision, he has a great ability to convince himself that he had always held to it. If he has always believed it, it is strange that he cannot explain why he did not move much sooner. The kindest thing that I can say to the Secretary of State is that, whenever the matter was raised by the Opposition, it was met by arguments of inertia with the straightest and deadest of bats, and there was no sign of movement until the crisis was so acute in terms of the system's credibility that something had to be done.

Dr. Spink: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on to the detail, may I press him on the principle that parents are responsible for their children? Does he recall composite motion No. 9 at last year's Labour party conference, which stated that the Child Support Act undermined the welfare state and removed from partners the right to extricate themselves from intolerable relationships? Does he agree with that? How does that fit with the principle that parents remain responsible for their children?

Mr. Dewar: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. I am delighted to know that he spends his time reading composite motions put forward at Labour party conferences. I confess that that is more than I do, but that is my fault. I shall take his point seriously because I presume that he is passing on a message from

Conservative central office brief and means it to be taken seriously. I clearly remember that, at the last conference, a motion that was too radically destructive of the case which I support was defeated by conference. The hon. Gentleman must look at what we have been saying consistently throughout this debate, which is that we do support the principle that parents are responsible for their children. It is important that parents accept responsibility for contributing towards the upkeep of their children and no one in the Labour party has been prepared to compromise on that.

The Select Committee on the ombudsman charitably decided that it was implicitly acknowledged that, at least with the benefit of hindsight, the Secretary of State had got policy decisions wrong. We might qualify a little on the Committee's kindness in referring to "hindsight", but his decisions clearly were wrong and I am glad that there has been some movement.

I am concerned not only to get the general principle of a departure from the financial formula established but to establish that we have got it right. That will be the job of the Standing Committee. I reassure the Secretary of State that I shall not encourage my hon. Friends unduly to delay the Committee stage. We have always believed that proper consideration should be given and important points should be properly aired. People on both sides of the argument would want and expect that. However, we can learn much from the harsh experience of recent months and it is important that we do so.

I remember receiving a letter from the Secretary of State—it may satisfy his inquiry about his attitude—which no doubt went to many other hon. Members as the word processor chattered. The quotation that I particularly remember is:

> "we must not put the improvements in performance that we are achieving at risk by introducing unnecessarily disruptive changes".

As a generalisation, that may sound plausible, but it was a response to my arguments for a degree of flexibility. Anyone who bothers to write the history of these matters will see, in looking back at them, that one of the main difficulties was the fact that the late Mr. Lilley did not respond to the crisis. In any event, I welcome the fact that he has been drawn to accept the right of redress.

It is important that we turn to the practical details. Schedule 2 is the part of the Bill that we shall all scrutinise. It is currently drawn up to mean that the Secretary of State may, by regulation, include matters such as access costs; the cost of long-term disability of applicants or applicants' dependants; debts arising during the course of the partnership, which were for the joint benefit of both parents; and so on. I want to make it clear that I approve of that list. It is right and proper that those details should be part of the machinery. Some interesting arguments will arise, however, about, for example, debts incurred during a partnership. Furniture purchased for the benefit of both parents may become matters for debate and issue because of continuing hire purchase payments, and so on. It is inevitable that that will happen and we must live with that.

The circumstances covered by schedule 2 are presented as a menu of what the Secretary of State may do. I assume from what the Secretary of State said in his speech that he intends to include the list in the first part of schedule 2 in the regulations that he will lay. An important distinction—I presume it is important, although the Secretary of State may want to comment on it—is contained in paragraph 4(2) of new schedule 4B relating to additional cases. The right hon. Gentleman referred to them again today and some of them are extremely important in practical terms. He made particular reference to cases in which a person's life style is inconsistent with the level of his income. That is an important example, which could lead to some problems, because such cases are often attended with great bitterness. Complexities may arise because one party or perhaps both have formed new relationships with new financial implications.

When the Under-Secretary of State replies to the debate, I hope that he can tell me whether the first set of conditions in schedule 2 will be implemented in the regulations. Will the additional cases also be subject to the regulations, or is that an open possibility?

Mr. Lilley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dewar: I note that the Secretary of State has acknowledged that the menu will be implemented in full and will be available to those who wish to use the machinery. That is helpful. I have always thought it curious that Ministers, who are always so reluctant to concede discretion to others, are so ready to exercise it themselves. On this occasion, in view of the assurances, that would be an unworthy thought.

The White Paper suggested that just a minority of cases would qualify under the system. That may be true, but I wonder whether Ministers have formed any opinion on the likely consequences. I know—I am clear about the recollection—that the Secretary of State has said to me in the past that the gate in the Australian system is too wide. I have not ticked off pedantically the conditions listed in schedule 2, but it seems that we have broadly replicated those familiar to us from the Australian system.

I am anxious to ensure that we have machinery that can handle appeals. I am conscious of what the report of the Select Committee on the ombudsman said about the disability living allowance precedent. I am also aware that, last year, there were just over 23,000 appeals concerning invalidity benefit. Ministers are now assuming that, in the first year of incapacity benefit, that number will increase to 140,000 appeals. Considerable problems will flow from that.

It may be seen as an act of disloyalty on the part of someone who earned his corn in the law, if that is not too undignified a way of putting it, but even when we deal with what are meant to be informal tribunal systems, we have a habit of getting bogged down in formality. Precedents appear; case law emerges and legal representation for those who are rather more affluent begins to be offered, even if legal aid is not available. I am concerned to ensure that the proposed system remains an informal one.

The official Australian report states:

> "A single review officer conducts the hearing. On the original application and response forms, each party can request alternatives:
>
> a hearing with the other party present;
>
> a hearing without the other party present;
>
> a hearing by telephone;
>
> a review based on written forms only with no personal appearance.
>
> A hearing usually lasts between 40 minutes and two hours.
>
> 'It is the Agency's intention that these hearings be conducted with relative informality and privacy.'"

[Mr. Dewar]

If that will work and give quick redress and justice on the basis of common sense in the individual case where hardship or injustice is alleged, perhaps we should struggle to keep it as informal as possible.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: For the last time to that hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Spink: On the issue of departure from the tribunal, does the hon. Gentleman accept that, although he has said that he does not want too many precedents, most of those cases will have to be determined by reference to precedents that are fixed nationally, so that there is equality of judgment throughout the country on those matters?

Mr. Dewar: That is an interesting assumption. I understand what the hon. Gentleman means; but the system has always been, or at least I have always wanted to regard it as such, one in which there is informality, in which people can represent themselves, in which the documents can speak for themselves and in which commonsense arbitration—it is perhaps more analogous to that than to other systems—emerges.

I fear that, two or three years down the road, if I ever find myself back in law practice, which is very unlikely, I will—*[Interruption.]* They could not resist it. Pavlov's dogs live again. That is not a reference to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), but, when I come to think of it, it is quite appropriate. I can imagine myself reading specialist journals reporting cases—reporting precedents. That will lead to great difficulties and dangers. I leave it there, but I urge on the Ministers the need to be careful about that.

In Australia, at least originally, when I saw the figures about 11 or 12 per cent. of maintenance assessments ended up in the review officer procedure. The equivalent here would be about 40,000 to 50,000 cases, which is an awful lot by any standards.

I notice that in paragraph 9 of new schedule 4A there is a power for the chair to sit alone. That may simply be an administrative safety valve for an emergency, but it may, however, be an interesting precedent, and something that the Secretary of State wishes to consider.

The latest estimate that I have, which reached me by fax as recently as today, is that in 1994-95 it is estimated—the year has not quite finished—that there will be 20,800 successful appeals in Australia using the review officer procedure. That is measured against the number of assessment cases to June 1995 of 287,000. I am talking about successful appeals, not the number of appeals. If that were rolled on as a precedent for this country—this might be misleading, but at least is an interesting rule of thumb—we would anticipate very large figures indeed.

As many hon. Members who have followed those arguments know, in Australia the child support system is run by the internal revenue—the tax system. I was delighted to see that printed proudly across the bottom of the page of the letter that I received from Australia was the slogan:

> "Taxes: building a better Australia."

I recommend that to the Chancellor in his current time of travail. It would be good for morale.

Mr. Lilley: I think Australia has a Labour Government, which may be associated in the public mind with taxes, and we are glad to note that the hon. Gentleman thinks that taxes and Government go hand in hand. It is a good advertisement to the electorate before the next election.

Mr. Dewar: I am delighted to be reminded that the Australians have a Labour Government. I think that the Australian precedents are very important in the specific argument, and that is one precedent that I suspect that this country will follow very shortly. I accept that we shall have to wait and see.

I shall quickly discuss a couple of matters of some importance that are related to the departure machinery—the travel-to-work cost provisions and the capital and property transfers. They are, I understand—it was confirmed by the Secretary of State—applied in a broad-brush administrative approach initially and will then become factors in the application for a departure. I welcome both. It is proper that they should be taken into account. I have no quarrel with that in principle.

The provision relating to 10p per mile over 15 miles as the crow flies would, no doubt, lead to some controversy. It is a matter of making a judgment about what is right, and I accept that the Government have that duty. We shall obviously want to consider carefully in Committee the way in which it will work, but I would certainly accept that it is in the interests of no one, in those tangled affairs, that someone who is liable to pay maintenance should be forced to give up his job. That machinery may build in some form of safeguard.

I have some doubts and concerns about clean-break settlements. I entirely accept that the proposal is an attempt to deal with retrospectivity and, as such, I think that it is important. It is unfair that settlements that were made in good faith—probably with the good faith of both parties—before the CSA was thought of should now be ignored when assessments for maintenance are being made.

I have a philosophical point to try on the Secretary of State which is of some practical importance. Let us consider a case in which a divorce settlement was made before 1993 and a capital sum was laid down by the courts that had, in part, been met by the transfer of property in a house. Is it right that, subsequently, on an entirely distinct and different point—the settlement of the maintenance payment for the child—that property transfer which was part of the court settlement between the spouses should be used to reduce the maintenance assessment? There is an important point of principle in that argument. It is one that can be considered in Committee—I say that as someone who will, perhaps, not be on the Committee.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): On a philosophical point, does the hon. Gentleman believe that it would be right for the Labour party to stop its traditional objections to contracting out work to the private sector, in view of the evident failure of the civil service to manage the job?

Mr. Dewar: I have heard many irrelevant and slightly smug interventions, and I do not intend to bother with that one.

A more general point that I raised in an intervention during the Secretary of State's speech is worthy of serious consideration and will, no doubt, be debated at later stages. We say that it must be a clean-break settlement prior to April 1993. But as the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), recognises, at some stage there will be cases where the court has made a settlement or where a voluntary agreement has been reached between the parties—such cases will be unilaterally referred to the agency.

It is important to consider future provision. There are other systems where, in clean-break settlements, as they are sometimes called, the property or capital transfers are taken into account in future negotiations. Under the Australian system, where there has been agreement between the parties, where it has been intended by the parties that it should impact on the maintenance settlement and that has been quantified and formally reported, if the Child Support Agency subsequently becomes involved because one of the parties starts to receive benefit, within limits, that policy is implemented. Those matters are worth considering, and I shall briefly explain why.

My view of the subject is coloured because I was once a solicitor in an ordinary practice. In my matrimonial work, I constantly found myself persuading someone that it would be common sense to transfer the house as part of the arrangements—that it would be in the interests of the children to stay on in the house in the area and surroundings with which they were familiar. In such a case, the family, on both sides of the divide, would be traumatised, but the children would be particularly damaged.

I did a reasonable enough job in persuading people that it would be sensible to agree to the transfer of the property on the basis that adjustments and compensations for that could be made in terms of other financial arrangements. The trouble now is that, because the possibility of action by the CSA at some future date cannot be excluded, the wise advice for a solicitor to give is not to transfer the matrimonial home. That is an expensive price to pay in terms of social stability and I am genuinely concerned about it. For that reason, I hope that Ministers will think long and hard before maintaining the backward-looking provision, but doing nothing in terms of looking to the future. That is a major point which is well worth considering.

Another rather odd legislative change is the maintenance bonus. The machinery is familiar: it is child of back-to-work bonus. Under the provision, the parent with care who is not deriving benefit from the increased maintenance paid because of clawback against income support can be credited with £5 per week up to a maximum of £1,000. That sum is then payable when she—in most cases, it will probably be the mother—gets a job of 16 hours per week or more.

I must confess that I understand the importance of job incentives and of encouraging people to look for work—indeed, the Labour party has plans in that regard. However, I am not sure about this provision. Maintenance is a right for the child and a duty for the parent who must pay it, and I do not think that the child's right should necessarily be dependent on whether a mother finds work.

The provision poses another danger to which I referred in relation to the back-to-work bonus when I suggested that it was not so much a matter of jam today as one of jam tomorrow and perhaps no jam at all. In this case, it is a matter not of jam tomorrow but perhaps of jam in the next century. Parents with care must have great staying power if they are to reach £1,000; it may become a millennium event for them. Some may experience a quicker return to work, but I think that it will prove be an odd and perhaps tantalising prospect for many.

If it is such a good measure, why must it be postponed until April 1997? I would have thought that it would be possible to implement it in April 1996. Even if we take a gloomy view of the Bill's passage, it will be on the statute book by April 1996. No doubt the Under-Secretary will enlighten us on that point.

I raise another point which leads to further important matters. Although the Secretary of State will deny it, I believe that the legislation represents a form of apology; it is a nod towards the great gap in the system. It fails to offer anything positive to those children of households which are dependent on income support. That concern lies at the heart of the Labour party's reasoned amendment to the Bill. We believe that the system is incomplete and fundamentally flawed and we have argued consistently for a disregard.

I have listened to the Secretary of State's points, and he will not be surprised to learn that I have not been convinced by them. I believe that our arguments have gathered strength in recent times because the unhappy truth is that those who are most at risk are least likely to benefit under the legislation. I find that very difficult to square with the call for more money for more parents for more children which formed the climax of the Secretary of State's speech. If he believes in that objective, I believe that there is a very strong case for a disregard, without which we will not achieve or exercise the social purpose of the Child Support Act 1991.

I commend to the Secretary of State the report of the Select Committee on the ombudsman, which was released this morning. It states:

> "Targets should place efficient service to the public before savings to the Treasury."

I suppose that that might be known as Pawsey's law because the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is Chairman of the Committee. That is an important message from a Committee which, like most Select Committees, has a majority of Conservative Members. I move an addendum to the report which I believe goes hand in hand with that message: when we are dealing with social policy, social objectives should be given as great a weight as—if not greater weight than—savings for the Treasury. That is not the current position, as is demonstrated by the Government's failure to give ground to the argument for a disregard which we have consistently urged on Ministers.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): We have been over the point in debate so often that the hon. Gentleman will probably know what I am about to say. Although the maintenance bonus is an incentive for the parent with care to return to work, perversely the maintenance disregard would have the reverse effect. Absent parents might even give up part-time work, because of the marginal benefit involved, in order to receive the disregard and become better off. Should not that perverse incentive be taken into account in Pawsey's equation, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned a few moments ago?

Mr. Dewar: Pawsey's law has become Pawsey's equation, and it may become Pawsey's theorem by the time I have finished a philosophical debate with the hon.

[Mr. Dewar]

Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). I do not believe that a small disregard would be a disincentive for finding work. If a job were so poorly paid that the disregard became a factor, I wonder whether it would be worth having that job at all. In any event, it would be subsumed to an extent in family credit. I do not think that that is a factor.

The latest figures which were released by Miss Chant from the chief executive's offices show that in the current year 38 per cent. of maintenance is going to children and 62 per cent. to the Treasury. I freely concede that those figures are better than last year's. They are the latest figures available, and I take them at face value. However, I do not believe that that was the kind of balance that we envisaged when we first debated the matter in the early 1990s.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman refers to philosophical points. An important philosophical point to remember is that 100 per cent. of maintenance goes to the mother with care of the child, which, in some cases, removes the need for the taxpayer to support them. The idea that the natural situation is that everyone should be supported by the taxpayer and that maintenance is jam on the cake is absolute nonsense. All maintenance goes to and belongs to the parent and the child, not to the taxpayer.

Mr. Dewar: I understand that point. I live in the practical world as well—I suppose that we all live in various different worlds. The Child Support Agency is founded on an important principle, but it also has a powerful social objective which I do not believe that it is achieving. A principal reason for its failure is the difficulty that we have just debated.

As the Secretary of State knows, we were told originally that a £10 disregard would cost £400 million. That cost then fell to £340 million and by May 1994 it had become £290 million. At the last call, it was £205 million. The explanation for that reduction was that greater sampling had taken place which showed that fewer lone parents were claiming income support. That is a somewhat vague form of words. I welcome the fact that the cost has fallen, as it obviously strengthens our case for a disregard.

It has always been assumed that we would opt for a £10 disregard. If the Secretary of State wishes to assist us by saying that he would accept a £5 disregard—he could take the £5 that he is using in his maintenance bonus calculations—according to his Department's answers, the cost would be £110 million. Although that figure is not insignificant, if he were to offset the cost of the maintenance bonus at £25 million, the cost of the disregard would fall to £85 million. If the Secretary of State opted for the £5 disregard—he cannot say that it is unimportant, because he picked that figure himself—the Opposition would welcome that as establishing the principle of the matter.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No; I said that I would not give way to the hon. Gentleman again and I must be a man of my word. We feel very strongly about that matter. We must help those children who are most at risk, and I rest my case on that point.

I welcome much in the non-statutory provision. The 70 per cent. of net income is no longer a guideline but a limit that cannot be broken. The Select Committee heard evidence that about 47,000 people were left with less than 70 per cent. of net income, so that measure is obviously important and it is very welcome. The suspension of fees until 1997 is a recognition of administrative failure. The question is whether they should be reintroduced in 1997. However, we welcome that moratorium.

Some of the fine-tuning in the legislation must be examined with a critical eye. In that respect, I flag the reduction in the maximum level of payment in the formula. I believe that the child should share, as fully as the maintenance formula allows, in the affluence of the parent. I am not sure about the rationale behind that reduction.

We must also remember the parliamentary question released mysteriously on 27 December which announced that 350,000 cases had been shelved as a product of the agency's desperation. According to answers to further parliamentary questions, I understand that they will be reinstated by the end of the year. We expect the Secretary of State to hold to that promise. Similarly, with regard to the deferral of cases that were to come into the ambit of the CSA in 1996, we believe that it is important to stress the word "deferral", as my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said. There is a beguiling argument—which I suspect has been put to Ministers—that, because those people do not receive benefit and because they already have agreements or court orders, allowing a unilateral reference to the CSA would encourage them to depart from contract. That may indeed be a beguiling argument, but it would be wrong for the CSA to become an organisation dealing with those on benefit and in financial difficulties while the more fortunately placed escaped the net altogether.

Administrative problems are at the heart of the matter, often adding insult to injury. It is worth reminding the Secretary of State of the Select Committee's comment that policy deficiencies had been

> "cruelly exacerbated by administrative incompetence".

The foundation for that charge was considerable evidence of bad advice, maladministration and delay.

We must do something about the compensation that is provided for people who have suffered in this way. It is remarkable that, by the end of January 1995, financial redress had been made in only 34 cases. That strikes me as very unsatisfactory, given the enormous stress that has attended the early history of the agency.

I accept that the agency is very difficult to run, that running it has been a difficult job for all involved and that some improvements have been made, but we are still missing targets. I am concerned about, for example, the enormous difference between the number of maintenance application forms issued since April 1993—1.19 million—and the final number of maintenance assessments, which is 299,000. I realise that some 129,000 interim maintenance assessments could be included, but those cases have not yet been finalised. The number of applications cleared without assessment—403,000—strikes me as remarkably high. Many questions remain to be answered.

In only 46 per cent. of cases has it been accepted that there is good cause for details not to be given. In 42 per cent. of cases that has not been accepted, and in 12 per cent.—presumably as a result of pressure—the absent parent has been named. Already more than 16,000 cases have been referred for benefit reduction, and it looks as though that 42 per cent.—30,618 cases—will vastly increase the number. The shadow of what was initially described as a small problem is now beginning to loom.

What we all want to know is, will the Bill work? Will it contribute to stability, and help to restore public confidence? There has been so much damage and bitterness. A difficult balance is involved: the interests of the various competing parties must be traded off—for they are competing parties, as we must recognise. We cannot duck that.

According to the Government's own figures, the February 1994 changes are worth £85 million in 1995-96, £95 million in 1996-97 and £95 million in 1997-98. The new package, which looks much more dramatic, is worth £40 million in 1995-96, £65 million in 1996-97 and £85 million in 1997-98. It is worth less than the changes that were introduced in February 1994, and therefore will have no revolutionary impact.

People tend to forget that changes in exempt income must be filtered through the formula. For instance, a reduction of £20 resulting from the banding of a capital settlement can easily end up as a reduction of only £10 in maintenance; £60 can be reduced to £20. I know that averages can be misleading, but a parliamentary answer to me suggested that the February 1994 figures were worth an average of about £8 a week to those paying maintenance, while the current crop will be worth between £5 and £10.

Whether we have the balance right should be a matter for anxiety, and I suspect that we have not heard the last word on the subject. I accept—Miss Chant gave me the figure before yesterday—that the present average maintenance assessment, excluding income support cases involving a payment of £2.30 for a single child—is between £38 and £40 a week. I think that, if that amount is reduced, people may consider the arrangements a little more reasonable than they have been in the past.

I am convinced that, indeed, we have not heard the last word. I think that, even as amended, the system is incomplete and will be unable to deliver its social targets fully; hence our reasoned amendment. For all that, any contribution to confidence building is important. That is our vital task: we must convince those who fear the system that they have nothing to fear, that the administration is not their enemy and that money paid will benefit the children in whose name it is collected. That does not seem too much to ask of the system.

Dr. Spink: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you advise me? Can it possibly be right, according to the rules of the House, for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) to say that he will spend another £110 million or so—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I can help the hon. Gentleman without his going any further. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is responsible for his own speech.

4.55 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I welcome the Bill, because the evidence clearly showed that the workings of the Child Support Agency needed to be improved. I am aware that the Government have accepted most of the recommendations in the second report of the all-party Select Committee on Social Security and, in some cases, have gone even further; as a Chairman of a Select Committee myself, I fully approve of their response.

I applaud the measures contained in the Bill, which provide new help for parents with care—especially the administrative changes, which will simplify the procedures, speed up the maintenance process and encourage compliance by absent parents. Nearly all my constituents' complaints about the Child Support Agency have been associated with the agency's poor handling of cases and with inflexibility, and I am sure that the proposed changes will greatly assist. Nevertheless, I still support the principle of the Child Support Act 1991 that parents should pay for the maintenance of their children to the extent that they can afford to do so, and that taxpayers should have to help only when parents do not have the means to support their children. While I commend the Government for listening to the concerns of parents with care, absent parents and the groups that represent them, I am anxious for the original intention of the Act not to be forgotten.

As the House knows, I have always considered it important for both sides of the story to be presented. I must tell Ministers that, for example, many lone parents with care feel that by limiting the maximum payable under the formula, the Government are signalling that rich absent parents do not have to share their wealth with their first children. It is vital for maintenance assessments to be both fair and consistent, but I regret to say that many lone carers have come to believe that those who oppose the agency's work have used unacceptable tactics to press their case, and have bullied the Government into succumbing to some of their demands.

I personally have received a great deal of spiteful and threatening mail from anti-CSA groups as a result of expressing the views of lone carers in the Chamber. The latest communication that I have received from the "Network Against the Child Support Act" informs me that supporting the Act could cost a Conservative Member of Parliament his or her seat. Together with the letter, a list of Conservative Members is being circulated to NACSA members with the heading "Up and At 'em", and the instruction that it is time to strike because

> "There's plenty you can say to concentrate the mind of any insecure Tory politician."

It would appear from the list that, fortunately, I am not considered to be in one of the 150 most marginal Tory-held seats, but I deplore such intimidation and harassment by any organisation. I believe that it is totally improper. I am not talking about normal lobbying procedures. I imagine that similar tactics are being used on Opposition Members of Parliament, too.

I hope that the Government will take a strong line against those who seek to put unacceptable pressure on those of us who do not support the anti-Child Support Agency brigade. It is deplorable that such people should cause aggravation not only to Members of Parliament, who are perhaps used to rather vigorous lobbying and can deal with it a little better than most, but against the employees of the Child Support Agency, who I understand have been subjected to the most outrageous behaviour—for example, letters have been sent to them containing razor blades, and they have also received letters on coffin-shaped paper. I believe that I am correct

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

in saying that anti-CSA supporters were invited to target a particular named member of the CSA's staff in the campaign of harassment, merely for doing their job.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give me an assurance that now that the review of the CSA has been completed and this Bill is before Parliament, when the legislation is on the statute book, it will be given time to work effectively and that a period of stability will follow. More and more tinkering with the system will be extremely disruptive. We now need time for the CSA to get on with its work, without hindrance, so that a period of tranquillity can follow and the service for which it was designed—to put the welfare of children at the top of the agenda—can be delivered effectively and efficiently.

5.2 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), particularly as she commented about the threats made to her and to other Members of Parliament. It is a sign of how unrepresentative this place is that an Act that is clearly affecting men and women equally has largely heard the male side of the case but not the female side—the mothers concerned. Although I share her criticism of much of the campaigning tactics of those who wish to see the Act replaced, some of those people—I object to their aggressive behaviour as much as she does—nevertheless have points of which we need to take account in the Chamber. It is surprising that for a Bill as important as this so few Members should be present today. There is clearly something wrong with our representative machinery that it delivers so few to such an important debate.

I want to comment on the atmosphere in which we are having the debate, not only on how few Members are present but on how the Act is received in the country. Clearly, a large number of people—fathers, largely—disagree radically with what is being done to them. I place responsibility for that on the Treasury Bench for allowing matters to reach the state that they did before the CSA was introduced. I cannot pretend that I pick up—no matter where I go in the country—the feeling that the Act has failed. There is an appreciation of real difficulties in delivering, but I have not had people rushing up to me in the street, saying, "It is the most foul deed you have done in supporting the Child Support Agency." Many people when drawn on the issue are amazed that it took Parliament so long to act, not that it acted when it did.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) made an important plea in the Secretary of State's speech: we should send the Bill to a Special Standing Committee. It important that the Secretary of State bears that in mind, even if on this topic he had a 100 per cent. record of getting it right. Given that his performance is a little less than that, I would have thought it reasonable for him to say that, if he delayed the passage of the Bill for a couple of weeks, it may give great dividends at the end of the day, as the measure would be more effective when it finally reached the statute book.

I disagreed with a number of things that the Secretary of State said and with the atmosphere that he was presenting—that we are debating almost the last major change to be made to the CSA. I would be amazed if that was true. Perhaps he will be able to fence until the end of this Session of Parliament and not be forced to introduce another Bill, but I would be totally amazed if he did not have to introduce other regulations. Our plea at this stage surely should be that, given our incompetence as a legislative Chamber in getting the measure right, we should see reforms almost as a sign of success. We should think less of our pride as a legislature and more of not roughing up people and getting their lives on the wrong end of legislation. We should see it as the prize rather than a real sense of failure.

My feeling today is that the measure still has massive support in the country, but we will need regularly to review and change it. The hon. Lady commented on the nature of the campaign outside in the country, which has been very tough. One can hardly attend a meeting with those who oppose the Act without feeling the violence that is in the air and wondering whether the meeting will remain peaceful or whether one will be up against a wall and made to feel the aggression and the sense of frustration that those people feel. We need to register that.

It is important to understand why some people feel so strongly about the Act. Clearly, no Act that takes money from men and gives it to women will be popular, but the Government do not come to the House with clean hands. On a number of occasions, I asked about the collapse of maintenance for women on income support, to be met only by puzzlement by Ministers on the Treasury Bench. I wrote about it.

The Government took action only when taxpayers were asked to pay 4p in the pound on income tax to meet the costs of raising children when one parent had deserted them. Not only is that a pretty horrendous sum for taxpayers to find—largely through the Government's inaction to work the liable relative section effectively—but it sent out a message to men in the country: the Government were not terribly interested whether they paid maintenance or not. The number of our constituents being chased was falling. The informal bushfire message was, "Don't worry. Start the second family. The Government won't chase you. You won't hear any more." On the basis that they did not expect to pay maintenance, a large number of men started second families and thought that they could manage.

The Government panicked because the reaction of those men cost taxpayers 4p in the pound and letters started to arrive from the Child Support Agency. The iniquity of people caught by a retrospective Act and those whose marriages break up and who know that the agency exists are major sources of grievance. I hope to return to that theme.

There are some good measures in the Bill and as the Select Committee proposed some of them, it would be ungracious of me not to mention that. The way in which the Government have got off the hook of giving a maintenance disregard is ingenious, although the timing is ingenious only to the Government and not to families. Instead of a disregard which would have been a disincentive for mothers who were returning to the labour market, there is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, a child back-to-work bonus called the child maintenance bonus.

Why will the back-to-work bonus come into operation in 1996 while the child maintenance bonus will not begin to operate until a year later? Is that because the Secretary of State lost out at the Cabinet table while his colleague at the Department of Employment got his legislation through? Women who benefit from the measure will have to have been on benefit and their ex-partners paying maintenance for eight years before they can reap the maximum return. That takes them to the year 2001. If the Secretary of State had thought that although that was not the solution it was at least an incentive to help mothers back into the labour market, he would have displayed a greater sense of urgency over this small but important reform. Perhaps the winding-up speech will explain that.

The second issue is the deferral of cases. Somehow the statement was timed to be made just before Parliament rose for Christmas and we could not question the Secretary of State. I thought that it covered not only non-benefit but benefit cases. I will happily give way if I am wrong about that. We are not talking only about those who have so far featured in the debate, people whom the Secretary of State somehow thought were of less concern because they were not costing the taxpayer and would not be helped by the measure. It also covers those women who have failed to return their maintenance application forms. That is the hidden part of the collusion which the Government are clearly aiding and abetting. I shall come to that in a moment.

When we add the deferred cases, which were announced just before Christmas, to those that have been announced since we get a grand total of more than 500,000 families whose cases have been deferred under the regulations. The Secretary of State looks puzzled. The two figures are the 180,000 cases that we have recently been given and the 340,000 that were announced just before Christmas. It is a sizeable number. I shall deal in a moment with the collusion that is going on under the Act.

In effect, the Secretary of State has announced that he is deserting those mothers who have managed to get back to work. Because they have had a maintenance settlement in the courts, he is saying that they do not need the services of the Child Support Agency and can go back to the courts. But the reason for the Child Support Agency, at least according to the Secretary of State, was that the courts were failing in that they were arbitrary, that people, and especially mothers, had great difficulty in getting their cases heard fairly, and that settlements were absurdly low.

Of course some mothers are leading their former partners a song and dance, but that is not generally the case and it is not the general impression that we get in our constituency surgeries about how the courts operated. Some fathers were represented in court and some mothers were not, and courts too readily accepted the father's costs of getting to and from work and agreed on very small maintenance payments. The totally unsatisfactory way in which the courts behaved, especially towards women with children, was one of the reasons for the establishment of the Child Support Agency.

It does the Secretary of State no credit when he tells a large number of working women who do not depend on benefit and who are doing exactly what he wants them to do, that they should not worry about the CSA not helping them because they can use the courts. It is not good enough for the Secretary of State to support people while they do precisely what he wants them to do, and then desert them at this stage because it is inconvenient to take them on to the books.

When the Minister kindly allowed me to intervene I asked, "What does referral mean? Does it mean that the files will be closed?" No, it means deferral. It means that there will be no action on any of those cases before the election at the earliest. Goodness knows how long after the election it will be if the Government are returned. Today we are formally deserting large numbers of working women who are trying to bring up their children. When one thinks sacramentally about what the agency does, it is clear that that will give powerful messages to women on benefit. They will ask how the Government find it so easy to desert those who have done precisely what the Government want them to do. If I were bringing up children and dependent on benefit I would think much harder about whether going back to work was sensible.

When the Under-Secretary replies to the debate he must give us some hope that those women are not to be cast out into political limbo but that there will be a timetable for bringing them back within the arrangements of the agency so that they can use it to get redress and decent maintenance.

Thirdly, I shall deal with the important question of collusion about which the Select Committee and hon. Members have warned the Government. Many parts of the legislation were wrong but we got right the protection for those women who would be threatened with violence by their ex-husbands or ex-partners if they tried to enforce a maintenance order through the CSA. Nobody who lives in the real world knew when we were passing that important safeguard that it was open to abuse. A handful of deferred cases has now risen to 16,000 in which the agency believes that both partners are colluding to defraud the taxpayer. That is sickening news for taxpayers, but it is also alarming for those women who have correctly claimed that an ex-husband or partner is threatening them not to enforce CSA orders on that person. They must know that as the number of people taking the taxpayer to the cleaners escalates, the patience of this place will clearly break. The safeguards, therefore, that we rightly put in place for women under threat of violence from ex-partners may be changed.

I make a plea to the Secretary of State. I ask him to announce quickly changes in what is required from separated parents who claim that they cannot fill in the form for fear of being beaten up. Would it be unreasonable to expect such individuals at least to have told the police that they have been threatened? The agency should ask for that piece of information before accepting at face value that someone is being threatened with violence if they continue in their wish for the Child Support Agency to become involved.

I believe that there is already one mother with children by three different partners who is telling the agency that her third partner, just like the other two, has threatened her with violence if she goes ahead with her application. As the rules stand at the moment, there is no automatic procedure to protect officers when dealing with such people. I hope that before the number of cases reaches 30,000, 50,000 or 100,000, as it will unless the procedure changes, we shall hear some comments from Ministers—before the Bill is given a Second Reading and before it goes into Committee. It is crucial that safeguards are put in place not merely for taxpayers, but for women who are genuinely in fear of their lives if they give information to the CSA.

I now turn to the unfairness to parents to whom the Act is being applied retrospectively. I again underline the point I made at the beginning of my speech about the comments made by the hon. Member for Broxbourne. She

[Mr. Frank Field]

said how offensive most hon. Members have found some of the tactics of those who have campaigned to get the Act off the statute book. The campaign has probably taught male Members more about some of the violence that women have to put up with in marriages than any other tutorial to which we could be subjected. That does not mean that some of the sheer frustration of people who think that their lives are being ruined is not justified in some respects.

The Government lost interest to a large extent in chasing fathers whose ex-partners were picking up supplementary benefit or income support. Under this Government, the percentage of single parents on benefit who had a maintenance order to help offset the cost to taxpayers more than halved. That was the message going out to the country. This Government, who talk tough, are anything but tough when it comes to it. The message was that it did not matter. One could start a second family and one would not hear any more. One could expect the whole of one's income to go to that second family. People made arrangements on that basis and they feel aggrieved, with some justification, that the Government panicked at the size of the bill—4p in the pound—that they were presenting to taxpayers for the cost of single parents on income support and that they acted as they did.

The pleas that some of us have made have been simple. We have asked that we should make a distinction between families to whom the Act applies retrospectively and families to whom it has applied since it reached the statute book. Those families know perfectly well that the Child Support Agency is in existence and that all of us hope that it will work even more effectively than it is working now.

The Government's response has been that such a distinction would be too complicated. They say that it is difficult enough now, that there is enough chaos behind the scenes and that they do not want to add to the complications. I swallowed that argument until the Secretary of State came forward with plans to put a cap on the contributions from richer parents. He made that move, of course, to help parents who, in previous elections, had strongly supported the Conservative party. They are the main beneficiaries of the cap under which no more than 30 per cent. of disposable income can be taken under the formula. If, however, a cap can be applied to this group, other caps could be applied. If it is simple to apply a cap to the maximum amount of income that will be taken, it should be quite possible to have a 20 per cent. cap for families for whom the Child Support Act 1991 is retrospective. In making one concession to individuals who, in previous elections, may have supported the Conservative party rather well, the Secretary of State clearly showed how we could also, with the minimum of fuss and difficulty, and without interrupting the formula, provide a 15 per cent., 20 per cent. or 25 per cent. cap for those for whom the Act is retrospective.

I do not believe that some of the anger will go away until we recognise that it is a gross injustice for any Parliament to tax retrospectively. That is what we have done with the Child Support Act. It is important to deal with that partly because of the sense of grievance felt by many fathers. It shows up at meetings, as the hon. Member for Broxbourne explained; I have participated in such meetings as well. There is also something much more important at stake than ministerial pride or even the pride of the House of Commons. The importance of the Act is that it is not just about trying to cap the contribution that taxpayers make towards the support of single parents although, as I have tried to explain, the Government allowed that bill to get out of hand. It was long overdue for steps to be taken to limit the growth of expenditure in a manner that did not put at a disadvantage the women and children who had been deserted.

As I said in the previous debate, we are, for the first time, making a change in the whole direction of the welfare state. At one time, the House of Commons would take to itself more power and more responsibility. We are now putting responsibility back into the country, into families and individuals, and we are saying, "This is your decision and you must live by it." That is an important change. We are now thinking about the impact of legislation on character, an aspect that we have lost in the past 30 years. We should not throw away the reform of the Child Support Agency too quickly.

My plea is this. Although the Bill is important and although I hope that it speeds on to the statute book after proper and open discussion, I cannot believe that it can or should be the last change we make. When we are dealing with the most intimate side of people's lives, we should be more than willing to come back to the House with reform measures when we find that things are not working properly. It is a foolish politician who dabbles in this area who thinks that he has somehow got the right solution. Clearly, we have not had the right solution. I would be amazed if this modest measure got the balance right now. I look forward, however, to the debates on this measure and future measures as we try to get this most important reform right.

5.28 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I am delighted to take part in this debate and especially delighted to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I have had the pleasure and privilege of serving on his Select Committee on Social Security since it was set up at the beginning of this Parliament. Into no other investigation have we put so much thought and so much time. No other investigation has caused us so much concern or has brought before us so many heart-rending issues as has our investigation into the Child Support Agency. It is rare that legislation comes before the House which owes so much in its entirety to the work and findings of a Select Committee. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birkenhead for the manner in which he has chaired the Select Committee and for the constructive manner throughout in which he has taken forward the arguments about the Child Support Agency.

I have listened to comments about the Bill being committed to a Special Standing Committee. I confess that, after just three years in the House, I have no direct experience of such a Standing Committee nor do I know how it operates technically. The Social Security Committee, however, has taken an enormous amount of evidence and has already spent a great deal of time discussing the agency. Since many of the measures in the Bill have already been gone through in some detail by the Committee, I hope, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that we shall be able to move forward to get many of those measures on to the statute book as quickly as possible to help those whom they are meant to help.

In concluding his speech, the hon. Member for Birkenhead returned to a theme with which he has dealt in the Chamber and which has run throughout the deliberations and reports of the Select Committee. The Child Support Act, as originally passed, was a major landmark in social security legislation because it redefined the responsibilities of the state and the individual. This redefining has, of course, gone on in one of the most sensitive areas of policy, involving as it does not only the breakdown of family life but the children in that family. There is no doubt that under the Act and the agency, certain responsibilities have been restored to the individual in place of the previous state support.

We hear a great deal today about rights and responsibilities and the balance that needs to struck between them. There can surely be no greater responsibility in our lives than that which we owe our children. I am therefore pleased that the Government have brought a Bill forward that reflects many of the concerns of the Social Security Select Committee and, indeed, of constituents of hon. Members throughout the House, which have been expressed in mailbags and at surgeries. It was inevitable that an Act of such a nature would arouse strong and polarised views. Similarly, its implementation was never going to be easy in the face of breaking down long-held beliefs and supposed rights felt by absent parents and parents with care. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the problems which exist in Australia and New Zealand several years after the supposedly successful implementation of their own child support Acts.

The underlying principle of the Act has been continuously supported by the overwhelming majority of hon. Members and by virtually every member of the Select Committee. Yet the practical applications of it and the operations of the agency since it was implemented have contrived to cause sufficient problems and ill-feeling throughout the country—possibly—to undermine the very existence of the agency. That is why the Government have kept its workings constantly under review. They have responded positively not only to the Select Committee reports, but to the concerns that have been expressed in hon. Members' mailbags, at their surgeries and at meetings in their constituencies throughout the country. For that reason, I believe that the agency is no longer facing the crisis that it was—possibly—a year or so ago.

It was conceivable at one time that we could have been standing here today debating the potential collapse of the agency, so great had its overload become. Over the past few months, however, the whole atmosphere and nature of the debate surrounding the Child Support Agency has changed for the vast majority of hon. Members and has changed throughout the country for all but a few die-hards who still implacably oppose the principles which lie behind it.

This Bill is, of course, part of a much wider range of packages which my right hon. Friend announced a few weeks ago in the White Paper. It is therefore only natural that today's debate should focus on some of the measures in regulations as well as those in the Bill. It is only right that the Government should act in the interests of not only the absent parents but of the parents with care and, most particularly, the very people whom this Act is supposed to help, the children.

There can be no doubt that in setting up the agency and in the Act's implementation over the past two or three years, the major problems that have faced the agency have revolved around two principal areas. They have revolved, first, around the retrospective nature of some of the legislation, which we have heard discussed today, and, secondly, around the application of the formula, which has led to high—often, indeed, impossibly high—assessments of payments to be made by absent parents.

The Act as drafted took no account of previous property or capital settlements. The so-called clean-break settlements often involved the wholesale transfer of property, very often the family home, in exchange for deliberately low maintenance payments. The arguments about clean-break settlements have been rehearsed many times in Committee and on the Floor of the House. Transfers were often made between the separating couple and very rarely reflected the true interests of the children. Of course as we all know, a clean break from our children is impossible or should be technically impossible. Even under the old court-based system, parents with care could always return to the court to have their maintenance reassessed if they so wished. Nevertheless, a combination of the misconception that clean breaks were possible and a strong sense of natural justice have combined to make this the most contentious of all issues.

The Government are right to point out that, often, such settlements are deliberately engineered to maximise the burden on the taxpayer. In many cases, however, they are not engineered and we continually heard evidence in Committee that they are a real bone of contention. Little sums it up better than the evidence that we received from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which told us:

> "it is wrong, and against the rules of natural justice . . . to overturn agreements which everyone—the Courts and the Government—accepted at the time were final and people have organised their lives accordingly. People have got on with their lives, made new ones and it has been one of the biggest causes of antagonism against the whole of the Child Support scheme".

That last sentence is most telling. For anyone struggling to get over the trauma of a separation or a divorce, the ultimate ambition is to get on with one's own life. For many, unfortunately, this legislation has made it impossible for them to do just that and has all too often opened up old wounds to which they need never have returned.

The system of departures is in clauses 1 to 9. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) pointed out, schedule 2 contains the real meat of the issue: the rules of departures. This system of departing from the rigorous formula which did not often allow such departures is most welcome. It introduces an air of discretion which was sorely lacking in the original legislation. The Bill proposes that the absent parent will have to prove either to the agency or, if the agency says that it is too complicated for it, to the tribunal which will be set up, that any property or capital settlement made prior to April 1993 does not fully reflect the true circumstances of that settlement.

I have no doubt that such a move will go a very long way to helping many of those absent parents who have been hardest hit by the agency, often because of the large sum of money which they have been asked to pay. I am only sorry that that requires primary legislation. I am especially pleased, therefore, that the Government have introduced alongside the Bill, by regulation, an immediate

[Mr. David Faber]

broad-brush formula change, which will be extremely helpful in the short term to some of the absent parents who are suffering the worst hardships.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained in some detail how the departure system will work in relation to the current formula. In addition to the issues which arise from previous property settlements, absent parents or, indeed, parents with care, as my right hon. Friend was keen to stress, may apply for a departure because of additional expenses which they may undertake and which may not be reflected in the formula. The allowance for high travel-to-work costs will be most welcome, especially in rural areas such as my constituency. Many of my constituents who live in west Wiltshire work in Bristol or Bath and often have long journeys to work each day. It has become increasingly difficult for them to survive while meeting their travel costs and increased maintenance payments. That has made many people angry. The need for primary legislation has meant, inevitably, that there will be a delay. I welcome the broad-brush allowance, which my right hon. and hon. Friends will be introducing in regulations, based on the distance as the crow flies between the absent parent's home and his workplace. That will go a long way towards alleviating, in the short term, many of the problems with regard to long journeys to work.

Other qualifying conditions for a departure from the formula should also be praised. In particular, expenses resulting from long-term illness or disability will now be allowed. That will greatly ease the worry of many absent parents who suffer such illnesses or difficult disabilities. The costs of caring for stepchildren will also, although admittedly in exceptional cases, be considered. That will help alleviate another major bone of contention that has run through the agency's workings throughout its operation.

I welcome most warmly the decision to take into account the high costs of travel to maintain contact with the children of the marriage. One of the most heart-rending problems which the agency has caused has been that which we have all witnessed in our surgeries and in our mailbags—the breakdown in communication between some absent parents and their children.

In some instances, the problem has arisen because of a breakdown in relations between the divorced parents. There is no doubt some parents with care do, however regrettably, use their children to blackmail the absent parent or to cause stress after the marriage has ended. All too often, the difficulty in respect of the contact between the absent parent and his or her child has arisen simply because the costs have become prohibitively high.

In today's society, there can be no excuse for preventing absent parents from seeing their children whenever and wherever they can within the remit laid down by a court. Children desperately need a healthy, full and loving relationship with both parents. That is sometimes all too sadly forgotten by family law practitioners and, I hesitate to say this, by the judges.

I want to refer briefly to some of the arrangements in the Bill for helping the parent with care. All too often the parent with care has been forgotten in the deliberations with regard to the agency. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State correctly highlighted—and the hon. Member for Garscadden confirmed it—that the only major complaint in the Opposition amendment is that the Bill lacks a maintenance disregard.

Members of the Select Committee are aware that the maintenance disregard divided us. I have no doubt that it would have been superficially attractive for any amounts between £150 million and £350 million to have been spent on a maintenance disregard to soften the blow. Contrary to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, I believe that the new child maintenance bonus—which the hon. Member for Birkenhead described as ingenious—is an imaginative and sensible way of giving an incentive to the parent with care to move from a benefit dependency back into work.

The bonus will accrue at a weekly rate of up to £5 and it will enable parents with care to receive a lump sum of £1,000 when they move back into work. I understand that the provision will benefit 60,000 parents with care and it would be churlish of the Opposition not to welcome it.

The Bill contains much else that is especially welcome, most notably in relation to the work burden which the agency must undertake and the efforts over the past few months to ease that burden. As other hon. Members have done so in passing, I want to pay tribute to the staff of the Child Support Agency, many of whom we found in our visits to the various offices to be among the most highly motivated staff in the Department of Social Security. The previous chief executive confirmed that point.

The staff work long hours and extremely hard. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said, some of the staff have been the target of quite unnecessary vilification at work, and, I am sad to say, at home. All hon. Members would deplore that.

Mr. Frank Field: I forgot to make a similar point in my speech and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to make it now. However, does he realise that one reason why the staff are so highly motivated is that this is one of the few reforms which the House has passed with which large numbers of people in the country agree?

Mr. Faber: I agree entirely: not only do large numbers of people agree with it, but we found that there is an underlying desire among those who work in the agency to make the provision work and to see that it works. They are motivated because they understand that the provision will benefit the people they are trying to help.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I have no criticism of the motivation of the people who work in the Child Support Agency. However, the hon. Gentleman is wrong to believe that the administration of the agency is yet anything other than a shambles. The administration is an utter shambles. Several cases were brought to my attention at the weekend. In one, a lady has been waiting six years, but she has received no maintenance despite long conversations with seven different people in the CSA. In another case, a gentleman received letters indicating diametrically opposed positions on the same day, one through me and one direct from the appeals system. Whatever the motivation, the administration is still greatly lacking with regard to the aims set by Parliament.

Mr. Faber: The hon. Gentleman used strong language when he referred to a shambles. I do not know whether he heard the beginning of my speech, but I made the point that, a year or so ago, I might have agreed with much of what he said. The agency faced a severe crisis then. However, I do not get the impression that the agency is still in a shambles. My impression is that much has been done over the past few months.

Reference has been made to the report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. In his evidence to the Select Committee on 1 February, the ombudsman noted, having spoken to the new chief executive of the agency,

> "I formed a very positive view of Miss Chant's resolution to put matters on a firm and better footing."

The agency is doing much to ensure that matters are placed on a better footing and that more people are being devoted to the job in hand to get it done.

Motivation in the agency is high. The staff need the support and help which I believe they are now receiving. We have seen a major turn around in the past few months and over the past year.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever difficulties exist in relation to the administration of the Child Support Agency, the members of staff who deal with the correspondence and inquiries of hon. Members on behalf of our constituents have always been courteous and helpful and always try to expedite matters as quickly as possible?

Mr. Faber: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I have seen no signs to the contrary. However, in some ways, it is a sad reflection that we need a specific targeted telephone line for Members of Parliament. My only criticism of the agency is that it would be nice occasionally if some of our constituents, who clearly have great problems getting through to the agency, had the silver service that is available to us.

We have a wonderful service and the people who are targeted to look after us do their job extremely well, as do all the staff. However, it would be nice if, occasionally, some of the administrative burden was taken from us and if our constituents could obtain answers directly from the agency. That is what the new chief executive is trying to achieve. Work is being undertaken to improve the system. I am sure that the House would want to send its strongest support to those who work in the agency.

I have referred to the agency's work burden and to what the Bill does to alleviate that burden. The deferment of non-benefit cases where a court order or a written maintenance agreement was in place prior to April 1993, is most welcome. Such a decision should have been taken on policy grounds and not purely on administrative grounds. In that respect, I differ with the hon. Member for Birkenhead.

Where agreement is not reached, one parent or the other should have the right to call in the agency or to use its collection service. However, I cannot for the life of me see any reason why, where maintenance has been agreed amicably and a court order has been handed down in a proper manner, the agency should have any role to play. If the taxpayer is happy, the parents are amicably happy about the arrangement and, most important, if the children are adequately cared for within the arrangement, I see no reason why the state in the form of the agency should be involved. I hope that the deferment of those cases will be indefinite. We have not heard a date until which they will be deferred.

We have also heard talk of the 30 per cent. cap that has been put on assessments. That is an important move. Many of the public relations problems that the agency has faced have arisen out of nothing more than the total amount which the absent parent has been asked to pay. It seems right that some cap should be put on the total sum that a parent can be asked to pay and 30 per cent. seems the right amount.

The Bill and the regulations accompanying it contain other measures which reflect the views of the Select Committee and are therefore, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead pointed out, warmly welcomed. It would be churlish not to welcome them. Interest payments on arrears and the fees which were charged by the agency have caused huge resentment among absent parents. They were seen as an extra burden on top of everything else. Non-enforcement of arrears and the interest on those arrears in certain circumstances, coupled with the deferment of fees for at least two years, will help remove the administrative irritation which has created so much opposition to the agency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne and the hon. Member for Birkenhead referred to the activities of the anti-CSA organisations. My hon. Friend complained that, as parliamentarians, we were unduly targeted and lobbied by those who opposed the Child Support Agency. I submit that, as parliamentarians, we are used to being lobbied and we are able to look after ourselves. Threats such as, "You will lose your seat at the next election," do not always wash with us in any case.

What is more sinister and what we as Members of Parliament, our families and those who work within the agency should not have to put up with is threatening behaviour and campaigning. I have received several personal threats. Such behaviour is simply intolerable. If people want to change the way in which the agency operates, they should concentrate on political campaigning and put any personal threats to one side.

In that context, I should like to comment on some of the press and media reporting of the issue and in particular on the few, but tragic cases of suicide which the press and media have sought to attribute to the activities of the CSA. Divorce is always traumatic; it is always extremely difficult for the people involved. In many cases, all too tragically, it may lead to suicide or suicidal feelings. It is irresponsible and wrong for the media and people associated with the campaign against the CSA to suggest that the agency was directly responsible in any way for the suicide of certain people. However tragic and desperate those cases may have been it would be wrong not to see them in the wider context of a separation and divorce, which the people in question will clearly have gone through. It was irresponsible of the media to have pretended otherwise.

I wish to sound one small note of disappointment and one word of related caution about the Bill. In its report, the Select Committee unanimously recommended that the Government consider replacing the term "absent parent" with "non-custodial parent". Throughout our report the term "non-custodial" is used. I have no doubt that for hundreds of thousands of fathers throughout the country and a few mothers, the term "absent parent" is pejorative and even insulting. I hope that the Government will reconsider the matter.

[Mr. Faber]

The Government's official response to the Select Committee report was disappointing. They gave the following reason:

> "'Non-custodial' is not appropriate for two main reasons: firstly, in the 1989 Children Act 'custody' was replaced by residence as the legal arrangement for the care of children; and, secondly, the term implies that the person with care of the child also has 'custody' of that child, which may not actually reflect the position."

We could debate all day the implementation of the Children Act 1989. It would make an interesting debate for a Wednesday morning. It is one of the most abused pieces of legislation that the House has passed in recent years. It is often deliberately misrepresented by the very practitioners who are paid to implement it, from the courts down.

Although "residence" may now be the technical legal term, the term "custody" is widely understood, especially when used in the term "shared custody". I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider the matter. The term "absent parent" causes great grief to many people. It is a pejorative term and it can be considered an insulting term.

My word of warning is not directly associated with the Bill but it arises out of the Bill. The Bill highlights the appalling difficulties in dealing with social issues. At the weekend there was a great deal of media comment in which the imminent publication of a White Paper on divorce law reform was predicted. If such a White Paper is published, I have no doubt that it will broadly reflect the Green Paper that the Government published last year. If that is so, it will undoubtedly contain much that is admirable for those involved and much that is good for the children. However, I have to warn the Government that it will also contain much that is anathema to many people, especially many absent or non-custodial parents and many who have gone through the trauma of divorce. I hope that the Government will take note of the strength of feeling that has greeted the Child Support Agency and think very carefully before introducing divorce law reform on the Floor of the House.

Legislating for children and divorced couples in today's society is, I am sad to say, something that we have to do but which is nigh on impossible to achieve satisfactorily. Divorce is probably the most traumatic event that any person can go through in his or her life. It is even more traumatic than bereavement in the family. As we have seen only too accurately from the Bill and the publicity surrounding it, the problems and trauma can stay with people for many years, possibly for ever.

I congratulate the Government and particularly my hon. Friend the Minister, who has done so much to listen and act on the problems highlighted by the Select Committee and all Members of Parliament, as they have seen them reflected in their constituencies. The Bill will improve provision for assessment, collection and enforcement of child maintenance payments. It will make payments fairer and improve the service offered by the agency. Above all, I hope that it will ensure that maintenance is paid to the children.

5.56 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): There comes a time with everything when it becomes beyond repair. I believe that we have reached the point at which the Child Support Act 1991 is beyond repair. We are all in favour of the principle. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House are in favour of all parents paying for the upkeep of their children. That is not in dispute. What is in dispute is the operation of the Child Support Agency and the Act.

The Bill before us tinkers at the edges. It does not go nearly far enough. The Government have had their chance and they have failed. The Child Support Act has had its chance and has also failed. That is why I tabled a reasoned amendment. I felt that this Bill did not go far enough. That is why I would like to see the original Child Support Act repealed. I honestly wish that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen had come out and said today that they were in favour of repealing the Act. I am disappointed that they were unable to do that.

Mr. Frank Field: Where does it say in the hon. Lady's reasoned amendment that that is what the Liberal Democrats propose?

Ms Lynne: As the hon. Gentleman knows, a reasoned amendment declines to give a Bill a Second Reading. Whether or not it says that it declines to give a Second Reading, that is what it does.

Mr. Field: I am aware that the Liberal Democrats, of whom I usually speak with great favour, as the hon. Lady knows, are against the second Bill. She speaks about the first Bill, which has become an Act. Why did she not table an amendment which said that she wanted to scrap the Act?

Ms Lynne: I tabled such a reasoned amendment, but because it did not relate to the Bill before the House today, it was ruled out of order. I said in the reasoned amendment that I would like to see the Child Support Act repealed. It was ruled out of order. The official Opposition also tabled a reasoned amendment. It declines to give a Second Reading to the Bill before us today. I am in favour of the principle that all parents should support their children. We have here an Act that is crumbling before our eyes, and the Government are putting a coat of whitewash on it. I do not believe that that is enough.

The Bill contains the sound of silence on many issues. My noble and learned Friend Earl Russell, in a letter to the Chairman of the Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee, said that

> "almost every important substantive decision is left to be made by regulation and the Bill itself creates little more than a series of regulation making powers".

There are 30 clauses in the Bill and three schedules, and I have counted 42 mentions of regulations, orders or "may be prescribed". That is government by decree, and it is neither democratic nor efficient. It is not democratic because we cannot adequately debate what is before us today.

Schedule 2 of the Bill deals with the creation of powers to make regulations for departures from the formula, but it does not say specifically what those powers will be. The schedule does not say exactly what will happen. It is all regulation, orders and "may be prescribed". We want flexibility in the formula, but the Government talk about departures from the formula without spelling out what they mean.

The problem with the Act was that it was totally inflexible but the Bill does not make any changes to that whatsoever, and that is why I cannot support it. How can we possibly debate a sequence of regulation-making powers? That is what we have been asked to do today. The Government may say that we need flexibility, and I agree, but we need flexibility not only in the Act, but in the Government.

Hon. Members will have received a deluge of letters and studies about how the Act is working. The majority of members of the all-party child support monitoring group, of which I happen to be the vice-chair, have been told that the Government's proposals will not make a blind bit of difference to parents with or without care. Hon. Members will still get letters about the matter and people in their surgeries who are concerned about it because this Bill will not change much at all.

The Act is discredited, and it should be repealed. It does not have the confidence of anyone it affects—either the parent with care or the parent without care. If the Act does not have the confidence of those people, how can it possibly work? The parents will not co-operate.

We have talked about a maintenance disregard, but there is nothing in the Bill for such a disregard for a parent with care. The so-called absent parent would have an incentive to pay if he thought that the parent with care was going to get more money for the child, as the child must be at the centre of the scheme.

People who lose income support can also lose passported benefits such as free school meals. The Government have come up with a maintenance bonus of £5 a week if a parent gets work for more than 16 hours. The ceiling on that bonus is £1,000, but that would quickly be eaten up by child care costs. The Government should be talking about a child care disregard and tapering benefits if they want to get people back to work.

What about the much-trumpeted opportunity for departure from the formula in the Bill? The Government say that we need more flexibility, but they still seem to be wedded to the idea of the formula. Or are they? They are not wedded to the formula for pre-1993, non-benefit cases, and they say that those can still be decided by the courts. The Government say that they might get around to those cases in the future, but they are dealing only with benefit cases at the moment because they want to get money back for the Treasury.

Departures may be allowed—in the Secretary of State's words—in certain "tightly defined circumstances". It would be up to the Secretary of State to judge—according to unspecified regulations—whether an appeal for a departure is granted. I do not believe that parents with or without care will be mollified by that.

In April, property settlements of over £5,000 will be taken into account, and that will make a marginal difference. For example, someone who has settled for £25,000 will be £9 a week better off. After 1997, more departures from the formula may be addressed.

The Act should not have been made retrospective in the first place, and that is why it is so discredited. The principle was good, but I cannot believe that it can be made to work now. People should have been fully consulted before the Act was brought in. They were not, and that is why it is in such a shambles.

Mr. Hendry: Is the hon. Lady saying that there should be no element of retrospection at all? If so, does she think that it would have been fair that an absent or non-custodial parent who got divorced the day after the Act came into force would have to pay £20 or £30 a week for child care, whereas someone divorced the day before the Act came into force would pay nothing?

Ms Lynne: I do not know whether it would have been fair, but it would have been a way to make the Act work. The reason it is not working is because of its retrospective elements. Some people have made clean-break settlements, taken out hire purchase agreements, married again and had two children by their second family. The Act did not work because it was retrospective. That proposal may or may not have been fair, but it would have made sure that the Child Support Act worked a lot better.

Mr. Frank Field: While we understand why the hon. Lady wants the Child Support Act removed from the statute book, we all know that it will not be removed. We must look for reforms, and I regard the retrospective nature of the measure as its fatal weakness. In the circumstances, will she support the idea that—as there is a 30 per cent. cap on disposable income on richer parents regarding their contribution of maintenance—there could be a cap of 20 per cent. or 15 per cent. on those families for whom the Act is clearly retrospective?

Ms Lynne: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. If the Bill is passed today, the hon. Gentleman's suggestion could be a way forward. I would like to see the Bill defeated and also the repeal of the Child Support Act, but, sadly, I think that that will not happen.

Let us look at some other matters, such as the 15-mile travel-to-work disregard. As the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) said, it is 15 miles as the crow flies and does not take into account the route taken to work. Nobody can get to work as the crow flies. A 15-mile trip to work makes 30 miles a day and 150 miles a week, but the money will be paid only after those 150 miles have been travelled, and at a rate of 10p a mile. No company gives 10p a mile for travel costs, and hon. Members would be extremely worried if they were offered 10p a mile for their travel costs.

I am pleased that the costs of travelling to see a child may be taken into account if there is a departure from the formula and if the regulations state that a parent can appeal against it. That does not go far enough, and it will not deal with my constituents who have been affected by the measure. A man was in my surgery the other week in floods of tears—all hon. Members will have had such cases—because he used to visit his son, who lives miles away. I doubt whether the man lived far enough away to be covered by the new measures in the Bill, but he lived far enough away from his son for it to cost him too much money to visit. His maintenance payments had increased and he told his ex-wife that he could not get there. Their divorce had been very acrimonious and when the son asked his mother why daddy wasn't coming to see him any more she said, "Because daddy doesn't love you any more". That was why the man was in floods of tears—he had telephoned his son, who refused to speak to him. It is not an isolated case, as it is happening in constituency after constituency. Now, we have this Bill and it is not good enough.

What about appeals? They will not be independent. I am glad that housing costs may be taken into account for the second family and the children of that family, but the Child Support Act 1991 was a Government initiative and it is not doing what it set out to do. I supported it in the

[Ms Lynne]

first place because of what it set out to do. I sincerely thought that the Secretary of State and the Minister were listening to what we and the all-party child support monitoring group were saying. If they had been listening, they would have come up with a little more than we have in this Bill.

The White Paper said, "Children come first." That has a very hollow ring today. The Act is in a shambles and neither parent—the one with or the one without care—has seen any benefits from it. If the non-co-operation continues, case loads will get longer, settlements will take longer and the morale of support agency staff will get lower. People are already refusing to work for the CSA because they do not want the hassle and I cannot blame them.

The 1991 Act should not have been retrospective. Just before Christmas, 340,000 cases were deferred. The Government are indulging in crisis management. This is the second time that they have had to come to the Dispatch Box to make changes. How many more times will they have to come here to change the Act? Why do they not wake up to the fact that it is fundamentally flawed, and that parents with care and so-called absent parents alike see it as a Treasury support Act? In response to the report of the Social Security Select Committee, the Secretary of State said that they should base performance targets on benefit reduction. Even he was admitting that it is a Treasury support Act.

Children's welfare must come first, which is why I want the Act repealed. We must go back to the drawing board, reconsider, have proper consultation with all interested parties—not piecemeal consultation, or consulting and not listening—and come back with a unified family court system, which is something that the majority of people on all sides of the debate want. It has not been tried before. The Government could then set up a collection agency. They could use CSA staff if they must, but they will have to rename the agency and use it as a collection agency. Even the Children Act talked of the necessity for a unified family court system that could deal with maintenance and all family law issues. The court would have to have full investigative powers. The collection agency would have to be allowed to do its job. The Act and the courts have failed—they were not proper family courts—and no one has collected or enforced the settlements. People got away with not paying and no one bothered to chase them. We need co-operation and flexibility, and a unified family court system would provide that.

The Child Support Act has not worked because the Government did not consult properly beforehand. As I have said, and will continue to say, the principle that all parents should support their children is right but, if we are not careful, the agency will sink further if more people do not co-operate. People were hoping that, after their representations, the Government would produce something concrete so that they could say, "Yes, the Government have listened to us." But we have got this meagre Bill. I hope that in the long term we will repeal the 1991 Act and start again from the beginning with full consultation. In the meantime, I will vote for the reasoned amendment.

6.14 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am pleased to be able to follow the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). I had not expected to get the opportunity to speak, as I thought that the House would be packed and we would be overwhelmed by hon. Members wishing to speak. I am pleased to find that I have a chance to join the discussion about what I would describe as the VSA, or various support agencies, because my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have taken immense pains to consult and to listen to the results of those consultations. It has not been an easy row to hoe and I am obliged to my hon. Friend for accepting a number of the points that were important to me, even though I hardly flatter myself into believing that mine were the only representations that weighed with him.

The new Bill will go a long way to meeting many of the problems. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale that, if we could only repeal the Child Support Act 1991, and start again, we would have some sort of magic formula. The fact that the unified family court system has some considerable merits does not exclude the likelihood that people would come in equal numbers to our surgeries to complain about its behaviour as readily as they now complain about the Child Support Agency.

The truth of the matter is that this is a delicate part of human affairs. It is full of pain, anger, dismay and, in many cases, financial difficulty. In those circumstances, no new name or formula will eradicate people's desire to complain to Members of Parliament or anyone else who will listen. It was a bit rich of the hon. Member for Rochdale to complain that discretion was not tightly defined—the very nature of discretion is that it should not be so tightly defined, so I have difficulty with that idea.

The way in which Ministers have handled controversy over the agency is a vindication of our political system. When one sees Ministers traipsing through the Lobby late at night, or being summoned back from important international meetings to play their part in the voting arrangements of this place, one sometimes thinks that it is a barmy way to run the country. There is tremendous merit, however, in having members of the Executive drawn from ordinary constituencies and having to face their own electors and correspondents. This issue has been a good example of that.

I listened with care to my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), who made an admirable speech. Like him, I regret the fact that the 1991 Act was retrospective, but the changes will help. It is important for us to consider the context in which the Act was brought into being. It is terribly important to remind young people of the continuing responsibility to children that they must undertake when they have children of their own.

The CSA is a tangible and recognisable statement by society that children should not be "lightly entered into"—in the words of the old Church of England marriage service—but are a continuing responsibility and are now recognised as such. Few people enter marriage with the intention of allowing the relationship to break down but, these days, thousands of people every year go into marriage with their hopes and their confidence in their capacity to sustain the relationship over a long period at such a low level that we are all paying the heavy cost of that. It is not just the financial costs, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded us that it costs £8.5 billion to support single parents. As the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said in a remarkable speech, that is a massive sum for taxpayers to bear. It is also a huge cost in human misery and pain, not merely for the parents, although it can be extremely costly in emotional terms, but for the children, some of whom never recover from the experience and many of whom take many years to overcome the difficulties.

We must be careful not to consider the Child Support Agency's financial remit as an isolated element in the whole business of sustaining marriage in a better way. One or two hon. Members have already said that, where good relations exist between former spouses, it is important that the CSA should respond in ways that do not damage those good relations. For example, there are endless stories about people whose good arrangements for seeing their children are in danger of being undermined. I hope that the new discretions and concessions will make that easier to deal with.

One of the reasons why the CSA appears to be an isolated element of our provisions for coping with family breakdown is cross-departmental boundaries. Given that it is now clearly predictable that, if a marriage breaks down, the parent without care will be required to pay for the maintenance of the children of that marriage, cannot that be taken into account and codified before divorce is granted? In new cases, it is unnecessary to have a long, drawn-out procedure continuing after the divorce. Manifestly, in cases where the parents were divorced before the setting up of the CSA, we can do nothing about that, but we must look carefully at making the CSA's demands part of the divorce settlement.

I am delighted that travel-to-work costs and pre-existing debts are being taken into account. Many couples enter into those financial commitments with no idea that their marriage will break up. Some couples enter into financial commitments, such as a job that involves heavy travel costs, or costly home improvements, with the desire to save their marriage, and others enter into those commitments with no idea that their marriage will break down. It has always seemed grossly unfair to expect those commitments to be totally ignored and it is a tremendous step forward that they will be taken into account.

On penalties for late payment, how willing is the CSA to accept responsibility in cases where its actions are involved in the delays? I have written to my hon. Friend the Minister about the clear case of a constituent of mine who knew that his assessment was grossly more than it should be. He offered to pay the sum that he thought appropriate, but the CSA refused to accept payment of less than its original demand. Many months later, after an enormous amount of to-ing and fro-ing—I have seen the correspondence—the CSA finally admitted that my constituent's original contention was wholly correct. Had he paid what was originally demanded, the agency would have had to repay him more than £3,000, but because it would accept nothing less, he is now being taxed with not only arrears but interest on those arrears. That is simply not on and I hope that, under the new arrangements, the agency can be flexible in that respect.

Discretion is a great historical difficulty for Social Security Ministers. Whenever new social security legislation is introduced, the desire is to have no discretion but to have clear, straightforward and simple legislation. Within 10 minutes, however, the first pressure group, whether for the disabled or some other group, presents a cast-iron case for saying that the formula cannot work and the Minister, usually to the applause of the assembled House, gives way and an element of discretion creeps in. Before long, the system is so full of discretions that everyone complains that it is grossly unfair and the anomalies are hopeless, and the Government of the day are pilloried for running a system that does not work.

That is exactly what will happen in this case. The CSA was created with a clear remit to have as crisp and clear a formula as possible, with no discretions. We have now discovered that there must be some discretion in the system. I record for posterity that I welcome the arrival of discretion, but I am fully aware that, some years down the track, we shall all complain that the system is not predictable.

I share the concern of the corn-fed shadow Minister—although he claimed to be corn fed, he would agree that he is not a chicken—that appeals may become too formal. For different reasons, he and I both have considerable experience of the children's hearings system in Scotland, which is the equivalent of the juvenile court. Given how long that system has existed—it was introduced in 1967—it has maintained a degree of informality that many courts would welcome. I hope that we can arrive at an appeals system that is as informal as possible.

I am amazed at the relatively small number of hon. Members in the Chamber for the debate. The subject has dominated my surgery week after week, and I am sure that it must have dominated the surgeries of many other hon. Members. I hope that their absence is a tribute to the recent manifest improvements in the workings of the CSA and the public's perception of it. I trust that it has nothing to do with any fear of intimidation by opponents of the Act, about which we have heard from other hon. Members. It is important to draw attention to the disgraceful behaviour of some people opposed to the CSA.

It is a symptom of one of the weaknesses in our current political system that single-issue groups are becoming increasingly important within it. I accept that they frequently provide Back Benchers with helpful information and useful ammunition for use in debates and in Committee, because we cannot draw upon the resources of Whitehall Departments for our research. Some of those groups, however, have got so carried away by their own effectiveness and organisation that they are becoming violent, threatening and damaging to the political process. Whether it be animal rights, the CSA or anything else, I am now predisposed to vote against violent pressure groups, almost regardless of the validity of their argument, simply because, in a democracy, I regard their actions as disgraceful. After all, those pressure groups have great access to considerable powers of persuasion without going down that violent route.

The Bill is welcome because it enshrines a great many of the improvements for which hon. Members on both sides of the House have lobbied Ministers. I commend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary for having taken on board so many of the anxieties that have been expressed. I am sure that the hon. Member for Birkenhead is right: we shall need to revisit the system when the changes to it have settled down. Should we need to modify it yet again, no one should regard that as a defeat.

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

I would be sorry if the CSA was regarded as separate from the rest of society's efforts to keep families together. Changes in the way in which we support families and children and those threatened by divorce should be taken into account when we consider the work of the CSA. Its work should not be corralled into a separate box, because it impinges greatly on the way in which families, and second families in particular, function. The CSA's very existence says something loud and clear about the way in which British people view the breakdown of a marriage.

6.32 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) commended the Under-Secretary. Perhaps I should just add that, faced with the summer Government reshuffle, he was one of the few Ministers who viewed that event almost with happiness. It is credit to his stoicism that he has ridden the storm and continues to take responsibility for the Child Support Agency.

I did not agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), except about the number of regulations, diktats and orders that the Government issue after a Bill has been passed. The Government's growing tendency to rely on such regulations is unacceptable. I do not agree with the hon. Lady that the CSA's current operations are a shambles. That is far too strong a word, given the problems that the agency has faced.

I am more in agreement with the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber). A year ago, I, too, came close to thinking that the CSA was almost beyond hope. I thought that if it were not to be scrapped, it needed to be reformed radically. A year later, I am convinced that we can make the system work, although I do not believe that the Bill goes far enough to achieve that.

One of the problems with the CSA is almost a repeat of those encountered with the disability living allowance. A completely new computer system had to get up and run for the United Kingdom without any pilot project. The staff had to amend that system as they worked, so the backlog which built up is partly due to that untried computer system. Now the system is beginning to work.

I know about the gradual success of the system because I visited the local CSA centre in Birkenhead under a fortnight ago. That centre deals with all the cases from Wales and the north-west of England. It employs 800 staff—700 whole-time staff—and deals with about 1,500 case applications a week. At any one time, 40,000 cases are awaiting assessment, so the centre's work load is enormous. In addition to those staff, there are 1,700 field staff nationally, about four of whom are attached to each Department of Social Security office.

Those field staff, who are often overlooked, are among the most important staff of the agency. They represent the CSA's interface with the public. They meet people to discuss their applications and they already exercise some discretion as they negotiate the terms on which arrears are paid. I know from the staff that, in some cases, it will take 15 years for the current arrears to be paid. That is a symptom of the strain that the system has been under as staff have tried to get it off the ground.

Those field staff will be charged with a further discretion, as they will chase down the relevant data and trace those absent fathers who have proved difficult to track down. I know from my discussions with the staff that they now enjoy higher morale than previously, because they feel that they have gone through the trough and have come out the other side. They now believe that they are far more successful than the courts ever were in tracking down parents who have failed to take responsibility for their children.

I disagreed with the hon. Member for Rochdale, who argued that we should abandon the current system in favour of a new court-based one. Given the two years' experience gained by the CSA, to abandon it for something new presents me with another nightmare. I would rather the current system was made to work. A court system would not necessarily deal with parents who deny parentage. How would it deal with a mother who did not marry the father of her children? The CSA is seeking to deal with such difficult cases and a court system might be unable to tackle them.

The agency staff to whom I spoke welcome the proposed changes to regulations, but they believe that the current formula is still too complex. Although the staff understand the hugely complex calculations that they must make, they are thankful that a computer system does those calculations for them. The calculations are made to the penny. As a result of minor changes to the data fed into the system, two separate calculations can be made, resulting in two quite different maintenance assessments. I suggest that that arrangement is one of the reasons for the large number of wrong assessments, for which the CSA was criticised in the recent report by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Has it ever been considered that calculations should be made to round pounds rather than pennies? That might not solve all the problems, but it might lead to fewer wrong assessments being made.

The staff told me that they felt that the proposals in the White Paper demonstrated that they, as the staff who must implement our proposed changes, had been listened to for the first time. I hope that the Government will not consider the Bill as the final reform of the CSA. I hope that they will continue to review its work and, if necessary, return to the House where it is obvious that further change needs to be made. I do not think that that is a reason to criticise the Government. It is something to welcome, and it demonstrates an openness that we might wish to be shown in other aspects of the implementation of Government policy.

I ask the Minister to take special care, as the new changes are introduced, to ensure that the targets that are set for the agency are achievable. Staff must play an important part in consultation before the targets are set.

The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration has said that efficient service should be given higher priority as a target than benefit savings. I was told that benefit savings were notional anyway; therefore, they were difficult targets to achieve and perhaps, for the same reason, could be easy targets for the agency to say that it had achieved. The value of benefit savings as targets is questionable.

I wish to echo and emphasise the opinions expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in the intervention that she made on the speech of the Secretary of State, when she called for greater support for civil servants, especially those who take telephone calls from members of the public.

I was able to visit the call handling section at Birkenhead, where there are 50 people, the newest staff. That is the highest pressure point of the agency, and I watched the staff taking calls and heard them describe the problems that they have to tackle. They receive initial training and are then given hands-on work to do and learn as they go along.

Thought must be given to ways in which we can support the staff, who tell me—I was astonished when they said it—that all the telephone calls that they receive from absent parents are abusive. I said, "Surely not all?" but all the absent parents who telephone have wound themselves up to such an extent that they ring the agency, and they are abusive or angry and aggressive in their interactions with staff.

The staff told me that many of the telephone calls from parents with care are also abusive. If the calls are not abusive, they are from people who are upset. Frequently, the staff become upset when they find themselves talking to people at the other end of the telephone who are in desperate circumstances.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I am grateful to the hon. Lady, to whom I could listen for a long time, for giving way. Did she sense, as I did when I was there, listening to exactly the same things, that one of the reasons people were previously so angry when they came on the telephone was that they had tried to get through and failed so often? The system that we have introduced, which is in use in Birkenhead and employs many more people on the telephones, cuts through that. People are not now so wound up and, after they have spoken to the team, they feel much better about matters, often because they have been able to get through and to have a simple question answered.

Mrs. Kennedy: I think that that would be borne out by what I was told, but I was given the impression that people were full of anger or were upset when they first came on the telephone. The staff on the receiving end had to deal with that. As the Under-Secretary says, better systems are in place now. Staff are able to talk people down from their high emotional state, but that takes a toll on staff. Thought needs to be given to what training and support can be given to the staff who do that work.

Disappointingly, the threats continue. I had gained the impression that the hoo-ha had, to an extent, died down. At one time, we received a great deal of mail about the Child Support Agency, but it appeared to slacken off. However, staff at Birkenhead told me that they continue to have to cope with unacceptable behaviour from some of the people with whom they deal. Indeed, an X-ray machine has been installed at Birkenhead to help to intercept, as they come through the door, the fake bombs that have been sent to the agency, and the razor blades—which have been mentioned—which continue to be received frequently, so much so that a team of people check the mail and open it. That is all that those people do, all day long. Unfortunately, the X-ray machine does not intercept the excrement that is occasionally posted to the Child Support Agency offices.

It is important that Members of the House understand the pressures that we have imposed on civil servants as we expect them to carry out perhaps the most controversial piece of legislation and the most dramatic change in the way that we deal with families in our society.

As recently as Christmas, threats were made to some of the staff and the families of staff, especially those who have been unjustly identified in the media. I wish to add my name to those of hon. Members who have commended the work of the staff and condemned the actions of those who have threatened or endangered in any way the health and well-being of the staff, who have simply tried to do the best job that they can.

It is not all doom and gloom. When I met the agency staff, I became aware of how much more positively they were feeling. They are starting to receive thank-you letters. The agency's work is not universally disregarded, and a range of people benefit from it; in particular, parents with care are starting to benefit.

I am told that about 95 per cent. of the parents with care with whom the Birkenhead office deals are women. Those women are starting to write to agency staff to thank them when their maintenance is sorted out. Those parents with care are also able to say that, because maintenance is now part of the benefits on which they depend, they have options that they did not have previously, when they depended entirely on means-tested benefits. Some women have written to say that they are going to college. Some are even taking jobs, because there is less fear of the poverty trap. Some parents with care say that they feel better about their position.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for all parents with care. Not all absent parents are happy, and people on benefits whose ex-partners—or the absent parents of their children—are on benefits receive little or no help. I am told that Birkenhead has abandoned only those cases where the parent with care has failed to return the form—much has been said about why parents with care do not return the forms—or where no maintenance can be paid. Those are cases where the absent parent is on benefit and there is little financial return for the child or the parent with care or, indeed, the Treasury—the taxpayer. However, staff at Birkenhead told me that they would not abandon a case where the parent with care insisted that some attempt be made to gain maintenance.

Perhaps we need to accept the fact that the agency will not be able to sort out the feckless fathers—if one wants to call them that—whom many hon. Members on both sides of the House wanted to be brought to book and made accountable for their own children. As there is no financial benefit to the taxpayer, the temptation has been to abandon those cases altogether.

On page 10, the White Paper talks about producing a scheme designed to ensure that

"the system produces fair and consistent results".

I want to take issue with the use of the word "fair". It has been used by speaker after speaker in the debate, and I wonder why we seek to invest with fairness a system that will continue to implement a rigid formula, although with some discretion.

The word "fairness" has certain connotations. When one is dealing with family breakdown or the type of very sensitive circumstances with which the agency deals, there will always be someone who is able to say, with

[Mrs. Kennedy]

some justification, "This is not fair," so I object to the use of the word. We need to take more account of whether the system works efficiently and effectively than of whether it is fair. By that, I am not saying that it should be unfair; it is simply that connotations accompany that word.

In the most recent major debate that we held on the issue, one hon. Gentleman—I hope that he will forgive me for not remembering who it was—spoke about not requiring the Child Support Agency to exercise the judgment of Solomon. It does not seek to apportion blame; it simply seeks to calculate maintenance on the basis of a formula.

For me, the hardest and least fair cases are those where the absent parent is a man who has, in his terms, lived an honourable life. He is married with children and his wife leaves him, takes the children and, in some cases, the house as well. He sees himself as having lost everything. He does not deny that he is required to pay maintenance; he wants to pay maintenance because he sees it as a continuation of his responsibility. In some cases, his former wife worked, so between them they maintained their home. After the break-up of the family, she may find a new partner who is wealthy enough for her not to work, so she gives up work. The absent parent finds that his own maintenance requirement is increased because his former wife has given up work. In no circumstances could one persuade that person that the case was fair. We must disentangle the concept of fairness, and say that it is the right and proper maintenance for him to pay as his children will benefit from his wealth and income as a result.

The question we need to ask ourselves about the Bill is whether the changes proposed—either in regulations or the Bill—increase the agency's efficiency and performance. The Bill contains half the changes to child support announced in the White Paper and allows for departures from the usual rules for determining maintenance assessments. Those departures will be allowed only in cases where the absent parent incurs necessary expenses that are not allowed for in the formula and where failure to take them into account would result in hardship.

How do we define hardship? The White Paper states that it will not be defined in arithmetical terms. Who will define it? Will the agency staff define it? The system will result in a number of appeals. The Child Support Agency will first decide whether a departure from the formula should be allowed. If either parent is unhappy with the decision, he or she can ask for the matter to be considered by the child support appeal tribunal.

If the independent tribunal service deals with appeals, will it deal with those appeals as well as those arising from the new incapacity benefit and from the jobseeker's allowance? I foresee a strong likelihood of logjams of appeals. Sufficient resources, adequate training and supervision must be provided if past mistakes in dealing with such backlogs and logjams are not to rear their ugly heads again.

Mr. Rowe: I am listening with great attention to the hon. Lady's interesting and constructive speech. Her point about logjams of appeals is important. Is there not scope at least for considering whether, if it becomes apparent that many people are appealing for no reason other than to try to defer making any payments, there should be a mechanism for trying to control that?

Mrs. Kennedy: I hope that in Standing Committee there will be an opportunity to examine the appeals procedure, which will be put under great pressure as a result of the changes. I take note of what the hon. Gentleman says. In my experience of dealing with appeal tribunals, it is the length of time that it takes for tribunals to be set up, and evidence to be collected and presented, that creates great problems. If there were a sifting system before that part of the process, would it be necessary to have an appeals procedure against a wrong decision at that stage? We must look at that possibility, but we must not make the grounds for appeal so restrictive that we build up more hostility to the agency and its work. We need the appeals system and its decisions to be supported and abided by, by both parents.

There will be a number of grounds for departure from the formula. There are the travel-to-work costs, the cost of caring for stepchildren, which is welcome, certain debts from the former relationship and the existence of pre-April 1993 capital and property settlements, which is not currently reflected in the assessment. Those factors are not listed in the Bill but are some of the items that will be determined by regulation.

I have three criticisms of that system. First, although regulations would allow for flexibility, I am concerned that there will be a consequent lack of parliamentary scrutiny of them. Secondly, as the Child Poverty Action Group states:

> "we are concerned that the system of departure is rather convoluted, that CSA clients who are already confused by the different review and appeal routes will be even more perplexed as to what is happening"

as a result of the changes. I would go along with that. My third criticism is that, despite the promise of more staff, the agency may not be able to cope with the number of applications for departure that are bound to follow. Account must be taken of that.

Other changes to child support that are not contained in the Bill but are to be made by regulations are due to take effect in April. I understand that they have not appeared in draft form yet. It is questionable whether they can be effectively implemented by an already over-burdened agency. The changes appear in the White Paper and we have a summary, but they have not yet been published—

Mr. Burt: They were published last week.

Mrs. Kennedy: I beg the Under-Secretary's pardon. I must obtain a copy. The point that I am making still holds good—the fact that the agency will have to have the changes ready for implementation by the end of April will place it under a lot of pressure. Thought must be given to a system that is to be introduced across the United Kingdom. Any absent parent who has had a complaint will look to the new regulations to see if his or her case can be reviewed. The backlog of cases will be enormous if the system is not handled properly.

As the departure system requires primary legislation and will not be introduced until at least 1996, the changed regulations allow for a broad-brush adjustment to the formula to allow for past property settlements. Where the absent parent has transferred more than £5,000 of his or her share of equity, the allowance will fall into three bands. That allowance recognises only that the transfer took place;

it will not precisely reflect the settlement. Only when the new departure system is introduced will we be able to give more detailed consideration to such cases.

One of the reasons I shall support my hon. Friends' amendment, not the Bill's Second Reading—

Mr. Dewar: That is a relief.

Mrs. Kennedy: I am sure that my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench will be relieved to hear that.

The measure helps absent parents more than it does parents with care and contains nothing to combat the poverty of lone parents and their children. The lump sum bonus will not be introduced for two years, unlike the provisions for absent parents, which are to be introduced in four weeks. I concur with the criticisms of that issue made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). There is no mention of a maintenance disregard and absent parents on income support can, at present, have £2.30 deducted from their benefit in lieu of child maintenance, bringing them below subsistence level. The Social Security Advisory Committee has expressed concern at the increasing number of deductions that can be made from benefits—a retrograde step.

In previous debates on the subject I have asked for special consideration of, and investigation into, the effects on children of family break-up. Much of what we have been doing has focused on the costs and the financial benefits and returns for children. I asked for the Rowntree trust to be commissioned to carry out further research into the effect on children of family break-up. The welfare benefit system puts increasing pressure on families in poverty and makes it financially beneficial for partners to break up and live separately. We should be looking to reform that system so that lone parents are given support and helped out of the poverty trap. But parents who stick together should not be financially disadvantaged, the one compared to the other. We have an opportunity to do that. We cannot achieve that goal with the Bill, but the issue is becoming increasingly important.

Last week in Kensington in my constituency I went on a police patrol with my local constabulary. As well as the pleasure of driving around in a fast response car with flashing lights and going through red lights, I witnessed the patrol dealing with some serious incidents. One such incident the police described as a disturbance—I would have called it a riot. Sixty young people with an average age of 12 were fighting in a terraced street in my constituency. Although their average age was 12, most of them were drunk. They had got the alcoholic drink from somewhere—the police are investigating that. Problems are being created in our society as the result of the breakdown of families and one of the contributing factors is our benefit system. It behoves us to look at that system carefully to see whether there are ways in which we can reform it and make such incidents less likely to happen.

6.59 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate on the Child Support Bill. I am particularly pleased to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), whose speech typified the sensible and constructive approach that most hon. Members have adopted to the debate. The only sad part of her speech was when she informed us that she would not vote with the Government tonight. Until that point, many of us had been seduced by her charm into thinking that she might; but we must live with that disappointment.

The Child Support Agency has been the subject of letters which have filled our postbags, and it has prompted many visits to our surgeries over a considerable time. Although we are now seeing a diminution in the number of such cases, hon. Members must not underestimate the importance that should be attached to reforming the workings of that agency.

At the outset of my speech, I pay a warm tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. They have listened to all reasonable arguments in an effort to ensure that the agency will work better, while the principles that lie behind it are retained. Their work has built on that of the Social Security Select Committee under the leadership of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). Their joint approach characterises the desire to find a way forward that enshrines the principles of the Child Support Act 1991 and of the agency while making the agency more acceptable to the people who are affected by its decisions.

It is with sadness that I exclude from my tribute the speech by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). She did nothing to add to the value of the debate. She gave a typical Liberal commitment. She said that we could afford to pay more benefits to more people but that no one has to pick up the tab. In the best Liberal tradition, she promised everything to everyone in the knowledge that her party will never be in a position to deliver anything.

I also pay tribute to the work of community groups which, in most cases, have lobbied sensibly. I include in that group the child support action group in my constituency. Its approach to the issue could not be more different from the aggressive and objectional attitudes of some extreme groups elsewhere. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), I deplore completely the attitudes of the most extreme groups and the way in which they have intimidated many people. For example, they reminded my constituents that I hold a marginal seat—as if I were not aware of that already. I think about it every day and I shall live with that fact until the next election, when I shall increase my majority by leaps and bounds. That is only a small example of their intimidatory tactics.

We should be aware of another worrying factor. Even the more responsible groups which oppose the Child Support Agency have sought to create unnecessary fear. People who are worried about being investigated and who have turned to those groups for advice and support have received an unrealistically high estimate of the demands that the agency would place upon them. Every constituent who has been given a figure by a local group has discovered later that the real amount that he is expected to pay is much less than he feared initially. Even those groups which have sought to be more responsible than others have created fear in the community, and I believe that the House should deplore that consequence.

Today, we are examining the way in which the Government have listened to people's concerns and have decided to take action to ensure that the principles of the Act are retained while the agency is made more workable. Many hon. Members are concerned about the way in

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which the agency has affected those people who have acted responsibly towards the children who no longer live with them.

For example, a father in my constituency bought a house for his ex-wife following the marriage break-up. She then sold the house, spent the proceeds of the sale and moved from Derbyshire to the Western Isles of Scotland where she lives on income support. He made what he felt at the time was an extremely responsible commitment to his children, but found subsequently that he was being chased for more money and that he could no longer afford to visit his children in Scotland. That is patently wrong and I welcome the fact that capital transactions and gifts from one partner to another will be taken into account in determining the level of maintenance payments.

I am also satisfied by the inclusion in the legislation of changes to travel-to-work rules. In my constituency—which is a commuter belt—people travel significant distances to work. However, we may wish to examine in Committee the limit of 15 miles as the crow flies. The Peak district is a mass of small, narrow, winding roads and one cannot travel to work as the crow flies because the old footpaths which were built on those routes are not widely used by commuters. Therefore, people travel significantly greater distances than 15 miles even though the actual distance between two points may be no more than that.

I welcome the recognition in the legislation of the fact that debts from former relationships should be taken into account on occasion. Two of my constituents whose marriage broke-up had bought a house with a small mortgage, but they borrowed a significant amount of money to renovate it and make it livable. In those circumstances, I think that it is reasonable that debts and loans should be taken into account.

The Government have recognised many of the practical problems which resulted from the original workings of the Act. I welcome, too, the fact that the full mortgage will now be taken into account when there is a second family. That will help those who have second families by taking into account the actual costs involved in maintaining them.

The legislation contains a number of practical measures which will enable absent parents to provide more realistic support for their children. Arrears in payments will be limited to six months where the Child Support Agency has been at fault. That measure is extremely welcome, as is the fact that no fees will be charged for those assessments that are made between April 1995 and April 1997.

The cap on amounts payable to 70 per cent. of income should prove extremely helpful. In the past, hon. Members have told their constituents that, in principle, they should not expect to pay more than two thirds of their salary in maintenance, only to find that they have had to pay much more than that. The 70 per cent. cap will be a great comfort to many people who are worried about the extent of their monetary commitment.

I believe that the measures represent responsible and reasonable steps, particularly where the legislation will be retrospective. Like some of my colleagues, I have general reservations about retrospective legislation. However, I have been persuaded—I made the point by way of intervention during the speech by the hon. Member for Rochdale—that it would not be fair to treat those who were separated or divorced after the Act came into force differently from those who were divorced before the operation of the Act. That would not be good legislation and it would create rifts within communities, workplaces, villages and towns. We were correct to avoid that consequence, and we welcome the Government's response in recognising people's legitimate concerns. There is always a danger with retrospective legislation that people will have moved on and built new lives based on their current and foreseeable circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Minister knows of a constituency case with which I have been dealing. My constituent had what he believed was a cast-iron legal case: he had passed over property to his wife, and made a commitment to pay 5p a year towards the maintenance of his children in addition to a significant capital transfer. He assures me that he would never have made the commitment if he had been advised that at any point in the future it could be opened. He now finds that, because of the workings of the Act, the position has changed. My constituent may have been badly advised by his lawyers—I suspect that he was—but I think we are right to recognise that, having made a significant capital transfer in the past, he is less able to pay than others who have made no such transfer.

I have many reasons for supporting the Bill, because of the reasoned way in which the Government have put their case. One reason, however, is the flawed argument advanced by the Opposition. Many Opposition Members suggest that all who are unhappy about the claims being made on them will be entitled to appeal, but we know that—seductive though that is—it is not true. It is a liberal little suggestion, intended to be attractive; but ultimately, if there are to be exclusions and special appeals, by definition they will be available in only a small minority of cases. To suggest the possibility of a general appeal is to undermine the principle on the basis of which the Child Support Act was passed.

The Government are right to suggest a maintenance bonus when people return to work, rather than a general maintenance credit. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has come up with a much more realistic incentive for people to resume employment. Conservative Members know that the main barrier preventing single parents escaping from poverty is inability to work.

In an excellent and wide-ranging speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) spoke of his objection to the term "absent parent" when applied to the parent who is not looking after a child. I agree: I think that we should consider the term "non-custodial parent", to avoid being gratuitously offensive to many parents who are deeply involved in caring for their children and making the decisions that are necessary for their proper upbringing.

Much anger is felt by parents who believe that they are contributing not just to their children but to their ex-partners, helping to maintain their standard of living and enabling them not to have to work after what may have been an acrimonious divorce or separation. I hope that we can deal with that problem as well.

The workings of the agency have improved beyond recognition in the past couple of years. The number of complaints has fallen dramatically—although it has not fallen enough—and I welcome the pressure exerted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon.

Friend the Minister to secure a faster and more efficient response. Not only have there been delays in replying to letters, but in far too many instances letters have been lost and people have been asked for the same information not once but twice or three times. The agency sends a letter saying that a substantive reply will be sent within a certain number of days, and no reply is received after two or three times the period specified. That needs to be corrected quickly: such a correction would constitute the most rapid way of regaining people's support for the principle that underpins the Child Support Agency.

The principles of the 1991 Act remain paramount. They enjoy the support of people of all political persuasions, throughout the country. The Bill will make the Act work better—and that is in the interests of all of us, of our constituents and, above all, of the children in our constituencies.

7.14 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Today we are examining, and trying to understand, a changing map of income distribution and life chances, especially as those factors affect children. In the case of earlier generations our analysis would have included low pay, unemployment and the risk of disability; today we should also include family changes and insecurities as one of the major causes of poverty and dependency.

It is no surprise that—as the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) mentioned earlier—another Government Department, the Lord Chancellor's Office, is currently grappling with the fine detail of divorce law reform. Recent reports suggest that we may soon have a White Paper, and possibly legislation. That reform raises issues similar to those that we are now discussing.

It is also no surprise that another piece of social security legislation—the Pensions Bill, which is now making its journey through another place—has recently been amended significantly to allow for the impact of divorce on women and to entitle them to a share of the pension. That gives us a third example of the way in which, at long last, the force of trends in our society has caused family change to have an impact on the policy agendas that count. Indeed, there are many more examples.

We need to become more familiar with such complex territory if Parliaments and Governments are to make wise decisions in the future. The issues are more difficult than some with which the House has had to deal in the past: they are not only complex but emotional, raising fundamental questions about relationships between individuals, their families and the state. We are dealing with the raw edge of policy, and it is not surprising that that rawness should show itself not only in our debates but in our constituency surgeries.

Two couples visited me recently, on separate occasions. In both cases, one parent—the husband in one instance, the wife in the other—had discovered that his or her partner had had a child in a previous relationship; the existence of the child had come to light only as a result of the CSA's intervention. Each had had to contend with that dramatic information in the context of a new relationship. That husband in Croydon kept repeating, "I never knew: it is all new to me," as, understandably, he tried to get to grips with the matter. It is not surprising that the agency's blood-and-thunder policy has been so controversial.

The policy undermines a basic assumption that has been made by society and the welfare state—that a certain family model prevails. We have often assumed, at least implicitly, the existence of that model, based on the durability of marriage and the proposition that children are born within marriage. It has been assumed that their parents will remain married, happily or otherwise, at least until the children are in their teens or early 20s. As we know, that model is being increasingly challenged. I am always struck by the summary fact or projection that, by 2000, which is very soon, probably only half the children in Britain will have what we used to think of as a typical childhood—namely, being born in families in which the parents are married, and spending all their childhood and young adulthood with parents who are married, happily, I hope.

Already, 30 per cent. or more of children are born outside marriage. Those who are born inside marriage will sometimes see the divorce of their parents. It emphasises the point which many have emphasised in recent years: if we make policy on an assumption about typical families, increasingly we get it wrong. I repeat the point that it is not surprising that our policy agendas are becoming cluttered with significant items that deal with the impact of family change. Although I do not believe that all family change is associated with insecurity, much of it is, and therefore policy is grappling with family insecurity.

We are again assembled here to consider the financial costs of family change and how we as a Parliament and, indeed, the Government, grapple with those family costs. The issues are clear. The key questions are: what are the costs of family change? Who pays those costs? Who does not? What will be the implications of our answers on our law and our policy making? One fact that is abundantly clear from the Child Support Act—I mentioned it in a previous debate—is that children are very expensive. I sometimes think that, if a Department of Social Security or a Child Support Agency sent a bill to all parents itemising the cost of our children—the clothing, the shoes, the housing, the heating, the telephone calls, many of us would run away and desert.

The serious point that I am making is that, for parents who have had the misfortune to divorce or who live in other circumstances and are not living with their child, it is a shock when an agency says, "This is the cost of having a child in modern Britain." Most of us never see that bill, thank goodness, but for those who do, it is a shock, and I am not surprised that when confronted with it people say, "If I pay this bill for my child, I cannot live; I cannot spend the money that I want to spend on other things."

I sometimes get weary when people talk about all the expenses that should be taken into account before calculating the costs of one's child. I sometimes think that all parents should get to grips with the fact that paying for one's own children should be one of the early responsibilities that we take on and should not be at the bottom of the list after all sorts of other expenses are calculated. Having children is expensive. It brings joys, no doubt, but it also brings obligations—some financial. That is the issue with which we are trying to get to grips in difficult circumstances.

Some of the facts are clear, but possibly need restating. I am talking in general terms and in averages, and that, no doubt, is unfair to individuals. After divorce, women and children tend to be poorer, and fathers who have not

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paid their maintenance in the past tend to be better off. Not only are their living standards unaffected, but if they are not paying maintenance they are often better off. It has been calculated that one in four children born this year in Britain will have parents who divorce before the child reaches the age of 16. Increasingly—although we are talking about minorities—we are talking not about tiny groups, but about many children in our society.

We are not just talking about divorce. The fastest-growing proportion of one-parent families are those that are headed up by a single, unmarried mother, who tend to be the most vulnerable, the most insecure, and certainly the poorest. While a staggering seven out of 10 one-parent families—I hope that this evidence is reasonably current—are on income support, the proportion of single, unmarried mothers is higher at about 85 per cent., according to the evidence that I have seen. The fastest-growing group—the single, unmarried mother—is also the poorest.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament just two and a half years or so ago in 1992, one of the things that has made the deepest impression on me as a constituency Member of Parliament is seeing a single, unmarried mother who presents at my advice surgery, often with child in arms, perhaps to get some help with heating, or perhaps her child has asthma or perhaps the mother has a health problem. When one finds out more about the circumstances, there is usually an absent father. I use that term advisedly. When one asks about the father—somewhat nervously—often he is not a factor. He is not around. He is certainly not paying any maintenance. He is not now involved with his own family. That equates with the evidence from the Department of Social Security survey a while ago on one-parent families, which showed that more than four out of 10 children—possibly 43 per cent.—had no contact with the absent parent, normally the father, following the breakdown of the family. That is a worrying fact. I see such a family every week in my surgery.

The real issue is about what happens to the absent parent and why he often becomes absent. What that tells us about young men and the formation of those families requires a great deal of study and concern, not quick judgments. It worries me deeply. As I recall, from the studies that have been made of one-parent families throughout Europe and the European Union, there is something particularly British in the phenomenon of the large number of single, unmarried mothers. While many of the trends that we are discussing are on the march in the same direction throughout Europe, whether east, west, north or south, the large number of single, unmarried mothers seems to be a particularly British issue.

We should be concerned about that because there is an equation between being in a one-parent family, particularly one headed by a single, unmarried mother, and dependence on the state. While right and left may draw different conclusions, none of us can be happy about a situation in which so many of those young and vulnerable families, which include so many children, are now dependent on the state for housing—it is often poor, local authority housing that is badly heated, in bad repair and often has mould on the walls. They are dependent almost entirely on the state for income and often have far too much contact, because of ill health or poor welfare, with the social services department, the hospital and other parts of the national health service.

Mr. Jenkin: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to his comment about the ratio of single-parent families in this country compared with those in our European competitor countries? He spoke about dependency. Are those two states in any way connected? In particular, does he think that perhaps the most highly developed social welfare system in Europe for a great many years, certainly in the early post-war years, that of Britain, has led to or has any connection with the high rate of divorce and single parenthood? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would be prepared to proffer an alternative suggestion.

Mr. Wicks: I have an alternative analysis. I do not think that I would follow Charles Murray's new right analysis in the United States in terms of a correlation between welfare provision and the development of certain family forms. If I am told that there is evidence for that happening I will accept it because I have respect for evidence, which is an unusual characteristic in the House. I take evidence rather seriously.

The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) has made an interesting point. Most young women in Europe are significantly postponing the birth of their first child into their mid or late 20s or early 30s and sometimes later. That explains why the average European Union—I mean European woman. I stumbled over European Union when I looked at the Secretary of State because I did not want to upset him. The average European woman is now having just 1.5 children, a child fewer than in the early 1970s.

Why are women in Europe having fewer children and successful career women having their children later? Why is it that a significant number of young women in Britain—I am talking not about those aged 12 or 13 but about women in their late teens and early 20s—are having children in disadvantageous economic and housing conditions? We should ask questions about the options and opportunities, or the lack of them, that we offer those young women. In a planned way or somewhere between planning and non-planning, such women have children and get locked into the cycle of dependency. That is a rather different perspective.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Is not one of the problems that has been identified over the past 10 to 20 years that many such young women feel that they can strike a blow for independence largely because they will receive benefits which at that early age seem to be worth a lot of money? It is only later that they realise that they are trapped in a state close to poverty because they are not provided with the amount of money that they had hoped they would get. The state is partly to blame for leading them into that predicament.

Mr. Wicks: Young women who think that on income support they can live the life of Reilly are making a grave mistake. When I see such families and sometimes visit the housing that has been allocated to them by public authorities, I feel sad that our young people and their children will live in that way not just for a few years but perhaps throughout the lifetime of those children. That is a poor option and I am desperately worried that too many of our young people and their children have to live that way.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: Does my hon. Friend think that one of the reasons giving rise to that trend is that in a constituency such as mine over 50 per cent. of women who are registered as available for work have not worked for 10 years or have never worked in their lives and are very young? That is certainly worth investigation and should form part of a detailed study of trends and families in our society. The opportunities for work and for building their lives and gaining independence which may be available to young women in our European partner countries are not available to young women in my constituency. Therefore their roles are different.

Mr. Wicks: I accept that, and it reminds me of a related issue in a recent parliamentary answer from the Department of Employment. It drew on labour force survey data which showed that about six months ago 1 million of Britain's children lived in households in which the head was unemployed. The figure may be lower now because of falling unemployment. I hope that it is. The majority of people in that group were victims of long-term unemployment—that is to say, the head of the household had been unemployed for more than a year.

That relates to my hon. Friend's point because in some communities children are growing up without the model of a mother or father who has to get up early, have a shower, dress, go into a place called work, earn a wage that enables him to be independent and come home in the evening. Analysing and picturing such children becoming unemployed enables us to explain some of the issues that concern the House. It need not be like that. While seven out of 10 of our one-parent families draw income support, in other societies, such as that in Sweden, which I do not say is perfect, the head of seven out of 10 one-parent families is in the labour market. Although on average their incomes are lower than those of two-parent families, there is not the same poverty and the same dependence on the state.

Although on the political right there is talk of a dependency culture, I prefer to speak about a dependency state because the word culture seeks to blame the victim. We should be blaming ourselves for what has happened to the framework of rights and full employment policies which has undermined opportunities for young people. I certainly see the challenge in social policy, and it relates to the Child Support Act 1991, and how to move resources from dependency and breakdown to investment.

During Question Time it was revealed that social security spending is now at a record level. I do not take comfort from that because, if anything, there is a correlation between record levels of state benefit and social insecurity. That is an exaggeration because we need to understand the benefit totals and take account of other factors such as demography. The fact that we are now spending a large proportion of public money to keep people on low state benefits when many desperately need opportunities to become independent worries us all. I ask again: how do we move from spending resources on breakdown and shift them towards what I call investment in people? That is one of the key challenges.

Not many people need to be reminded, because the mood has changed in the House, that whatever our critique of the Child Support Act—and I have joined in the critique of its practice—we cannot turn the clock back to a court-based system that depends on maintenance collection. That did not work in the past and it is not the future. I turn again to the survey from the Department of Social Security on lone parents which was undertaken by York university. It showed that only 39 per cent. of one-parent families had ever received maintenance and that only 29 per cent. received it regularly. When I say "regularly", that does not imply that the amounts were high enough; they were often very low. I would be loth to accept a critique of the Child Support Act 1991 which assumed that the past was better. It was not. It failed people and it especially failed women and children. For too long in social policy and in society, we have pursued a principle of women and children last. It is time that we changed that.

I have never said that I support the principle of the Act and gone on to undermine it. I have criticisms of it, but I truly support the principle of parental responsibility. Through the Select Committee report, the White Paper and the Bill, we are properly addressing the issues. Whatever our disagreements about details, we are properly addressing areas where the Act may have been overbearing or unfair, to men largely. I accept that and I shall be interested in the details when the Bill goes into Committee. I accept that there is a proper agenda about men's issues. I am, however, sometimes disgusted by the way in which the debate has been heavily dominated by men's concerns and by the way in which the needs of women and children have often been largely neglected.

Many of our children are involved. There are 2 million children in one-parent families. I repeat that seven out of 10 of them are dependent on income support. A wiser Parliament would listen harder than this one does to the silent voices in the debate and would not listen only to those who shout loudest. Many of the silent voices are those of women and, if they could speak, of their children who have been the major victims of family change. Family change in Britain has been a social revolution, but it has not been a bloodless one. Most of the victims have been women and children and we should ask hard questions about women and children.

This is the point where I profoundly disagree with the development of our child support legislation compared with that in, for example, Australia. When Baroness Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, rolled a hand grenade with the pin half out in the direction of the Department of Social Security—when she made her speech—the Department did not know what was coming. It had to grapple with the problem and it was a difficult one with which to grapple. Too soon, the Treasury, whose short-termism makes it a poor promoter of social policy, got its claws into the concept and realised that this was a way in which to raise revenue. It went in for a process of strangulation of an infant social policy. We have not recovered since.

I was last in Australia in 1990; I cannot, therefore, present the House with an up-to-date account. Others know the position there as well as I do or possibly better. In Canberra, I visited the Australian taxation office which collects child maintenance. Everyone I met, whether politicians, civil servants or people in the voluntary sector, told me that there was a clear disregard for lone parents so that they got some of the maintenance. I know that they get the maintenance in our system, but in Australia, there is no deduction of dollar for dollar. In Australia, lone parents were better off as a result of child support legislation. Everyone told me that that was the oil that made the new machinery work.

I was told on several occasions that mothers often rang up the Australian taxation office and asked how everything was going and what their share of the child

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maintenance would be that week. There was, therefore, a constituency of support in favour of the legislation among custodial parents and among a wider public. People said, "This legislation seems to be controversial, but it seems to be a sound piece of social policy. It is truly a Child Support Act."

I regret the way in which we have a party political conflict about the issue. Any suggestion by the Opposition that we should have a disregard is met with the cry, "Is that another expenditure commitment?" I believe that if there had been a disregard from the start, we would have oiled the wheels. In future years, the share of money coming to the Treasury would probably have been higher than is likely under the present system which has suffered from the Treasury's mean-mindedness.

We have to get this one right; I echo the comments of colleagues on both sides of the House. Sadly, this issue is one of growing importance. There is a rising proportion of children suffering financial, social and emotional insecurities in their childhood. We need to bring about a cultural revolution whereby we make it clear to both parents that whatever may happen to a relationship or a marriage and even though, sadly, many of our children will spend much of their childhood not living with both parents, both parents must take on the financial and other responsibilities for their children.

The issue of how we balance the rights of parents against their responsibilities is one of the key concepts in social policy. I have never felt that it is a useful political debate either to emphasise rights or to emphasise responsibilities. It is the balance between the two that is crucial. Just as I champion the development of the child benefit scheme as a universal provision or just as I champion the growth of child care and provision for the under-fives, so I shall champion, with equal sincerity, the view that parents must take the major responsibility for their children. If that belief is lost in the future, we face the prospect of a lost generation of children. The issues today could not be more important.

7.46 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) could have ended his excellent speech by explaining to us why he intended to vote against the Bill. I fail to understand why he intends to vote against it, as much of what he said was in favour of the Bill. I also fail to understand why the Opposition intend to vote against the Bill.

The Child Support Agency touches virtually everyone in some way or another. It has had a fantastic effect. I am very surprised that although the Child Support Act 1991 has had so much effect on parliamentarians and on individuals outside, we have here in the Chamber only about seven hon. Members on one side and only about eight on the other. There are no Liberal Democrats here at all at this stage.

The setting up of the Child Support Agency was the most fundamental and revolutionary step. It has been described as part of an infant social policy; it is more than that. It is the most enormous social policy, which goes into the homes of many people and affects so many more. It has replaced a system that was based on people—the way in which people react, the work that people do and people's individual problems—by, in many ways, a mathematical formula. In its original conception, it was a most socialist bit of legislation. I was part of the pack that chased the original Act through the House of Commons. I followed it and chased it through, yelled loudly and said how good it was. Yet I find myself saying that it is not the sort of legislation that one would expect a Conservative Government to enact.

Mr. Duncan: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ashby: Let me develop my argument. Many Conservative Members concentrated on the fact that people received benefits, so the fathers must be chased to pay the people and the benefits, but I do not think that they appreciated that the Child Support Act would give an agency control over every person involved in a marital dispute, a separation and an eventual divorce and that there was to be total state involvement. I so welcome the Bill because we have stepped back from the brink and are now into deferment.

However, I do not want deferment. I want permanence. There are areas in which most people can look after their own affairs better than the state and this is one of them. The state need only interfere in and become involved with payments. Individuals can make up their own mind about what they will pay each other and decide how they will work it out between them, what the property transfer will be and how they will go about their own business. That is what should happen and we should encourage it as much as possible. We may see great encouragement of such policy in future legislation. The only trigger to involve the state should be the provision of benefits. I do not know whether that answers the point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) wanted to intervene, but I shall happily give way.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because I remain puzzled at his initial accusation that the Bill is a socialist piece of legislation, or, at least, that the initial Act was. Ever since the war, the state has taken on more and more responsibility for individuals and, indeed, the taxpayer has been forced to pick up the tab for split marriages. Of course, the state is involved in paying benefits, but surely, in trying to reverse the dramatic trends since the war, the Bill is the exact opposite of a piece of socialist legislation.

Mr. Ashby: My hon. Friend does not understand exactly what socialism is in that case. Socialism is the state telling people what is better for them than they know themselves. Socialism is the state telling people what they should be doing and not what people feel that they ought to be doing. Socialism is the state taking over one's will and one's powers to be able to negotiate and discuss with one's partner what one thinks is best. That is what socialism is and that is what the Bill does. One's entire financial future is set to be taken over by a body based in Belfast, which will dictate exactly what one should or should not do and what one should or should not pay one's wife in respect of the children, regardless of whether the children will benefit or not.

I totally endorse and most sincerely welcome deferment, as it is a fundamental step back from the original Act. However, if we were to start again, I hope that with hindsight and knowledge of what has happened, we would not go down this path. But we have gone down it and we must try to make the best of it. I welcome the Bill for that reason if for no other.

Various hon. Members have spoken about the morale of the agency staff. The absence of flexibility in the legislation must have affected their morale. It must have been extremely frustrating for them to have common sense dictated to them time and again over the telephone by various people who were asking them why they did not do this or that, or why they did not take into account this or that. The staff must have known that not taking into account such aspects was crazy, and not having flexibility in the rules must have affected them. Lack of flexibility has certainly been a source of tremendous confrontation between clients and staff of the Child Support Agency.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), I have been lobbied by very concerned people who have been affected by the Child Support Agency. I deplore threats and I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who raised the issue of terror tactics, was absolutely right to say that we should never give in to them. I have received many blackmail-type letters telling me that I would not be re-elected. Fortunately, all of them come from places far from my constituency, such as Manchester. Some of the letters may have come from Bury, North, but they have certainly not come from my constituency.

In my constituency, the most helpful organisation has continually told me that it supports the Child Support Agency and its fundamental aim. It is headed by Nick Jeffreys, who has acted like a social worker in the area. He has taken disgruntled and upset clients to see the right people for sound advice. Mr. Jeffreys also gives sound advice and, by and large, the organisation has done much to defuse the situation. People who have lobbied me in my constituency have been helpful and constructive. They have convinced me of the problems with the Child Support Act and, when one looks at the Act and the changes in the Bill, one sees that they have convinced the Government, too. So, far from being outrageous, such people have been absolutely correct. We must welcome the fact that the Bill addresses many of the issues that they raised. We are obviously listening and altering things as we need to.

Although I said that I would not have started from such a point in looking for maintenance for children, legislation is now in place and we must make the best of it. Nothing is written in tablets of stone. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary saying that time and again. He has listened time and again, too. He has given counter-arguments at times, but at other times he has certainly accepted what has been said and been most constructive about it. We cannot write such legislation in tablets of stone, because we are talking about human nature, and the effects of anything that we do on human nature are never clear. We hope that the changes in the Bill will resolve most of the problems—we expect that—but they might not. We must have flexibility and always listen.

Above all, we must remember that we are trying to balance the needs of the child and the needs of the mother and recognise that civil rights and human liberties are involved. Hitherto, it could have been said that we did not achieve that balance. Certainly, we were not taking account of the civil rights of the people who were involved.

So many of us represent rural areas. However, the travel-to-work area is not taken into account in these matters. If someone does not earn very much, travel to work can involve a great deal of money. Most people in my area work in Leicester, almost 30 miles away. According to the new provisions, a travel-to-work distance of 15 miles will be considered. That means that about £25 will have to be disregarded before those people receive something back, because we are talking about a provision in the Bill for 15 miles a day before 10p a mile is paid.

We all know how much Members of Parliament receive per mile for travelling expenses. Why do we expect other people to have lower costs per mile than we have? Why do we expect people to have lower costs per mile than what the RAC and the AA estimate are the true costs of running a car? I suppose that one of my constituents driving to Leicester might drive a 10-year-old car as he probably cannot afford anything better.

Mr. Duncan: He can take the bus.

Mr. Ashby: The problem is that there are no buses and they do not arrive at the right time anyway. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton is aware of the problem with buses in his area: catch a bus, indeed. He is as aware as I am of how difficult it is to take a bus to Leicester.

A father has visited me on several occasions and he wants to know where the justice is in his case. There are four children in his family: he has kept two and his wife has kept two. The two he has kept are being disregarded. He told me, "I have my children for five days and my wife has her children for five days. On normal Saturdays and Sundays, my wife's two come to me, so I have four children for two days." The agency disregards the fact that he feeds and keeps his wife's two children on those extra two days.

In that father's case, the agency also appears to disregard the fact that he has the other two children when it assesses what must be paid to the wife. Although it claims otherwise, it further seems to disregard the fact that the wife now has a boyfriend who seems to be keeping her quite well. That father feels that he is very much worse off than the wife. He feels that there is an injustice and I tend to agree with him with regard to the present formula.

What people require most of all is justice. People might wince when they have to pay a large amount, but they do not rebel until they come across injustice. People are really seeking justice and that is why I welcome the appeals procedure. I sincerely hope that if the appeals procedure is used properly, it will do much to resolve injustice.

One of the fundamental problems experienced by the people who come to my surgeries is the belief that the CSA has not listened to them properly when they say that the facts are not the facts that the agency says has been presented to it. People present me with the facts and they can often produce letters and photographs to verify those facts.

The CSA should be triggered off by the fact that a wife is on benefit. Should not that be the first port of call? The first question that the agency should ask is whether the person is entitled to benefits. The agency should listen to husbands who say that a person should not receive benefits. If the agency did that, and inquired properly into whether benefits were being triggered, it might be able to get rid of many of its cases.

[Mr. Ashby]

There was a very interesting answer to a question today about people on benefit. We were told that 720,000 people are earning nothing, but their spending is above the average. People do not get money from nowhere. It seems that 720,000 people may well be making claims that they should not be making.

Mr. Jenkin: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ashby: I would be happy to know whether the figure that I have quoted is incorrect.

Mr. Jenkin: I would not dream of disputing my hon. Friend's figure. However, on being approached by the CSA, many single parents have asked themselves whether they should be entitled to benefit. A very large number of single parents—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will enlighten us about this when he replies to the debate—have left the benefits system as a result of an approach by the CSA. That seems to be grist to the mill of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and I wanted to help him with that point.

Mr. Ashby: I am delighted to hear that. I wish we had some figures to prove that point. Perhaps they will be provided when my hon. Friend the Minister replies later.

I am a tremendous believer in the welfare state helping those who really need help. However, there is an awful lot of fraud. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister does not accept that there is as much fraud as I suggest there is. I believe that there is an enormous amount of fraud. The depth of fraud is much greater than any Government have acknowledged or were prepared to acknowledge.

I see fraud from the other side, time and again. As a member of the Bar, I am involved in areas where most of my clients are unemployed and have never been employed. Is it right to say that crime gives rise to unemployment? As far as I can make out, half the people with whom I am involved have never wanted to be employed. I do not find that unemployed people turn to crime; it is the other way round. It is the criminals who are unemployed. I see those people in confidence. I cannot disclose what is said. One feels so inadequate. Virtually every one of those people who comes before the courts seems to be involved in some sort of benefit fraud.

When people come to my surgery and they describe the CSA's involvement in their cases, I see the same pattern time and again. On occasion, I ask whether the person in my surgery wants me to do something about the problem. When the answer is "Yes," I telephone the fraud inquiry section in Leicester. The telephone rings and rings. When I try later at 4.30 pm, it rings and rings again. Finally, someone answers and says, "They've all gone home." I cannot do anything about the problem.

I am not sure whether the fraud inquiry section is as good as we try to make out. It seems to be quite happy to pursue people across the fenlands to discover whether they should be working or whether they are on benefits. I have seen that on television. It was all high profile, with the television cameras trained on those people. No doubt the people on the programme had been alerted to come along and see the kind of work that the section does. However, I have reported fraud on many occasions and I cannot describe how dissatisfied I am with the way in which fraud is investigated by the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there are other elements of fraud, which might be described as legitimate fraud? For example, in a case of which I am aware, it is claimed that an ex-wife who was in employment, and who was earning a substantial income including overtime, stopped earning overtime as soon as she became aware of the CSA arrangement. As she did that, her pay slips showed that she was earning below the stated level for the period required. As soon as she had submitted her pay slips, she went back to working overtime.

Mr. Ashby: That is absolutely right. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, because that complaint has been raised with me on several occasions. That system is fairly well known. The hon. Gentleman has obviously been told about that in his surgeries, so he knows that it goes on. I know that it goes on and I know how dissatisfied I am. We have to tackle the problem, because people who play the game by the rules and behave properly are profoundly dissatisfied when they find out what happens. They are legitimately dissatisfied and unhappy and that reflects on all of us.

I have made the point about fraud. I could go on talking about it. My hon. Friends know how often I have raised it. I feel that we must do more about fraud. We must fundamentally change our fraud organisations so that we can investigate it properly. We should possibly take it away from the Department of Social Security and return it to the police. We must do something to bring fraud investigation to the forefront. It is costing the country millions of pounds. That money could legitimately and properly be used to help people. That comment is not Treasury based. The Treasury has properly put money into budgets to be used to help people. When it is misused, it does not help the people whom it is supposed to help. We should be tough and tight on fraud.

I welcome most aspects of the Bill. I have some concerns about some of the changes. They will put enormous pressure on the Child Support Agency. At times, I feel that the Bill will be another nightmare. I am thinking, for example, of the new payment provisions. Implementation will be a bureaucratic nightmare for the Child Support Agency. It will increase the work load greatly. At present, we receive complaint after complaint about what is happening in the CSA. Here we are trying to change things. We are putting another burden on it, which will cause more problems. I hope that hon. Members realise that we are trying to improve things, but that the changes will place an added work load on the agency. We shall see more delays as a result of that.

In general, I welcome the Bill. It is an improvement on the original Act. It provides greater flexibility in case assessments. It allows affected parties to appeal. It provides for special payments in certain circumstances. It is a valuable piece of legislation to that extent. We must appreciate that if we are to have an appeal procedure, there must be a full opportunity to examine the facts on both sides.

I intervened in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ask a question about appeals. He seemed to say that the CSA would not be able to look at facts on appeal. If we are not to look at facts on appeal, we ain't going to get justice. It is justice that people want. In cases in which there has been continued misrepresentation and an aggrieved party knows that the facts stated are wrong, he should be able to produce such evidence as is necessary to show that he is right.

8.13 pm

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The Bill is a skeleton Bill. Many of the details, such as amounts of money, qualifying criteria and procedures to be followed, will be given in the regulations, which are not yet available. Yet there is sufficient in the Bill and there are sufficient omissions of important changes that the public wanted for me to feel confident that, when I opposed the Child Support Bill that became the 1991 Act, I was correct.

I said in 1991 that if the Government really wanted to improve the system of child maintenance, they would set up family courts and an agency or service to collect or enforce maintenance. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) was criticised for proposing that we should have family courts. It was said that family courts had failed, that there was no going back and that that was that—we had this system and we had to stick with it and do the best that we could. I remember everyone saying some years ago that the rating system had failed. People on both sides of the House agreed with that. The poll tax was introduced. It was a head tax which everyone, even those on income support, was to pay. They would be watchdogs to see that councils did not overspend. People said that there was no going back and the poll tax was there to stay.

Yet the public outcry about the poll tax was such that it did not stay. The Government were forced to change it and we now have the council tax. I predict that the public outcry about the CSA will not only continue but increase and that the agency will have to be changed. If the Government have any sense, they will start to think about introducing a family courts system, as outlined in the Children Act 1989.

Any Bill that deals with the maintenance of children should have children's welfare at the heart of it. I attacked the first Child Support Bill because it appeared to me then that the Government's main interest was in clawing back benefit. No one wants to pay unnecessary taxes. No one likes paying taxes, although most people see the necessity of paying taxes and do so, even if unwillingly. Everyone believes that parents should be responsible for their children, not merely financially but in every other way, and that if they can afford to take financial responsibility, they certainly should do so.

We do not seem to agree that the state in a civilised society also has responsibility for children. The Bill does not recognise that responsibility. There is still a benefit penalty. The Bill does not remove it. By the end of January, 15,500 parents with care were penalised by reduced benefit directions. There are 40,000 more in the pipeline and thousands more are intimidated by the benefit penalty, which forces them to sign the maintenance forms when they feel that it might harm them and their family to make contact with the divorced or separated partner.

Mr. Duncan: Why does the hon. Lady think that the state should continue to pay benefits to a family which happens to be split when, if the family had remained together, the state would not have been obliged to pay any such benefits? Does that not provide through the state an incentive to families to split?

Ms Gordon: I thought I said clearly that where absent parents can afford to support their children, they have the responsibility to do so; they should have that responsibility. I also said that the state had a responsibility to children and that no one in a civilised society should want to see children go hungry. I set up the all-party parliamentary Child Support Act monitoring group. We have received report after report from respectable voluntary agencies recognised by the Government, saying that mothers go hungry. They say that mothers whom they meet give their children money for chips and have no lunch themselves. They say that when they visit such mothers, they find empty refrigerators.

A citizens advice bureau in Sussex reported a single parent with five children under seven whose benefit was reduced by £20 per week to repay rent, water rates and community charge arrears and a social fund loan to buy furniture. She was finding it difficult to manage on £75 a week. If that woman had been in a relationship in which there was violence and she had been afraid of making contact with the father of her children because she thought that it would be traumatic for the children, that £75 would have been reduced to £65 a week. Those children would go hungry, and we surely cannot accept that. The welfare of children must come first.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Lady must concede that if the lady to whom she referred signed the forms and went to see a child support officer to set out her circumstances, she would be allowed good cause not to comply with the Child Support Agency and her family would not need to go hungry.

Ms Gordon: There must be some differences of opinion, or there would not be 40,000 women whose reasons have been rejected and 15,000 women who have suffered the benefit penalty. Those women must have had good reasons to appeal, or they would not have put themselves in a position where they could possibly suffer a penalty of a reduction in their already low income by nearly £10.

It is poor families who have their water, gas and electricity disconnected, and who get into serious trouble. I see such families all the time, because I represent one of the poorest areas in the country. I know very well the sort of difficulties which those people can get into, through no fault of their own. Those people have often managed miraculously on what they have, but the money is just not enough. It should be left to the parent—nearly always a woman—to make the decision whether or not to apply to the agency. The parent knows why her relationship broke up and the effect that that has had on the children.

Mr. Burt: I understand the point that the hon. Lady is making, but she must see the other side. She is asking for a mother to have unilateral control over whether she asks the father for maintenance or relies on the state. That cannot be the case, because she would then be giving carte blanche to a bloke to wander off and abandon her and to let the state pick up the tab. There has to be someone who decides whether there is a proper good cause, and that is what the agency's officers do. The fact that they accept 50 per cent. of the reasons which come before them

[Mr. Burt]

suggests that they exercise a good deal of sensitivity on the matter. To have no rule at all—which is what the hon. Lady is asking for—would surely do no one any good.

Ms Gordon: I am not saying that there should not be a rule, and I never have asked for that. My question is—who are the people who make the decision, and how do they do it? Will it be half-trained civil servants, making a decision on the basis of a rigid formula? Or should it be a family court, which can listen to the problems of that family and take a rounded view of each case? That is a completely different situation. I am not asking for anarchy, and I never would.

There is nothing in the Bill to give immediate help to the poorest of parents with care who are on income support. All of the voluntary organisations have called for a disregard, which would not only raise the standard of living of those parents with care and their children, many of whom are going hungry—that is not a sob story, but a fact—but would give an incentive to the absent fathers to pay the maintenance regularly. The fathers might pay if they knew that some of the money was going for the benefit of their children, and not to the state.

The changes which will benefit absent fathers will be put into effect in four weeks, but the only benefit for mothers with care is the bonus that has been deferred for two years. It will take four years before mothers can reach the maximum amount specified, but they need help now. What happens to mothers who want to stay at home to look after small children? It is perfectly legitimate to want to be at home with small children, and not leave them to go out to work.

What happens to a mother who takes a job, is made redundant from that job, goes on income support and then goes back to work later? Will she get the bonus, or will it be lost because she lost her job? That is not clear at all. The Bill says that the agency will save up the money in those circumstances where women take a job, but it does not say whether interest will be counted on that money while it is held back. The money will be given to the mother

"only on the occurrence of a prescribed event"

which seems to be when the mother gets a job.

We do not know whether the mother will have to work a certain amount of time before she gets the bonus. That is very unclear, but it seems to me that she will not receive much benefit. That is especially relevant when most of the jobs which women can get are part-time, low-paid and insecure jobs. If a mother is going to look after her children properly she wants to make sure that she gets her maintenance, income support or whatever her lifeline is. She can take employment only if she has a secure job. I would not advise a mother to take an insecure, part-time low-paid job because that would do her and her children more harm than good.

Mr. Duncan: If the hon. Lady reads the Bill carefully, she will find that it makes provision for a much more simplified and effective review procedure in the event of a change in circumstances. The problem of a mother with care taking a part-time job and then perhaps having to go back on benefit is very sensibly addressed by the Bill.

Ms Gordon: That is better than the former situation, in which a mother had to wait for six months. We do not know how the system will work, and having a part-time insecure job is still a problem. A mother wants security and to be able plan ahead for herself and her children.

The changes in the Bill do not help low-paid absent fathers either. A man on income support still has to pay £2.50 a week, which may leave him with a very low amount on which to live. That is punitive, and the changes are overwhelmingly in favour of wealthy absent fathers.

Clause 18 states that parents with care who had pre-1993 settlements will not be helped. The big benefit of the system was to be that mothers who had maintenance arranged by the courts which was not being paid would be able to go to the agency. Some mothers thought that they would not have to go back to the court, and that the agency would sort it all out. All of them have been disappointed, as the agency has done nothing of the sort. The Bill is saying that the agency is not even going to look into those cases. It is not interested in them, and it is really interested only in parents who are on income support. That is quite obvious.

Voluntary agencies have outlined about 40 different changes which they thought would be needed in the Act to make it work, and some of those have been taken into account. The grounds for departure from the formula now take account of the cost of travel, the cost of maintaining contact with children, the cost of supporting stepchildren, disability, illness, clean-break settlements, debt from previous relationships and certain other expenses. That is all to the good, but the Bill gives no information on the costs that will be allowed and does not give the criteria for deciding whether those are essential costs. It does not specify how much discretion the child support officer will be allowed.

The Bill states that the intention is to limit the number of potential beneficiaries. It stresses that the system of departures will be available only to a "small minority of cases", and that the amount by which an assessment can be reduced or increased will be strictly limited. So there is not as big an improvement as has been trumpeted.

Many other changes are necessary, as the voluntary agencies have outlined. For example, the care and maintenance of older children in tertiary education is very expensive and should be acknowledged. There is also the matter of child care costs. If a second wife goes to work, her child care costs could be £90 to £100 a week for each child.

Again, I can only stress that each case is individual and that only family-based courts can be seen to be just. If we want fathers to pay maintenance and not to try to wriggle out of it—not that the majority of fathers want to, as they want their children to be well looked after—and to pay it regularly, they have to see it as a just decision. If they are able to put their point of view to a family court and if all the factors are taken into account, even if they disagree with the decision, they have to see it to be fair and just. The Government would get a better system and fathers would pay more regularly.

If one tries to impose a rigid formula, as has been done, even though some changes might take the edge off some of the worst grievances, many more will be left and it creates bitterness, which is eroding relationships. Couples often manage to find a modus vivendi that helps the children after very traumatic divorces. Now much bitterness has been stirred up and children have been upset. It has been happening throughout the country and I am not making it up. The Minister's mailbags undoubtedly show it to be true—those are facts.

A Catch 22 is built into the complaints system, in that the absent parent cannot take up the matter unless his payments are up to date, but he is probably complaining because he cannot afford to pay and therefore cannot bring them up to date. If he cannot afford to pay and to cancel out the debt, he cannot take his case to the tribunal. It seems that fathers will have to go first to the Secretary of State, which means the Child Support Agency officers, who will be flooded with cases.

The system has proved to be inefficient. I have had some most intemperate letters from Miss Chant, the head of the agency, which I intend to send to the Minister. They make me doubt whether she should be there at all. I cannot see that the new system is going to work—there will be a huge backlog and it will be another fiasco.

The Secretary of State is making a second attempt to patch up this ill-thought-out Act because he is under pressure from his Back Benchers, who are in turn under pressure from their constituents. Each time that he makes a change, it brings new problems, injustices and unfair situations. In the end, the Government will have to give up this Act and all the alterations to it. They will have to face facts and move to a system of family courts, and the sooner that they do so, the better for the parents and children of this country.

8.32 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) understandably concentrated on those people who live in her constituency who have very little money. From what she said, it was clear that their main experience of life is having to manage the myriad benefits that exist. They have to learn the system if they are to survive, and they do so very quickly to ensure that they can use to their best advantage all the very different benefits that are available.

That is understandable, but the fact that people have to do that perhaps also illustrates one of the grave problems of the advance of the welfare state since the war. They have to do it because there are not enough jobs around. One might argue strongly that the existence of those benefits in that form is the reason why they are not around. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar also concentrated on the detail of the workings of the Child Support Agency. She looked at every detail and clause essentially to find out how the Bill can best be worked by its beneficiaries.

We should not lose sight of the larger picture and social policy into which the Bill fits. We run the risk of not being able to see the wood for the trees by concentrating so much on the detail, without realising the significance of the Child Support Agency as a change in the social policy of post-war Britain.

During the past week, Mr. Amitai Etzioni has been in town and has attracted much publicity. He is the champion of the new communitarian thinking that is beginning to occupy many a brilliant mind in Britain and the United States. If my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) had not been compelled to take a Trappist vow by sitting on the Front Bench as a Whip, we would have heard quite a lot from him in the past few days on those themes. Essentially, communitarianism is a search for the sort of social stability and patterns of social life that we have lost, not merely in this country but in many western democracies since the war, which the Bill and the Child Support Act 1991 that preceded it are attempting to address.

Community is the new buzzword—to try to find some green and promised land that can allow us to return to those stable family relationships and patterns of behaviour that have disappeared in such large numbers and compelled the state to pick up the pieces. In the search for that promised land, many ambiguous themes go with the notion of community.

If we were to use the word community simply and to apply it to family life and the sort of problems that the Child Support Agency is trying to solve, the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar and I might both say that we believed in it. I suspect that the hon. Lady and the Leader of the Opposition see it as a means of extending state power, however, whereas I see it as a means to reduce it. We applaud the idea of community, but I would argue that all the virtues of family life for which the CSA and other measures are searching have been suffocated by Government and cannot be restored unless the Government retreat from many areas of life. The hon. Lady's whole speech clearly illustrated the poor effects of the dead hand and the over-extension of Government intervention into every nook and cranny.

In assessing how we want community and the restoration of proper family life to arise once again in Britain, I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), who has left the Chamber. He said that this legislation is socialist, but it is the opposite. Since the war, the Government have had to pick up the pieces of changing patterns of social life. The number of one-parent families has risen dramatically and, instead of families—split though they may be—being compelled to sort out the problems for themselves, the state has been picking up the pieces. The point of the Bill is that it is the first social legislation in post-war Britain, if not ever, to reverse the trend of the state taking on responsibility for family life and to compel parents once again to do just that.

This is the first Bill to have turned the corner from the state producing many more benefits and more dependent people and to say instead that, if parents who have split up can afford to bring up their children in the way that they would have done had they remained together, they should do just that. As such, it is the most crucial, important and significant legislation in social policy since the war and it is the duty of every hon. Member to ensure that it survives.

Mr. Jenkin: I am enjoying my hon. Friend's speech and I am also enjoying the spectacle of one or two of the faces of Opposition Members who are listening but showing puzzlement. The reason is that, for the state to withdraw from aspects of people's private lives, we are having to increase its power. I wonder whether my hon. Friend can explore that theme because, however popular the ideas of Mr. Etzioni and communitarianism might be becoming on the Opposition Benches, supporters of communitarianism and family life, which is what the Bill is all about, fail to understand that to reinforce the moral

[Mr. Jenkin]

atmosphere around which families coalesce requires the state to take on or make judgments about aspects of people's lives in a way that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point, not mini-speeches.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) for presenting such a cogent and reasoned exposition of his view. He has hit on an important point which is that, if one attempts to roll back the frontiers of the state, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People once said in a memorable speech, severe problems of transition arise. It is those very problems that the Act and now the Bill address. One could simply say that single mothers with an absent husband who could afford to bring up a child should be excluded from the benefit system. However, that would be unduly cruel and unjustifiable in a modern, civilised society. The proper legislation to bring about the transition from the state paying for that child to the absent father with means doing so must involve the state in setting up a system whereby the mother, if she is to come off benefit, can receive money from someone who can pay—the absent father. The Bill tries to deal with the problems of that transition.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will take note of the point that I am about to make, which deals with the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North has just raised. Whereas the state has the right to intervene in the family finances of a split couple where the mother is on benefit and therefore making demands on the state, it does not have the right to intervene in the family finances of a couple where the state does not support the mother and children. The Bill should draw a line to distinguish between cases where, perforce and often for good reasons, the mother is on benefit and those where the couple has means and the mother is not on benefit because she is kept by the absent father under some lasting court settlement.

Mr. Dewar: I am curious about the consequences of the hon. Gentleman's point. As he knows, a proposal has been made that certain cases that were to come within the ambit of the CSA in 1996 should be deferred, "deferment" being the operative word. As those are cases where no benefit is involved, does he argue that they should be permanently excluded?

Mr. Duncan: Yes, I do. Indeed, I would think for an eternity before bringing them within the aegis of the CSA. This may be a slight and peculiar disagreement with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, but it happens to be my view. In cases where the mother is not on benefit, except through the court system, the CSA has no right to intervene in the finances of her family. That is where I would wish to see the line drawn. Where the mother or, in some cases, the father, is on benefit, CSA rules should apply. I draw the line so that those who do not rely on the state for benefit should not come within the ambit of the CSA.

The Social Security Select Committee has drawn up two reports on the CSA. Unlike the Select Committee on Employment, where there has been more theatrical discussion of current issues, the cross-party assessment by the Social Security Select Committee has been sensible and purposeful, and has looked into the details of the CSA during the past year—*[Interruption.]*

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): That Committee has a good Chairman.

Mr. Duncan: Indeed, it has a Labour Chairman, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who handles it in a way that ensures that there is cross-party co-operation and a proper study of everything that comes before us. That, rather than television theatricals, is exactly what the Select Committee system should be about. The value of our work is evident in our reports. When we attract television attention and comments by journalists when, for instance, a Minister with something to say appears before us, it is for absolutely the right reason—so that those who attend our Select Committee proceedings learn something rather than just watch a purposeless spectacle, as they have so often done with the Employment Select Committee which, I regret to say, is bringing the entire Select Committee system into disrepute.

The Social Security Select Committee's first report made some suggestions, most of which were taken up by the Government. However, there were clearly still some problems. Injustices were arising from the workings of the CSA; its administration was over-burdened and those working in it, many of whom faced a vulgar and disgusting campaign against them by the sort of people who would send razor blades in envelopes through the post, did a good job but could not wholly cope. It is therefore right that, by and large, the various recommendations that we have made in our second report have been taken up by the Government. We made 22 proposals, most of which have been incorporated in the Bill. In some cases, the Secretary of State has gone even further. I am grateful to him for that. I commend the Under-Secretary on the way in which he has handled the matter with a cool head and open ears to ensure that solutions to problems that have genuinely arisen have been incorporated in the Bill.

The Bill assists the process of reversing trends that have devastated some families since the war. It is crucial that the legislation that we have put in place is allowed to work, and assisted so that it can work properly. We shall see that, by handing back responsibility to parents for the care of their children and by reversing the scope of the state to go into many nooks and crannies of family life, we have taken a first step towards introducing the sort of communitarianism that many people are debating so actively. By reducing the size of the state, we shall reverse the way in which the state has displaced so much private virtue, private responsibility, liberty and freedom. Most Opposition Members' definition of community and communitarianism is a cloak for wishing to extend state power and, in nicer language, simply to have more of the same and do more of the same damage.

This is a truly revolutionary Bill. Britain has been gasping for such a Bill for many a decade and I urge everyone in the House to support it.

8.47 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I have really enjoyed tonight's debate. It has been one of those rare occasions in the House in recent years when I have felt that Back Benchers have had some influence on the decisions that are being made.

The comments of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) related more to the 1991 Act than to this Bill. My view of that Act is that there was general support for the principle of the Child Support Agency arrangement that absent parents should contribute towards the upkeep of their children. But the argument at that time, last year and now is about the conditions that apply to the legislation. The political differences between the two sides of the House seem to be about those conditions.

I am not entirely in favour of the Bill because it does not go far enough, and for that reason I shall vote for the amendment, but it is a step forward from the 1991 Act and the changes that were made last year. It offers a more humanitarian approach. The terms of the 1991 Act were Conservative based, whereas we are now moving towards a more socialist attitude to our business.

I always try to look at any legislation objectively to see what is or is not of benefit to my constituents and the area that I represent. As a result of the 1991 Act, I accept that absent parents became more responsible for their former families. Today, Conservative Members in particular have drawn attention to the militant attitude of some critics of the 1991 Act. I have had many dealings with absent parents in my constituency, however, and they have never criticised the basic principle behind that Act. They have always said that they believe that absent parents should make a contribution, but they questioned the way in which the Act operated.

From my experience of the 1991 Act, the sad thing to note has been the heartache that it has caused to both partners in a marriage, but particularly to the children involved. I am sure that every other hon. Member has had a similar experience, because we have all had to deal with problems to do with that Act. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) has said, at one time we had to deal with problems caused by the horrendous poll tax, which also caused heartache to many of my constituents, but I believe that the 1991 Act has caused as much, if not more heartache.

I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that the 1991 Act has aggravated the problems faced by people when their marriage breaks up. I have seen constituents who told me that their separation and eventual divorce was reached on fairly reasonable terms. Genuine attempts were made to resolve the problem to look after the interests of the children in particular. In many ways, that reflects how matters stood before the CSA existed, when the courts decided that an absent parent should make a financial contribution towards the children of a marriage. Those parents made that contribution based on the court instruction and, more often than not, they also helped to pay for clothing, holidays and various other things needed by the children. Such arrangements worked fairly reasonably, but once the CSA became involved, matters became acrimonious. Formerly acceptable arrangements between ex-partners suddenly became contentious and that affected the children one way or another.

In two cases in my constituency teachers told me about watching a certain pattern develop because of the involvement of the CSA. They told me that when the parents of children in their classes got divorced, the work of the children affected initially declined and they became less attentive. With the help of the school, those children gradually overcame their problems and began to work properly again, but once the CSA became involved, the standard of those children's work fell right back to where it was before. The CSA's involvement has meant that the relationships between people have gradually declined until matters have become extremely difficult and the children involved have suffered.

The significant mistakes in the original 1991 Act were slightly eased by the modifications announced last year, but even those changes caused problems, as other hon. Members have already said. The confusion created by the operation of the original Act was compounded by further confusion as attempts were made to resolve cases.

On a number of occasions, I had to refer to the so-called local office for my area of mid-Northumberland, which was in Falkirk. Many of my constituents who had to telephone that office to try to resolve their problems were not enamoured by the gentle, nice Scots voice at the other end of the line. In my part of Britain, our relations with the Scots were not too good for many years, although we are overcoming that problem now. There was genuine resentment, however, at the fact that the local office was in mid-Scotland. I am pleased to note that the Minister responded to that, because we now have a local office in my town, to which the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) now have to go to get their cases dealt with. The Minister's response was important, because my constituents were glad to be able to go to their local office instead of having to ring Falkirk and trying to understand a difficult foreign dialect.

In one difficult constituency case the parent made his contributions through the courts, generally through direct debit. The CSA then got involved and he received a demand for the payment to be made through it. The ex-husband continued to pay through the courts and at the same time tried to pay through the CSA. He paid twice because no one told him that he did not have to pay through the courts any more. I had to write to the CSA to get its staff to write a letter to that man, because he was an honest citizen, who felt that he had to continue to carry out the instructions from the courts until someone said differently. Eventually he was advised to stop paying through the courts and make his payment through the CSA.

I recall the previous debates that we had on the CSA and I appreciate the Secretary of State's response to previous attempts to modify the 1991 Act. Those attempts have been acknowledged by all hon. Members, including the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). Although the Secretary of State's actions were somewhat out of character, bearing in mind his right-wing views on many other issues, progress was made. Perhaps it is too little, and perhaps it is too late.

I, like many other right hon. and hon. Members, will attempt to explain the issue. Obviously, all my constituents who are involved with the CSA believe that there will be changes, but I understand that some of the changes will not come into force until 1997. People continue to suffer the problems.

There will be a long delay regarding certain elements of the Bill when it becomes an Act. There are elements that are there under the regulations, as I understand it.

I hope that the Secretary of State will bear in mind one matter. I mentioned it earlier when I intervened on the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) when he was talking about fraud. I quoted the instance of a constituent who explained to me that his wife was in

[Mr. Jack Thompson]

full-time employment and was being paid overtime, and that when she became involved with the CSA she stopped working overtime, which meant that her pay slips were down. She was then able to claim income support, which meant that her ex-husband paid more, because that block of pay slips was used as evidence. When that exercise was completed, she returned to working overtime. That is unfair.

I know of the reverse happening in another case. A constituent who works seasonal overtime was assessed on his seasonal overtime, which was unfair.

One way in which the Secretary of State might overcome that problem is to consider annual income. It is better to consider a person's annual income than to consider a five-week period.

Mr. Burt *indicated assent.*

Mr. Thompson: The Minister is nodding his head. I think that the problem should be properly recognised and overcome, because it is an important problem for my constituents and those of other Members of the House.

Although I welcome what has been proposed, it has not gone far enough. That is why I will vote for the Labour amendment. The Secretary of State promised that there would be a further review of the issue, and I hope that we shall have another opportunity to consider it.

The Secretary of State has been repeatedly accused of using the Child Support Act 1991 to reduce benefit costs. I would not disagree with that comment. He has constantly denied it, saying that it is not a saving and that it will not be used to allow tax reductions in future, but that it is there to improve the service and make the system fairer. I am not convinced of that.

However, the Secretary of State could convince me, and I think many others, if he would allow a small maintenance disregard. That would show clearly that he is interested in children—I believe that that is the essence of the argument—and it would provide greater benefits for poorer families. It would also satisfy those absent parents who are making their contribution, expecting that their children will be better off financially.

I seek clarification from the Secretary of State or the Minister when he replies of the changes that will take place. I understand from the speeches that have been made that regulations will be introduced, which will be the short-term proposition; then, if the Act is passed as it stands or even if it is amended, it will be introduced and brought into force in about 1996 or 1997.

I read the memorandum submitted to the Social Security Committee by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency. There is a small element near the end, under the conclusions:

> "6.8 Whilst we consider these achievements significant"—

one might argue about that—

> "much work clearly remains to be done."

The important part is:

> "We are currently preparing our Business Plan for 1995-96, which is bound to be a testing year."

I would not argue with that. The interesting thing about that is that, if one is preparing a business plan for 1995-96, one must include what has been suggested in the changes in the regulations and look forward to the projected changes under the Act in 1997. Will that not cause confusion in preparing a business plan? From my experience of involvement in preparing business plans, one needs to look a long way ahead. If those things are going to take place, some very quick decisions must be made about the regulations and very positive proposals must be made when the Bill becomes the Act.

Mr. Burt: To save time, yes, the agency has been working on assumptions. It obviously knows what is in the House's mind. Naturally, it cannot anticipate the House passing everything, but it is fair that it should work on assumptions. So those matters have been taken into consideration. I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Thompson: I am grateful to the Minister. That allows me to sleep a little easier tonight.

As I said earlier, when the Bill becomes an Act it will partially humanise the Child Support Act 1991. If only it went a little further. I should like the next stage to take place, and my colleagues and I will campaign genuinely to humanise the Child Support Agency.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have talked about the problems that give rise to the need for a Child Support Agency, and the reason why we need legislation to control the difficult position of separated parents, of divorced people and of children, with single-parent families in many cases. It is a question of the laws in this country as regards aspects of divorce.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) mentioned family courts. I know that it would be difficult to introduce appropriate legislation, but it would help if we were able to begin at the beginning and modify the divorce laws—I understand that some proposals have been put forward on that. We do not necessarily want to make it more difficult to obtain a divorce, but we should produce a different pattern, with more counselling—of which I am strongly in favour.

There should be more counselling for people, from the time when they decide not to live together any longer until they embark on divorce. They should receive proper, professional advice, which costs money, to resolve the problems before they arise. I have experience, as have many hon. Members, of people—generally young people—who come to my surgery, and when I start to talk to them about their problems I find that they are divorced. When I start to probe into why they are divorced I often find that it is for the most petty reasons, which could have been resolved with the proper guidance and help at the right time. There might be fewer cases for the Child Support Agency or the divorce courts if there were a different procedure for dealing with people in the run-up to that difficult time.

9.5 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I think that we are all grateful to the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) who brings many years of practical experience to resolving the problems that beset the early years of the Child Support Agency. I listened with great interest to his comments and was particularly pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister was able to respond on the subject of average incomes—an issue raised in the hon. Gentleman's speech. I also support the hon. Gentleman in his efforts to persuade the Government to humanise the Child Support Agency. As he suggested towards the end of his speech, the avoidance of marriage breakdowns in the first place must be the highest social objective that we should attach to everything that we do here.

I wish briefly to respond to one or two of the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) who said, with great relish, that he disapproved of the CSA becoming involved in any non-benefit cases. The argument that he promulgates—that those not on benefit provide no locus for the state to interfere in the arrangements—would stand up if the courts had proved perfect at solving all the problems between such couples. But the courts have always been a cumbersome mechanism, and have always been a state mechanism. All we have done with the CSA is to substitute for one state mechanism a more effective state mechanism—we should keep that in proportion.

There is nothing magical and apolitical about the operation of the courts. The law that the courts interpret is made here, just as the regulations for the Child Support Agency are made here. I hope that—and with all due respect to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—the CSA will prove a little cheaper than the average family lawyer.

I had hoped to follow the speech by the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) as I feel that she represents—I must phrase this carefully—many of the problems that the CSA faces. However, I do not think that she represents the solution. While we must satisfy the concerns that she expresses—I am sorry that she is not in the Chamber as I say my few words about her—I do not think that we shall ever satisfy her and the particular demands that she makes.

We in this country are not subject to government by consensus of voluntary agencies. The 40 or so voluntary agencies to which the hon. Lady referred make all sorts of suggestions for their own reasons—not least to ensure that they remain popular with the various interest groups that they purport to represent. That does not necessarily mean that all their suggestions are the most practical and balanced.

The hon. Lady expressed disappointment that the system of departures offered in the Bill will be limited to a small number of cases. That was always bound to be the problem when introducing a system of discretion or appeal into the process of allocating maintenance. There would either be wide gateways, in which case the whole system would become discretionary like the courts, or narrow gateways, in which case very few people would qualify under the appeals system.

We must take comfort from the fact that we have introduced a system of appeals in order to deal with the least satisfactory cases under the formula rather than introducing a general system which makes people feel that they have received a fair hearing. No formula-based system could achieve that objective.

I was interested to hear the comments by the hon. Member for Garscadden about the system in Australia and the rubric which appears at the bottom of its Child Support Agency stationery:

> "Taxes: building a better Australia."

I do not recommend that to the hon. Gentleman as a substitute for a proper policy with regard to the Child Support Agency. However, if he were to substitute the word "Britain" for "Australia" it would portray accurately the likely Labour party policy at the next general election. I am sure that that slogan would prove very effective.

I do not apologise for the fact that the Child Support Agency saves taxpayers' money indirectly. Opposition Members who have sought to deny that fact have made a mistake. The majority of people in this country resent the idea of the state picking up the tab for the maintenance of children whose parents, between them, should be able to afford to pay for them.

I notice that the Liberal spokesperson, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), is nodding in agreement. I think that it is inconsistent for her to advocate scrapping the Child Support Act 1991 and starting again if she agrees with that principle. This is the best chance that we have of getting a proper child support system off the ground. If we destroy this Act it is unlikely that we will get a second chance.

Ms Lynne *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I have little time left, but I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful. I nodded my head because I agree that parents should pay for their children's upkeep. However, the Child Support Act is not working and a family court system would be much better.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention because she has demonstrated once again that the Liberal Democrats will say one thing and then another and seek to satisfy all discontented parties without ever producing a consistent policy.

I was pleased to be involved in preparing the report by the Social Security Select Committee and I welcome the Bill. I think that the discretionary element that it introduces in dealing with departures from the formula is justified.

A case in my constituency has troubled me and I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could explain how it would be dealt with under the new legislation. When an absent parent suffers from severe diabetes and faces significant medical and dietary costs, would that qualify for consideration under the new appeals system?

I am pleased with the maintenance bonus. I think that it is preferable to the disregard which is the Opposition's alternative incentive bonus. The formula includes several new aspects, such as the travel-to-work bonus and the maintenance cap and it takes full account of second families.

I make no apology for the maintenance cap. It will not apply simply to better-off families, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) suggested. The cap applies to an income percentage; it is not an absolute cap in cash terms. Therefore, the income cap will apply equally to a single person who lives at home, perhaps with a parent, and who has low housing costs and a low income, and to a parent who has a second family, all the allowances and a large income. I am also pleased that the amount of additional maintenance payable will be halved.

When considering amending the Child Support Act, it is important to focus on its original objectives. I detect a growing measure of consensus across the House.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) spoke eloquently of the purpose and intent of the Bill, sounding almost as if he would be supporting the Government tonight—until he was brought up short by some of my hon. Friends. I urge him to join us, none the less.

[Mr. Jenkin]

The House may be reflecting public opinion. Conservative Members, perhaps, are more enamoured of the ideas of Charles Murray; as has already been pointed out, Opposition Members may be more attracted by those of Mr. Etzione. All of us, however, see a growing need to re-establish society, whatever "society" means; my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Thatcher said that it meant families, communities, villages, towns and businesses. The Bill and the Act that it amends aim to restore some of the bloom and to remove perverse incentives that we have put into the system, which have encouraged families and communities to fragment. That is the effect of too much state support: it removes people's incentive to depend on each other within their own communities.

There are other issues that we could pursue on a future occasion—the possibility, for instance, of restoring the married couple's tax allowance and the child tax allowance. Those proposals, however, belong to a future Bill, or perhaps a future Budget.

9.15 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, of which I am a member, has conducted its own investigation of the CSA and, in particular, the complaints that have been received: some 30,000 have been received since the agency's inception. Little foresight or planning was involved in its establishment, and those moving into it from other Departments were given only six weeks' training, despite the complexity of the legislation involved. That caused many problems. I do not know whether the increase to 10 weeks will improve matters.

The stopping of all new cases will of course ease the position. The Department of Social Security used to work hand in hand with the CSA, telling the agency who was on benefit and who was not. I can give two constituency examples that sum up the CSA: it is possible that not all the problems were the agency's fault, but most of them were.

A constituent of mine, a young lady with three children receiving family income support, was reported to the CSA as receiving benefit. The CSA duly sent her a form; it wanted to know her husband's whereabouts, because she was entitled to child support. She wrote back to the agency, explaining that her husband had been dead for five years. The agency did not believe her, because it had been told that she was receiving family income support and therefore assumed that she must have a husband. It sent her another form, insisting that she sign it and explain where her husband was. I am afraid that I cannot give the second example, because there is not enough time.

Such things would not happen if we had the family courts that were mentioned the other day. I believe that the position will become worse because of the new appeals system; cases are backing up, and a crisis is set to explode again. I am sure that the Parliamentary Commissioner, Mr. Reid, will have another flood of complaints to deal with.

Given those 30,000 complaints, people may wonder what compensation has been paid. In fact, hardly any was paid: 16 people received compensation. That was a shambles in itself. As the Select Committee has said, the whole idea of the CSA and the complaints system was a shambles. The Committee said:

> "We criticise the Department for not ensuring that such measures to deal with complaints and backlogs were introduced sooner."

In other words, everyone in the Department allowed the backlog to build up until it became a big mushroom, which exploded at the end, and we see the consequences of that.

In the Select Committee, we had the Minister in front of us, and I recall that when we questioned him he said that it was not his responsibility to oversee what was going on; that he was responsible only for putting the Act in place and that it was up to the officials. We disagreed with him. We thought that it was his responsibility to have briefings with officials and, if things were going wrong, to see that they were put right. He did not. His attitude was, "It was not my department. It was not my area. It was somebody else's. I was the Minister. I was there only to put the Act in place." We criticised that. It is in the report—

Mr. Burt: I did not say that.

Mr. Campbell: The Minister did say that. He said that it was not his responsibility. He said that he was a Minister, that he was not there to oversee the day-to-day running of the CSA. We told him that he should have been aware of what was happening, that he should have been aware of the backlog and the mess that it was in.

I say this quite honestly. I think that a bigger mess is coming and that the Minister will be in trouble again. I believe that the review procedure will just pile up again. People are crying out for reviews, because they do not know what is happening or what they will have to pay. One gentleman came into my office only two weeks ago. He had filled in the form last June. He wanted to pay his money. He was not one of these "getter outs". The first letter that he received from the CSA was in November. It said that he would have to pay £70 a week and that he owed £2,000—to the mother of the child in this case. What sort of agency is that? What sort of set-up is that? No wonder people's backs are up. Here was a young lad who was working, who wanted to pay his money yet he got a letter after six months to tell him that he was in debt for £2,000 and that he must pay £70 a week—after being in the courts and paying £20.

That has been the problem with the CSA. The Minister never looked at it. That is one of the criticisms of the ombudsman. The Minister never planned it. He should have looked at what happened to the disability allowance. He never did and that has been the problem. I hope that the new measure will be better, but I very much doubt it.

9.22 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. Although there has been some comment about the lack of numbers in the Chamber, there have been 14 Back-Bench contributions, all giving various thoughtful comments about the way in which the legislation has worked to date and about the hopes and aspirations for the changes that will come about through the Bill. It is worth while briefly pulling together one or two of those themes and pressing the Minister on one or two of the points.

A number of hon. Members raised the point about whether, before it goes into Standing Committee, the Bill should be referred to a Select Committee or other scrutiny Committee to ensure that the detail is properly considered. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that proposal.

On behalf of the Opposition, I add our tributes to the staff who have laboured under great difficulties during the years since the agency was set up. I reinforce the point that adequate resources are required in future for the training of all the current staff and the new staff who will be taken on to deal with the consequences of change to the formula and of the departure appeal system, to ensure that there is no erosion in confidence as a result of the pressures that they have to undertake. Although we welcome the Bill because of the way in which it addresses some of the problems that have been identified, I would not go as far as the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), who suggested that the Bill is revolutionary. The debate would have been different if the Bill had fallen into that category.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and others that if this debate had taken place 12 months ago, there might have been a different response from hon. Members. That is because there is some recognition that the major shortcomings of the original legislation are at last being addressed. The Secretary of State was less than generous in his comments about our reasoned amendment to the original legislation, in which we highlighted property settlements.

Mr. Lilley: I specifically mentioned that, but it was only in the context that future property settlements might bring about the problem that the hon. Gentleman mentions. There was no reference to the so-called retrospective aspect, which is what has caused concern.

Mr. Bradley: I shall return to the issue of property settlements. I had the distinct feeling that the Minister was being less than generous, or even perhaps lugubrious, as he has been throughout the debate, on that point.

I shall look briefly at both elements of the package—the regulations and the Bill—because although that is a package, the Bill has sometimes been confused with some of the regulations that will be presented in less than four weeks. I share the concerns of my hon. Friends about the lack of time for proper parliamentary scrutiny of those regulations and the speed at which they will come into effect. They were laid only last week. I thought that the Government would have learnt a lesson from trying to rush through changes without proper parliamentary scrutiny. The lack of such scrutiny may again lead to further administrative chaos, the agency will fall into disrepute and there will be a subsequent public outcry if the Government do not get it right.

Now is not the time to rub the Minister's nose further into the report that was issued today and I do not intend to do that. We want to look forward. I hope that he will allow proper scrutiny of the regulations. We all have to try to rebuild confidence, and the Government must ensure that the changes are adequate and relevant and that the agency can implement them efficiently rather than add to the chaos. To ensure public confidence, the Minister should provide details of precisely when the regulations will be debated before they are implemented on 18 April. I urge him to do that.

It is clear that, while many changes to the formula and the introduction of the appeals system are welcome, we have missed an opportunity to tackle other fundamental issues. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has highlighted, the failure to introduce a child care disregard is particularly disappointing and is the principal reason for our clear, reasoned amendment, which concisely presents our position on the Bill.

Many organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux and the Child Poverty Action Group have supplied powerful evidence showing the struggle by lone parents to bring up children on benefit. A disregard would help at the point at which they need money, and would provide an incentive for absent parents to pay. The proposal in the Bill to allow parents with care to accrue a lump sum which is paid on taking work may help some people in the longer term, but by no means all children will benefit. I shall return to that matter. Moreover, the implementation date of the proposal is more than two years away, whereas many of the regulations, which we shall debate, will come into force in merely four weeks' time, as I have said.

The second point, which may be more contentious, is the benefit penalty to which many hon. Members have referred. I ask the Minister to look carefully at that point and to initiate further research into reduced benefit directions. As he knows, from next month, the reduction will be £9.30 a week for the first six months and then £4.65 a week for a further year. Clearly, that is harsh. A large amount of money will be taken from families, particularly lone parents, on benefit. Although I accept some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) about collusion in these matters, I suggest that we need further information and research to ensure that families who are struggling to bring up children on benefit are not being unfairly penalised.

Thirdly, in changing the standard formula, the Government have not taken the opportunity to tackle two other contentious aspects—the parents as carer element and the fact that new partners' income, in a small number of cases, increases the maintenance assessment. We stress that the introduction of the departure appeal does not negate the need to ensure that the formula is as fair as possible at the starting point. If it is, fewer people, we hope, will need to resort to the departure appeal system.

Many other matters are dealt with through the regulations—the first part of the package. Again, I press the Minister to tell us when the House will have the opportunity to debate them.

It is interesting to note that the first nine clauses of the Bill introduce the departure system. Again, I take issue with the Secretary of State. We believe strongly that we have called for an appeals system throughout the process. He was rather disingenuous to deny that point. Although the Government expect that departure will not be used often, the grounds cover a wide variety of circumstances, as outlined in schedule 2. Many of the departure criteria are the result of the broad-brush approach, which has been introduced through regulations and changes to those regulations, especially in terms of travel-to-work costs, the interpretation of extravagant life style or substantial assets and the existence of pre-April 1993 capital and property settlements.

[Mr. Bradley]

As I said that I would, I return to the point about pre-April 1993 capital and property settlements. The answer given by the Secretary of State on that point was unsatisfactory. My hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden outlined clearly how past and future settlements of property could be considered. I reinforce his request to the Minister to look again at that point. I also ask that, when the Bill goes into Committee, we shall be able to pursue that point more fully.

There is obvious concern that the new system will not be able to cope with the number of departure requests, that not enough staff will be employed in the process and that the child support appeal tribunals will not be able to cope. The Floor seems to be shaking underneath me at this point. The strength of the argument is obviously getting through to the whole House. Will the Minister comment on the fact that it is possible under the provisions of the Bill for the chair of the appeals tribunal to sit alone? Perhaps it is a recognition of the number of cases that may be brought forward by the departure appeals. Has the Secretary of State decided that he does not wish to add further chaos to the administration of the system by introducing that procedure?

Further, given that the details of departure circumstances will be given in regulations and that the Secretary of State has the power to prescribe other circumstances, it is difficult to know how they will be interpreted in practice. The Secretary of State can also, of course, prescribe limits on variations from the standard formula. We shall pursue that point further in Committee, but suffice it to say at this stage that a number of other costs should be taken into consideration. I am thinking of work-related costs, particularly the expensive child care costs that a mother may face on returning to work.

Clause 10 provides for a maintenance bonus for parents with care on income support or jobseeker's allowance along similar lines to the proposed back-to-work bonus available to those on part-time earnings in the Jobseekers Bill. Much of the detail of the bonus will obviously follow in regulation. The White Paper states that, if maintenance is paid, income support claimants will receive a credit of up to £5 each a week. That credit will be paid as a lump sum of up to £1,000 when the claimant leaves income support to take up work of 16 hours a week or more. As many hon. Members have already pointed out, the claimant will take several years to accrue that maximum. Given the average length of an income support claim, the majority of payments will be well below that amount. The limit of £5 a week compares with the back-to-work bonus weekly credit of 50 per cent. of earnings over the small earnings disregard.

The back-to-work bonus is to be introduced in October 1996. Given the similar training and systems that will be required for both bonuses, it is miserly not to introduce the maintenance bonus at the very latest at the same time as the back-to-work bonus comes in under the jobseeker's allowance. Even that is a highly unsatisfactory delay, given that the CSA is having to implement significant changes which favour absent parents. A way should be found for the Benefits Agency to introduce the maintenance bonus in October 1995.

Time is extremely short and the state of the building is extremely worrying, so I shall quickly mention clauses 18 and 19, about which we have heard so much. They refer to delays in bringing forward maintenance agreements pre-dating April 1993. I shall not rehearse the arguments further, but the deferral prevents the very groups of parents with care who had most to gain from applying to the CSA from doing so. It also penalises second families, where the father has received increased demands from the CSA, but his partner cannot apply to the CSA to take into account her children from a previous marriage.

The reluctance to deal with that group fuels accusations that the Government are concerned only with those on benefit and benefit savings and reinforces the view that the Bill is Treasury led, rather than being drafted to address the real needs of maintenance payments and the cost of children.

It is important that we properly and adequately scrutinise the Bill in Committee. We intend to be constructive in that task, and we shall not unduly delay the progress of the Bill. The Bill does not come into effect until 1997, so there is adequate time for proper scrutiny. As I said, we shall be constructive. Although we recognise that the Bill attempts to address the appalling shortcomings of the original legislation, we believe that we may have an opportunity to address other matters further in Committee.

As the Bill addresses key issues for which the Opposition have been pressing for many months, and as the Government have finally recognised those points, we shall not vote against Second Reading tonight. However, the failure to recognise the injustice of not allowing the parent with care, normally the mother who is on benefits, to gain from child maintenance payments is unacceptable. That is why we have tabled our amendment.

The Government's continued failure to address that issue leads us to believe that, yet again, they are more concerned with the diktats of the Treasury than with finally getting the matter right and ensuring that the real costs of caring are recognised in the legislation and that mothers benefit properly from a proper maintenance system.

Madam Speaker: I do not know why hon. Members are concerned about a few vibrations. Throughout its history, the House has withstood more than that and smiled back at it.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I shall certainly smile back at the various vibrations that have come my way over the past 24 hours. I am delighted to respond to the vibrations that have arisen from the debate.

I thank all my colleagues for their usual constructive contributions to a subject that we have debated on many occasions, most often in the right spirit. That spirit was demonstrated once again today. I shall respond briefly to two or three of the points raised by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), although I have a great deal of ground to cover in relation to concerns raised by other Members.

With regard to the regulations that were laid last week, we have no problem with a date. That is in the hands of the usual channels. I have no problem with the debate, but I do not think that a date has been set yet. However, that is not a particular problem.

I do not think that the Bill should go to a Special Standing Committee. The issue has been trawled extensively and we want to get on with it, as the hon. Member for Withington indicated. I cannot see any point in bringing the Bill before a Special Standing Committee to take yet further evidence. One of the reasons why we have reached this stage is that we all listened to the evidence about the workings of the CSA over the past two years. I do not believe that we need take such matters any further.

The background to the debate can be characterised in two ways. First, as several hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) said, the fact that this is a reform Bill as opposed to a Bill to abolish the CSA is a success in itself. We have come some way in relation to the concerns of the hon. Member for Broadgreen about whether the CSA could succeed. I have told the agency staff that the fact that we have reached this stage is a measure of the fact that we have proved the point about the principle behind the CSA.

We have tried to listen. The Select Committees have played their role, as have all Back Benchers and the constituents who have lobbied us. We have tried to respond to the concerns that have been raised about policy and administration.

In response to the point raised by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) about the particular strictures identified by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), I felt that the hon. Gentleman was slightly unfair in trying to suggest that I was avoiding responsibility. That was not the case.

I pointed out to the Committee that there are different functions within the Department in terms of the day-to-day responsibility for the running of the agency and the Minister's policy-making job. However, I have to take responsibility from the Dispatch Box for everything that the agency might do. But in no sense was I suggesting that it was a hands-off approach, that it was up to the agency and that it was not my problem.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: We agreed to a passage that reads:

> "We consider that Ministers were at fault in being so easily satisfied with the assurances of officials."

Mr. Burt: A passage that I could read out suggested that my job in dealing with the day-to-day work was to be much more positive and to say to the chief executive:

> "'This is not good enough, we must change this. Bring me your proposals for how we can deal with this basic problem of communication.' Over a period of time, of course, those changes are made."

I said that it was our role to prompt those changes. That was my particular job. However, I hear the hon. Gentleman's criticism. The Government will respond in due course.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the pile-up of reviews. In the year to date, the Department has received 22,100 applications for second-tier reviews. It has cleared 22,500. There is a backlog of some 8,000, which ought to be cleared towards the end of this month. That is a measure of the steps that we have taken to deal with some of the problems that have rightly been raised. In no sense have we ever considered that we should have a hands-off role.

Various tributes have been paid to the work of the staff of the Child Support Agency. I am grateful for that. The hon. Member for Broadgreen referred to the important issue of field staff. I was grateful that she did that. The staff have been in day-to-day contact with many people affected by the agency. They have put up with a great deal. They work extremely hard.

I am pleased when any hon. Member takes the opportunity to go and see the work of the regional centres of the CSA. For all the criticism of the CSA and its work, few hon. Members have gone to see it at first hand to understand the process and how it can be undertaken. I should be grateful to any hon. Member who visited a centre. Those who have done so have seen the improvements and the work that has been done. I appreciate what they have said about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) raised the issue of the telephone service. He appreciated the telephone and handling service that Members of Parliament received. He expressed concern that such a service was not available to constituents. We have taken great steps to improve the telephone service available to all members of the public. We have a charter target time of responding to 80 per cent. of calls to the national inquiry line and the Child Support Agency centre lines within 20 seconds. The figures for the year to date for the national inquiry line show that we hit that target in 92 per cent. of cases. For the CSACs, we hit the target in 61 per cent. of cases. That is not as good as we would like, but it is far better than it used to be. It is right that we deal with concerns raised by constituents as well as those raised by Members of Parliament.

The fact that we are still here endeavouring to put right the administration of the CSA is one part of the background to the Bill. The second part of the background, which was referred to by several hon. Members, is the wider problem of family background and family breakdown. We could spend a great deal of time on that subject. I appreciated the speeches made by the hon. Members for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) and for Broadgreen and by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). A great deal in the subject ought to worry the House of Commons.

Family breakdown is responsible for more misery and despair that I see in my surgeries than virtually anything else. Damage is done over a period of time, not only at the time of the breakdown. The breakdown is the culmination of a variety of pressures on families. The change that is occurring in the country as a result of that growing pattern is immense. It leads to huge consequences for not only child support but housing, education and wider social issues, which may involve destructive children and such problems. I suspect that we shall return to the issue many times. It is a matter of great seriousness, on which the House needs to put its collective heads together.

The two issues to which I have referred form the background to the Bill. Several of my colleagues rightly concentrated on the proposals in the Bill and the wider proposals in the White Paper. A broad welcome was given by the vast majority of hon. Members who spoke to the measures introduced in the Bill. A particular welcome was given to a more flexible system, which we call the departure system. It provides the opportunity for some of the hard cases that cannot be dealt with by the formula to be dealt with in a different way.

[Mr. Burt]

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) saw the need to respond to what he considered to be the good, sensible pressure from his local group. Several hon. Members commented that, although some of the national groups had given a great deal of trouble, some of the local groups were sensible and straightforward. We have done our best to respond to those who have been sensible and responsible. We have not had any time for those who have caused harm or distress to members of the agency or others in the way in which they have gone about their protest.

The travel-to-work concession that we are seeking to bring in was welcomed by hon. Members. The concession is calculated on a straight-line basis, and there is a sensible reason for that. We could work out by computer from post code to post code the distance between where people live and where they work, but a straight line means that one does not get arguments about how people get from their homes to their place of work. There will always be arguments—often raised by spouses—about what route people have taken and whether they are going slightly too far to avoid a maintenance assessment. We decided that the best way to deal with the matter was on a straight-line basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak said that there would be anomalies in some districts where straight lines might look simple on the map but, because of geography, would not be so simple on the ground. In that area, the departure systems will assist in the broad-brush elements that are to be brought in by regulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) welcomed the change that we had made in relation to property and so-called clean-break settlements. Again, we are trying to bring in a more immediate opportunity for relief through a broad-brush system in the regulations, and that will come into effect soon. But we recognise that there can be a broad-brush approach only if the departure system is behind that, and if we are giving proper and adequate consideration to the problems that people may raise concerning the regulations.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) tried to claim some spurious credit for the appeal system, which he has always been on about. The point that we are trying to make is that we know that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned that system over a period of time, and we have not dismissed it. But if we do not want to go back to a second-guess system of total discretion, where do we draw the lines and boundaries? We offered opportunity after opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to enlighten us, but he did not.

When we produced the Bill, we showed that we had tackled that knotty problem by bringing forward gateways. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right to chastise the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he tried to go about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) said that the gateways had been the essence of the system, and it was the Government who thought of them rather than the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead rightly said that the way in which my right hon. Friend has given support to the parent with care through credit rather than a disregard was not only ingenious, but an incentive to go into work. We thought carefully about a disregard, but we felt that it would not do the job as well as a credit system.

Mr. Frank Field: Does not the Minister agree that we could have had both systems?

Mr. Burt: That is possible, but we would find ourselves with a problem to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred. We would be giving an unfair advantage to some parents who would be able to get a supplement on their income support that was not available to others. We would again be looking to the state and the taxpayer to provide a bonus, when the Government are trying to wean people off benefit and off the dependency state to which the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West referred. A credit system fulfils the Government's objectives. We reject the benefit dependency culture, and we spend a lot of time encouraging people away from that and into work.

The prize for the most cynical speech of the evening goes, without doubt, to the lady in green, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). It is some time since the House was treated to such a neat about-turn for the spurious purpose of picking up some stray Labour votes. That was the gist of what the hon. Lady had to say. I would have had rather more time for her principled position in favour of family courts if we had heard that argument advanced week after week in a principled manner by the Liberal Democrats. We heard nothing about that subject at all until tonight, when it was pulled out of a hat like a rabbit. The hon. Lady knows full well that it is very easy to promise something that has no chance of coming about, because it offers her the opportunity to be all things to all men.

Ms Lynne: I proposed family courts because the Child Support Act is not working and the Bill does not go nearly far enough. It is a disgrace for the Minister to stand there and pretend that it does. He will have to come back time and again because the Act will continue not to work.

Mr. Burt: It is the collective view of the rest of us that the Child Support Act has an opportunity to work, is working better and is the preferred option of the House. The hon. Lady never quite escaped the charge levelled by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that she was offering the absent parent the chance to pay less and the parent with care the opportunity to receive more, which struck me as typically Liberal.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East) *rose*—

Mr. Burt: No, I will not give way. The hon. Lady has not been in her place throughout the debate.

A number of other issues were raised and I shall go through them briefly. We had a useful, but brief talk about Mr. Amitai Etzioni, whose extremely interesting lecture I attended the other week with other hon. Members. Much in his principles started on these Conservative Benches—not on the Opposition Benches—such as self-reliance and the opportunity for people to work together without state interference.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) dealt with the difficult issue of whether we should constantly be looking for further reforms and progress, or whether we should have some stability. We must balance that by not shutting ourselves off from the possibility of further reform, but it is now important that we give the system some sense of stability. That is why I appreciated the way in which the hon. Member for Withington dealt with the matter. We want to improve the operation of child support, but it is crucial that we make the general public understand that we have made the major reforms and that there is a structure on which people can rely. If we do not do so, we shall have failed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury asked whether the term "absent parent" is a good one; hon. Members on both sides of the House might welcome a slightly off-the-hoof response. I have had reservations about that term and so has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We are accordingly renewing a suggestion made some time ago—we are not fixed in our view of that term. Originally, we tried to come up with a better term, but no one found one that was acceptable. If hon. Members want to try again, I am open to the suggestion, as I have been moved by the way in which a variety of good parents, who do not feel that they are absent, have felt that they have been unfairly characterised by the term. It was never meant to be pejorative, but that is what people felt, so let us see what we can do about it. I am very open to that.

With regard to whether we should spend more time discussing the matter, I want colleagues on both sides of the House to know that I am conscious that the agency must implement what it is changing extremely well. We have all suffered from the poor implementation of the 1991 Act and it is crucial that we implement these changes well. I am prepared to allow proper time not only for consideration, but for the practical putting into effect of the matters that we have been discussing.

Tonight's Bill is the culmination of a great deal of thought and consideration that have been given to child support during the past 18 months. Through two Social Security Select Committees and innumerable debates and questions, the basic principle behind child support—that parents should be financially responsible for their children before the taxpayers, in so far as they can afford it—has come through unchallenged.

The Child Support Agency's role in dealing with child support has been challenged, but it has also been given approval to continue. The Government have heard, listened and responded to proper concerns about the agency's operations and have authorised and initiated reforms, some of which are in the Bill. The main part of the Bill's reforms demonstrates that we are a listening Government—not merely to one section that is affected by the revolution in child support, but to all sides.

With regard to parents with care of the child, their concerns are still paramount. The average payment of maintenance, which was too low, is now higher, reflecting the change in the needs of children.

The changes that we are making tonight will encourage compliance and, therefore, the payment of maintenance, which must be helpful. The maintenance credit bonus will be of significant assistance in helping people back into work and will be of benefit to all parents with care, especially those who depend solely on income support. The formula changes will assist parents without day-to-day care of the child, and Parliament must show the taxpayer that it remains constant to its view that the burden must be held by the parent, not by society at large when parents can afford to pay. That is rightly parents' responsibility.

It is right that the burden on the taxpayer is lifted; it is right to ensure decent maintenance for children; it is right that the system of administration should be improved; and it is right that this reform package, which both improves the formula and introduces appropriate flexibility to the system, should have the full support of the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 290.

Division No. 104] [10.00 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'I)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David

Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms. Estelle Morris and
Mrs. Barbara Roche.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward

Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 40.

Division No. 105] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert

King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon South)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Mildred
Hall, Mike
Heppell, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ilsley, Eric
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Pickthall, Colin
Rooney, Terry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. David Chidgey.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CHILD SUPPORT BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Child Support Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State in respect of expenditure incurred by him under or by virtue of the Act;

(2) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided; and

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

CUSTOMS AND EXCISE

That the Gaming Licence Duty (Games) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 442), dated 22nd February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS SHIPPING SERVICES

That the draft Undertaking by the Secretary of State for Scotland with the consent of Her Majesty's Treasury and the agreement of Caledonian MacBrayne Limited, which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

HALLMARKING

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9508/93 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 9th June 1994, and 8251/94 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 17th October 1994, relating to the marking of articles of precious metal; and supports the Government's view that the proposed procedures for manufacturers' marking of articles of precious metal would not provide an adequate level of consumer protection and that the proposal will therefore need substantial amendment if it is to be acceptable.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Barry Field be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Den Dover be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITIONS

Sudan

10.28 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I wish to present a petition signed by members of various churches in Golders Green. Some 300 people have signed the petition, which concerns the civil war in Sudan and the peace talks held by various Governments from the horn of Africa. It states:

> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons encourage Her Majesty's Government to support these peace talks about the war in the Sudan in co-operation with their European partners and to urge all the parties to the conflict to take the quest for peace seriously.
>
> And the Petitioners thank the House of Commons for its help in this matter.

To lie upon the Table.

Live Animal Exports

10.29 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I have a petition from 760 signatories, all of whom are concerned about the export of live animals, particularly veal calves. The petition was initiated by one of my constituents, Mrs. J. D. Collier, who was soon joined by colleagues and students at St. Philip's sixth form college, where she worked, and then by their friends and relatives. The petition reads:

> The Humble Petition of St Philip's Sixth Form College, Hogley Rd, Birmingham B16, and friends
>
> Declares that animals are mistreated in transit and young calves are subject to cruel treatment before slaughter.
>
> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House acts through legislation to stop the export to the continent of livestock.
>
> And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Scottish Enterprise Tayside

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.30 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My debate this evening is about the Keathbank mill project in Blairgowrie. It is also about how public funds are used to assist tourist capital projects schemes in Scotland and Tayside.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will know that, in 1990, the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill passed through Parliament. Part I of that Bill, now an Act, created Scottish Enterprise and local enterprise companies. He will also know that, from 1 April 1994, Scottish Enterprise was given responsibility for business development activities in the tourist industry; thus, Scottish tourist board activities under the section 4 scheme of capital assistance were transferred to Scottish Enterprise.

In a Scottish Office press release of 29 June 1993, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), states:

> "I shall be looking to the Enterprise Network to contribute to the formulation of the national tourism strategy and to integrate its training and business supportive activities into the new framework."

During the passage of the Bill to create Scottish Enterprise, and at the time of the transfer of responsibility for capital grants for tourist projects from the STB to Scottish Enterprise, Ministers assured myself and other hon. Members that projects in the pipeline would not lose out because of the change in the agency with responsibility for grants.

I submit that the Keathbank project, which is vital to tourist activity in east Perthshire, has lost out. Scottish Enterprise Tayside accepts that there have been continuing negotiations between the Scottish Development Agency, the STB and Scottish Enterprise Tayside, that the project has been in three phases and that some of the officials involved have worked for the SDA and Scottish Enterprise Tayside, thus giving continuity of contact.

On 13 March 1995, in answer to a question about what changes had been made to the statutory provision for public support towards tourist-related capital projects with the transfer of responsibility from the Scottish tourist board to Scottish Enterprise, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), replied, "None."

So now we know. Scottish tourist board powers have been transferred to Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise Tayside, and there have been no changes in the statutory provision. We also know that the STB, following the practice initiated by the Highlands and Islands development board, allowed work to start on projects where another Government body was giving assistance; in the case of the Keathbank project, it was at that time the SDA. The letter dated 25 March 1991 from the STB, signed by Anne McGinnis, of the investment and planning division, states:

> "The Board has no objection to work starting on the project as the majority of this relates to assistance offered by the Scottish Development Agency. I understand that there might be some intrusion into the areas which are being considered by my Board but this will not"—

[Mr. Bill Walker]

this is important—

"prejudice your application for financial assistance."

There is also the fact that another project was in hand at the time called PRIDE, the programme for rural initiatives and development. It is interesting to note that, in a letter, Gordon Langlands, who was head of business development for the Scottish Development Agency at the time—he transferred to Scottish Enterprise Tayside later—said:

> "It was also agreed that as a short-term measure, it might be possible to undertake some essential works which enable M and W Stephens Limited to relocate the Keathbank Mill and this would have the effect of buying some time to consider these particular points."

Of course, PRIDE at that time made it quite clear that an eligible project had to meet

> "PRIDE's employment and income objectives; involve the development of property; is within an eligible area as shown in the accompanying map."

Keathbank met all those requirements. PRIDE also stated:

> "Projects which involve property development to accommodate manufacturing, service, commercial, or crafts activities can be considered."

Keathbank met all those requirements. I suggest that the project was an SDA initiative: it began with the SDA. In 1985, Keathbank mill was advertised for sale by Thomas Thompson of Blairgowrie, and in that year there was a report on Blairgowrie for Tayside region by Mackay Consultants, which recommended that the mill should be developed for tourism. That was agreed by the SDA, TRIO, Perth and Kinross district council and the Blairgowrie area development association.

In 1987, Art Enterprises Ltd. was approached by Bob Bruce of the Blairgowrie area development association who asked if it would be interested in purchasing Keathbank mill with help from the Scottish Development Agency because the SDA's feasibility study had concluded that a private developer was required for Keathbank mill. The SDA commissioned architects to design a visitor attraction for a £3 million-plus development. Bob Bruce approached Mr. Peter Stewart-Blacker to take over the project with a promise of Government and SDA help as private sector capital was required. Peter Stewart-Blacker agreed to put in that capital.

In 1988, there was an initial appraisal and broad agreement to fund the purchase and carry out the conversion of the mill by the SDA and the Scottish tourist board. Perth and Kinross district council had responsibility for a car park, landscaping, signposting and enhancement of banks of the river with help from the Countryside Commission for Scotland. Architects and quantity surveyors were appointed.

In 1989, the mill was bought by Art Enterprises on the strength of letters of support from L. and R. Consultants, which proposed the business plan with the architects, the quantity surveyors, the Scottish tourist board and the SDA. Several meetings took place. In March, the sale from Perth and Kinross district council was concluded. At that time, funding was still being discussed with the SDA.

On 1 November, Gordon Langlands stated that land and buildings included in the PRIDE guidelines were eligible for expenditure. The car park and bridge were completed during the winter, but no signposting or further improvements on the far bank were carried out by the district council or the Countryside Commission.

In 1990, a letter from the SDA, which I have sent to my hon. Friend the Minister and from which I have quoted, said that a start would not prejudice the grant application. The go-ahead for phase 1, workshops and offices, was given and was completed by July 1990. This was all carried out in negotiation with Mr. Gordon Langlands of the SDA, who is now with Scottish Enterprise Tayside.

On 17 October, an application was made to the Scottish tourist board. Accounts were awaited and there was still no agreement on the grant. In January 1991, the Scottish tourist board asked for more details, but it had spoken to the SDA and agreed a £38,000 grant. In March, the SDA draft offer of grant was sent to Art Enterprises and was revised by both solicitors. In March 1991, phase 2 began and there were problems with the quantity surveyors, who rewrote the whole bill of quantities. It became apparent that phase 2 would exceed the budget. That led to the letter from Anne McGinnis of the Scottish tourist board from which I have already quoted. Building completion was delayed from 15 June to 1 July to 1 August and the eventual handover was on 15 August 1991. This work was intended to make the building wind and watertight.

On 15 August, the mill opened with free admission due to the lack of fitting-out. It closed two weeks later. In September, £98,000 was paid by Scottish Enterprise Tayside conditional on the STB paying it £38,000, which was never received. There were negotiations with quantity surveyors and architects regarding the underestimate of capital costs.

Gordon Langlands of SET was kept informed and he said that SET would look at phase 3 grants with the STB, but that it needed new projections in the light of the £100,000 overspend and the obvious profit and loss implications affecting profitability. In September 1992, discussions took place with architects, quantity surveyors and Scottish Enterprise Tayside on the increased cost of phase 2. The STB requested a new feasibility study as capital costs had risen dramatically. There were increases of about £150,000 which affected the profitability of the project. Again, there were problems with the accounts. One partner was in hospital and eventually retired. His assistant left due to a reported nervous breakdown. These were the accountants working for Peter Stewart-Blacker of Scottish Enterprise.

In August, there was a meeting with the Scottish tourist board which was not prepared to look at grant aid for the project because of increased costs unless Art Enterprises could show viability, taking into account increasing depreciation due to the additional capital costs. Contact was maintained with Scottish Enterprise Tayside which was prepared to continue to look at grant aid once accounts were forthcoming and the final bills of the building phase settled.

Responsibility for section 4 funding at this point transferred from the Scottish tourist board to SET, but the project was told that no cash was available. On 19 March 1993, Mr. John Gardiner requested the Art Enterprises accounts for 1992. According to another member of SET, Jack Martin, SET had to look at grants or investments as Mr. John Gardiner was the investment analyst. Art Enterprises was approached again by Gordon Langlands and it was proposed that it be included as part of the financial management service pilot scheme as it had a history of lateness in delivering accounts which would affect its grant application. The scheme started shortly afterwards. Art Enterprises entered an agreement to have accounts.

The matter goes on; I shall not bore the House further other than to say that I could continue to relate the saga at length. On 18 November 1994, Mr. David Gosling, the divisional director, and Mr. Bryan Barbour, the regional director of the Edinburgh Woollen Mill visited the mill and were impressed. However, they were worried about the car park, the general lack of interpretative facilities and the unfinished state of the mill, particularly the steam engine and the water wheel. They felt, however, that the location was ideal, provided improvements were carried out in time for the season beginning in April 1995.

I have a long list of telephone calls from 1992 to 1995. I shall not bore the House with all of them, but I shall let my hon. Friend the Minister have copies. I believe that I have demonstrated clearly that the project, in three phases, has been adversely affected by the change from the Scottish Development Agency to Scottish Enterprise and then to Scottish Enterprise Tayside, and by the change from the STB to Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise Tayside.

All I ask is that Blairgowrie be treated equally with everywhere else in Scotland and particularly with Dundee. I ask that Keathbank be seen, as I believe it is, as the Discovery centre of east Perthshire; after all, it is the only covered attraction that is likely to be available in east Perthshire in the foreseeable future. I ask for the pledges given by Ministers during the passage of the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill—I have copies of the pledges given on Second Reading, in Committee, on Report and on Third Reading—to be implemented and I ask for the pledges given in written answers and in debates on the structure of the tourist industry and activity in Scotland to be implemented. The Art Enterprises projections which have been given for 1995, 1996 and 1997, which I understand are acceptable to Scottish Enterprise Tayside, demonstrate that the project will go from a net profit of £35,867 in the first year to £56,118 in the second year to £85,596 in the third year.

This is a viable project which certainly merits consideration and support. If nothing else, I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will recognise that these are important matters and they cannot simply be brushed aside because the matter has been, I think, adversely affected by the changeover. I am not saying that Art Enterprises cannot be accused of making some mistakes—it probably has, but that is not what is important. What is important is whether we are to have a viable, worthwhile project in east Perthshire to meet tourists' needs. We ought to have such a project.

I have given my hon. Friend some written questions which he has passed on to the chairman of Scottish Enterprise and I shall be pressing for answers to them. In addition, I expect that the statement by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West, on 29 June about the change should apply equally to Blairgowrie and Dundee. On that basis, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say that this project should receive proper and adequate consideration in the near future.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on securing the debate. I know that he has a long-standing interest in encouraging tourism and economic development in his constituency and the surrounding area. I also pay a significant tribute to his tenacity in pursuing this case on behalf of one of his constituents. I thank him for the courteous and helpful way in which he has put forward his arguments. In my response, I shall deal with two particular points about the Keathbank mill project: the viability of the project and the question of the retrospective aid. I shall then touch on some of the other points that my hon. Friend has made.

I must tell my hon. Friend that viability has, of course, yet to be established. It is a substantial project with costs made up from a number of separate elements. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, while I have been made aware of the costs and sums of money involved, I have not thought it appropriate to go into those in detail tonight. Scottish Enterprise Tayside has indicated to Mr. Stewart-Blacker that it may be prepared to provide a significant sum, by way of grant, towards the cost of the project subject to its satisfaction, which it must ensure, as to the overall viability and confirmation of the availability of other funding. Mr. Stewart-Blacker has indeed been asked where that other funding will come from and, as I understand it, has yet to provide a satisfactory answer. My hon. Friend may well have acknowledged in his speech that something may have come in at the 11th hour.

Specifically on the question of viability, the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise Tayside wrote to Mr. Stewart-Blacker on 9 March pointing out that before a decision could be made on the viability of the further development of the mill, Mr. Stewart-Blacker needed to provide a response to 10 points detailed in the letter. Those points, as I understand it, have not yet been answered. Mr. Stewart-Blacker may have submitted his responses to those points in the past 24 hours, in which case, of course, they will be duly considered. Until the information is available, Scottish Enterprise Tayside cannot be satisfied that the project is commercially viable.

I turn to the issue of retrospection, which is slightly more difficult, and whether the works already undertaken on the mill should be considered for financial assistance. I should point out that this is at present a secondary consideration and that unless and until it can be established that the further development of the mill is a commercially viable project, there can be no question of any financial assistance being made available. Scottish Enterprise Tayside has told Mr. Stewart-Blacker that the provision of assistance in respect of expenditure already incurred would be contrary to the operating guidelines laid down by Scottish Enterprise. I confirm that that is certainly the case. It reflects the general principle that financial assistance for economic development should make something happen that would not otherwise happen.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will recall that I said that the Scottish tourist board and the Highlands and Islands development board, in relation to tourist-related projects in particular, allowed that to happen.

Mr. Kynoch: If my hon. Friend will be patient, I will try to refer to the question of the application, or whether there was an application, to the Scottish tourist board.

[Mr. Kynoch]

As I said, the general principle is that financial assistance for economic development should make something happen which would not otherwise happen. It would obviously be a misuse of funds—as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North would agree—and of public expenditure to provide assistance for a project that would have gone ahead without such assistance.

Where an individual or company has gone ahead with a project before assistance has been secured, the view taken normally is that that demonstrates that the assistance was not essential to the project going ahead and that therefore it should not be eligible for consideration.

However, my hon. Friend quite rightly referred to the assurances given to Mr. Stewart-Blacker in 1991. With regard to the point that my hon. Friend raised about the history of the project pre-1991, Scottish Enterprise Tayside gave Mr. Stewart-Blacker a grant of £92,000, fulfilling a promise made by the SDA which was, of course, for phase 1 of the project. I know that my hon. Friend accepts that.

My hon. Friend referred to the fact that Mr. Stewart-Blacker received assurances from the Scottish tourist board in 1991 that work on the mill at that time would not prejudice the application for financial assistance that he made or was considering making to the STB. However, no properly completed application was ever made to the tourist board. I am aware that an application was made in 1990, but it was recognised by everyone concerned at the time that the necessary supporting information was not available. That information was sought on several subsequent occasions, but it was never received.

In 1993, responsibility for capital assistance to tourism-related projects was transferred from the Scottish tourist board to the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands enterprise networks. There was no change in the statutory position: it was simply announced in answer to a parliamentary question—which I had tabled—that the Scottish tourist board would no longer accept applications for such assistance and that support for business development activities would be consolidated in the enterprise networks.

The Scottish tourist board transferred all outstanding applications for assistance to the relevant enterprise company on 29 June 1993. That did not include Mr. Stewart-Blacker's application for assistance, as the Scottish tourist board had received no further information and thus, understandably, two and a half years after the application was originally submitted, it considered that no outstanding application was present. In those circumstances, it took the view that any such application should be considered as lapsed.

In those circumstances, any assurances given by the Scottish tourist board in relation to the provision of its financial assistance cannot be held to apply to the different financial assistance regime operated by Scottish Enterprise Tayside. No commitment was ever made by Ministers on that point. Indeed, no such commitment was ever needed, as no complaints were made to the Department about the impact on individual cases of the transfer of responsibility from the tourist board to the enterprise networks.

I should now like to deal briefly with the suggestion that Scottish Enterprise Tayside was in some way responsible for Mr. Stewart-Blacker's failure to provide the financial information to support his 1991 application for assistance, because of the unsuccessful financial management service pilot which Scottish Enterprise Tayside helped to fund. My hon. Friend has not referred to that in the numerous letters with which he has understandably and rightly bombarded my officials and my Department.

As my hon Friend is aware, Scottish Enterprise Tayside provided very substantial sums in financial assistance for the initial development of the mill. I have already referred to the £92,000. One of the conditions of that assistance was that Mr. Stewart-Blacker provide regular annual accounts to Scottish Enterprise Tayside. Unfortunately, he failed to do that.

Mr. Bill Walker: I recommend that my hon. Friend the Minister look at the agreement. The onus also lay with Scottish Enterprise Tayside to ensure that that happened.

Mr. Kynoch: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but I suspect that Scottish Enterprise Tayside has had some difficulty. I know that my hon. Friend will give many excuses and explanations for the failure of the company to produce those accounts. The long and the short of it is that, sadly, the information has not been forthcoming.

As a result of his difficulties in producing accounts, Mr. Stewart-Blacker was offered the opportunity to participate in a pilot scheme whereby he received consultancy assistance at the expense of Scottish Enterprise Tayside. The scheme was not successful for three reasons. My hon. Friend has touched on some of them.

First, the three staff assigned by Mr. Stewart-Blacker to work with the consultant left the business and valuable time was lost in retraining new staff. Secondly, once the 15 consultancy days which Scottish Enterprise Tayside had agreed to fund were used up, Mr. Stewart-Blacker did not fulfil his part of the agreement to retain the consultant at his own expense to conclude the project. Thirdly, there were problems with computer hardware, but it was replaced by hardware suppliers at their own cost.

So there were significant delays, but my hon. Friend is not necessarily right in pointing the finger of blame at Scottish Enterprise Tayside for the failure of Mr. Stewart-Blacker to produce proper accounts. Indeed, I have to say that Scottish Enterprise Tayside has gone out of its way to assist Mr. Stewart-Blacker with his financial monitoring systems.

My hon. Friend has touched, certainly in correspondence, on the Discovery quay project in Dundee. It has been suggested that Scottish Enterprise Tayside may have given more favourable treatment to Discovery quay than to Keathbank mill. I have to tell my hon. Friend that that is not the case. However, the two separate projects were competing for public expenditure resources. The Discovery quay project was fully appraised and investigated before Scottish Enterprise Tayside agreed to provide financial support. The actual and potential economic benefits of Discovery quay are considered by Scottish Enterprise Tayside more than to justify its intervention.

I should also remind my hon. Friend that Scottish Enterprise Tayside is not a centrally directed organisation which simply carries out the Government's bidding.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): May I remind the Minister that the concept of Discovery quay was aimed at regenerating the city of Dundee? It was not one simple project to be given assistance. It was for the regeneration of a city that was in decline following the decline of the jute industry. There is hardly a comparison.

Mr. Kynoch: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not entirely disagree with him. The point that I was trying to make was that a project was submitted which was properly financially appraised. For that reason, it received funding.

I have no reason to believe that the location of Keathbank mill in Blairgowrie is a factor which affects adversely the consideration by Scottish Enterprise Tayside of the application for financial assistance. I assure my hon. Friend that I believe that Scottish Enterprise Tayside has tried hard to look at all areas within its area of responsibility. I attended the opening, which I know that my hon. Friend attended, just the other day of the Acorn business centre in Perth. It is certainly outwith Dundee and it was clearly for the benefit of a different part of that area.

It would be inappropriate for me to let this occasion pass without referring to the boost given to the tourist industry in Perthshire by the achievement of European Union objective 5b status for the area. I know that my hon. Friend—this is a little wind-up—considers that this additional European finance is simply a reimbursement of our national contribution to Europe. Nevertheless, the change in status for Perthshire must represent good news for the tourist industry, which will now be eligible for additional assistance.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: I do not have much time left. I should like to complete my speech so that I can respond to my hon. Friend's points. I know that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has a great interest in tourism, but with respect I should like to concentrate on this issue.

My hon. Friend may wish to note that one of the projects which Scottish Enterprise Tayside has submitted for objective 5b funding involves expenditure of more than £200,000 for a landscaped walkway by the River Ericht in Blairgowrie from Keathbank mill bridge—surprise, surprise—which is adjacent to the project at the centre of this debate, to the Blairgowrie bridge. So I do not think that the area is being neglected.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for initiating the debate. I hope that I have outlined the current position to him. The provision of assistance to small businesses is always a difficult matter, particularly when the business in question believes that it is entitled to more support than it is offered. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that Scottish Enterprise Tayside has acted reasonably and constructively in this matter and that it will continue to promote the interests of tourism in the whole of Perthshire.

As for Keathbank mill, Scottish Enterprise Tayside stands ready to provide substantial sums of assistance to the project once the information necessary to support the application for assistance has been submitted. My hon. Friend says that the information has been submitted. I hear what he says, but if the information has not been submitted, I hope that my hon. Friend will pass the message that I have given him to his constituent and urge him to submit all the information available at the earliest time. I hope that it will be given fair wind and that it will be proved to be a viable proposition. Of course, that is up to Scottish Enterprise Tayside, not to me.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Sir James Alexander Kilfedder, Member for North Down. I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the hon. Member's family and friends.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Reading Ability

1. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the reading abilities of 10-year-old children in England and Wales. [13242]

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): The chief inspector's annual report for 1993-94 states that seven to 11-year-olds are making satisfactory or better progress in reading in 90 per cent. of schools. We shall have a clear national picture of the reading standards of 11-year-olds as a result of the Government's introduction of tests for the first time this year.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Minister aware that, on 9 March, an editorial in *The Times* estimated that poor standards of reading among children coming into and leaving secondary school is costing the country £10 billion a year? Does he recognise that one of the biggest problems is the inability of primary schools to teach six and seven-year-olds good reading skills? Why have the Government abandoned the reading recovery programme and, therefore, cut money available for specialist help, which has proved to be very effective in giving seven-year-olds a well above average reading ability for the investment of a relatively small amount of money and little intensive teaching time?

Mr. Forth: Whether the estimated £200 million to continue this scheme nationwide is a small amount of money I shall leave to the hon. Gentleman to argue with his Front-Bench spokesmen. Indeed, whether he is making a commitment on behalf of his Front-Bench team, I shall leave them to sort out for themselves. The reading recovery scheme is one of many which deal with pupils in that age group who have reading difficulties. It is interesting that, having looked at the scheme, a number of local education authorities have decided to pick it up and to continue it as one of their priorities. That must be the right way to proceed rather than us dictating from the centre what local education authorities—or, indeed, schools—should do.

Mr. Evennett: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the national curriculum and the testing of children are helping to raise standards and that the policies of his Department are doing much to improve the calibre of teachers, teaching and standards in the classroom?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because he has identified rightly the battery of measures that we now have in place in schools to assist them in ensuring that our young pupils learn to read and to master numbers effectively. The curriculum is the keystone of that, regular objective testing is an important part of it, the independent inspection of schools is a vital element and the publication of school results, now welcomed by the Leader of the Opposition, is another key element. Together, all those measures will produce a steady increase in standards over coming years.

Early Years Learning

2. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has to increase the provision of early years learning. [13243]

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): We shall be providing new places with new money by the end of this Parliament.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State clarify exactly what she will be providing and when? Are we not entitled to such clarification, and to a little honesty? We have the Chief Secretary to the Treasury saying that we should introduce vouchers, we have the Prime Minister advocating increases in the number of nursery places and a place for everyone and we have the Secretary of State for Education herself writing to her colleagues saying that LEAs could cut nursery places to fund the underfunded teachers' salary increase. What is the situation?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Gentleman by saying that my letter to colleagues about local government spending simply pointed out that, in a tough spending round, it is appropriate to question all areas of spending, especially non-statutory areas, when councils are complaining that they cannot meet their statutory obligations. One of the delights of education, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, is that it arouses very strong passions. Pre-school education is no exception. The Chief Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister and I have all made it clear that no option for the delivery mechanism of nursery education has been ruled out and no option has been ruled in. Whatever mechanism is finally chosen, it will place parental choice and quality at its centre and an announcement will be made when we are ready.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the number of primary schools in my constituency that have encouraged nursery provision on the school premises? Indeed, last Friday I attended the opening of the Black Firs playgroup in Congleton. Is she aware of how helpful such arrangements are both to the schools and to the relationship between the playgroups and the reception classes? Do they not represent one way of assisting early learning among very young children?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes, the whole sector is characterised by great diversity, with excellent classes in nursery schools, excellent reception classes in primary schools, and very good provision by playgroups and in the independent sector. It is getting all those threads to work together for the advantage of parental choice that is complex, and that takes the time.

Mr. Steinberg: Despite the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), will she tell the House whether she is in favour of a voucher system for nursery education? Is she aware that today there is a lobby of Parliament by parents, teachers, governors and support staff, who want a fully funded education service on an equal basis that is fair to all children in every school, including nursery provision that is not based on right-wing claptrap?

Mrs. Shephard: I expect that the hon. Gentleman has been playing an important part in the rally organised by the National Union of Teachers this afternoon. Like other hon. Members, I have followed with interest the press reports about Cabinet splits, Ministers under pressure and so on. Like all good fiction, they make a good read, and I look forward keenly to the next instalment. Vouchers are an option as a delivery mechanism; they have their attractions but also their disadvantages.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, contrary to what the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, the most effective way to ensure choice and diversity in the provision of pre-school education would indeed be a voucher system, and that such a system would have much support among Conservative Members?

Mrs. Shephard: Vouchers that put cash purchasing power into parents' hands would certainly ensure choice. As I have said, vouchers are an option, and they have both attractions and disadvantages.

Mr. Beith: Has the Secretary of State not confirmed, only a few moments ago, the pessimistic interpretation that everyone in education places upon her letter to her colleagues—that she believes that, in what even she admits is a bad year for education funding, it would be right to abandon the development of nursery education and to cut the programmes that local authorities have put in place for it? What kind of advice is that to give to education authorities?

Mrs. Shephard: I realise that financial realism is not a characteristic of councils run by Liberal Democrats, but, as I have said, it is appropriate to question all areas of spending, especially non-statutory areas, when councils are complaining that they cannot meet their statutory obligations.

Grant-maintained Schools

3. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the financial benefits that come from grant-maintained status. [13244]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Grant-maintained schools control the whole of their budgets, not just the proportion that would have been delegated by a local education authority. That gives them greater, flexibility to spend more money where it really counts—in the classroom.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that extremely interesting response, which I am sure will be noted by all schools with tight budgets and tight settlements. They may see that reply as representing a way forward. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the principal attraction of grant-maintained status is not the added funding that such schools receive but the greater freedom that they enjoy, and the fact that we have cut the cords that secure such schools to local education authorities?

Mrs. Shephard: I know that my hon. Friend is a great enthusiast for grant-maintained schools, as are all my right hon. and hon. Friends—as are many people on the Opposition Front Bench. Grant-maintained schools are indeed good and popular schools that continue to attract keen recruits. One of the strongest reasons for their success, as any head of a GM school will tell us, is their freedom from LEA control, as was made clear last autumn by *The Times Educational Supplement* survey covering more than 500 GM schools.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Notwithstanding the platitudes of the loony right of the Conservative party, does the Secretary of State recognise that immense damage is being done to the education of the vast majority of our children by preferential funding? How can she justify the situation in South Glamorgan, where two grant-maintained schools have received £4 million of capital funding as opposed to the total of £3 million which is going to 200 LEA schools? Is that not blatant bribery of schools for ideological ends?

Mrs. Shephard: I am disappointed to tell the hon. Gentleman that I am not responsible for South Glamorgan, but I can make it clear again that grant-maintained schools will continue to receive extra resources to reflect their extra responsibilities. We shall make sure that they continue to receive also a fair share of locally available resources, despite the best endeavours of hostile local authorities controlled by the Labour party.

Mr. Allason: Does my right hon. Friend accept that one good way for a school to become insulated from the profligacy of local education authority spending is to go grant-maintained? Is she aware that grant-maintained schools in Torbay have been protected from the disgraceful threats of cuts made by Devon county council?

Mrs. Shephard: One of the greatest strengths of grant-maintained schools is their independence from LEA control, and they also have flexibility to manage their own budgets in a tough year.

Ethnic Minorities

4. **Mr. Stevenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment has been made of the effects on schools of changes in section 11 funding; and if she will make a statement. [13245]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): Most of the £30 million recently announced for new section 11 projects starting in 1995-96 will benefit schools. Together with continued funding of existing projects, it will support specialist English language teaching for ethnic minority pupils, and so help raise standards generally.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the Minister aware that his response will be greeted with dismay throughout the country? Does he realise that section 11 cuts are having disastrous effects on pupils whose first language is not English? Will the Minister urgently intervene to restore the damaging cuts before further irreparable harm is done to that vital service?

Mr. Boswell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the funding programmes are of great importance both to children and to schools generally, and I pay tribute to the teachers involved in them. The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed the announcement, which amounted to a doubling of new section 11 funding. For example, in the hon. Gentleman's own local education authority of Staffordshire, £191,000 of additional money will be given to support the existing programmes. That pattern will be reflected throughout the country in all areas where there is a major need for that activity.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend accept that there are many Conservative Members who do not echo the calls from Opposition parties for more funding for a variety of ethnic programmes at a time when budgets are inevitably tight?

Mr. Boswell: I agree that we must have priorities, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed that when drawing up his Budget decisions. The programmes have value, and they are not the only way in which we support areas of educational difficulty. They must be judged on their merits as part of a balanced programme.

Selective Education

5. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy on selective education. [13246]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): The Government believe that schools which select pupils by ability, or which specialise in particular subjects, have an important part to play in giving parents a choice of schooling for their children.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware that, as well as the serious budget cuts in various parts of the country, one of the anxieties of those lobbying Parliament today is the reappearance of selection, especially in Tory areas such as Wandsworth? The last thing that I want for my children and for my constituents' children is for them to be written off at the age of 11, as I was under the Tory education policies of the 1950s and 1960s. While selection may be the obvious next step in terms of the Government's policy, will they for once look at the lessons of the past and learn from the experiences of people like myself and thousands of others in the 1950s and 1960s?

Mr. Squire: Unlike the hon. Gentleman and his party, the Government are not bound by dogma or ideology when it comes to selection in schools. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, we believe that it is up to local education authorities, controlled schools and, where relevant, grant-maintained schools to make proposals for selective education if they believe that it meets the demands of parents in their area. If the Labour party showed our commitment to higher standards in schools, it would not attack good schools of proven worth.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will approach with caution suggestions for changes in admission arrangements where they might have an unbalancing effect on a cluster of grant-maintained schools in a given area?

Mr. Squire: I can reassure my hon. Friend that any proposals on admission changes are considered most carefully by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That consideration includes the impact that those changes would have on other schools in the area.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the Minister explain to the House why, since 1970, successive Tory Secretaries of State have signed the orders to close most of the grammar schools?

Mr. Squire: I can only say in answer to the hon. Gentleman that those proposals did not come to me. They came to my ministerial predecessors, who will have considered them on precisely the merits of the schools which I implied in answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) a moment ago. Labour Members seem unable to grasp the fact that there should be diversity and choice in our education system and that the Government are pledged to defend that choice and diversity.

Surplus Places

6. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the cost of surplus places in local authority schools; and if she will make a statement. [13247]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We estimate that the direct costs of maintaining surplus places in local authority schools is some £225 million. Of course, not all those places are in practice removable.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that rising pupil numbers may fill some of those spaces, but that that is no excuse for failing to improve teaching standards in unpopular schools or closing them altogether?

Mrs. Shephard: Given that the Audit Commission has pointed out the savings to be made from sensible rationalisation, I hope that all authorities will look carefully at the position in their area. If they make savings, that will obviously enable them to take the measures that my hon. Friend has identified. Nothing could be more important than raising standards.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Secretary of State not realise that the biggest disincentive to local authorities to remove surplus places has come from the Government giving schools the opportunity to opt out of local education authorities? Does she realise that removing surplus places takes at least two years and is certainly no answer to the funding crisis that our schools face now?

Mrs. Shephard: The first point is that high priority is given in capital funding to LEA bids for cost-effective rationalisation proposals. The second point relates to GM schools. We do not normally approve proposals for self-governing status drawn up in response to a threat of closure, but we reserve the right to approve GM status for such schools when we are not persuaded by the LEA's case and the school is viable, effective and popular.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Derbyshire there are more than 17,000 surplus places? Can she confirm that every LEA this year had an increase in the amount of money that it could spend? Therefore, if there is any cash reduction to schools, it is simply because the LEA has changed its priorities.

Mrs. Shephard: Yes, this year's settlement provides for an increase for all authorities. It should be viewed in the context of generous settlements in the past few years and lower than expected inflation. It is certainly the case that if Derbyshire had been prepared to tackle the large number of surplus places in the past, it would not have had the problems that it claims to have now.

Class Sizes

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the links between class sizes and pupil attainment. [13248]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The accumulated research evidence has not demonstrated any conclusive link between marginal changes in class size and pupil attainment. What matters most is the quality of teaching provided.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State accept that 1 million primary school pupils are now in classes of over 30; that the size of primary school classes has increased by 20 per cent. over the past two years; and that this year's settlement will result in further increases in class sizes next year? Will she therefore come clean over Government policy? Do they favour smaller classes, as set out in their 1983 and 1987 manifestos; are they neutral about smaller classes, as they showed by saying nothing about them in their last manifesto; or do they now argue that class size increases make no difference? If the Government think that class sizes make no difference, I presume that their education policy is like their taxation policy, on which they argue one thing but are so incompetent that they produce exactly the opposite result.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I expect that he is overjoyed that Southwark will spend an extra £8 million on schools this year. He must be delighted by the Government's generosity in making that possible. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry but I have asked hon. Members to be careful when entering the Chamber when a Minister is responding to an hon. Member.

Mrs. Shephard: It is worth while for the hon. Gentleman to note that, while class sizes have edged up recently, standards have improved steadily at all levels at the same time. Moreover, Ofsted reports have made no suggestion that class sizes are too large, and there is clear professional advice that teaching quality and leadership, to which we are committed, are the key factors.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: Will my right hon. Friend add to those qualities classroom organisation and preparation? Will she reiterate the point that the evidence on class sizes is ambiguous and that, as in the recent past, examples in the former ILEA showed clearly that the linkage between resources and attainment was far from conclusive?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: there is no conclusive linkage between resources and attainment. He is also right that teacher competence is the most important factor, which is why I am extremely pleased that we have been able to devote £250,000 to school effectiveness, in-service training, and grants for education, support and training programmes to achieve that competence.

Mr. Blunkett: Does the Secretary of State believe the head of the private girls' high school in Sheffield who said on local radio recently that the three major reasons why her school was so successful were that she could choose her own pupils, she did not have to follow the national curriculum, and her class sizes were half those of neighbouring state schools? Who does the Secretary of State believe this afternoon: those who are lobbying as parents, governors and teachers, including the heads of private schools, who say that class sizes are crucial; or those around her who believe that the cuts in education imposed in the coming year will have no effect on standards and opportunities?

Mrs. Shephard: The vast majority of pupils are taught in classes of 30 and below. The average size of classes in the primary sector is under 27 and, in the secondary sector, just over 21. One of the reasons why people choose the independent sector for their children is that, like Conservative Members, they value choice and diversity. So, too, do many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, including the hon. Members for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Perhaps he should ask them for their reasons. I am sure that they would be happy to explain.

Grant-maintained Schools, Hendon

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the number of applicants to Hendon grant-maintained schools for September 1995. [13249]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not collect data on applications for places at individual schools, including Hendon grant-maintained school; but I would expect that, like GM schools generally, the three in Hendon are increasingly popular with parents.

Mr. Marshall: Is my hon. Friend aware that Hendon school was the first grant-maintained school in London and that, since then, it has been transformed from being under-subscribed to being heavily over-subscribed? Is he aware that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) visited the school, a teacher came up to him and said that she was a member of the Labour party but that the best thing that had happened to the school was its becoming grant-maintained? Does he believe that that school would be good enough for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes his point unmistakably. I am delighted to join him in congratulating the school in being a pathfinder and to tell him that not only are 1,034 other schools now grant-maintained, but, in under two weeks, they will be joined by another batch of schools which will be free from LEA control.

As my hon. Friend says, a growing number of schools that are becoming grant-maintained continues to contain governors who are strong supporters of other political parties. I assume that they, having seen the evidence of their eyes, will go out and convert the Opposition parties so that they also become aware of the advantages of grant-maintained status.

Exam Courses

9. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of GCSE and A-level courses can currently be undertaken on a modular basis; and if she will make a statement. [13250]

Mr. Boswell: This information is not collected by the Department. We understand from the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority that 8 per cent. of national curriculum GCSE and 5 per cent. of GCE A and AS approved courses are modular.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are many roads to heaven, and that provided—

Mr. Skinner: I go where angels fear to tread.

Mr. Greenway: Do not forget it!

Does my hon. Friend agree that, provided that standards are high, modular courses at GCSE and A-level are as valid as A-levels where standards are equal? Does he accept that some pupils perform better on a modular-based course than on a course leading to an examination on a one-day basis?

Mr. Boswell: I can readily agree with my hon. Friend that there are many ways to heaven and, further, that many pupils may benefit—at least, teachers tell me so—from the adoption of modular courses. The essential matter is that there should be some safeguard against accidentally straying on to the primrose path; that is provided by the SCAA code of practice and guidelines, which bear equally on modular and non-modular A-level courses.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Is the Minister aware that his former permanent secretary will make the case on television this evening that the present A-level structure is too narrowly conceived and offers limited opportunity to more than half our children? Why is it that, when the Confederation of British Industry, the National Commission on Education and the teacher unions and associations demand reform of the post-16 examination position—when there is that consensus in arguing for reform of the A-level system—the Government alone resist?

Mr. Boswell: The Government are determined to maintain standards and excellence. Sir Geoffrey Holland was a most distinguished public servant. He is a highly distinguished vice-chancellor, with whom I have always enjoyed excellent personal relations and whose opinions I shall consider with the greatest attention and interest.

Schools, Barnet

10. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many school places are provided in the borough of Barnet; and how many children are attending schools there. [13251]

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of pupils attending maintained secondary schools in Barnet is 18,790 and information provided by Barnet LEA and the Funding Agency for Schools shows that for 1994, there was a total of 20,268 places.

Similarly, there are 22,048 pupils attending maintained primary schools with places for 22,212. The latter figure excludes GM primary schools, for which such information is not collected centrally, but where I understand that 854 places were being provided when the schools became GM.

Mr. Booth: Will my hon. Friend publicly recognise and congratulate the outstanding, second-to-none performance of the pupils of Finchley and Barnet, supported as it is by partnership between admirable parents and, until last year at any rate, a Tory council?

Mr. Squire: I willingly join my hon. Friend in congratulating the schools in Barnet, whose results compare favourably with other LEAs. Barnet is in the top five LEAs in respect of the percentage of pupils achieving at least five GCSE grades A star to C, and in the top 25 LEAs in respect of GCSE A and AS-level achievements. By any standards, those are excellent results.

Teachers (Hours Worked)

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average number of hours worked (a) per day and (b) per week by classroom teachers in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools during term-time. [13252]

Mr. Forth: The work load survey, based on teachers' own returns and carried out for the School Teachers Review Body, showed that the average total hours worked by full-time classroom teachers during a term time week in March 1994 was 48.8 hours for primary teachers and 48.9 hours for secondary teachers. Data are not available on a daily basis.

Mr. Butler: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures show, yet again, just how hard teachers work and fully justify the Government's decision to increase their salaries by just short of 40 per cent. in the past five years and to allow in full this year's pay recommendation? Does he share my regret that parents, teachers and governors have been forced to lobby Parliament today because local education authorities continue to spend on discretionary and politically correct measures rather than fund properly, with the money that they have available, the full teachers' pay settlement?

Mr. Forth: I am glad to join my hon. Friend in praising good teaching by good teachers. I agree that to concentrate simply on the number of hours worked reveals only part of the picture: it is the effectiveness of those hours which matters. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct about LEA spending. It is interesting that a number of LEAs have been able to order their priorities in such a way that they have been able to meet the teachers' pay rise in full and to continue to provide well for their pupils and schools. If all authorities approached funding in that manner, we would not have to witness the artificial hysteria that has been generated in some quarters.

Mr. Battle: Is not the truth that teachers have been totally demoralised as a direct result of 17 years of the

Government's education policy? Today's lobby of Parliament, which has brought together teachers, governors and concerned parents, should be listened to by the Government, because they are withdrawing capital funds from local authorities to repair schools and they are undermining those authorities' ability to pay the wage bill. Why are the Government shuffling off their responsibilities, as usual?

Mr. Forth: I am slightly surprised by the hon. Gentleman's assertions for two principal reasons. First, it is certainly true that teachers' worth has been recognised in the pay increases that they have received under this Government, under whom they have done extremely well—and rightly so, I believe. Average teachers' pay, after 1 April 1995, will be £22,200 per annum. That amply rewards the contribution that they are able to make.

As for the hon. Gentleman's second assertion that the pay awards cannot be met, he obviously did not listen to my earlier reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler), in which I pointed out that a number of authorities, including many controlled by the Labour party, have found it possible to fund the teachers' pay award in full. I welcome that.

Grant-maintained Schools

12. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have applied for grant-maintained status. [13253]

Mr. Robin Squire: To date, 1,157 schools have published proposals to acquire grant-maintained status. A further 15 schools are currently under a duty to publish such proposals following "yes" votes in parental ballots.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he a member of the Transport and General Workers Union? Does he agree with me that if the 1 million members of the TGWU had gone to grant-maintained schools, preferably the Oratory, they might have been prepared to support Bambi, the leader of that lot on the Opposition Benches, in rewriting clause IV?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend, in his typically understated way, has put his finger on it. Although I am not a member of the TGWU, what is good enough for its members and for those sponsored by it should be good enough for and on offer to all parents. That will happen as self-governing schools become the norm under the Government.

Mrs. Mahon: Are not the Minister and the Government engaged in a huge bribery exercise? Surely that is why the Government have given more than £400,000 for the capital building programme to just one grant-maintained school in Calderdale, Holy Trinity, while the remaining LEA schools have just £125,000 to spend between them for 1995-96. How do the Minister and the Government justify such blatant discrimination against LEA schools?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Lady is wrong. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said a moment ago, capital programmes for LEA schools will increase by more than 6 per cent. next year.

Mrs. Mahon: Not in Calderdale.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Lady suggests that Calderdale is treated differently from the rest of the country; of course it is not. Capital allocations for LEA or GM schools are treated on the same basis. If she visits the GM schools in her constituency or in Calderdale she will generally find that, far from being bribed to become grant maintained, schools are pleased to become GM and they would not dream of doing anything differently.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Did my hon. Friend see the news item in last Tuesday's *Evening Standard*, which proved conclusively that support for grant-maintained status is not confined to Conservatives? Eric Hammond, a well-known trade union leader, said quite categorically that it was not in the interests of the school in his area to be part of an expensive bureaucracy such as Lancashire county council.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend, in her inimitable fashion, adds her voice and her own references to the examples that have already been given of prominent socialists who have seen the light and who are now embracing the advantages of grant-maintained status. We can only wait until all Labour Members take that view and, more particularly, encourage their local supporters to remove their tanks from the lawns of schools whose only crime is to seek to run themselves.

Schools (Standards)

13. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy for improving standards in schools. [13254]

Mr. Forth: The Government's education reforms, including the introduction of the national curriculum and testing, performance tables and independent inspection arrangements, are all driving up standards in schools. More pupils than ever before are achieving five or more GCSEs at good grades, and more are going on to further and higher education.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware that his statement will ring hollow in Warwickshire, where angry parents, teachers, councillors and Members of Parliament from all political parties believe that education standards will fall as a result of the Government's financial settlement? What do the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education have to say about declining education standards in Warwickshire, where school classes of more than 40 pupils are anticipated and 200 teachers may be sacked? What will be done to ensure that education standards in Warwickshire do not fall?

Mr. Forth: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman and parents and governors in Warwickshire ask some pretty searching questions of their local authority. They might look to a neighbouring authority, such as Birmingham, which is able fully to fund the teachers' pay rise in spite of the fact that it faces the same stringency and demands as other local education authorities. I believe that the hon. Gentleman's local education authority has many questions to answer and I hope that he will start asking them.

Mr. Dunn: Is the Minister aware that the Labour-Liberal Democrat-controlled Kent county council spends £12,000 per day on conferences? What contribution does that expenditure make to raising standards in Kent schools?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the problem that people up and down the country are facing. His example follows on very well from what I said to the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien). I suggest that my hon. Friends should advise any parents, teachers or governors who approach them to look very carefully at the books of their local authorities. They should examine their local authorities' priorities and what they are spending taxpayers' money on. If that money is being spent on useless conferences of the kind that my hon. Friend mentioned, I suggest that local education authorities should give much more positive answers than we have had so far.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Minister give priority to improving the teaching of history and geography in order to bring home to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the full impact of what 16 years of Tory government have done to this country's industrial base?

Mr. Forth: It is perhaps regrettable that Members of Parliament are unable to take advantage of the excellent national curriculum that we have introduced in our schools. I am sure that had many hon. Members had the benefit of the national curriculum, they might have been better able to face the present policy challenges.

Mr. Harris: Does my hon. Friend agree that a fair system of funding is important in improving standards in schools? Will he join me in condemning the contemptuous campaign run by Liberal Democrats in Cornwall, who claim that the Government allow Cornish schools £100 less per pupil than the rest of England? Does he agree that that claim is completely and utterly untrue?

Mr. Forth: I was shocked to hear of the scurrilous misinformation being spread by Liberal Democrats in Cornwall. Unfortunately, I suspect that it is not unusual and the people of Cornwall should be getting pretty fed up with it by now, but I confirm absolutely that the assertions made by Liberal Democrats in Cornwall are utterly and totally baseless. I hope that the people of Cornwall will realise that and will ask some searching questions of the county council.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13272]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meeting later today.

Mr. Hill: In his busy day, has the Prime Minister noticed that his plea for peace within the ranks has failed and that the Chancellor and Lord Tebbit are at each other's throats again over Europe? How does he feel now that it is apparent that all sides of his party share the same view as the rest of the country—that he has no authority and is not up to the job?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about differing views in Europe, I suggest that he has a look around the Benches beside him. If he seriously thinks that the deputy Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), agrees with the Leader of the Opposition, or that the Leader of the Opposition agrees with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), he is living in a fantasy world.

Mr. Duncan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that most calls for more funding are really calls for higher taxation and that most calls for greater economic well-being are really calls for higher inflation? Will my right hon. Friend, therefore, undertake to continue his policy of keeping a firm grip both on inflation and public expenditure and not to do what the Opposition always seem tempted to do—cheaply to buy people's votes with their own money?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the necessity of holding down public expenditure, and equally right to point out that it is simply economically illiterate to object to taxation levels and at the same time to call for higher expenditure, as the Opposition so frequently do.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree with his Education Secretary, who said this morning—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order; otherwise I shall have to name a Member on the Conservative Back Benches.

Mr. Blair *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: It is Jacques Arnold.

Mr. Blair: I apologise to my hon. Friend's dog.

Does the Prime Minister agree with his Education Secretary who this morning admitted that in funding the teachers' pay award some schools and authorities would face "considerable problems"?

The Prime Minister: Of course we recognised from the outset that this year's settlement is tough in education. We have never made any secret of that fact. We have made it clear that local authorities must choose their priorities. We believe that teachers in the classroom are a priority and should be a first priority among education authorities.

Mr. Blair: But what does the Prime Minister say to schools and authorities that, as the Secretary of State for Education admits, do not have the reserves and balances to fund the award? If it is proven to the Prime Minister's satisfaction that such schools and authorities exist—for example, in Tory Buckinghamshire—will he take action and intervene?

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman exactly what I would say to such authorities. If any local authority is thinking of cutting the number of teachers in the classroom, I would ask it what savings it had made in non-teaching aspects of education. I would ask if it has two administrators for every three teachers, as happens across the country. I would ask what administrative savings it had made. If the answer is none, I would ask, "Why have you made no savings, and why are you singling out teachers in the classroom?"

Mr. Blair: Is not the Prime Minister aware that five out of the six authorities with the lowest administration costs are Labour—and that all are facing cuts? The right hon. Gentleman talks about non-statutory funding. His Secretary of State for Education said what that means—nursery education, youth work and school transport. Is that an option? Why does not the Prime Minister listen to the voices of parents, governors and teachers, who speak for Britain when they say that if we fail to provide properly for our schools, we are not just letting down our children but betraying our country's future?

The Prime Minister: We have provided more adequately for education and for choice in education than the right hon. Gentleman would ever contemplate. If he wants to know what the priorities are, I suggest that he addresses authorities—most of which are run by Labour—about the 1 million surplus school places, which cost £250 million a year, about making use of the estimated £700 million in unspent balances held by schools and about cutting bureaucracy at county hall, where they have failed to take account of the responsibilities of schools and where for every three teachers there are two support staff. Those are the questions that the right hon. Gentleman should address to education authorities. If he thinks that there are no savings to be made, I suggest that he refers to the Audit Commission report, which made it clear that better management of pay bills would save £500 million—5 per cent. of the whole pay bill.

Mr. Heald: Does my right hon. Friend agree that regional assemblies for England would be confusing, expensive and divisive? Does he accept that people in Hertfordshire do not want to be governed from Norwich? When he exposed that policy, the Labour party fell into confusion and chaos. Will he say today that we are not going to do it?

The Prime Minister: There certainly seems to be some confusion on the Opposition Benches about regional assemblies. Almost every statement about them that can be made has been made. As Labour examines its policy, it realises that it is the total nonsense that I pointed out some time ago.

Mr. Prescott *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head; clearly he does not understand that his party's policy is nonsense. When Labour examines its policies for Scottish and Welsh assemblies in further depth, it will find precisely the same.

Q2. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13273]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McKelvey: Has the Prime Minister no sense of shame at having dithered over obscene fat cat salaries, alienating low-paid workers in the health service, including nurses and midwives? Is not the right hon. Gentleman setting the scene for a summer of discontent throughout the NHS?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that we have funded the health service better than any previous Government. That is clearly shown by the number of people treated in the national health service, the wider range of services and the better treatment that is available.

Q3. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13274]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Bearing in mind the fact that this is national science, engineering and technology week, has my right hon. Friend had time today to read the encouraging report from engineering employers, which states that economic recovery is developing in a way that will increase national prosperity in the longer term? Is not that a tribute to Government economic policies, and is not this the right time for young people to go for a career in engineering?

The Prime Minister: I agree about that, and about the need to encourage more young people into engineering and more people into learning skills of that sort. That is why we established the non-vocational qualifications some time ago. In engineering and manufacturing generally exports are growing and employment is increasing; that has not happened in manufacturing generally for many years.

Q4. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13275]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: I welcome the Government's decision to provide £1 million for the clearing of anti-personnel mines in Cambodia. Is the Prime Minister aware, however, that there are 100 million anti-personnel mines strewn around the world, and that there have been 1 million casualties and fatalities, especially among children? Does he agree that the time is ripe for an international moratorium that would bring within its scope the area-denial mines that are still shipped out of this country? Will he not agree with the terms of the early-day motion, now supported by more than 100 hon. Members of all parties, urging the Government to give a moral lead?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of the fact that he wished to raise a detailed question about land mines. We have neither produced nor exported anti-personnel mines for some years, and we have contributed generously to the demining programme. In July we announced an indefinite moratorium on exports from the United Kingdom of mines without a self-destruct mechanism. We shall be hoping to use the review in September of the UN weaponry convention to strengthen the protocol on the use of land mines and to ensure that its provisions gain universal support.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend support a measure to make it a statutory requirement that all local authorities declare in their published budgets what is and what is not a statutory requirement and a statutory area of expenditure?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend suggests an ingenious method of ensuring that local authorities' priorities are met. I shall invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to examine it.

Q5. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13276]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Prentice: Can the Prime Minister tell us whether it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Home Secretary who is right about the feelgood factor?

The Prime Minister: The people who have most felt the feelgood factor thus far are the 600,000 people who are no longer on the unemployment register, as a result of the fall in unemployment. In terms of economic management, we are seeking to make sure that we come out of the recession of two years ago in a way that avoids laying the seeds of future difficulties, which were sown on many other occasions since the second world war. Hence we have had to take long-term, difficult decisions; as a result we now have the best prospects of rising living standards, year after year, that we have had for many years. That will produce a very good feelgood factor.

Mr. Rathbone: Does my right hon. Friend accept that many Conservative Members share the qualms about land mines expressed by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), but that none of us will accept the fact that Liberal Democrat county councillors are not funding education as they can—particularly in East Sussex, where they resisted and voted against a Conservative amendment to the budget that would have provided the necessary funds for education in the county?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the example to which my hon. Friend has drawn my attention, but the rather cavalier use of taxpayers' money by Liberal Democrat authorities is no new phenomenon.

Q6. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13277]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is it not true, from what we have seen and heard, that there is no policy area apart from Northern Ireland about which the people of this country believe anything that you, Prime Minister, have to say? In education, the parents and teachers are against you. In health, the midwives have been moved to militancy. Is not the best thing that could happen to this Government who cannot agree among themselves that you should resign and that we should have an immediate election?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not addressing the House and the Prime Minister correctly. Would he like to try again? He has another minute.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I apologise, Madam Speaker, if I have not spoken in the language of the House, but I am expressing what I think the majority of British people feel.

The Prime Minister: Had the hon. Gentleman been in the House longer, he would have heard remarks like that put to me before the last general election.

Mr. Butcher: Will my right hon. Friend publish all the evidence, some of it garnered in response to hostile questions from Opposition Members, which shows beyond any doubt whatever that a reduction in the top rate of income tax has increased the proportion of tax paid as a total from the top 10 per cent., and that any proposal to increase the top rate of income tax will produce a shortfall in revenue which can then be obtained only from middle-income earners?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend sets out a matter that has been well understood for many years. I will certainly invite my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to lay that information out in the House of Commons Library. It might be very instructive for the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is giggling on the Front Bench because he does not understand it.

Madam Speaker: Time is up. We now have a statement from Mr. Secretary Gummer. *[Interruption.]* Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving please do so quickly, as we have a statement on local government reorganisation to deal with?

Local Government Reorganisation

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the review of local government in England.

In my statement on 2 March, I set out my aims for the local government review. I announced my decisions for 20 counties, and I also announced that I intended to invite the Local Government Commission to carry out further reviews of a small number of individual districts.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asked me to consider adding a small number of other districts to the list; he particularly pressed me to consider Norwich and The Wrekin. I have now decided to add those two districts to the list of those that I shall consider for fresh reviews.

At the time of my statement on 2 March, I was not in a position to announce the name of the new chairman of the commission. I am now pleased to say that Sir David Cooksey, currently chairman of the Audit Commission, has agreed to become chairman of the Local Government Commission for England. Sir David's appointment will be for one year initially, by which time we expect the programme of shire district structural reviews to have been completed. Sir David will take up his post in early July.

My statement on 2 March left just 12 counties on which I had not yet announced my decisions. I am pleased to be able to do so today.

I have decided to accept the commission's recommendations for the counties of Derbyshire and Staffordshire. The former county boroughs of Derby and Stoke-on-Trent will become unitary authorities; the rest of the county will, in each case, remain two tier.

Similarly, I accept the recommendation for Wiltshire, that Thamesdown—that is, Swindon—should become a unitary authority, and that the two-tier system should be retained for the rest of the county.

For East Sussex, the commission recommended a new unitary authority, to incorporate the existing boroughs of Brighton and Hove. I know that that recommendation has aroused strong local feelings—for and against. On balance, however, I agree that the combined authority is the right solution for the area. The rest of the county will retain the status quo.

I also propose to accept the commission's recommendations for Devon. The former county boroughs of Plymouth and Torbay will become unitary authorities. Elsewhere in the county, the two-tier system will be retained, except that, as I announced on 2 March, I am considering including Exeter—which is, of course, another former county borough—on the list of districts to be referred to the commission for fresh reviews.

Similarly, I accept the commission's recommendation that Nottingham should become a unitary authority and that the rest of Nottinghamshire should remain two tier, subject to possible further reviews of the districts of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe.

For Essex, I propose to accept the recommendation that Southend should become a unitary authority.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Hear, hear.

Mr. Gummer: The independent view of Southend is pretty well known to the House.

The commission also recommended that the boundary of Southend should be extended to include Southend airport. *[Interruption.]* It has a large number of European services. That needs further exploration and I may want to ask the commission in due course to look at the matter again.

With regard to elsewhere in Essex, I have already announced that Thurrock and Basildon will be subject to further reviews. With that in mind, I do not intend to act on the commission's recommendation for a major boundary change involving Basildon, Brentwood and Rochford. The rest of Essex will remain two tier.

In Hereford and Worcester, I agree with the commission that the historic county of Herefordshire should be restored on its former boundaries as a single unitary authority, and that Worcestershire should be restored as a county in its own right, retaining the two-tier system throughout the county. The district of Malvern Hills, which was created at the time of the 1974 reorganisation, will be split as recommended by the commission.

For Leicestershire, I am minded to agree that the city of Leicester should be given unitary status. I am also minded to agree that the historic county of Rutland should regain its independence as a unitary authority. That is one case where the arguments based on local identity seem to me to be particularly strong.

I recognise, however, that there are likely to be particular problems with the effective and convenient delivery of local services in that area—particularly with regard to Rutland, whose population is just 33,000. Before I introduce the order to implement these decisions, therefore, I shall want to be satisfied that good practical arrangements can be made for local services. I expect that, at least for some services, some form of joint working with neighbouring authorities may be needed. I shall also want to be satisfied that that can be paid for on the same basis, and within the same financial constraints, as for other reorganised authorities, and without imposing unacceptably high costs on the people of Rutland.

I now come to three counties where I have decided to depart from the recommendations made by the commission.

For Hampshire, the commission recommended that Portsmouth, Southampton and the New Forest should become unitary authorities. I agree with the recommendations for Portsmouth and Southampton. In the case of the New Forest, however, I have concluded that the case for unitary status is not sufficiently made out in a district that has more in common with the many districts recommended to remain in a two-tier structure. I have decided therefore that in the New Forest, as in the rest of Hampshire, the two-tier structure should be retained.

Similar considerations have affected my decision for the neighbouring county of Dorset. I agree with the commission that the boroughs of Bournemouth and Poole should be given unitary status. But elsewhere in Dorset I note that the existing authorities are not enthusiastic about the commission's proposals. On balance, I have concluded that the rest of Dorset will be better served by the two-tier system.

Finally, for Berkshire the commission has recommended the replacement of the county council by a structure of five unitary authorities. I agree that the county council should be abolished. But I disagree with the commission's recommendation that the districts of Bracknell

Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead should be combined. I am satisfied that each of the existing districts in the county is capable of operating as a unitary authority, and I propose to modify the commission's recommendations accordingly. The county area of Berkshire will be retained together with the Lord Lieutenancy, but it will no longer have a county council.

Although my decision for Berkshire follows a different pattern from other counties, I am satisfied that the difference is justified. I note that it has the support of all the district councils concerned, and that until recently the county council also favoured a unitary structure for the county. I have said before that different structures may be appropriate in different areas to meet different local circumstances; Berkshire is a case in point.

I have given a full explanation of the background and reasons for the decisions today, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). There are copies in the Library and the Vote Office.

My officials will now start work on drafting the orders that are needed to put the decisions into effect. The local authorities and their associations will of course be consulted. I hope that the first orders will be ready to bring to the House soon after the local elections on 4 May; in the meantime, we shall also be consulting on draft guidance to be given to the Local Government Commission for the fresh district-based reviews.

In my previous statement, I announced that a small number of districts would be referred to the commission for further review, and that I was considering whether to refer a limited number of others. Given the need to minimise uncertainty—and for there to be a clear end to the review process—I should perhaps repeat that, apart possibly from the two districts that I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, I am unlikely to want to add to the list.

The decisions that I have announced today reinforce the pattern that has emerged from the review. In broad terms, it constitutes abolition of the unloved "artificial" counties created in 1974, which have never commanded the loyalty of local people; creation of unitary local government in many large non-metropolitan towns and cities that will be well placed to benefit from the extra coherence and effectiveness that unitary local government can bring; and, elsewhere, the two-tier system retained, but with improved co-operation between the tiers.

I remind the House that I made it clear in my earlier statement that I would hold the counties to their promises of better co-ordination, greater subsidiarity and keenness to listen to the attitudes of local people in both parish and district councils in achieving the kind of government whose retention they sought.

I hope the House will agree that, with those changes, local government will be in better shape to meet the challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I welcome the statement, as far as it goes. It has the singular merit of being in line with the principles that the Secretary of State set out in his statement of 2 March, which we welcomed. What it boils down to is a recreation of county boroughs that should never have lost their county borough status in the first place. I especially welcome the decision to give county borough status to Derby, and to retain two-tier local government in the rest of Derbyshire. I hope that that means that the Government and their supporters will now abandon their continuing mean-minded attacks on the county.

The Government's proposition rights the glaring anomalies that arose from the review. I refer in particular to the recommendation of independence for Rutland, which contains 33,000 people, but not for places containing 180,000. Apparently, even the Secretary of State now has some doubts about the Rutland decision; but we shall see what happens about that.

I welcome the Secretary of State's acceptance of the inclusion of The Wrekin and Norwich in the list of districts to be, as it were, reconsidered for reconsideration, but I was serious in regard to the other councils that I mentioned when we last discussed the matter. Since then, other districts have submitted themselves for consideration. I realise that the Secretary of State must draw the line somewhere, but I hope that he will not automatically rule out the districts that neither he nor I mentioned on the previous occasion. I do not think that we should proceed on the basis that the Department of the Environment is the fount of all wisdom in this regard. The right hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that it should be open to other districts to put themselves forward for independence if they can make a rational case.

I expect that the new Local Government Commission will make what may be described as a more structured, consistent and sensible approach to the task that it has been given than its predecessor did, that the criteria that it applies will be applied to each district and that there will be proper and consistent consideration of people's views. Also, if polling is to be done, I hope that it makes propositions clear, so that people know on what they are voting.

County boroughs and the districts that have been named will have the opportunity to demonstrate to the commission that they are entitled to independence, that their independence will be workable and popular and that they will be able to provide decent services for local people. That is to be welcomed because a council that can draw on civic pride and a sense of place is more likely to be able to provide decent services.

I welcome the appointment of Sir David Cooksey to chair the commission and I look forward to him conducting an orderly, sensible and consistent review. I welcome the undertaking from the Secretary of State that we shall be consulted about the remaining membership of the commission and the guidelines.

Although it may seem churlish, I must confess that I am, from time to time, a churl. I therefore remind the House that this whole review started with a statement from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the then Secretary of State for the Environment, who said:

"most local authorities want unitary status and we believe that such status will provide a better structure for the future in most areas."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 37.]

As a result of that, we have had a protracted, ill-considered, expensive and acrimonious review of local government across England, during which large numbers of staff in counties and districts have been deployed to present arguments for or against change, and in some areas, for two or three years, vast amounts of resources have been used and money has been paid out in court action. The review has simply distracted attention and

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diverted resources from the councils' proper job of providing local services. It has been very unsettling for the staff.

In the new circumstances, I hope that the Secretary of State will acknowledge that what is proposed in some areas prolongs uncertainty. In other areas, the staff will have to go through the process of change. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that they are entitled to some protection and help over compensation, transfer, detriment and the implementation of compulsory competitive tendering. I am glad that in his previous statement he accepted my suggestion that he should meet the unions. I know that that meeting has now been arranged. I hope that he will find it possible to accept some improvement because the changes are not the fault of the staff—they have been forced on them by the Government.

I hope that the new commission will get on with its job and carry out the task in a proper and sensible way, and that this time it will do a decent, consistent job. All this could have been done two to two and a half years ago, and the county boroughs could have been recreated two years ago if the Government had recognised common sense from the start.

All these changes are being proposed to councils that were set up and had their boundaries established by a previous Tory Government. They are changes to things that the Tories got wrong in the past and I hope to God that they will not get things wrong again.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the part of his comments that supported what we are doing. I am sorry for his lapse into churlishness, and I shall return to that. I was also surprised that he should start by suggesting that there were those who were mean minded about Derbyshire. The county of Derbyshire could have done with a little more meanness itself and then it would not have been one of the most disliked local authorities in the history of mankind. The fact of the matter is that Derbyshire, both under Mr. Bookbinder and with Mr. Bookbinder still in the wings, did not and does not set an example of county government that most of us would like to follow. That is why I have some sympathy with those of my hon. Friends who wish that we could have gone further with unitary authorities in Derbyshire.

As for the other matters that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras raised, I too am concerned for the staff. That is one of the reasons why I want to restrict the number of councils being considered. The period is significantly shorter than the period originally announced, because I shortened it myself from the six to seven years that looked likely at first. None the less, staff will still be uncertain during that shorter period, and I should like to reach solutions as quickly as possible.

However, the staff are the servants of the local authorities, and if in the end we want to achieve the best local authorities that we can, there are bound to be difficulties occasionally. We must accept the fact that in private business most people have to cope with change all the time, so I am not quite so enthusiastic about suggesting that every local authority member of staff should have the kind of protection that is not available to everybody else who has to deal with difficulties such as making a profit, selling goods, providing services and being directly at the behest of customers and the public.

I was also a little concerned by the hon. Gentleman's attack on the fact that the process had led to so many court actions. He should ask the Labour members of the former Cleveland county council what they were doing when they spent all that money on such court actions. They lost every one, as almost everyone could have told them in the first place that they would. Nevertheless they were prepared, as Labour councils always are, to spend other people's money in the defence of their particular—I was about to say "dogma", but I shall not.

The same is true of Lancashire; I shall watch carefully to see whether that county council carries through its considerable promises to the districts and parishes of Lancashire as to how it will operate in future.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman said that we were changing structures set up by a previous Conservative Government. I remind him that the original changes were made 20 years ago. If he really thinks that local authorities stay in the same place and are absolutely perfect after 20 years, he has a curious view of the pace of change, and little grasp of the fact that we no longer have local authorities that think that they should run everything. We now have enabling local authorities, with a different view of how they should operate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I seek to call as many Back Benchers as possible, but I shall not be able to call many unless questions and answers are brisk. This is a day not for votes of thanks, but for one question, and one only, to the Minister and for a brisk reply.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as so frequently in the affairs of Southend, all respectable Conservative opinion will be thrilled and delighted by the decision that he has announced, which will restore to Southend the unitary status that it had for more than 50 years, with which it governed its affairs with remarkable success? Is he further aware that the only people who, for some mysterious reason, will oppose the decision are the Liberal and Labour members of the town council? For the sake of clarity, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the elections will take place in 1996 and the new authority will start in 1997?

Mr. Gummer: There will be elections next year and the new council thereafter. I thank my right hon. Friend for what he said. I would have expected nothing else from the Liberals and the Labour party in Southend—especially the Liberals, who find it difficult to maintain the same view for two days running.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): What does the Secretary of State mean by consultation? Although I welcome the appointment of Sir David Cooksey, I remember that during his previous announcement the right hon. Gentleman said that he would consult the Opposition before making the appointment, whereas in fact he simply told me whom he had asked to do the job, without any consultation whatever. What does he mean by consultation in the case of Berkshire, which he has announced will be given six unitary authorities—a solution proposed by nobody, and on which no consultation whatever has taken place? What does he mean by consultation when he announces that Rutland, which will be a small unitary authority, gets through on a

60 per cent. popular vote while New Forest, which also achieved a 60 per cent. popular vote, has been refused the same status although it would be much larger?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman sat in my office for 10 minutes and was asked to give his opinion on what should happen in Berkshire. At every moment, he refused to give his opinion and the councillors who were present became more embarrassed and got redder because he would not give his opinion. The Liberal Democrat party gives an opinion only when it has decided that it will get one extra vote by going one way rather than the other. The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) is worse than most Liberals in that way, and I must say that consulting the hon. Gentleman is almost impossible.

I consulted the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras about the person who was to be appointed, and I am perfectly happy to consult widely, as I have done in the past, about the members of the commission. I hope that that can also be done on the guidelines. The hon. Member for Newbury was given every chance to speak about his own county, and he could not manage it.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the main reasons why many of my constituents expressed opposition to a merger of Hove with Brighton was their understandable fear at the thought of their well-run Conservative council being joined with a borough whose socialist council is notorious for its inefficiency and extravagance? My right hon. Friend mentioned the incorporation of Southend airport in the borough of my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon). Is he aware that the western boundary proposed for my local unitary authority is unsatisfactory both economically and geographically, and that it divides the port of Shoreham? Can he assure me that he will look at the earliest possible moment at that boundary, which ought to be extended to the River Adur?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to assure my right hon. Friend that when we come to look at the boundaries, which will not be immediately, I shall make sure that that particular boundary is carefully looked at early on. One of the real objections that I have heard widely in Brighton and Hove is the fear that the present Brighton town council would become dominant in the new authority. That council is so forgetful of the interests of its ratepayers and is so rude to incoming conferences that it forces the conferences to choose other towns to go to. That is because of the inability of Brighton council to keep its extremist left-wing views to itself. The answer is for the citizens of Hove to continue to vote Conservative and to make sure that the new borough is run by sensible people.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that we have had three Etonians in a row, could I ask the Minister whether he thinks he has come to the hard part now? The Government have gone back to the 1974 regime of Derby city and two-tier status for the rest of the county. Does he understand that one of the problems in local government—apart from the boundaries—is the fact that this Government have withdrawn £50 billion in grants over the past years? What local government really needs is the money to provide work, to do the jobs and to reduce the class sizes—to the same as those at Eton if necessary—and to get more teachers. The Government must stop the rate capping of local authorities and let local democracy thrive.

Mr. Gummer: Year in, year out the Government have provided more money to local authorities, and year in, year out Derbyshire has wasted large sums of money, both from this Government and from its own ratepayers. Derbyshire has an appalling record, and the fact that the hon. Gentleman should still be defending it shows just how appalling his judgment is.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will my right hon. Friend explain to me how it is that last week he called Derbyshire county council incompetent and the chairman of the Conservative party called it corrupt, but that today he has brought forward proposals that will re-establish a Labour majority in that area for many years to come? How does he expect me to support the proposal?

Mr. Gummer: I fear that I must say to my hon. Friend that I have to distinguish between the council and the councillors. The only answer in Derbyshire is to get rid of those who are at the moment mis-running the local authority and replace them with people who can run it. I understand my hon. Friend's frustration, but he must accept that—however bad the councillors may be—it would be quite wrong for me to make a judgment for all future generations. I have to judge on the basis of the councils.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): While I join my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in welcoming some of the points that the Secretary of State has made today, may I press him on the timetable? He says that he is minded to add The Wrekin to the list. When does he expect to reach a decision on that? If he decides to add The Wrekin to the list, what will be the time scale within which the commission will work?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. Between now and July, when the new commission will come into operation under the new chairmanship, I intend to hold discussions with the county councils, district councils, parish councils and other people who are involved to decide whether it seems sensible to offer The Wrekin as one of the names on the list to be considered. If I decided that it was, it would be for the incoming commission to make its timetable, but I hope that the matter would be considered as soon as possible after July.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision about Portsmouth? Will he and his Department do everything possible to persuade the Liberal Democrat-led Hampshire county council to co-operate from now on with the new arrangements? That would be in stark contrast to the expense and wasted time of the abortive attempt to keep the Liberal Democrats' county empire as intact as possible.

Mr. Gummer: I shall certainly seek to do that. The order will insist that the county council take on its shoulders the responsibility for proceeding as rapidly and conveniently as possible. I agree with my hon. Friend that,

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as in other parts of the country, no one whom I have known has been so assiduous in tending their own interests as Liberal Democrat-dominated county councils.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the Minister aware that he has now left north Nottinghamshire in limbo-land? While he has announced unitary authorities for the four districts in the south, he has not made any announcement as yet about the four districts in the north. Is he aware that all eight district councils wanted unitary status and that the only fair solution is to grant it to all of them? Will he have a look at what he now proposes to do for the north?

Mr. Gummer: I have the problem that the commission retreated from its original views. I do not have the powers to denominate any of the extra authorities—certainly not the three plus the four. I have said that I shall consider whether the three authorities that I mentioned ought to be looked at again by the commission.

I have a problem with the decision on Nottingham city. I maintain my view that Nottingham city should become a unitary authority, although I find it particularly difficult as I read today in the *Daily Mirror* that Nottingham city council has banned the use of the words "ladies and gentlemen" in any of its properties. People will not be able to say, "My lords, ladies and gentlemen" at the beginning of a dinner in any property owned by Nottingham district council because that is thought to be in some way sexist.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the profound disappointment that his statement will cause in my constituency? Will he look again at Eastbourne's former county borough status and its profound local identity, which even the Local Government Commission managed to spot, and send it for further review under the newly constituted Banham-free commission?

Mr. Gummer: I understand the particular difficulties with Eastbourne. As my hon. Friend says, it was historically a county borough. It is not one of those areas that naturally fit the suggestions that I have made. I do not think that it appeared in my original list. There has not been pressure from outside, but I understand my hon. Friend's point. I shall, of course, look at it again.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does the Minister accept that the decision to give Nottingham unitary status, which I welcome, cannot move forward positively until decisions have been made on the surrounding unitaries—Gedling, Broxtowe and Rushcliffe? Clearly, that creates uncertainty. Can the Minister give me an idea of the timetable that he and the commission have in mind to resolve that problem?

Mr. Gummer: That does not need to hold things up. The elections could not take place in any case for a further year. In the course of that year, I am sure that we shall come to an understanding about the other authorities. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have found unsatisfactory the comment that I made about Nottingham city council. The reason why I made it is, first, simply that it is true. I have checked with the city council that it is true. Secondly, it reminds us that unitary authorities have a responsibility to act in the interests of everyone and not to press the particular ideas of political correctness that are damaging and downright silly.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Southend airport, to which he referred, used to be RAF Rochford and is within the Rochford district council area? Does he know that it is a large piece of undeveloped land that separates urban Southend from semi-rural Rochford? Does he agree that, if the airport is included in a unitary Southend with its own planning authority, it is likely, should the airport fail, that that land will be built up, to the great detriment of both Southend and Rochford?

Mr. Gummer: That is precisely why I felt that it would not be proper to take the commission's recommendation on board, but that the matter should be considered further in the future.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am sure that the Minister is aware that there will be great disappointment in my constituency of Carlisle, a fine historic city, that he has not designated it for unitary status today. Will he explain the reasons briefly? Does his statement mean that he has closed his mind to giving Carlisle unitary authority status?

Mr. Gummer: The district of Carlisle contains significant rural parts that were not in the original county borough of Carlisle. I have considered Carlisle carefully; it is unlikely that I would want to add it to the list as it fits none of the reasonable proposals and it would stand out rather surprisingly if did.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): My right hon. Friend's announcement that he would not accept the Local Government Commission's recommendation on the boundaries between Brentwood and Basildon is welcome. He will be aware of correspondence between us about the funding of the proposed merger, but he will not be aware of a recent statement by Liberal Democrats in Brentwood that, somehow, they could make a profit from such a merger. Does he agree that local government reorganisation on that basis would be ludicrous and that the best thing would be to base it on a locality? Does he further agree that Brentwood council should now look for civic pride for the people whom it represents in Brentwood, not for empire building elsewhere?

Mr. Gummer: We shall certainly look at all the figures that have been put forward, but, on the surface, the argument put forward by the Liberal Democrats seems pretty specious. It is important that Brentwood and places like it should seek to increase the civic pride that arises from people's sense of place.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Halton borough council is now on his list for review and that, when Halton and Warrington are reviewed, there will be strict guidelines on what county councils can spend on the campaign because, during the previous review, Cheshire county council threw its cheque book away, which was a waste of ratepayers' money?

Mr. Gummer: I remain of the opinion that Halton should be considered for a possible review. I shall look at it in the way that I have said to others and decide before July whether it should be reviewed. A good case has been put forward, so it is worth looking into it carefully.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): On Norwich, given that my right hon. Friend appeared to restate the assurance that he gave the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) earlier this month, will he consider carefully the following points when he refers the matter for further consideration? More than 70 per cent. of people in Norwich rejected unitary status in a MORI poll; any change would cost the taxpayer millions of pounds; and proper consultations must be undertaken with the county council and the other district councils in Norfolk, which have strong views on the matter. Will he bear all those concerns in mind?

Mr. Gummer: I did not immediately suggest that the commission should consider a range of local authorities, precisely because I want time to look into them, in the way that my hon. Friend suggests. It is clearly necessary to establish that, even where a town—in this case, a city—fits the general criteria that we sought to use, there is local support for the proposition of a unitary authority. It would be wrong to deny people the opportunity to give that local support, but it is necessary to try to gauge it in some way, and I shall certainly talk to all the authorities to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): Does the Minister accept that there are many similarities between Norwich and Ipswich, not only our ability to prop up the rest of the Premier league, along with Leicester—

Mr. McLoughlin: Not for long.

Mr. Cann: Does the Minister also accept that we are both towns of about 120,000 people in rural counties of 600,000 or 700,000 people, which had county borough status for hundreds of years and ruled their own lives for hundreds of years? Yet the Minister proposes, against the wishes of people in Norwich—as I understand it from the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson)—to give unitary status back to Norwich, but to deny it to Ipswich. I am sure that he cannot possibly mean that, and I hope that he can assure me that he will review the matter.

Mr. Gummer: If I may dare say so to the hon. Gentleman, it is a pleasure to see him dealing with his own constituency rather than with matters that relate to other people's constituencies, as is usually his wont. I am his neighbour, and I say that because, over Bentwaters, he is busy dealing with a matter that is no business of his and is causing my constituents considerable trouble as a result.

Mr. Cann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I will not give way. I am answering the question. The hon. Gentleman must have some courtesy. He has given me the opportunity to answer his question and he has also given me an opportunity that the rules of the House do not usually give me, because I am not able to have an Adjournment debate on a matter of that type.

The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that I have read the local newspaper carefully and I found that the Labour party is extremely reticent about whether it wants Ipswich to be a unitary authority. I have detected no widespread feeling that Ipswich should be a unitary authority. It is not the same as Norwich. As a matter of fact, it is a smaller town, and it has a declining population. There are reasons to believe, therefore, that perhaps the same condition does not apply. However, I shall consider the points that the hon. Gentleman brings me, should he wish to.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the fact that the people of Swindon will be pleased and proud at the first opportunity ever to be wholly responsible for their affairs? However, will he and his hon. Friends continue to hold a watching brief on the relationship that will now begin to develop between the unitary authority in Swindon and the rest of Wiltshire, to ensure that there is a co-operative spirit between the two new sets of authorities?

Mr. Gummer: I shall do my best to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Secretary of State sweep away the hideous title, Greater Manchester council, restore the ancient Lancashire boundaries and put the city of Salford, the borough of Wigan and the borough of Bolton—all three standard authorities—back into the title of Lancashire?

Mr. Gummer: There will be boundary reviews of the mets when there is a big demand but, in the meantime, no.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The county of Rutland is, as it were, at the starting gate. If it can show itself to be a runner and a safe bet, my right hon. Friend will fire the starting gun. Does he accept that nothing could be fairer than that, and does he accept the gratitude of those who live there for the way in which he has handled that matter? Will he further confirm that the city of Leicester will not be allowed to continue to expand its boundaries?

Mr. Gummer: That is not a matter of boundary review at the moment. I cannot control whatever may happen in future, but at present it is a matter of deciding which areas should have unitary authorities, and I very much hope that Rutland will rise to the challenge.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Secretary of State referred three times, I think, in his statement to questions of history. Against that background, and given the fact that that opinion is supported by the Labour party, the Conservative party and the chamber of commerce, will he review his decision in respect of Chester and, if he is prepared to do that, the consequential effects elsewhere in Cheshire?

Mr. Gummer: I have looked at Cheshire generally and Chester specifically, and I do not think that Chester meets the requirements so that we could reasonably envisage it as a unitary authority. I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that, in terms of size and other matters, it would probably be better if it remained part of a two-tier system. I do not at the moment intend to review that opinion.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the great majority of people in Southend-on-Sea, including my family, will be delighted that the Secretary of State has decided to restore local government independence to Southend-on-Sea, will he seek, after that excellent decision, to advise his Cabinet colleagues that there is huge merit in avoiding the centralisation of decision

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

making, and that one cannot obtain more efficiency and better value other than by having decisions made locally and democratically?

Mr. Gummer: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The great advantage of subsidiarity is that one does at the lowest level that which is best done there. The other part of subsidiarity, however, means that one does at other levels where things can be done what can be done only there. I am happy to say that Britain takes that view. We do at Westminster what is best done here and we do at European Union level the things that otherwise we would not be able to do at all. That is why subsidiarity is such a sensible idea.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): My right hon. Friend has made it absolutely clear that he expects county councils to live up to the promises that they have given to him. His ministerial team will know that Dorset has been extremely forthcoming in saying that it would accept an external audit—tough auditing—of its functions and expenditure. Who will carry out that function? Will my right hon. Friend appoint someone with the authority to carry out that audit on a six-monthly basis to make certain that Dorset is making the right progress?

Mr. Gummer: The Audit Commission has that particular role. I shall certainly draw to its attention the point that my hon. Friend made. I should also mention to him another serious matter. The proposals that were made by county councils in regard to their intention to change their methods of operation will be codified and brought together. They promised to be more co-operative and to be more full of the spirit of subsidiarity, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor) rightly raised in the House. Those lists of promises will be passed on to every parish council and district council in each county area, so they will know precisely what has been promised. I hope that, perhaps after a year or so, we shall then be able to review whether those promises have been met.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, when he looks at the borders of the new unitary authority of Brighton and Hove, he should not expand them eastwards, as there is no desire among people in my constituency suddenly to find themselves within that unitary authority? When he reconsiders that boundary, in the light of his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), will he be able to give the reassurance that many people have requested, about funding of county council services once Brighton and Hove have been extracted from the county?

Mr. Gummer: I very much hope that we shall be able to see a sensible use of money in the remaining county once Brighton and Hove are removed from it. I also hope that Brighton and Hove will be able to run themselves effectively and efficiently, particularly if they make the political decisions that I suggested earlier. I believe that the people of Telscombe will be able to rest easy in their beds, because there is no intention to change the boundaries. I promised my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir. T. Sainsbury) that when the boundary commission considers boundaries—some boundaries need to be looked at—his question about the division of Shoreham harbour will be considered. That is all that I have promised and I certainly do not intend to look for any wholesale change.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Is my right hon. Friend aware that prima facie evidence exists to cast doubt upon the ability of Leicester city council to manage its affairs impartially in the interests not only of its own citizens but of those in the wider county of Leicestershire? Will my right hon. Friend do nothing to alter the present system of local government throughout the area currently run by Leicestershire county council until a full judicial inquiry has been held into the evidence to which I referred?

Mr. Gummer: One has to make such decisions irrespective of the activity or the action of a particular council in a particular town at any one time. Otherwise, one would have to say about a number of places that we are considering, that the efficiency of the council is such that one must question whether a particular group can be trusted. One must accept that it is necessary to try to look at matters impartially and not deal with the people who happen to be in charge at the time. If my hon. Friend feels that there are matters relating to Leicester city council that should be given a wider airing, he will have the time to present that evidence. I do not believe that the decisions that I have announced today will be formed in law for a little time, because we need to leave Rutland with the chance to discover how it will proceed.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be satisfaction and relief in Staffordshire as a result of his decision? However, will he clarify the position regarding elections next year? I understand that there will obviously have to be an election for the new county authority, but must elections be repeated next year in the areas where boundaries remain the same and where elections will be held this year?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The elections will be conducted exactly as one would expect; they will not be repeated. The only difference will be in Stoke, where a shadow authority will be elected.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Under the new arrangements, South Hams in Devon will be wedged between the unitary authority of Plymouth in the west and that of Torbay in the east—both of which have well-known territorial ambitions for expansion. When my right hon. Friend meets the Conservative leaders of South Hams district council tomorrow, will he consider seriously referring back to the commission the issue of unitary authority status for South Hams? In the recent referendum, more people voted in favour of making South Hams a unitary authority than voted in favour of unitary authorities in any other part of the country where referendums were held. Will he consider that matter very seriously?

Mr. Gummer: Of course I take the matter seriously. I acknowledge what my hon. Friend said; he has been assiduous in pressing the case on behalf of both South Hams district council and, as usual, his constituents. It is one of the smallest authorities in the country.

Mr. Steen: One of the best.

Mr. Gummer: Indeed, it is a very well-run authority. However, if we were undertaking reorganisation entirely on the basis of well-run authorities, we would not even consider the case of Norwich, for example. That is a different issue altogether.

With regard to my hon. Friend's district, I shall listen very carefully to the views of council leaders. However, I think that it is fair to say that, given the enormous strength of Devon county council, if it were better run—I have high hopes that that will happen very soon—it could assist South Hams in resisting territorial pressure from its neighbours. I do not wish to see it become another Danzig corridor.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Despite the fact that my right hon. Friend's decision will come as a disappointment to Salisbury district council, will he take it from me that we shall do our best to work with the new unitary authority? However, does he agree that it is not helpful to imply or to state that the reorganisation will mean no change for the rest of the county outside Swindon? When a third of the population is removed from any county, those who are left in the old county must face completely new challenges and perform new tasks.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. I apologise if I gave the impression that there is not a great deal of work to be done in counties whose composition has changed.

The reorganisation presents an opportunity to run the show much more effectively, efficiently and co-operatively than has occurred until now. For example, county social services departments must work more closely with district council housing authorities. Their operations can be conducted jointly. In my hon. Friend's case, I have looked very carefully at the points that the county council made in fighting for its cause and I shall expect it to carry them through to the letter and in the spirit that it suggested to both my hon. Friend's district council and the parish councils.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I believe that I speak also for my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), when I ask my right hon. Friend whether he is aware that the recreation of the historic counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire will be very welcome in Worcestershire. However, we are disappointed that my right hon. Friend has not gone one step further and implemented the original recommendations of the Local Government Commission for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire.

Mr. Gummer: Unfortunately, that was not the commission's final recommendation and I have limited powers as to what I may or may not modify. I have some real sympathy for my hon. Friend's point, but he must accept that I am restricted by the terms decided upon by the House. I have done my best within those restrictions.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend will know that there was a fierce argument in rural Dorset outside Bournemouth and Poole as to whether there should be one council or two. The county council said that it would be much more expensive to have two. My right hon. Friend has chosen the county's second option of establishing seven councils in that area. How much extra will my constituents have to pay for those councils, or will additional Government grants pay for them?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is discussing a county much of which is retaining the system that we have had up to now, although not the status quo, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) would remark. The change provides the opportunity for the Liberal-dominated county council to begin to run the council properly, and that will mean a good deal of change from its present activities. The county council can perfectly easily make it a cheaper alternative if it is prepared to ensure that the county council services are run in conjunction and in co-operation with the district councils concerned. I very much hope that my hon. Friend will look carefully at the promises that were made. We shall certainly do so, and perhaps together we can get even the Liberals to realise that efficiency provides money that can be used more effectively or that can reduce council tax bills. The difficulty for the Liberals in my hon. Friend's part of the world is that they promised everything and have suddenly discovered that they have to pay for it.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Is my right hon. Friend aware that eastern and East Sussex have a low tax base and will find it difficult to sustain two tiers of government? Is he considering any change to the standard spending assessment for Hastings and Rother, or will the council tax go up?

Mr. Gummer: I see no reason why either of those things should happen if local authorities improve their services. It will be necessary for officers to recognise that it is not a process of defending their particular empires, but one of ensuring that they are able to operate much more effectively in conjunction with the district councils, to provide better services at a lower price. My hon. Friend mentions another county council that has not had a good reputation in recent years and I shall be looking carefully to see that it provides services at the lowest possible price, with decent services provided for the people and not for the empire-building propensities of some departments.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the changes that were proposed in the original commission's document for Basildon, Brentwood and Rochford were extremely popular with people in my constituency? In view of his remarks today, will he assure them that Sir David Cooksey and possibly one of his ministerial colleagues will meet some of my constituents, so that they can explain the reasons for their decision, which were that my constituency is geographically contiguous with Rochford and Brentwood, but is separated from Basildon by a major roadway? They also face the possible prospect of being tied in with a new unitary authority, two councils in which are notorious for their high rates in the past.

Mr. Gummer: I can assure the hon. Lady that we shall of course make sure that every opportunity is given to her constituents and those in neighbouring authorities to put their points to Ministers and to the commission. As I hope she has been pleased to hear, I have already promised that those areas will be referred to the commission again. I hope that in the course of that, a solution will be found that will be beneficial to her constituents and those of her neighbours.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that while many in Chester and Cheshire will be relieved that the continuing uncertainty about the future of local government is coming an end, others in the unique city of Chester are dismayed that our district is not to be included in the review? Does he

[Mr. Gyles Brandreth]

understand their disappointment at not being able to press their case, and does he agree that it is incumbent on all those who continue in two-tier systems to make those two-tier systems work more effectively, to deliver better-quality services more cost-effectively and efficiently?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has honourably put forward the fact that in Chester and some parts of Cheshire, there have been significant differences of opinion on how best to proceed, but he must also be right that the purpose must now be to complete the review as rapidly as possible and to ensure that the authorities that are set up and those that remain carry forward the main purpose, which is to provide the best possible services at the most cost-effective price.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): My right hon. Friend read a list of fine historic former county boroughs, but omitted one of the finest—Southport, which as a result of a little local difficulty in 1974 was swallowed up by the metropolitan area of Merseyside. My right hon. Friend and his Ministers have been particularly helpful to me and to my constituents. In the light of his statement, I ask him to give me one further assurance this afternoon. When the Local Government Commission reviews the shire counties, will it take the opportunity to examine metropolitan areas where a strong desire has been expressed for change, so that my constituents can put their case to the commission and that once and for all, we can get out of Merseyside and back into Lancashire—where my constituency rightly belongs?

Hon. Members: Greater Bootle.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend will have noted that there were cries of "Greater Bootle" from Opposition Members. Perhaps my hon. Friend will make sure that his constituents recognise that in him, they have the only real bulwark against such a concept. I cannot widen my promise as he wishes, but I repeat my earlier promise to him that when the review is complete, Southport will be the first authority to be examined by the commission, so that the clear indications that he and his constituents have given may be given due weight in establishing whether Southport ought to be differently governed in future.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): While I cautiously welcome confirmation of the status quo for Worcestershire, how does my right hon. Friend propose to ensure that the new Worcestershire county council, in working closely—one hopes—with district councils, slims down its operations consistent with its lessened responsibilities under the reorganisation?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend knows that SSAs will be reworked according to the new characteristics. We shall monitor the activities of county councils and measure them against their own promises. We shall seek to ensure that we get the best value for money, and I shall endeavour to encourage the professional organisations to recognise that it is not a satisfactory way of maintaining particular old forms, not only to insist on empire growing, but not to empire prune. In my view, there is a great need among county councils to reassess the traditional structure, to ascertain whether there are ways of improving it now that county councils are obviously meant to be enabling authorities—rather than constantly seeing themselves as doing authorities. A distinction must be drawn between policing and providing services in many areas, which county councils often forget.

Point of Order

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on the way in which the House deals with Scottish legislation. You may be aware that the Leader of the Opposition said on Sunday:

> "All Bills that affect Scotland now, I mean a lot of people don't actually know this, go through a Scottish Grand Committee. There's a separate procedure altogether for it."

Am I right in thinking that the right hon. Gentleman is completely and utterly wrong and showed amazing ignorance of how the House deals with Scottish legislation?

Madam Speaker: Some Bills go to one Committee, others to another Committee. If the hon. Gentleman would like to come to see me, I shall explain the situation to him.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Safety)

4.32 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to specify more stringent safety standards for heavy goods vehicles and to increase the penalties for failure to comply with those standards.

There are 400,000 lorries in this country, and the Department of Transport says that, over 10 years, 17 per cent. of those lorries have been involved in fatal crashes. In 1993, 681 out of 5,935 fatalities—more than 10 per cent—involved lorries. It is important to understand that there is a real problem throughout the United Kingdom.

I want to ensure the safety of heavy goods vehicles by asking for increased staffing in traffic area offices, in the Vehicle Inspectorate, and in the police traffic divisions responsible for much of the enforcement. I want to impose a maximum of 11 hours on each driver, with a statutory rest period of 30 minutes in every three hours worked. It is important to set up a register of HGV driver training schools, and to have a nationally approved course for lorry mechanics. I should like also to widen the procedures for appeal to the traffic commissioners, so that we may include the rights of bereaved families to appeal against the decisions of the traffic commissioner.

The reason for all this is very simple. In December 1993, near Mold, Jane Gregory was killed when a lorry crushed her car on the Queensferry bridge. The lorry plunged off the bridge into the river, where the 26-year-old lorry driver was drowned. An inquest was told that the driver had not taken his rest breaks; and over the previous 10 days, from Northern Ireland to France and back to the United Kingdom, he had gone without his weekly rest periods, and on two occasions had gone without the minimum daily rest period. For one period there were no records at all, and the accident investigator, PC Gareth Owen, said that the high visibility at the time meant that the lorry driver should have been able to avoid crashing into the car.

In July 1993, four nurses died in their car in a tragedy on the M50, when a lorry tried to jump a queue of traffic by switching lanes, and ran over their Ford Fiesta. A passenger in another car was also killed. The lorry driver was jailed for 15 months, but Hereford Crown court heard that he was running late on the day of the tragedy because he had overslept.

University lecturer Susan Williams was crushed to death when a lorry with defective brakes and steering and other dangerous parts careered out of control down a hill, toppled on to her car and crushed her to death. The company involved, H G Pheasey and Son of Bakewell, which operates three lorries, was found guilty in September, in the magistrates court, on several counts of failing to maintain the lorry and comply with the tachograph rules. Mr. Pheasey was fined £2,300, most of it payable in £20 instalments. Despite previous convictions for mechanical defects and for one of his vehicles being found unroadworthy, he was allowed by the traffic commissioner to stay in business.

I have not yet mentioned the appalling case of Sowerby Bridge where six people were killed by a lorry with defective brakes. So we do not even have to think about the need for changes of the kind that I suggest: we know that it exists.

I must make it clear that I do not assume that all road haulage firms run vehicles that are substandard or dangerous; but there are certainly a large number of vehicles on the road which constitute a considerable danger to their drivers and to anyone who should have the misfortune to cross their path.

The Department of Transport, through the Transport Research Laboratory, did some work in 1988 and 1990 and decided that 7 per cent. of lorries had mechanical defects. It also stated that one in six of the lorry drivers involved in accidents was partly to blame, and that 2 per cent. of the accidents were due to insecure loads.

There have been repeated calls both from the traffic commissioners and from the industry—and often from police forces and various arms of the Department of Transport—for changes in the law. It is clear that greater punishment should be imposed, and that there should be far more frequent checks on substandard vehicles. It is even clearer that those who do this work must be fully trained and must have behind them suitable back-up services to ensure that they can find out what really is going on with heavy goods vehicles.

The reality, however, is that the Government, while paying lip service to such changes, are moving smartly in the opposite direction. Far from increasing fines, they are making it clear that they will not carry out the same checks in future. Ministers will deny that. They will say that although it is true that they are asking for a 20 per cent. cut across the Vehicle Inspectorate, including front-line services, that that will not in any way impair the ability of the Ministry to check adequately on road transport. I am afraid that no one will believe any such assertion.

Ministers will say that it is their intention to encourage the road haulage vehicle industry to produce higher quality. But they must know that, sadly, because of the competitiveness and the number of small firms that are running close to the uneconomic edge, there will be constant pressure on road haulage firms to seek to undercut one another. That will inevitably mean more pressure on drivers to drive for longer hours. There will be more cutting of corners and far less support for the responsible firms who seek in every way to run proper businesses in a responsible and intelligent manner.

There are a number of things for which the House should be asking. We should be asking the Ministry to liaise closely with the Home Office, to ensure that traffic divisions of the police forces, many of which are staffed by people who have specialised knowledge, are not run down throughout the United Kingdom. The Ministry should insist that police officers are available to carry out more spot checks, preferably six-monthly. It should insist above all that there should be no cuts in the front-line services of the Vehicle Inspectorate. The Ministry should be giving greater powers to traffic commissioners to insist on a rapid hearing of cases where fatalities or bad injuries have been involved, to take action against many of the firms concerned. I believe that the traffic commissioners are not only aware of the position, but have called increasingly for action to be taken and would welcome the support of the Ministry to ensure that that happens.

There are many simple changes for which the Ministry should be asking and which it should bring to the House to put on the statute book. In Japan, it is possible, because of a series of lights that are fixed to the front of any heavy goods vehicle, for anyone to tell the speed at which the

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

vehicle is travelling. Three sets of automatic lights give the onlooker a clear indication of the running speed of the vehicle. One light is illuminated if the vehicle is running at 40 kph or less; two if the vehicle is running between 40 kph and 60 kph; and three if the vehicle is travelling at more than 60 kph, which is the legitimate rate for vehicles in Japan. The speed indication lamps are quite clear—

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Norman Hogg, Ms Joan Walley, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, Mrs. Alice Mahon and Sir Donald Thompson.

HEAVY GOODS VEHICLES (SAFETY)

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody accordingly presented a Bill to specify more stringent safety standards for heavy goods vehicles and to increase the penalties for failure to comply with those standards: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 July and to be printed. [Bill 84.]

Agricultural Prices

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I have to announce that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the official Opposition and that there is a 10-minute restriction on speeches between the hours of 7 pm and 9 pm.

4.44 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5097/95, relating to agricultural prices for 1995-96 and related measures; congratulates the Government on its robust negotiating stance on the Common Agricultural Policy since 1979, its leading role in achieving reform of the CAP, its continuing pressure for further radical reform and its determination to ensure that EU agricultural spending is effectively restrained; welcomes the Government's key role in the negotiations which secured an effective agreement on agriculture in the GATT Uruguay Round; endorses the Government's drive to spearhead urgent and continuing efforts to combat fraud and illegal state aids throughout the EU; notes that UK farm incomes rose by 6.9 per cent. over the last year and that Government spending on hill livestock compensatory amounts and agricultural research and development has been maintained; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate an outcome on the 1995-96 price proposals which takes account of the interests of the United Kingdom, producers, consumers and taxpayers alike.

The debate has come over the years to have two separate but equally valid functions. First, the House has before it the latest proposals for the annual price fixing in the European Community, so that it can advise the Minister of its views before he or she goes to Brussels to negotiate. Secondly, the occasion fulfils the need for an annual general debate on agriculture, and gives the Minister the chance to give an account of what has happened in the past 12 months or so in this important industry. Any such report and statement of policy must inevitably deal with European agricultural policy issues wider than just the price fixing, since so much of agricultural policy is determined by the common agricultural policy, and so many of the improvements that we want involve changes to the CAP.

It is logical, then, to start by restating what we would like for British agriculture, British consumers and the British food and drink industry, and by setting out what we have been doing to enable those objectives to be met, both domestically and in Brussels.

Briefly, we believe that British farmers could do an even better job for our consumers and for the food and drink industry, which uses their raw materials, if they could compete more freely in a world in which there were fewer subsidies, fewer constraints on production and trade and more freedom for enterprise and efficiency to be rewarded. That means that we need a radical change in attitudes to agricultural trade, not just in Europe but in the United States, Japan and in many other countries, too. We want freer trade, the dismantlement of state aids and subsidies for production, and the ending of quantitative controls over farmers—set-asides, quotas and the rest—not just here but around the world.

We know perfectly well that that cannot be achieved overnight, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) rightly told the *Financial Times* today, and that unilateral gestures, even when they are available, do little good if they just disadvantage our people. We believe that clarity about where we are going and in what time scale is vital if damage and disruption are to be avoided to an industry that has been led in a different direction since Labour's Agriculture Act 1947.

We also believe that there must be a growing recognition of the importance of the environmental role of farmers, and proper incentives for them in this field. We should recognise that good stewardship of the land is a valid output of our farming industry, which no one else can deliver, and that, in some cases at least, they should be paid for it.

It is these objectives, domestic, European and worldwide, that have formed our policy since 1979. In 1979, we inherited a CAP with few constraints on expenditure or on its potential to create food surpluses. Since then, very important steps have been taken to begin to get the situation under control. The super-tanker has begun to respond, very slowly, to a change in course.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Notwithstanding what the right hon. Gentleman has just said, is not it a fact that we are now spending more money on the CAP than we were in 1979? To what extent does he believe that the absurdities of the CAP are undermining the whole concept of the European Union?

Mr. Waldegrave: If the hon. Gentleman waits just a moment, I shall give him some figures that might give him some pause, but I agree that sorting out agricultural policy, which must be sorted out, will do more to restore sensible support for the European Community than almost anything else.

Here are some figures. It is pretty useless nowadays, I have to say, to challenge the Labour party on its record in government. It is such a long time ago that half the population was not born when the Labour party were in government. I have woken up the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, and that may be a good thing, but it may not be entirely to his advantage.

There are some exceptions. Most of the people who brought this country to a halt in 1979 are safely grazing in lush pastures down the Corridor, in another place, mooing and lowing gently, weighed down with honours. However, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has not been allowed to escape. He was there throughout the period from 1974 to 1979 in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He has been kept in his crate and there he remains to this day.

I shall not bore the House with too many figures. I have just three sets. Between 1974 and 1979 expenditure from the CAP budget—this is the point in which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was interested—in real terms increased by 61 per cent. or, on average, by 10 per cent. a year. From 1979 to 1994, expenditure from the same budget has increased in real terms by 38 per cent., or 2.2 per cent. a year. But far more to the point, from 1988 to 1994, expenditure has hardly increased at all—by 1 per cent. or virtually nothing in average terms each year. That represents a huge shift in policy terms. The ship is starting to change its direction.

It may be tempting for the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, hearing those figures, to defend his record by attempting one of those somersaults that have been a feature of Labour policy recently. Perhaps when he was arguing for all those subsidies all that time ago he was working for the farmers; he was the farmers' man. Unfortunately, that argument does not work. Total income from farming in real terms fell between 1974 and 1979 by 32 per cent.—an average drop of 7.5 per cent. per annum. Since 1979, total income from farming has gone up by 10 per cent. In fact, since 1988, it has gone up by 21 per cent.

Most remarkable of all—I know that the House does not care for figures, so I simply give this third set—is the statistics on food prices. Between 1974 and 1979, food prices went up by 4 per cent. in real terms. That is, they went up that much faster than general inflation. In contrast, between 1979 and 1994, food prices have fallen by 20 per cent. in real terms. To put it another way, since we have been in power, food has become one fifth cheaper relative to other goods.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Has not the right hon. Gentleman missed out some of the most important facts in his biased view of history? Is it not true that between 1973-74 when we joined, and 1979, we were in the transitional period of the CAP, so food prices of course went up, as did expenditure? Did not the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) take people into the Common Market without telling them clearly that we would lose control of our own agriculture, our own agricultural prices and the use of our own soil?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman unwittingly makes my point for me. The Labour party, of which he was a loyal and redoubtable supporter—

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Distinguished.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is correct. The Labour party took the agricultural policy and did nothing whatever about it. Through those years there were no controls on overall budget or on the growth of stockpiles and food mountains. Now, we sometimes have to listen to lessons from Opposition Members about how they would change it all overnight. They did nothing about it whatever.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I hope that in reviewing agricultural prices my right hon. Friend will refer to the system of quotas and area payments, which is another way of considerably benefiting the farmer. My right hon. Friend will certainly know, but the House may not know, that the milk quota is now worth something approaching £2,000 for each cow in milk, that even sheep quota is valuable, and that area payments for arable farmers are now running at about £105 an acre. Those are all ways in which the distortions of the CAP indirectly benefit the farmer to the disadvantage of the taxpayer.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am in some difficulty because my hon. Friend is making somewhat eloquently a later section of my speech. He is entirely right. We must get rid of such distortions. The best of our farmers would far rather be allowed to compete in a world market without those constraints, even if it were in exchange for lower prices.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Waldegrave: Many of my hon. Friends are rising, but I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) was the first.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): My right hon. Friend began his excellent speech with the assertion that we needed radical reform, which he defined in terms

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

of abolishing state aid and protectionism. Is not that an argument not so much for reforming the CAP but for its abolition?

Mr. Waldegrave: No. I shall explain why in a moment. I should proceed because so many of these excellent points fit well with the structure of what I am about to say. However, I cannot resist my hon. Friends the Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell).

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. Friend was comparing the records of the previous Labour Government and this Government, but he omitted one crucial fact. To suggest that food prices rose by 4 per cent. in real terms between 1974 and 1979 obscures the huge rate of inflation during that period. Food prices in the shops rocketed then, as every housewife knows.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is true. There was no supply side policy; it was a policy of cartels and incompetence in the management of the economy in general which led to that situation.

Sir Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): My right hon. Friend has given us some interesting figures going back to 1974. However, would not he be able to prove his point even better if he went back to 1960, when we were spending 1 per cent. of GDP supporting agriculture, since when it has fallen. Only one quarter of 1 per cent. was spent on total support for agriculture in 1988 and even now it is less than half of 1 per cent. from both the EC and in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We should remember that the concept of agricultural support was not invented with the CAP. We have had agricultural support in Britain since the beginning of the second world war. It was formulated in the Agriculture Act 1947. It is worth reminding people that we should compare the costs of that deficiency payment system with the current system if we are comparing the overall cost of things. My hon. Friend makes a fair point.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East) *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: I give way finally to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Strang: I have a genuine inquiry. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's latter point. However, I cannot understand the figures that he quoted earlier in relation to the costs of the CAP. I mention in passing, and I shall repeat it later, that CAP spending in Britain in real terms has increased by more than 180 per cent. since 1979. I do not want to make great deal of that now, but I cannot understand why he is talking about no increase or an increase of 1 per cent. when, as he knows, the effect of the MacSharry changes was hugely to increase much of the expenditure—all the expenditure on set aside and the arable payments. The right hon. Gentleman's figure is inexplicable, unless he is referring to agriculture as a proportion of the total European Union budget, which I do not think that he is. That is quite a different figure. Other sums are going up there as well.

Mr. Waldegrave: If I may make one digression, I am reminded of the famous story of an American professor who said to Professor Durac that he did not understand the connection between x and y in a particular equation that Durac had written on the board and Durac continued with his lecture, thinking that that was a statement of fact which required no answer. The point is that expenditure went down in 1994. The figures are correct. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's figures go up to only 1992 or 1993. If he looks at the latest figures which are all published—

Dr. Strang *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: This is unprofitable. The figures are in the Library. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the figures that I have given are correct.

On the other hand, since 1979, and more particularly since 1988, the figures reflect the beginning of a huge shift in the cost and direction of the CAP in which no one, either here or in Europe, would deny for one moment that Britain has been the prime mover. As a result of our efforts, the monster has stopped moving. Now we must start a radical programme of slimming.

The change has not been caused only by the valiant battles of my predecessors as Ministers in the Agriculture Council. A turning point was the imposition of overall control on agricultural spending in 1988, an achievement led by Lady Thatcher. The agricultural guideline ensures that agriculture expenditure will fall progressively as a proportion of the European Union total. It cannot be breached except by unanimity, and we will not sanction such a breach.

Mr. Budgen: The proposal relating to the overall proportion sounded very good at the time, but considerable additional expenditure on other items—particularly the regional and social fund—was then envisaged: as long as the other expenditure rose nicely, it was inevitable that agriculture expenditure would decline as a proportion of the total.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is true—and expenditure that is declining as a proportion is not the end that I want to achieve. Let me use my analogy of the big ship changing direction: this ship is changing direction. Before, agriculture was driving the budget up; that is no longer the case. We have much more to do, however. I am not arguing with my hon. Friend about that.

Incidentally, the pledge that I have just given—that we will not allow the guideline to be breached—is not one that the Leader of the Opposition could give. That would imply that he was vetoing a European Community measure; that he was alone—and he keeps saying that he will not be isolated in the Community. That strikes me as a weakening of the negotiating position that is essential to this issue and many others.

The second watershed was the inclusion of agriculture in the general agreement on tariffs and trade for the first time in the Uruguay round. Britain was a leader in what was originally a minority group in calling for that. If it had not been achieved, we would not have secured the 1992 reforms of the common agricultural policy—which are now being phased in over three years, of which this is the last. Those reforms were driven by the need for European agriculture not to bring the GATT round to a halt.

I am far from saying that the mechanisms used in the 1992 reforms were wholly right; they were not. We wanted the price cuts to hold back over-production, but not the quotas or the bureaucracy. But—and it is a big but—those reforms started a process that has helped radically to reduce stockpiles, has reduced the consumer cost of the CAP by about £8 billion—with £1 billion of that gain coming to the United Kingdom—and has, via the so-called peace clause, prevented the EU from increasing support for commodities above the 1992 level in the future.

My party currently seems to be very self-denying in terms of claiming credit for its achievements. I do not believe that without our commitment to controlling public spending we would have got the guideline; nor do I believe that without our commitment to free trade we would necessarily have got agriculture into the Uruguay round, or secured the right outcome from the round itself. Those are our Government's achievements, and we should be proud of them.

As I said earlier, however, this is only the start. I am not asking the House to endorse the CAP today—far from it—but I ask hon. Members to recognise and support our objectives for reform and the success that we have achieved so far in a battle that will move into a crucial phase during the next few years, with a new GATT round in 1999 and the proposed entry of the central and eastern European countries.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I would like also to be able to congratulate the Government on what they have achieved, but it does seem rather difficult to do that at a time when our farmers must take more of their land out of production than farmers in any other European country, and our farmers must pour their milk down the drain while our milk manufacturing facilities are having to close.

Our farmers seem to have to put up with much more bureaucracy. The IACS form is an example. Under the integrated administration and control system, 24 separate documents could have to be filled in in Britain; nothing like that happens in Spain, Portugal, Greece or Italy. Why do our farmers get the wrong end of the stick every time, whereas all the other European farmers seem to get away with murder?

Mr. Waldegrave: The answer to that is that they do not. No one compels any British farmer to set aside any land, but if a British farmer wants to accept large subsidies for arable production, he must do so.

Quotas are a different matter. It is quite wrong for us to be controlling what is still over-production of milk in the European Community by means of quotas; we should be controlling it by means of lower prices. It should not be thought, however, that when that comes—as it must and will—it will be wholly welcome to dairy farmers. Dairy farming is the sector of British farming that is most profitable in terms of pennies per hectare.

I believe that the policy that I am presenting is supported by forward-looking farmers. Indeed, it is supported by the National Farmers Union, which knows what must be done in the long term. My hon. Friend must be a bit careful when seeking a cheer from British farmers: they are familiar with the other side of the coin.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the effect on our farmers would be devastating if we did not secure reform of the CAP before the entry of the central and eastern European countries, to which he referred? Given their huge areas, they will be appallingly difficult competitors if we do not get it right in time.

Mr. Waldegrave: As so often, my hon. Friend has made exactly the right point. Indeed, I was about to deal with it.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that I had better proceed with my speech. Perhaps I shall cover the point that my hon. Friend was about to make.

Our next objective must be to use the time that we have before those central and eastern European countries are ready to join to ratchet down the cost further, to make the policy one that will be affordable after they have joined. That was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). It is not so much pressure from the financial guideline as currently drawn that will help us in that regard; our first calculations show that the entry of at least the so-called Visegrad Four countries could probably be financed within the guideline on present, post-MacSharry policies. However, there would none the less be a large increase in cost. Moreover, the extra money "affordable" within the guideline would be completely wasted because it could not be used, under the GATT, to do anything other than destroy or permanently store the increased production that an unreformed CAP would produce in the central European countries. It could not be used for subsidised exports, for example.

I believe that the House, and all sane people, would regard such an outcome as absurd and unacceptable. It would be far better to return the money to the taxpayers, and to set prices at a level that avoids over-production in the first place. We must sort out the problem before those countries join. That means steadily lower prices, which in turn will mean dismantling—over time, and with due warning—the superstructure of controls and quotas that MacSharry introduced to restrain production at a time when the Community would not accept the alternative of greater price cuts. I can agree with one phrase in the Liberal party's amendment, among a number with which I disagreed. There must be due warning, so that the industry has time to adjust.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I ask the Minister to depart from his speech for a moment, and take us for a canter around Europe? Could we consider what will be the reaction of other European countries such as Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Spain to the radical proposals that the Minister is presenting?

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot resist the hon. Gentleman, as is often the case. I believe that in the next stage, according to the laws of arithmetic, the result of the interaction of the GATT with the CAP and budgetary concerns will demonstrate to other countries that the change is now unavoidable. After all, the same thing happened when both the last two changes to the CAP were made: external pressure on the Agriculture Council led to change.

The other countries that will respond fall into two groups. The group that does not want the change argues that we should postpone all action until after the entry of

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the Visegrad Four—have transition periods, hope for the best, all that kind of thing. Another growing group that firmly includes Sweden, Holland and Denmark, alongside us—interestingly, there is increasing support in France—holds that European agriculture is efficient enough to live much nearer to the world markets, and that we will head for a cliff edge if we do not act in time. That would be far more destructive to farming, and far more damaging to those who work in the industry. Although I would be wrong to claim that there is a majority in favour of my proposals, there is a significantly influential minority, represented in the Commission and among serious academics who, after some time lag, influence policy in Europe. The battle is not lost, but the battle would not have a chance of being won if it were not for the external constraints driven by GATT and the entry of the other countries.

The next stage will deliver lower prices in return for restored freedoms. But I must urge the House to believe that the slogan "repatriate the CAP"—I return to a point to which several hon. Members have referred—will not help us to get the outcome that we need. We cannot accept British farmers having to face subsidies for production elsewhere in Europe or, indeed, America, which they do not get at home, with free trade dismantling any protection for their goods. That is why we need a continuing CAP, with more not less rigorous action to rule out illegal state aids; a CAP which matches the single market with a single, simpler, cheaper, regime of support, which is, incidentally, increasingly focused not on production aids but on environmental gains.

We do not want repatriation of agricultural subsidies any more than any other kind of subsidies. We want fewer subsidies. We want our industry, which is one of the most efficient in the world, to be able to compete fairly and win prosperity from its own efficiency in the single market which we, after all, fought so hard to create.

In the meantime, as we prepare for the next forward moves, we are in a period in which the consequences of the previous changes are still working through, which makes the Commission's proposals this year fairly uninteresting. They involve very little change over and above those which result automatically from the 1992 reform. They include some welcome small steps further in the right direction, but the Commission should have gone further to reduce support prices across the board. It has missed an opportunity to signal to farmers and growers the intention to continue along the path set by the 1992 reform, as continue it must.

The main proposals affecting British farmers concern milk, sugar and cereals. In the milk sector, the Commission has proposed a 2 per cent. cut in the intervention price for butter, but no cut in quotas. That is welcome so far as it goes. The United Kingdom is only 85 per cent. self-sufficient in milk, so our producers and dairy industry would suffer disproportionately from any quota cut. I have urged the Council to adopt a larger cut in the butter intervention price so as to relieve pressure for quota cuts in the future.

I am also pressing for provision for the milk quota to be leased across member state boundaries. I regret that that suggestion has not commanded widespread support, but I shall stick to it. I shall nevertheless continue to press for measures to relieve the particular difficulties which our shortage of milk quota poses. That will be especially important if the Commission's report on the implementation of milk quotas in Italy and Greece, which is expected shortly, recommends that the quota increases granted to those countries in 1993 and 1994 should be repeated for 1995 and subsequent years.

For cereals, the Commission is proposing to reduce by two months the period during which intervention is open, as well as to cut the monthly increments in the intervention price in response to reduced storage and interest costs. I welcome those measures to reduce the role of intervention and encourage farmers to rely more on market price signals.

The Commission's failure to propose cuts to sugar support prices, which are indefensibly high, is particularly disappointing. I nevertheless welcome the proposal to reduce the level of storage refunds in response to falling interest rates across the Community. We shall seek to get the best deal from this unsatisfactory proposal on quotas for our producers, who are not, after all, the cause of the surplus which the Commission rightly wants to cut.

No change has been proposed in the levels of beef support beyond those determined in the reform, nor in the level of the sheepmeat basic price. I shall be pressing for changes to both those complicated regimes to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. Expenditure on the beef special premium is controlled by overall national quotas, known as regional ceilings. Yet there is also a 90-head limit on claims under the scheme.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would far more satisfactory from everybody's point of view and would certainly encourage a better quality of beef if all the support was given to the suckler herd instead of being spread across all beef production, which includes those dreadful beef—no, they are not beef animals—those dreadful Holstein animals?

Mr. Waldegrave: For a moment I thought that my hon. Friend was getting at the dairy industry and farmers. I know that he speaks with great knowledge. I am not sure that he would be universally supported by the agricultural industry, but he makes the serious point that if a great deal more Holstein-derived beef came on to the market for other reasons, we might see a fall in the beef premium for the specialist beef producers, which would be very unfair.

As I was saying, we do not need the 90-head limit. It imposes a considerable extra burden. We would much rather get rid of the individual quotas on sheep annual premium and suckler cow premium and replace them with regional ceilings, as apply in the beef special premium scheme to which my hon. Friend referred. Such a scheme, which would need to be signalled well in advance to give farmers time to adjust, would remove a significant bureaucratic burden from the industry.

In most other sectors, the Commission has proposed no change in the support prices. As I have said, I think that that is a lost opportunity. It has, however, proposed a cut in the basic pig meat price to bring it slightly closer to market reality, which is welcome.

Meanwhile, however, there is a different area of action to open up: the area of fraud and enforcement of the rules. We have been at the forefront of pushing the Community towards a much more rigorous approach to the control of fraud. That matters, of course, not only in relation to the CAP, but the CAP is particularly vulnerable and still accounts for over half of Community spending.

It was, of course, the British who saw to it that the role of the European Court of Auditors was strengthened and ensured that its reports and recommendations should be properly considered in Brussels. In our previous presidency, we pushed through the integrated administration and control system, which although neither my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) nor anybody else would claim is other than unpopular, is an essential part of ensuring that we can secure fair controls right across Europe. If we did not have such a detailed scheme, there would be nothing for us to press to enforce. I shall be able to give my hon. Friend some examples of where, because that system is in place, the rules are being enforced right across the Community. I do not know how we could do that without such an underpinning structure.

The 1992 reform helped to reduce one kind of fraud at least, by reducing the role of export refunds and intervention, which have shown themselves to be targets for fraudsters. I very much hope that the Council will soon adopt a new proposal—sometimes known as the "blacklist" proposal—which will further tighten controls in that area. We must vigorously sustain the fight against fraud. I particularly welcome Commission initiatives which introduce tough penalties for those who, it has been proved, have benefited from aid to which they are not entitled.

We have also been pressing the Commission to use to the full its powers to disallow—not to reimburse from the Community budget expenditure improperly incurred by member states. As a result, the Commission disallowed a total of 1.5 billion ecu, about £1.2 billion for 1991, which is the last year for which decisions have been taken. That represented about 5 per cent. of CAP expenditure.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that technology is extremely important in combating CAP fraud? I congratulate him on the press conference, which he held in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry, at the British National Space centre on 17 January, where it was announced that the spot satellite was to be used for the first time on earth observation and remote sensing, which will help us to combat fraud throughout the European Union.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend, who is extremely knowledgable about this subject, is entirely right. The results of some of the early remote sensing satellite pictures in some of the southern countries of Europe have been very interesting and much acreage has turned out not to exist. Such a system will turn out to be a very useful weapon in reconciling people's claims with reality.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Some of the remote sensing has to be used with a little care. For example, if one is trying to deal with the output of olive oil, one must know that an irrigated olive tree produces between 10 and 100 times as much oil as a tree which is not irrigated. So one must be a little careful in trying to combat fraud in the production of olive oil.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. The use of remote sensing will be most powerful in measuring hectareage, which is mainly linked to cereal production, and in areas where a farmer is claiming subsidies per hectare.

That is a powerful tool that the Commission has for obliging member states to put in place effective controls against fraud. I shall give the House some examples. Greece has been disallowed about £45 million for having inadequate controls on cotton expenditure. Substantial penalties will be applied to Italy and Greece in respect of grain frauds that have been uncovered. Those actions by the Commission—which I wholeheartedly support—send a clear warning to member states that poor controls will be heavily penalised.

Our record in the United Kingdom is good, but we too must ensure that our own controls are effective. There has been some publicity recently about off-contract deliveries of milk designed to avoid attracting super-levy. Although the so-called "black milk" problem is considered to be relatively small, I have instructed the intervention board to ensure that its anti-fraud unit actively investigates any information that it receives. If regulatory offences have been committed those involved will be prosecuted, and will also face a much higher levy bill as a consequence.

Part of the disallowance that I mentioned relates to the past failure by Italy, Spain and Greece to implement milk quotas, and the United Kingdom's action in the European Court resulted in a 50 per cent. increase in the disallowance originally proposed by the Commission. People have criticised my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer over the deal, but I believe that they are wrong.

Let me remind the House of the facts. We had taken European Court cases against the Commission's original decisions—decisions that would have led to a total disallowance of about £1.6 billion over five years. We thought that far too low. Despite our requests, not one other member state joined us in bringing the case.

There was, of course, no certainty about the outcome of the case; few litigants can ever expect that. Italy and Spain had counter-claimed, taking their own cases to the European Court and claiming that the disallowances imposed by the Commission were too severe. In any event the case would not have come to a conclusion for a considerable time.

In those circumstances the "out of court" settlement amounting to a total disallowance of £2.5 billion—about £1.2 billion more than the countries concerned received under the milk regime during the same period—was a good outcome. The deal also established the vital principle that the Commission could act only in accordance with the regulations adopted by the Council, and establishing that had been a major objective of the court proceeding.

Mr. Budgen: My right hon. Friend will agree that it was disgraceful that three of the countries in the European Union were found to have made no attempt whatever to impose the agreed milk quotas. Will he now tell us whether, after all the Chancellor of the Exchequer's generosity on behalf of the British taxpayer, those three countries have now set up a proper system for reducing milk production, as they agreed to do?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is unfair, for once, in that he says that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was

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generous in that business. As a lawyer who has practised for many years, he would have advised his client to accept such a deal, because it was a good one.

Mr. Budgen: What has happened now?

Mr. Waldegrave: On my hon. Friend's second point, the Commission must now come to the Council. It has not yet put the proposals before the Council, although I believe that they will be put before us at any moment. The Commission will have to convince the other members and myself that the proper arrangements are in place. I suspect that there will be a difference between the three countries, and that Spain will be better prepared than the others.

Mr. Budgen: How long will all that go on for?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend must restrain himself. The proposals will be before the Council in time for the proper decisions to be made, and we shall consider them. I shall certainly bear in mind the need to convince my hon. Friend and other Members of the House that we have taken the right decision.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: I must press on. Other hon. Members will be able to make speeches in due course.

It is essential that we press the Commission to fulfil its responsibilities to ensure that each and every member state obeys Community rules. As a result of our efforts the Commission declared illegal state aids by the French and Irish Governments—"Stabiporc" pigs aid in France, and the market development fund aid to mushroom growers in Ireland—and required that they be repaid. I shall let the House know of one or two other anti-fraud cases now in hand.

In one case "high-quality" beef was exported, with high export refunds, from two member states to the United States. The consignment passed customs but was never delivered, because the United States food health authorities declared part of the consignment unhygienic. It was then purchased at a very low price by an associate of the exporters and sent with false health certificates to two other member states as offal, with minimal import duty. After passing through a fifth member state, it was then exported to Africa as high-quality beef, once more with high export refunds. The organisation of the fraud involved companies in four of the member states through which the consignment passed.

Secondly, consignments of butter, sugar and milk powder en route from the Czech Republic to Morocco and Algeria via Spain, with Czech transit documents, were cleared as having reached the Spanish quayside for export, using a fake Spanish customs stamp. In fact they had been sold in various places inside the Community, avoiding import duty of about 20 mecu.

Thirdly, in September 1994 the Commission identified serious irregularities in the compensation paid to hill farmers in Corsica. All payments to Corsica under the heading involved have been suspended while the Commission and the French authorities make further inquiries.

Fourthly, a mission to Italy the same month revealed a fraud worth 2 mecu concerning fruit and vegetable processing enterprises and Community funds. Legal proceedings have been opened in Rome. I give those examples, which are merely the latest, to show that at long last the battle against fraud is beginning to make some real headway.

Mr. Gill: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that I had better press on, because I am almost at the end of my speech.

At the beginning of my speech I promised to report on the other main agriculture policy events of the year, but I fear that I must do so very briefly.

On farm incomes, as I said earlier, the news remains good. The latest 6.9 per cent. rise in total income from farming came on top of substantial rises in the previous two years.

Deregulation of the milk industry last autumn has opened up an over-regulated market to real competition. The same is happening with agricultural tenancies, and the Agricultural Tenancies Bill is currently before the House, to the delight of all parties in the industry—almost the only carping voice comes from the Labour party. As for the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales, I concluded that we should heed the advice that we received from most people in the industry and keep it. In the latest public expenditure round—a very tough one—we protected research and made no further cut in hill livestock compensatory allowances.

We have secured a 3 per cent. cut in set-aside, while our long-running campaign to ensure that land put into forestry and agri-environmental schemes can count towards set-aside has at last reached the point where firm proposals are on the table. We have widened yet again the range of our domestic agri-environmental schemes, with six new environmentally sensitive areas, a new habitat scheme and a new countryside access scheme. Total expenditure on those schemes will rise to about £100 million by 1996-97. We have also begun the consultation with the Secretary of State for the Environment that will lead to a new White Paper on the rural economy later this year.

We have, of course, faced the difficult and emotive issue of live animal transport, which we have debated several times in the House recently and may debate again soon. Work to secure a proper outcome, with the abolition of veal crates and tougher rules on transportation, continues.

It is always rash to say to a farmer that things are going well. When my father was a junior Minister in the Department that I now represent, he had on his desk a cartoon of two farmers leaning on a gate with a sheet of water in front of them. One farmer was saying to the other, "If the floods recede as fast as this we're going to have a very nasty drought on our hands." I have learnt not to say to farmers that things are going well. None the less, they are.

There remain huge tasks ahead of us, above all in securing the change that we need in the CAP and in securing it in an orderly way that does not make life impossible for the industry. But I believe that the Government have every right to ask the House to reject the Opposition amendment, which, incidentally, for the second year running, forgets to mention the words "farmers" and "agriculture", and to endorse our agriculture policies with some pride—pride in what we have achieved, and confidence that our direction for the future is the right one.

5.27 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "measures" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"but believes that the CAP continues to fail consumers, taxpayers, the rural economy and the rural environment and that the Government is not doing enough to make fundamental changes to an unacceptable policy.".

In opening the debate, the Minister rightly said that it has two purposes. It addresses the common agricultural policy price proposals and it is the traditional annual debate that used to follow the old agricultural price review before we joined the European Community. That was essentially a stock-taking exercise and an opportunity for the Minister to defend the price review and the agreements that he had reached with farmers' unions for the year ahead. I intend to treat the debate in the same way.

Like the Minister, I believe that we must accept that Europe is crucial to agricultural policy. All the major strategic decisions are made in Europe, and of the spending on agriculture in this country, expenditure through the framework of the common agricultural policy is about four times the Government's domestic expenditure on agriculture.

The Minister said that the industry is doing relatively well, and I am happy to agree. In fact, that is an understatement because across the industry there has been a significant rise in farm incomes, which we warmly welcome. That rise occurred against the background of the depressed incomes of the 1980s, and I think that most people in the wider community still do not appreciate how badly agriculture did during the 1980s and how much investment was depressed.

The Minister would probably accept that there are still some sectors which, to put it mildly, we would like to see doing better—the pig sector, the fruit sector and the upland sheep farming sector, which are not doing well enough—but returns for cereals and milk, major commodities, and potatoes are very good.

It is important that we continue to understand that the increase in prosperity is not a consequence of the Government's policy—far from it. The major factor in the increased returns for British farmers is what we still rightly call black Wednesday. It all goes back to that debacle in the autumn of 1992 when the Government were humiliated and had to abandon their policy of trying to stay within the ERM. It is important to dwell on that point so that people fully understand what happened. It was fundamental to the long-term prospects for British agriculture, and it explains why many farmers, who may be doing well now, are still uneasy about the future.

The Minister reminded us today that the 1992 MacSharry reforms produced an agreement to cut the cereal price. Other price changes were agreed, but the crucial decision was to cut the intervention price for cereals. To compensate cereal growers for that, direct payments to farmers were to be introduced along with set-aside and farmers were to have an arable payment scheme, which included set-aside payments. In other words, if a farmer had 100 acres of grain, he would get paid so much per acre of grain and so much for the set-aside, the land left fallow.

What happened in the United Kingdom is very different from what was envisaged under MacSharry, and very different from what happened in Germany. In the UK, the increase in the sterling green rate and the devaluation of the pound meant that we did not have a reduction in cereal prices. By and large—I am happy to be corrected on this—it is fair to say that cereal prices in the past two or three years have not changed for UK farmers, although they have, in the main, been above the intervention price.

There has been a huge change in the incomes of growers as a result of the arable and set-aside payments. The effect of the devaluation of the pound was massively to bump up those payments, and that is the crucial factor. Farmers did not experience a price cut and they received much more enhanced compensation payments than had been envisaged at the time of MacSharry.

The arable area payment for England, which began in 1992-1993 at £140 per hectare, increased to £247 per hectare for 1994-95. The set-aside payment in 1992-1993 was £253 per hectare; in 1994-1995 it was £313. There has been a huge increase of money into the cereal sector.

Mr. Marlow: What is the hon. Gentleman's conclusion? Is he saying that farmers are far better off because of white Wednesday, or that farmers should not have the payments?

Dr. Strang: I shall come to that later. I am not saying that price cuts could be made in Europe without some attempt being made to alleviate their short-term effect. What happened in the United Kingdom was totally different from what was intended by the Council of Agricultural Ministers.

Mr. Budgen: I am trying to understand the general drift of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He says that some sectors of agriculture are doing badly and require more investment. Is he offering more public support in the form of taxpayers' money to sectors of agriculture that are complaining? How is that consistent with reducing financial support for the agricultural sector?

Dr. Strang: I shall come to that. *[Interruption.]* The Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) will not be disappointed when I do.

The massive boost to British agriculture in the past few years is a direct consequence of black Wednesday. The Government cannot claim credit for the increase in farmers' returns because they and previous Conservative Governments have implemented policy changes that have tended to be inimical to British agriculture. I intend to dwell on some of those changes.

Before I do so, I wish to be fair and to describe two exceptions to those changes. The first is the decision to reprieve the agricultural wages boards. The decision to close them was inspired by Tory dogma, and it was opposed by the whole industry. We know from history, however, that that was not necessarily sufficient to ensure that the boards survived. The Minister decided to reprieve the boards, which were of great importance to the Labour party and it would be churlish not to thank the right hon. Gentleman for that decision.

The second exception is in relation to animal welfare. As I have explained, we do not think that the Government have gone far enough, although we had a constructive

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debate on the Adjournment on a Wednesday morning recently. I acknowledge that the right hon. Gentleman has adjusted the British Government's position on animal welfare, and has moved us towards a more pro-animal welfare position. There is still some way to go, but I welcome that fact.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: Not on the subject of animal welfare. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) will deal with that matter when he speaks. I will not give way on the agriculture wages boards either, as I merely mentioned the two subjects in passing.

I am grateful to the Minister for making available to us the Department's annual review, which is to be published on Thursday. The major event, as it rightly points out, was the decision to deregulate the milk industry after 60 years and to eliminate the milk marketing schemes. The Opposition do not believe that any of the evidence that has emerged since the abolition of the milk marketing boards justifies any alteration in our stance. We opposed the abolition of the boards, and said that—at the very minimum—the Government would have a responsibility to lay down an appropriate structure that would operate in the best interests of the industry.

The Government have abdicated their responsibility, although I know that that decision predates the term in office of the present Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We are still concerned about the closure of manufacturing capacity, and we see no evidence that the abolition of the milk boards is resulting in an increase in the production of high-value milk products, as the proponents of the changes on the Conservative Back Benches suggested. On the contrary, we are still worried about the reduction in capacity, which is not in the long-term interests of milk producers, although they are benefiting from the sharp price increase that has resulted from deregulation.

Before I move on to the CAP, I want to say a few words about the damage that the Government have done to the long-term prospects of British agriculture by attacking what I would call the public services, expenditure on which has nothing to do with Brussels. It is wholly funded directly by the British Treasury. It is mainly very positive expenditure that brings great benefit not only to farming but to the British people. I refer, for example, to agricultural training.

Anyone who goes about the country and knows anything about agriculture must be aware of the number of people directly involved in agricultural training who have lost their jobs. Expenditure on the agricultural training board has been slashed. The new ATB Landbase is only a pale shadow of the previous board. In 1992-93 the Government spent £6.7 million on the agricultural training boards. In 1994-95 the ATB Landbase contract was for just £4 million.

The state veterinary service—I hope that the Minister will listen to this—has a tremendous history. It has been peopled by some of the most dedicated vets and civil servants in Britain. It is a tremendous asset to the country. It is in the front line. It is not less important but more important now because of the increased risk of animal diseases coming in from central Europe. The Minister nods his head. Let me remind him what the Government have done to the state veterinary service. The number of vets employed by the service has fallen from 580 in 1979 to 403 in 1994—a 30 per cent. cut. We are talking not about money but about real resources. We are talking about what the veterinary service is about—vets.

Instead of fewer state vets, we should have more. I hope that the Minister will abandon the dogma that has bedeviled the service and demoralised vets. We will pay a price for it if we do not reverse the cuts. The price will be a costly one if some major disease that is prevalent in eastern Europe comes into Britain. Such diseases could easily come to Britain through the European Union.

The Agricultural Development Advisory Service is a great service. Colleges in Scotland and the former national agricultural advisory service in England, which became ADAS, served the industry well. Anyone who has spoken to any employee of ADAS will be aware of the destruction and demoralisation of the service by Government dogma and successive cuts. ADAS is a Government service, not a private consultancy. There are plenty of private consultancies about. We are all for them if they can earn a living. ADAS is a Government service that is supposed to help our farmers and give them independent advice, which they do not get from fertiliser companies or compounders. It is supposed to give them advice on all the things that we should encourage farmers to do. It is now required, according to the latest figures, to recover 63 per cent. of its costs from consultancy. The service has been pushed so far down that we do not know what its future is. I hope that the Minister will try to minimise the damage. He will never reverse the cuts, but I hope that he will not go for complete privatisation of ADAS.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) asked the hon. Gentleman about his demands for further expenditure, which he has failed to answer. We have demonstrated how many billions of pounds flow into British agriculture from consumers and taxpayers. The hon. Gentleman says that, on top of all that, we must add further taxpayers' money. Surely an industry with that amount of underpinning and support can pay for its own training.

Dr. Strang: The valuable state expenditure on services such as state vets, of which the Minister has complete control, is being squeezed, but the expenditure that we want to cut has increased since 1979 by 180 per cent. in real terms. That expenditure is under the CAP in the United Kingdom. We want to slash two thirds of it. I shall explain that to the right hon. Gentleman in a few minutes.

Mr. Budgen: The hon. Gentleman damages himself by getting so over-excited. Let us take the example of a dairy farmer—this may be embarrassing to my right hon. Friend the Minister. Since the introduction of milk quotas, dairy farmers have been given a quota under the common agricultural policy that is worth about £2,000 per cow and rising. Some dairy farmers have retired and simply leased the quota. They have found themselves in a comfortable way of life. Such people do not need further subsidy so that their cowmen can be trained at the expense of the taxpayer, do they?

Dr. Strang: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I do not want to digress for too long, but I shall make two points about quotas. First, the United Kingdom share of the total European Union milk quota is too small—I shall not go on about the increases that were given to Italy and Spain, for which I have already criticised the Government and I do not accept the Minister's defence—not because we do not have enough quota to meet our needs but because we are a relatively efficient producer of milk.

Quotas were introduced because there was a surplus of milk as a result of the CAP market support arrangements. We want those arrangements not merely tinkered with but eliminated. Intervention buying of skimmed milk powder and butter still occurs on the continent. Surely the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) understands that. We must have quotas because we have an overarching policy that drives up the price of milk and milk products, whether or not it can be justified by the market.

Mr. Budgen: Surely the hon. Gentleman realises that to most people outside the House the common agricultural policy is an utter nonsense and distortion. The hon. Gentleman looks at each point at which some slight reduction in state aid has taken place. He describes such reductions as a gross scandal and as taking the bread from an impoverished section of the community. We are meant to regard farmers in the same way as single mothers in a deprived area of Bristol or Wolverhampton. That is rubbish. The more that we examine the hon. Gentleman's proposals, the more it is obvious that he wants a great deal more money to be spent on agriculture.

Dr. Strang: I think I know what this is about. I shall not give way again. The hon. Gentleman is one of the Euro-sceptics. I have a document here entitled "Not a penny more". The hon. Gentleman's name is not on it, but two of his leading hon. Friends' names are on it. The document is clear. It makes a frontal attack on the CAP. It says:

> "Under the Common Agricultural Policy only £40 out of every £100 reaches them. The rest of the agricultural subsidy is swallowed up by fraud, bureaucracy and huge food surpluses which are dumped on world markets at give-away prices."

I intend to make a proposal that will end that.

If the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is to be true to the position that he has taken and vote accordingly, he should vote for our amendment. That also applies to his hon. Friends. They do not agree with me on most things, partly because I am Labour and they are Tory; everyone in the House of Commons knows that. We now understand that all these interventions are an attempt to justify the Euro-sceptics' intention not to vote in the way in which they have argued for the past few months.

The most important cuts are the slashing of expenditure on research and development. I accept that all the cuts took place before the right hon. Gentleman became Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The former Agriculture and Food Research Council has been replaced by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. The number of scientists was cut by 41 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1993-94. If we examine expenditure on research commissioned by the Ministry, we can see that Government-funded agricultural research and development has been slashed. We shall pay a long-term price for that. One of the reasons why we have had such a buoyant and successful agriculture industry over the past few decades is because of the investment that we have been prepared to make in that area.

I am disappointed by the way in which the Minister sought to present the figures for expenditure on the CAP and, as a consequence, I shall say a little more about them. In 1978-79 CAP expenditure in the UK was £337 million, and the projected figure for 1995-96 is £2,873 million—an increase of 180 per cent. in real terms. I take the year 1995-96 because the price proposals that we are discussing relate to the coming agricultural year. To suggest that there is some great success story here is misleading.

I shall give one or two more statistics that I had not intended to give, because we must nail this matter. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but he said that the 1994 outturn of the total European Union agricultural budget is lower than the 1993 outturn. In reality, total expenditure under the CAP has been ratcheted up year in, year out. I shall quote one or two statistics that I have converted into sterling from ecus. They are rough figures and I am prepared to concede plus or minus 10 per cent. The total CAP expenditure in 1980 was just over £7,000 million; in 1985, it was just over £12,000 million; in 1990, it was just over £19,000 million; and in 1994, it was just over £30,000 million. That 1994 figure is projected; the actual outturn may be somewhat lower. Even if the 1994 figure were just £27,000 million, it is still a huge ball-park increase. The projected figure for 1995 is more than £30,000 million.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is nothing more sterile than bickering about statistics, but they are important, as the hon. Gentleman says. Between 1974 and 1979, expenditure from FEOGA increased by 61 per cent. in real terms. Between 1974 and 1979, expenditure from FEOGA increased by 38 per cent. in real terms.

Dr. Strang: My final quote is from a letter for which I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson). The Minister's figures are flawed and I shall come back to them. The letter, dated 6 February, was from the Minister to my hon. Friend, and it said:

> "You request confirmation of the rate of increase in CAP expenditure between 1991-92 and 1995-96. Expenditure at 1991 was 31.9 billion ecu"—

so let us say 32 billion ecu, to round it up—

> "while the 1995 CAP budget has been set at 37.9 billion ecu"—

so we could say roughly 38 billion ecu, an increase of 6 billion ecu. *[Interruption.]* Those are huge figures. Do not hon. Members realise that the expenditure was a fraction of that a number of years ago? The right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) sought to argue in his letter that that was no longer a problem and that CAP expenditure was under control.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): Oh, no.

Dr. Strang: Oh, yes. That is the impression that he sought to give.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Dr. Strang: If the right hon. Gentleman is about to qualify that, I shall be delighted.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not about to qualify it other than to say that that is not what I said at all. I pointed out—the oil tanker is shifting—that there was a 61 per cent. increase in real terms under Labour and a 38 per

[Mr. Waldegrave]

cent. increase over the whole period of this Government. What is significant is that between 1988 and 1994, it has increased by only 1 per cent., so the change is moving in the right direction.

Dr. Strang: The right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman might like to rephrase that.

Dr. Strang: I accept that he is inadvertently misleading the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The use of the word "misleading" is not acceptable.

Dr. Strang: No problem; I withdraw it.

I do not dispute the increase in expenditure between 1974 and 1979. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) pointed out, that was a period of transition. I do not say that it was satisfactory, but we were moving from not being in the CAP to being fully in it. I challenge the Minister's figures for the real-terms increase in CAP spending, but he may have tried to exclude some countries and compensate for the enlargement of the European Union. If so, he should say so.

Mr. Waldegrave *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Strang: Let me move on.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will the hon. Gentleman help the House by saying exactly where his figures come from?

Dr. Strang: My figures have only two sources: first, Government documents—the Government publish figures not just on their own spending but on European Union spending—and most of the figures that I quoted are from that source, including the letter from the Minister of State; secondly, the last two figures that I gave are from a European Union document and I converted those from ecus to sterling.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have given the hon. Gentleman and the House figures derived from the Ministry in good faith, and I believe that they are right. If, as a result of the hon. Gentleman's amateur arithmetic, he turns out to have accused me wrongly—he backed down from accusing me of misleading the House only under pressure—will he apologise to me?

Dr. Strang: If the figures that the right hon. Gentleman gave are a fair representation of what has happened in relation to CAP expenditure, of course I shall apologise. I cannot understand this exchange because everyone sitting in this House of Commons knows that CAP expenditure has increased massively in the past few years. There is no dispute about that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is slowing down.

Dr. Strang: It has slowed down for only one year. Even the hon. Lady must understand that the MacSharry proposals reduced the price effect of the CAP on the continent—less in the UK because of devaluation—but it did not alter the cost of the CAP to the taxpayer. On the contrary, MacSharry would always have increased the cost of the CAP to the taxpayer and everyone acknowledged that at the time.

I am happy to make it clear that the Labour party wants an end to state intervention buying of agricultural commodities. We want an end to subsidising agricultural exports, which is some two thirds of CAP expenditure. The Minister spoke a great deal about fraud. Anyone who knows anything about fraud knows that the vast bulk of it derives from surpluses and the huge quantities of agricultural produce in store. Above all, it derives from the huge payments that are made to traders when they move produce across international frontiers. Interestingly, the examples of fraud that the right hon. Gentleman gave all related to the payment of export refunds and some related to agricultural commodities that had been taken into intervention. I emphasise that we want an end to that system of market support. We do not want an end to supporting our agricultural industry, but intervention buying and export subsidies should go.

I want to deal with the relationship between those subsidies and fraud, because if we ended that relationship we would tackle fraud. I must ask the House to put up with a long, important quotation from the head of the division of the audit guarantee section of FEOGA. He is a senior official of the Court of Auditors and is involved in the audit of all the market support money in relation to the CAP. He gave evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities, which, like our own Select Committee on Agriculture, provides a lot of valuable information to everyone interested in agriculture. That senior official was interviewed about fraud and he said:

> "Another example deals with agricultural expenditure. When considering export refunds (the export refund total amount this year would be about 8-10 billion ecu, which is substantial) the background of spending this money is the surplus of agricultural production in the European Community. To simplify, you could say that one wants to get rid of those surpluses; of course, not at any cost, but the Commission is pushing to get rid of the surpluses. Now we go in the same direction: the Commission wants to get rid of the surpluses; the Member States try to execute a policy to pay for the export refund; and the beneficiaries, the traders or manufacturers, play their role. It all gears into the same direction: spending the money. Of course, it does not mean that all traders would manipulate it. Not all transactions are fraud, but the problem is you create a kind of climate where, let us say, a little bit of a fiddle is more or less accepted. One should not be too critical of the traders because it could hamper trade; it could make it difficult to get rid of the surpluses. In such a climate you stimulate fraud, and that is a structural problem."

Let me repeat that final sentence:

> "In such a climate you stimulate fraud, and that is a structural problem."

The Minister may appoint as many bureaucrats as he likes to tackle fraud and we may have all the satellite surveillance to which the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) referred, but one will never end that fraud when such huge subsidies are paid on large volumes of produce that are traded across international frontiers. That is why the Opposition believe that we should get rid of agricultural export subsidies and state intervention buying. The Opposition have enunciated that policy for some time.

The Government's motion takes the biscuit. After all the fraud and the record of wasteful expenditure, it calls on the House to congratulate "the Government on its robust negotiating stance on the Common Agricultural Policy since 1979, its leading role in achieving reform of the CAP, its continuing pressure for further radical reform"

and so on. That is an insult to the intelligence of the House. That is a criticism not of the right hon. Gentleman but of his predecessors. We all remember what his predecessor but one, now Secretary of State for the Environment, said when the Labour party attacked the MacSharry reforms as being hopelessly inadequate [illegible] reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) he said:

"The hon. Gentleman has not grasped the fact that British Ministers have won their battles in the European Community and that the CAP reform is designed on what Britain wanted. There was no single major element of our negotiating list that we failed to secure in those negotiations."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 1228.]

That is what the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said less than two years ago.

What about the current Minister's immediate predecessor, now Secretary of State for Education? As I said last year, she had a great reputation as the voice of the Norfolk barley barons in the Agriculture Council. She tinkered with and argued about little concessions on set-aside, but made not the slightest attempt to reform the CAP radically.

The right hon. Gentleman has been in office for only a few months. He has appointed a committee of intelligent men and women—no doubt they are enlightened people—to consider the CAP. We will need a lot more than that if we are to tackle the enormity of the wasteful expenditure inherent in the CAP.

The Opposition's amendment to the motion is quite clear, because it states:

"that the CAP continues to fail consumers . . . and that the Government is not doing enough"

to change it. I have spelt out the radical changes that we would like to be made to the CAP, so the choice is clear. I urge this honourable House to vote for our amendment.

6.4 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) is right that the terms of the Opposition amendment are clear. But what did he say in his speech, which lasted for about 40 minutes, about how the Opposition propose to reform the CAP? I made a few notes of his speech and although he argued that radical reform was necessary, his only attempt at reform was to launch a diatribe on fraud.

We all agree that fraud should be tackled, but the hon. Gentleman devoted the rest of his speech to an arcane argument about various figures and criticised the Government for abolishing the Agricultural Trading Board, the state veterinary service and so on. My hon. Friends and I had expected the hon. Gentleman to provide us with some details of what the Opposition propose to do to reform the CAP—some of my hon. Friends might even have agreed with him. Apart from his attack on fraud, however, we were not offered one Opposition reform.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend is rather unfair. Surely it is plain that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) proposed to make the CAP even more expensive. He offered considerable aid from the taxpayer to large sections of the agricultural community, many of which are doing quite well.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree entirely.

In recent months, we have had several debates on agriculture. Farmers throughout the country will listen to today's debate and I am sure that they thought that they would, at last, learn about what the Opposition propose for British farming. I suspect that other hon. Members are as baffled as I am about the Opposition's intentions.

The Government deserve congratulations on what they have done to turn the titanic CAP around. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is early days."] I accept that, but the farming community can live with the Government's measured approach. We marched the farming sector up the hill in 1947 to make it farm in a particular way, so if, towards the end of the century, we are to march it down again, we must do it in a way that does not bankrupt farmers and ruin British agriculture. Farm incomes have improved and although not all sectors of farming are prosperous, farmers have been able to invest properly to restructure in order to face the full rigours of moving closer to the world market in future years.

The Government deserve credit, because my right hon. Friend has done a great deal to make the CAP more workable and has made it easier for farmers to adjust to the new regime.

It will be enormously complicated for British farming to move closer to world market prices. The proposed United States Farm Bill is important because we must be aware of what is happening in other parts of the world. GATT has become much more significant to Britain, in addition to the CAP, so we can no longer say that we are alone in Europe. We must bear in mind overseas pressures and the further developments in other countries.

Agra Europe magazine has considered the implications of the United States Farm Bill. If the Republican Senate is successful in removing set-aside from American farms, the amount of cereals produced in America will increase to such an extent that it could lead to 25 per cent. of British cereal farmers going out of business. British agriculture must be in a strong position to face such world competition.

One issue on which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East did not dwell, on which I hoped that he would dwell more fully, was that of hill farms, which is important for me as I have a hill farming constituency. He did talk for a second about the problems that confront hill farmers, of which there are many, but he did not discuss the issue of animal welfare and animal exports; he said that he would leave it to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who will sum up for the Opposition. That issue is of extreme importance to hill farmers and livestock farmers because any unilateral decision to do anything about the export of animals or the transport of animals will have a devastating effect on their income.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) asked what would happen if a great many dairy bulls came on to the market to be raised for meat. He called them horrible Holsteins, which I think is extremely unfair, but it gives an idea of the problems that could confront hill farmers who rear, as it were, proper beef, in all those markets if those dairy bulls were not exported and instead came on to the market to be fattened. That is of enormous significance to hill farmers, yet not a word did we hear about what the Labour party proposed to do about that.

Mr. Streeter: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said three times during his speech that he would come to a certain issue later, and failed each time to get anywhere near that issue?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Surely he always does that.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), and that is why I was disappointed with the speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. He was very good. He whizzed around the Dispatch Box and shouted and became quite excited at one stage, but we did not hear that he proposed to do anything radical.

Mr. Gill: I am grateful that my hon. Friend listened to my intervention in the Minister's speech. Does he recognise that the fact that so many of those animals are undesirable for the beef industry, and much else that goes on in the agricultural industry, is as a result of the regime? It is not as a result of a farmer taking a proper commercial decision in terms of supplying a real market or of supplying a customer. So much of the decision-making by the farmer is influenced by the intervention regime and the common agricultural policy, rather than by the customer. We have to return to consideration of the customer.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree entirely with that. I believe that we cannot get to where my hon. Friend wants to go, which is where I think that most Conservative Members want to go, unless we do it in a slow and measured way. That is why I argue in support of the Government and the way in which they have tried to restructure the common agricultural policy; I hope and believe that that is the way to get to where the hon. Gentleman wants to go.

Repatriation was mentioned by one of my hon. Friends on the Conservative Back Benches. I believe that a repatriation of those decisions would be extremely damaging for British farming. Although it is superficially attractive, it would succeed in closing off an important market, especially an important export market for livestock, which is important to hill farmers such as those in my constituency.

Mr. Budgen: That depends, does it not, on the overall relationship that we are likely to achieve with Europe if we achieve, at the next intergovernmental conference, a significant loosening in our relations with the European Union. We hope that we will be able to loosen the common agricultural policy and at the same time retain our right to trade with the countries in the European Union. The hill farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency should be all right in a well-negotiated settlement of that type.

Mr. Atkinson: I am always rather worried about giving way to the hon. Gentleman because I know that he will lob something complex at me, as I suspect that he has done this time. Currently, as far as hill farmers or livestock farmers throughout the United Kingdom are concerned, the European Community is an important source of exports, one hopes of deadstock, but also of some livestock. Therefore I fear that to move to a policy of repatriation would erect more barriers to free trade because other European Union countries such as France and Spain would spend more money subsidising their agriculture than the United Kingdom would and therefore we would be at a competitive disadvantage.

Mr. Marlow: I am sorry. My hon. Friend is a very intelligent man, but he has been misled by our right hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Tyler: Misled!

Mr. Marlow: I apologise. I withdraw that remark. He has drawn the wrong conclusion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would withdraw it formally.

Mr. Marlow: I have certainly formally withdrawn it. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has drawn the wrong conclusions from what my right hon. Friend the Minister said. There is this great fear that, if we had a level playing field in Europe—if we traded in agricultural commodities, as in everything else in Europe, without let or hindrance—the other Europeans would subsidise what we would not subsidise. The fact is that at the moment we make a net contribution of £3 billion to the European Community each year. If we were not part of the common agricultural policy, we would be able to keep £2 billion of that cash in our own pockets. That would be more than enough to keep our farmers in the way to which they have become accustomed.

Mr. Budgen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the word, "misleading" an unparliamentary word, because it does—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the question. *[Interruption.]* Order. the question was quite clear. The answer, in the context in which it was given, is yes.

Mr. Atkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am obviously becoming a target for a different debate. It brings me to my last argument, because I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak.

We must continue to push for reform of the common agricultural policy because, by the end of the century, we must allow our farming industry to become more ready to meet the world market that it has to meet.

Listening to my hon. Friends firing shots at me about Europe, I am reminded of what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said. He said, in an appeal to Members on the Conservative side of the House, that perhaps they should vote for the Labour amendment. When he said that, it revealed the intention behind the amendment because it is not about British farming; it is not about a Labour policy for British agriculture. It is trying to set a little snare—if that is not an unfashionable word, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to catch a few votes from the Conservative side of the House in order to make some cheap party political points in the debate that will follow tonight. I believe that such a serious debate about the future of British agriculture should be treated more seriously by members of the Opposition.

6.16 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The hallmarks of the European Commission proposals that we are debating are complacency in action and chronic uncertainty. Having listened to the Secretary of State's speech, I am afraid that the Government appear to have taken the same attitude. However, while we have that complacency, inaction and uncertainty we have remorseless cost increases. I shall return to that subject later.

The 1995-96 price proposals from the Commission are best described as the "no change proposals". Nothing is proposed for the sugar regime; nothing is proposed about milk quotas; nothing is proposed about beef; nothing is proposed about sheep; nothing is proposed about wine. One could go on and on. Yet we are asked by the Government to give our support to the general thrust of the Commission's proposals.

We have here a classic European Commission ploy. It paints a rosy picture overall, but when one gets down to the detail and the fundamentals of the position confronting us, one obtains a different picture altogether.

Indeed, so complacent is the Commission—and, apparently, the Government—that it says in the documentation that accompanies the proposals that it has no intention of promoting further fundamental reform. I find that staggering. It is, at the very least, a cause of disappointment that the Secretary of State did not even mention tonight the fact that apparently the European Commission has no intention of making further fundamental reform. In other words, he was saying that the MacSharry reforms were successful—I do not really think that there is a Member of the House who would accept that—and that that is the basis on which agriculture in the European Community should proceed into the next century. That is not only nonsense, but very dangerous nonsense.

The Secretary of State spent some time discussing agricultural issues in his speech. He mentioned consumers and I will check *Hansard* to establish whether he mentioned taxpayers. However, I am absolutely sure that during his 45-minute speech—even taking into account interventions—he did not once mention rural areas. That is a significant omission to which I shall return later.

It is apparent to everyone—except presumably the Commission and Her Majesty's Government—that, if for no reason other than the future enlargement of the European Union, the CAP as it is presently structured simply cannot survive. That very important point must be underlined in the debate. I agreed with the Secretary of State when he said that the current CAP proposals represent a serious lost opportunity.

The issue of cost has so far occupied much time during the debate. The Commission's attitude towards CAP costs, speeches by Government Ministers, and documentation and letters that hon. Members have received from the Ministry reveal that the agricultural guidelines, of which much mention has been made, started out as a mechanism for exercising at least some control over the runaway costs of common agricultural expenditure. It was thought that, allied with other instruments, it would be an effective means of exercising some control.

The agricultural guidelines were viewed in that way for the first few years of their existence. Although I believe that they are far too generous, they were set in the main by member states who had a vested interest in ensuring that they were set at a high enough level so as not to prevent the remorseless increases in agricultural expenditure.

I suspect—and everything that Government spokesmen have said justifies my concern—that the agricultural guidelines have shifted from being a control mechanism to being viewed as a target. No matter what we do, if we stay within the agricultural guidelines we are okay. Thus, by some magical wave of the wand, agricultural expenditure is "controlled". That appears to be the European Commission's attitude and the Government have swallowed it whole. I intend to produce information to substantiate that claim.

According to that logic, massive cost increases are justified if they fall within the outrageously generous guidelines. People emanate smug satisfaction when they say, "Why do you criticise increases in CAP expenditure when we are within the guidelines?"—guidelines which are extremely generous and which I suspect are being treated as a target. The Government have adopted the Commission's view and I believe that we should challenge it.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect a little on his own experience in the European Court. He knows that our Minister is responsible for only a small amount of the annual expenditure on agriculture in this country and that any reductions in expenditure elsewhere must be arranged in co-operation with our European partners. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could draw on his experience and, rather than criticising the current arrangements, tell us how the Minister could constructively arrange a better deal than the present one.

Mr. Stevenson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and I will return to that point later in my contribution. However, I must set the record straight: I have never been a member of the European Court; nor have I appeared before it. Unfortunately, the Government hold the record for the number of times that they have been dragged before the European Court over a variety of issues.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) recognises that we must not be fooled by the siren voices which say: first, agricultural expenditure is under control when it clearly is not; and, secondly, because it is within the guidelines, it is all right. We must challenge those views and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in doing so.

Mr. Gill: Is the hon. Gentleman confident that his views will be supported by other Agriculture Ministers in the Community? In asking that question, I am mindful of the words of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer in this place who said that, when he raised the question of fraud in the Economic and Finance Council, everyone reached for their newspapers; they were not interested in reducing the amount of money that is lost through fraudulent practices.

Mr. Stevenson: I am not sure what support my views may enjoy among other members of the European Community. I have not yet tested my views to that extent; although I floated them during my term in the European Parliament. I am not even sure whether my views have widespread support on these shores. However, I am certain that the present British Government's attitude stands no chance of gaining the support necessary to secure fundamental reform of the common agricultural

[Mr. Stevenson]

policy. While the attitude of smug satisfaction prevails, the consumer and the taxpayer will continue to be subjected to financial mugging.

Mr. Marland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stevenson: No, I would like to make a little progress. How are the Government responding to the situation? I would describe their response as nothing short of incredible. The Government motion refers to the Government's

"determination to ensure that EU agricultural spending is effectively restrained".

It goes on to say that the House should note that

"UK farm incomes rose by 6.9 per cent. over the last year".

The implication of the latter claim is that Government policy was responsible, through some mechanism, for that rise in UK farm incomes. If the Minister intends to say in his reply to the debate that farm incomes have increased as a result of Government policy rather than the disaster of black Wednesday and devaluation, I shall be interested to hear his reasons. The claim that the Government have "effectively restrained" expenditure beggars belief.

Many statistics have been cited in the debate so far and I do not wish to add to them. In a letter to me, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) has referred already, the Minister sells the pass. Between 1991-92—the year in which the MacSharry reforms were agreed—and 1995, agricultural expenditure increased by 6 billion ecu. That works out at about £4.5 billion. I do not understand how the Government can claim that they embarked on policies that "effectively restrained" agricultural expenditure in light of their own figures which show that the cost of the common agricultural policy increased by 25 per cent. over three or four years. According to the report published by MAFF, CAP costs will continue to increase. So not only do we face massive current increases, but, by the Government's own admission, we shall face even greater increases.

I should like for a moment to examine the Government's plans as set out in the MAFF report to which I referred. According to that report, United Kingdom expenditure on agriculture is due to increase by £466 million next year to a figure approaching £2.9 billion. The report states quite openly that most of the increased costs are due to devaluation. The term used was "currency alignment", but it comes down to devaluation. That devaluation has been responsible for increases in farmers' incomes over the past year or two.

If those costs result mainly from devaluation, I wonder what will happen to them as a result of the current turmoil in the European Union monetary markets. In recent months, there have been further devaluations and crises in the exchange rate mechanism. Those factors affect costs, therefore, when he replies to the debate, can the Minister give us some idea of what the additional costs will be as a result of devaluations over recent months?

Between 1990 and 1997, the Government expect United Kingdom expenditure on the CAP to increase by no less than £1.2 billion—so much for restraining expenditure. The motion is nonsense. The facts simply do not bear out the Government's claims. I know that that has not stopped hon. Members supporting the Government in the past, but I hope that on this occasion they do not fly in the face of the facts as presented and support the motion. We have heard much talk about fraud tonight. I believe that the Government motion is equally fraudulent.

There have been other changes in agriculture to which the Secretary of State referred. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East in welcoming some of those changes, but let us not be blind to the other changes and retreats by the Government over recent years that have disadvantaged British agriculture.

The arable area payments and the direct income support are skewed in favour of small producers—in other words, they are against the interests of the larger more efficient producers in the United Kingdom. The sheep premium agreement, which imposed a limit of 500 in lowland and 1,000 in less-favoured areas, affected British flocks because of their relative size. The sugar quota regime continues to be a scandal. The milk quota regime is another example, whereby in 1984 the Government enacted to the letter a swingeing 9 per cent. cut in quota when countries such as Italy never implemented their quota. The beef premium, which imposed a 90-head limit, and the livestock unit restrictions were against the best interests of United Kingdom agriculture and, of course, the common fisheries policy has been mentioned already.

I now turn to the point to which the intervention by the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) referred.

Mr. Marland: I simply want to put the record straight. I did not mean that the hon. Gentleman had been a member of the European Court but a member of the European Parliament and I was hoping that his experience in that role would prove useful in this afternoon's debate.

Mr. Stevenson: I realise that the hon. Gentleman was trying to make a useful intervention, and I am grateful to him.

We need to recognise that the 1992 reforms are at best misnamed. They were forced on the European Community by budgetary crises and the GATT negotiations. Inevitably, the future will force on us further reforms, but they will be for different reasons. There is no doubt that unless firm action is taken, there will be budgetary problems. Not only will we have to consider the budgetary problems and the results of the GATT requirements, but there will also be enlargement issues, particularly involving eastern Europe.

Any future reform must take a number of issues fully into account. First, there are inherent contradictions in the common agricultural policy that recent changes simply have not addressed. How can we be engaged in a policy that tries to equate growing olives in Greece with producing milk in Staffordshire? It is clearly a contradiction, so much greater flexibility needs to be brought into the system.

Repatriation has been mentioned. I am not arguing for repatriation, but for much greater flexibility so that we can remove some of the contradictions that are inherent in the common agricultural policy. Mention has been made of subsidiarity. What is wrong with greater flexibility that brings with it greater subsidiarity?

The second consideration that is absolutely essential in any future renegotiation of the reform of the CAP is that agriculture is an important industry; it is extremely important for our rural areas and rural communities.

However, it is only one factor; many other aspects of our rural areas and communities must be taken into account, not least, of course, the environment.

Three points need to be taken fully into account. First, flexibility is not just desirable, but essential because it is clear that if we continue down the present path, as outlined by the MacSharry reforms, United Kingdom agriculture efficiently operated will increasingly face problems.

Secondly, agriculture support needs to be decoupled from production and we should be removing the artificial restrictions imposed by quotas. Thirdly, agriculture policy should be seen as part of a wider rural policy. We should no longer accept that if agriculture is doing okay, then by some magical definition our rural communities are doing all right. We have enough evidence that that is simply not so.

According to the Government, farm incomes have increased by 6.9 per cent. over the past year, yet our rural communities continue to decline. Therefore, agriculture support must be seen as part of a wider rural policy framework.

It is now time to lay the foundations for that reform so that we can secure the future. The European Union will be enlarged and that enlargement will not bring not only opportunities but immense challenges, and potentially serious problems. Unless we are prepared to challenge the complacency of the Commission which sees fit to argue that no further fundamental reform of the CAP is required, that future will be compromised to the detriment of us all.

6.29 pm

Sir Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): Attacking the common agricultural policy is a popular sport, but I do not intend to play it. I welcome the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister, who said that the CAP is an integral part of the European Union and will remain so. It must remain. However, there is no doubt that changes are necessary. In the context of my constituency, it is obvious that we should not be penalised by having to reduce our sugar beet acreage when Britain is nowhere near self-sufficient in sugar. Neither should milk production be reduced when this country has a big shortfall. Both issues must be pursued with vigour. Some way must also be found of helping our pig industry, which is in serious trouble. It is wrong for Britain to be importing so much pigmeat.

I was concerned when my right hon. Friend the Minister described the CAP as a monster. Perhaps it needs controlling, but I will return to that point later. I was worried most by my right hon. Friend's reference to cutting prices. The European Union is fortunate in having ample food at reasonable prices. The cost of the CAP is often attacked. In the 1960s, as I said in my intervention, we spent 1 per cent. of our gross domestic product on support for agriculture. The figure subsequently fell, but it was always more than half of 1 per cent. until we joined the European Community. The figure is now less than half of 1 per cent. The people who imply that, if Britain left the CAP, agriculture would not have to be supported have got it wrong and they are being mischievous.

In 1960, the people of Britain spent 25 per cent. of their net disposable income on food. That figure has regularly decreased and today it is only 10 per cent. We spend less on food than any other EU member state and about the same as the Americans—but their GDP per head of the population is higher.

Mr. Budgen: When a country enjoys a long period of peace and steady, albeit irregular, growth it is bound to spend less on food and more on other consumer items. My hon. Friend merely points out the advantages of economic progress.

Sir Ralph Howell: My hon. Friend makes an interesting comment. This country has enjoyed 50 years of peace and prosperity, and the common agricultural policy probably did more to bring that about than NATO. The CAP was the first policy adopted by the six original members of the EEC. One purpose of being generous to the small farmers and to the peasant population of Europe was to stave off the threat of communism which was about to sweep across the whole of Europe at that time. By being generous to the small farmers, especially those who were working for firms such as Volkswagen and continued to live in the rural areas, communism was checked and did not get a hold in France, Germany and Italy. When the history of that period is written, the CAP will be held responsible for that success.

The fact that there have been no food queues in the EC when people east of the iron curtain were suffering from shortages of all basic foodstuffs is also a great success story, and it is about time that somebody said so.More misinformation is put around on this subject than any other, especially by the Eurosceptics or Euroseptics—I am not sure which it should be. The claim has been made that the CAP costs every British family £28 per week, but there is no substance in that or in the OECD report itself, which gave a figure of £20 per head. I challenged the Treasury, which does not seem to be very good at figures these days.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend is attacking everybody. He must try to find some friends.

Sir Ralph Howell: The other day, a Treasury Minister said that the CAP was costing every family £28 a week. That was too much for me to tolerate, so I went to see him. By the time I arrived, he had reduced the figure to £20 a week—and by the time I had finished with him, he had cut it to £15. But even that is not the right figure. The true UK and EU subsidy amounts to less than £3 per family per week. Part of the rest is supposed to be accounted for by food prices rising more rapidly than they would otherwise, but there is no proof of that either.

Mr. Waldegrave: Someone said from a sedentary position that my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell) does not have any friends, but that is not true: I support my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North in giving a strong health warning about such figures. They are all based on the idea that world prices would not change if agricultural support were abolished in Europe, which presumably that would not happen without its also being abolished also in America. World prices would be unpredictable, but they would almost certainly be much higher.

Sir Ralph Howell: I thank my right hon. Friend for those comments. There is no such thing as a world price of food or of wheat. Nobody can give one. The fictitious figure of £20 a week was calculated on the basis of wheat at £50 per tonne, which was available for a short period

[Sir Ralph Howell]

from Australia. The world cannot live on wheat at £50 per tonne. We would all starve if that policy were adopted. We should consider the issue in a more logical and sensible way. Thorough research should be undertaken to arrive at a cost figure for the CAP which stands up and is not merely guesswork. The people who are trying to damage Britain being in Europe are making great play of the cost of the CAP, and it is time that the Government put some effort into making the true facts known.

6.48 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): As a number of hon. Members wish to speak, I shall not go over old ground but will try to break new ground. I accept the Minister's point that this debate is our annual opportunity to review agriculture and the future of the common agricultural policy. I agree with the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) that there is a need to examine not only the European environment but the world context. I know that the Minister and others had some innocent fun at my expense when I spent some time with members of both Houses of Congress to discuss this very question. It is extremely important to open up discussions across the Atlantic. What happens to American agriculture is just as important to British farmers as ensuring that our continental competitors are not given an unfair advantage over us.

I agreed with hon. Members who have said that the so-called repatriation of agricultural policy would be a misguided step, not just for British agriculture but for the British countryside. I accept that in the past year there has been a modest overall increase of 4.4 per cent. in agricultural incomes. But some parts of the industry have not benefited to that extent, and it is important to recognise the difficulties that they have faced. For some of them it is a bit early to start celebrating just because they have progressed from near disaster to mere crisis. Even more unfortunately, some of the recovery happened because of black Wednesday: it had nothing to do with what the Government have done—the recovery has been despite what the Government have done.

The reform of the CAP has to take place at two levels. Strategically, we must try to persuade our colleagues around the table in the European Union that reform is inevitable, necessary and desirable, and we must maintain that pressure. That much is agreed throughout the House. That is the long-term goal. As the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends states, however, in the shorter term there are things that we can do in this country and it is important to think about that aspect today as part of the review of what is happening in the industry.

In the short term, there can be no doubt that MAFF is making a right old pig's ear of its implementation of the CAP. Compared with those in other member states, our farmers are all too often uniquely burdened by bureaucracy and entangled in red tape. Even when they can find a way through the administrative jungle there is always some ministerial ineptitude waiting to trip them up—delayed payments, lost forms, and so on. In short, all too often Ministers have made good measures bad, and bad measures worse.

Mr. Streeter: How would the Liberal Democrat proposal for a countryside management contract help with red tape and bureaucracy? What the hon. Gentleman is really suggesting is that local authorities should have a say in what farmers can and cannot do. Will that not burden them even further?

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. He is always a bit premature and he is particularly so today. If he will be patient, I shall come to that point.

The three watchwords for any improvement must clearly be reform, simplification and targeting. We must certainly reform the unnecessary regulations which have been imposed—uniquely—in this country and which have put our farmers at a competitive disadvantage. Reforms must simplify the elements of EU legislation which have been taken in comparatively simple form from Brussels and have been expanded as they passed through the Whitehall mincing machine until they have become unintelligible and largely unmanageable. The Government must target resources at specific, good-value objectives, whereas up till now they have squandered cash and imposed inadequate controls.

Rural policy objectives of the right sort are widely supported inside and outside the House. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), representing an urban constituency, is perhaps not aware of the support in all the agricultural organisations—the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and others—for reform measures of direct benefit to the environment and the rural economy. Across parties we should aim for a common rural policy. Clearly we must enable the farmer to have some real flexibility and choice—hence our idea of the countryside management contracts.

Parts of the industry have had a particularly difficult time in the past 12 or 24 months. The hon. Member for Hexham shares my concern about hill farmers. Over the past few years the hill livestock compensatory allowances have been reduced by one third, so hill farmers have been especially hard hit. The annual statement that the Minister put before us today states that the incomes of hill livestock farmers are expected to fall in 1994-95. They have already fallen in the past few years, and they will be falling again. That causes widespread concern in the House. Incidentally, the same statement makes it clear that the incomes of lowland livestock farmers in England and Wales are expected to drop in 1994-95. There will also be an impact from the livestock problems that were mentioned earlier.

All this comes at a time when the public are clamouring for more targeted investment in our uplands and hills, to maintain the landscape and to ensure that it is properly farmed. That is the sort of targeted investment that the public are anxious to preserve; yet these are the very payments that have been cut. Instead of maintaining a vibrant and living landscape, attractive to man and beast alike, many areas are being reduced to semi-dereliction.

When I challenged the Minister of State in Committee over the HLCA cuts in real terms, he said that I had not taken into account off-farm incomes. Perhaps he can explain today what he meant, but I hope that he has subsequently noted how his suggestion has been laughed out of court by the industry. There are not a great many openings for hill farmers to become ice cream salesmen, for instance. The hon. Member for Hexham will know that there are not many diversification opportunities in his constituency. It therefore seems absurd to build such a calculation into the equation for the first time.

Mr. Jack: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I want to make it abundantly clear that, when speaking about non-farm income—not off-farm income—I in no way implied that when hill farmers' incomes are calculated and the HLCAs are determined that type of income is taken into account; it is misleading of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that such a formula is being followed, because it is not.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear, but his comments in Committee have been widely misunderstood, as he will have seen in the farming press. He said in Committee—I hope that he will be careful about what he says today—that whenever farm incomes go up, the HLCAs will fall, as happened in the past two years. But whenever hill farm incomes drop—I note that the hon. Member for Hexham is nodding—there is no compensating increase. So for the hill farmers it is, "Heads you win, tails we lose."

MAFF is all too eager to save a penny or two when such cuts can be made, and the Chancellor can get the princely sum of £30 million—very small in terms of the overall agricultural budget. This is a gesture by the Ministry to display its financial rectitude to its colleagues—a small fish thrown to the sharks. For many comparatively small and vulnerable farm businesses, however, it represents the difference between viability and bankruptcy.

The pig sector has been mentioned already, and I should like to spend a moment on the subject. It, too, has been subjected to the most bizarre treatment. When Ministers decided to ban sow stalls and tethers, they claimed that they had examined each area of the UK to see whether farmers needed grants to help them make the change. First they looked at Northern Ireland; yes, they decided, the change would clearly impose intolerable costs during the transition, so Northern Ireland's farmers needed help to get through it. Then they looked at Scotland, Wales and England; no, they decided, the change would not cause farmers here any problems—they could be left to fend for themselves. So Northern Ireland gets special treatment, while the rest of the United Kingdom is left to its own devices.

What is the justification for that? No one has said. I do not want to jeopardise improving relationships with and in Northern Ireland, but this clearly is not an essential part of bringing peace to the Province. I suspect that the Northern Ireland Office used its arm-wrestling techniques to extract money from Whitehall and Brussels, even though other areas of the United Kingdom would also qualify for the grants concerned. Once again, this is no aberration on the part of Brussels: it is a product of Whitehall's double standards.

As hon. Members have said, all too often in the past huge sums have gone to those in the industry who are well off, while targeted investment in the form of farm conservation grants, waste water projects and HLCAs, to maintain livestock farming, has been neglected and rural communities, the rural economy and the rural environment have suffered as a result.

In the past, the Ministry has spent a great deal of time centralising the slaughtering capacity of this country. The number of abattoirs has halved in England, Wales and Scotland in the past 15 years, during the lifetime of the Government. Significantly, in Northern Ireland there has not been anything like the same reduction because there the same notorious hygiene regulations have not been introduced. As a result of that centralisation, not only are there additional costs to the industry but many farms are now stranded great distances from the nearest abattoir, exacerbating the problems of long-distance transport of livestock.

I am amazed at the complacency with which the Government congratulate themselves in their motion today. I do not think that dairy farmers in particular would regard this as the right moment for such self-congratulation. The chaos over milk quota has nothing to do with tight-fistedness: it has resulted from a lethal cocktail of irrationality, ineptitude and pigheadedness—irrational in the way in which the quota was set up in this country, not taking account of the full needs of our market, and making it very difficult to ensure that it was a tradeable commodity; inept in the way in which the new arrangement has failed to process quota transactions on time; and pigheaded in the way in which the Ministry has refused to use a bit of discretion and common sense in the resolution of disputes.

On the tapes this afternoon it was suggested that some 15,000 British dairy farmers will face fines of some £75 million for excess production in the current year—an average of some £5,000 per head. I do not know whether that figure is correct, but I hope that by the end of this debate the Minister will be able to tell us what sort of figures are involved.

All those factors seem to be unique to the United Kingdom. Everywhere else in the EU, competitor countries use their quota in a way that seems to be better controlled and ensure that it is not a speculative commodity. It seems to be reasonably administered. But above all, in most other member states there seems to be a system for providing new entrants and developers—the subject of the worst ministerial injustices here—with additional quota.

As Members of Parliament, we receive far more complaints about the inadequacy, incompetence or misdirection of the Ministry or its minions in the executive agencies than we do about the framework of the CAP itself.

Mention was made earlier of the integrated area control system forms. Of course they have a function, but it is extraordinary that the Ministry itself can make mistakes with IACS. The example field data sheet included in the 1995 IACS explanatory booklet, which is intended to show farmers how to do the job, itself contains two basic errors. The south-west National Farmers Union has pointed that out, but I do not think that the Ministry has yet been able to make the necessary corrections.

Then there is the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce. I bet that not one Member here who represents a rural constituency has not had problems with the intervention board. Again, I see Conservative Members nodding in agreement. The old example that we used to give of a barefaced lie was the promise, "Your cheque is in the post." The alternative now has to be the intervention board's assurance, "Your quota forms are being processed urgently." Dairy farmers all over the country are now finding that that simply is not true. I have a memorandum here from a firm of chartered surveyors and agricultural valuers, who tell me that they

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sent a batch of 19 transfers to the intervention board in time for the deadline of 12 noon on Saturday 31 December 1994. They report:

> "Of the 19 various transfers that were sent to The Intervention Board in this particular batch, it seems that six have not yet been processed and all the parties involved, i.e. the lessors, lessees and ourselves, have been constantly badgering The Intervention Board to confirm the leases.
>
> The Intervention Board contacted me on Friday of last week, March 17th, and admitted that they may have mislaid the forms and were wondering what they could do about it."

That is absurd and very expensive. Other cases have been reported in the agriculture media.

I do not have time to dwell on the Meat Hygiene Service, a new agency to be introduced on April Fool's Day, but I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned that the introduction of the new regulations and this new service takes it out of local elected accountability. A risk-free business is being established with a turnover of some £40 million; the Government are inventing a new monopolistic quango. Is that deregulation, decentralisation, democratic accountability? Is that the clarity to which the Minister referred? What hogwash.

Ministers ask us to believe that they are a safe pair of hands, to be trusted with the long-term review of the CAP. Well, judging from the experience of the way in which they operate the CAP in this country, it is a case of "physician heal thyself". Ministers seem to think that British farmers really will put up with that standard of administration, when their competitors on the continent are obviously benefiting to a far greater extent. Is it any wonder that so many people are leaving the industry? The Minister's own figures show a 15 per cent. drop in full-time farmers in the past decade.

In a perceptive article in *The Guardian* on 25 February, Martin Kettle was absolutely right to identify the Conservative Government's Euro-wobble as a major obstacle both to the reform of agriculture policy and to animal welfare improvements in the single market. Insistence on dilution of the EU by enlargement—it will be interesting to hear what the Minister has to say this evening—rather than encouraging cohesion by generic growth, lessens the chance of progress in both directions. Mr. Kettle pointed out that

> "the British veto sounds fine until your realise that it also means a Greek veto".

For as long as the most retrograde countries are allowed to block even the most cautious of reforms, the CAP will remain an expensive nightmare, the scale of fraud will continue, and animal welfare will be swept under the Council of Ministers' carpet. Further expansion eastwards, as the Minister hinted, where conditions are even more primitive, would simply make conditions worse. The more that Conservative politicians in this country pretend that these issues can be resolved unilaterally, the more our farming competitors on the continent will laugh all the way to the bank.

As though all those obsessions were not enough, let us consider the difficulty of the Minister and the Minister of State when they attend Council of Ministers meetings. How can they persuade their opposite numbers of British good intentions? Contrary to popular belief, Ministers in the 14 other member states are capable of reading what the Prime Minister and his colleagues think, not just about the need for European Union joint initiatives but about the personalities of those national leaders. People read what is said here in London.

The right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) is surely too astute to ignore the consequences of his own party colleagues' blinkers, and I am relieved to see that he has not joined in their recent xenophobia, but they done nothing to help him or his ministerial team to achieve Europe-wide progress on these fronts. By investing sacred calves with purely British significance, the Minister's party has increased the problems that he now faces, not diminished them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a limit of 10 minutes on speeches made between 7 pm and 9 pm. That will still apply even though the clocks have not been too helpful.

7.7 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Previous debates on the agricultural price proposals have usually been characterised by rows about price changes proposed by the European Commission, and the round-the-houses view of agriculture. With the exception of the something-for-everybody speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), the debate tonight—I suspect that it will continue in this vein—seems radically to have changed. It now seems that the CAP is wasteful and that there are calls for abolition, for repatriation, for dismantling price support. What I find astonishing is that, through all the debates that we have had in my eight years in the House, we have been trying to argue that if only the United Kingdom farmer could compete on fair and equal terms, the United Kingdom farmer would do well. Now that he can and is doing well, everybody wants to abandon it, in a spirit of knocking Brussels, of Euro-scepticism. I regard myself as a Euro-sceptic on these Benches, but we have to have a balanced view on just what is happening within the European Community.

I have long wanted to say that what really makes me angry is the way in which an argument is developed in order to take an anti-Brussels line. When, recently, we had a row about Spanish access to the Irish box to fish, everyone said, "Pity the poor fishermen. Isn't it dreadful that Brussels is allowing this and we are powerless to stop it?" Now we have the argument about the transport of live animals and the export of livestock, so crucial to the well-being of farmers in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), as he mentioned. People say, "It's dreadful that Brussels is stopping us banning such exports."

I would ask hon. Members to have the same concern for farmers as for fishermen. If they did, they would recognise that we are right to say that we must continue to support livestock exports and to argue in Brussels and in other member states for the opportunity to improve welfare standards across Europe. That is the right and consistent approach.

I do not have time to deal in detail with all aspects of the CAP which concern us. But it is clear that change and reform are needed. I intended at a fringe meeting with the

National Farmers Union at the Conservative party conference last autumn to call for a CAP policy review, but my right hon. Friend the Minister did exactly that in his speech that morning to the conference. A proper review of the CAP and our options is long overdue. I have 10 suggestions about how we should go about it.

First, the reform must be properly thought out. In the past, too many changes have been a quick fix. Milk quotas are a good case in point. They were introduced to cut the cost of supporting milk when the Community would not cut the price. Now we have sheep quotas, which are causing immense problems in my constituency where some long-established flocks have no quota because there was not enough to go round. Please, let us have no quick fixes. Let the policy be properly thought out so that we have a structure which will last us for another 40 or 50 years.

Mr. Budgen: Ah.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend thinks that I have let the cat out of the bag by referring to another 40 or 50 years. I imagine that in that time we will remain committed members of the EC, but we will have shaped it in a way that suits Britain, not the rest of the EC alone, which often seems to many of us to have been the case in the past.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, I shall not give way because I have only 10 minutes.

Secondly, the change must be gradual and there must be a transitional period because things cannot be changed overnight. Farmers need to know where they stand. Growing crops and keeping livestock requires a one, two, three, four or five-year cycle. Politicians cannot change things overnight.

Thirdly, we must move closer to the market. That will bring three benefits. First, as I have said, it will help to end artificial restrictions on production; secondly, it will mean that the United Kingdom's greater efficiency will count for even more; and, thirdly, it will reflect our obligations to GATT and to the third world, which farmers themselves recognise are important.

Fourthly, the CAP must be non-discriminatory. Too often in the past, as I have already said, we have been discriminated against. I do not accept, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said earlier, that the only reason why our farmers are doing well is what happened on a Wednesday in September 1992. Another fundamental reason why our farmers are doing well is that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), when he was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, went repeatedly to Brussels and said no to MacSharry discriminating against United Kingdom farmers. That must remain our watchword. We must say no to the ridiculous idea of modulation and the belief that because a farm is large it does not need support. Large estates like those in my constituency and the people who work on them are just as important as the small farm structures on the continent.

Fifthly, price support must be more closely linked to environmental benefits. One could make a speech on that alone. Clearly, much more needs to be done on that. If there were time I would make further suggestions. I agree with the concept of trying to decouple support from production to having some kind of contract in terms of the environment in our constituencies. Farmers themselves recognise how important that is.

Sixthly, any reform must have regard to the needs of the food and drink industry. We have talked about agriculture and the CAP, but I have yet to hear anyone mention in any detail just how vital the food and drink industry is to Britain. In many respects we are market leaders. After the huge devaluation in 1992, the price of raw materials for many manufacturers rocketed overnight and they have had a great battle in coming to terms with it. Therefore, we need fairness for them as well.

Seventhly, reform must tackle all commodities. Too many, particularly Mediterranean crops, have not yet been tackled. I want Ministers to go to Brussels and be more determined about that. There is scope for much greater reform in those areas.

Eighthly, we must reduce the overall cost of support. If I have time, I might say a few more words about that because I do not think that the cost is anything like as bad as people think. As has been said, progress has been made. But reducing the overall cost of support is essential if the central and eastern European countries are to be brought into the Community. Without that, the cost of the CAP will explode and we shall have serious problems.

Ninthly, we must retain the security of food supply, not only for now but into the future. That means not prohibiting our opportunity to grow crops and keep livestock in years to come.

Tenthly, the CAP must be less bureaucratic and we must tackle fraud. Those two objectives may appear contradictory but they are not. Much of the fraud is a result of too much paperwork.

Two phrases highlight the current situation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.17 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): It is worth reminding ourselves of the history of the CAP and national subsidy in Britain which predated the CAP. They arose at the end of the second world war when starvation was a reality in many European countries and when rationing was a reality in Britain. However, what began as a good project, solving that problem, has grown enormously and now desperately requires to be cut.

The CAP accounts for more than half the entire EU budget. There have been arguments about the total amount, but about £30 billion—£91 million a day—is being spent on subsidising agriculture throughout the EU, and that simply to build grain mountains of 16 million tonnes, beef mountains of 250,000 tonnes, butter mountains of 250,000 tonnes, wine lakes and so on. We are paying farmers large sums of money not to farm. It is a surreal system which should have been invented by Salvador Dali. As much as £2.5 million a day is being spent on growing tobacco that no European wants to smoke. More money is being spent on growing tobacco that no one wants than is being used by the European Union to improve our transport network. CAP spending is equivalent to the total of the rest of the EU's budget.

Fundamental reform is clearly long overdue: no party in the House should argue about that. The Government's efforts to secure changes in the package did not benefit consumers at all, but added to the level of spending. Two

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

achievements of the Government's negotiation on the MacSharry package were the securing of compensation for cereal growers irrespective of the size of their farms, and the securing of annual sheep premiums on larger flocks. I am sure that those two achievements were very worthy, but they did not help to reduce the total budget.

The CAP stops farmers being more productive. Its objective should be to ensure that the true market prices of commodities are reflected in the value that the farmer gets for his product, and that efficient farmers are suitably rewarded.

A number of hon. Members mentioned enlargement of the European Union. Enlargement will double the likely bill that British consumers will have to pay: huge sums will go to Hungarian, Czech and especially Polish farmers if the present system continues. But, even without enlargement, CAP policies are bound to be challenged by future GATT settlements. Export subsidies and border tariffs are not defensible now, and certainly will not be defensible in the medium or long term. As I have said, we need to change the CAP fundamentally, if not get rid of it altogether.

I do not agree that repatriating subsidy payments is any real solution. It will only mean the absence of a real single market in agricultural goods—and it will hardly constitute an attractive solution to countries such as Ireland, France, Portugal and Spain, which are net beneficiaries of the system. If subsidies must be paid, they must not be related to production: they must be decoupled from it. They must be paid to the individual farmer, rather than being dependent on the total level of production. The market must be allowed to determine the price of the commodity. Only in that way can overproduction be tackled without the imposition of a huge bureaucracy involving quotas, form-filling and a continuation of the inefficient and endemically fraudulent system that currently operates.

Let me say a little about the environmental impact of the CAP, and of direct subsidies to farmers based on acreage used for agriculture or on guaranteed prices for their products. The policies implemented in Britain and other European countries since the war have devastated what was a diversity of wildlife and habitat. During the past 50 years, half Britain's remaining broadleaf woodland has disappeared, as have 40 per cent. of our lowland heath, 90 per cent. of raised bogs and 60 per cent. of wet meadows. A third of our reptile and amphibian species are now in serious decline; and 50 per cent. of skylarks—a common species—have disappeared in the past 20 years.

As signatories of the biodiversity convention at Rio, we have an obligation not just to halt that trend but to reverse it. The CAP, as currently implemented, does not address the issue; temporary set-aside is no solution. The present system rewards farmers for being inefficient. It should be a laudable aim for farmers to produce the maximum amount of food on the minimum amount of land, but our system does precisely the reverse. Producing more food on less land would release land for other uses—in particular, marginal land that should never be brought into production. The release of that land would allow its use for recreation and the restoration of wildlife habitats.

Marginal land can be allowed to return to its natural state. If draining stops, marshland and wetland will return; if grazing stops, scrubland will return on pasture and open woodland—and, eventually, mature deciduous woodland—will reappear. The process of succession, perhaps aided by farmers, will restore many of our natural habitats. We shall be able to reintroduce species that are long lost, locally and perhaps nationally.

Our national policy advocates the retention and development of wildlife to third-world countries. Why do we not have such a policy in this country? It would not have to be expensive; indeed, without our current system of agricultural subsidies, it would be cheaper to remove marginal land from production and to develop national eco-systems that could well prove economically beneficial in the promotion of tourism. Moreover, we would not have the current daft system of subsidising farmers for doing nothing.

We should have a radical agenda. We might be the first European country to discuss that agenda, but I hope that others would follow our example. Why should we not reintroduce the beaver to parts of Britain? Why not reintroduce the wild boar? Why should those suggestions be considered unreasonable? If we want African countries to set aside land on which lions can roam, and Indians to set aside land on which tigers can roam, why should we not reintroduce some of the species that have been rendered extinct in this country? It would not require a great deal of Government intervention; it would simply require, initially, the withdrawal of Government subsidy from land that is not productive and not needed. Modern farming methods allow—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.27 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I hope that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) will forgive me if I do not follow his arguments. In the 10 minutes available to me, I shall not have time to argue with him as I should have liked to.

Let me begin by declaring an interest. I represent an urban and suburban constituency, but I am also a small farmer. During my years in the House I have rarely attended debates such as this and have usually abstained in the Lobbies, regarding the CAP as perhaps no more than the price that taxpayers and consumers must pay for being part of the free trade area which is what I wanted Europe and the common market—as I saw it—to be. Tonight, however, I intend to support the Government and my former party: I shall vote for the main motion, and vote against the amendment tabled by the official Opposition—a far less effective opposition than we are, I might add.

I shall do that for openly political reasons. [HON. MEMBERS: "You want to be reselected."] I do, and I also want to be re-elected. I believe that a Back Bencher should be as much nuisance as possible to his party when his party is doing well and is arrogant with success. On the whole, I was as rude as possible to Lord Lawson between 1986 and 1988 and I regard him as being the proximate cause of many of our present difficulties. Now that my former party is doing badly, it seems to be a very proper time to come to the aid of my former colleagues.

I intend to vote along the party line tonight for the reasons that I have given, but I make it absolutely plain that I still regard the CAP as being a very high price to pay for our membership of the free trade area. The CAP is certainly very expensive. I agree that no one can be absolutely certain of how expensive it is because we do not know what the effect of reducing all the subsidies and distortions would be on the world market place. It is certainly bad for the environment, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central pointed out. It certainly creates gross distortions, such as the quota system. I shall say a word or two, however, about fraud, which I contend is an inescapable part of these European programmes.

I commend to the House two documents from the Library—a document on the European Communities (Finance) Bill, which was published on 22 November, and a document on fraud in the European Community, published on 2 December. It seems clear that fraud in the CAP is running at about 10 per cent. of overall expenditure. The European Community is a half-formed federal structure, which makes it essential for us to understand the cost of further federalisation. It is not a fully formed federal structure such as in America. In the European Community, laws and regulations are made by the Commission with some input—arguably—from the Council of Ministers, but the enforcement is left to member states. The result, of course, is that the enforcement is, at the least, very uneven. Look, for instance, at the way in which the common fisheries policy is dealt with by Spain. Consider the system of transporting animals. Again, regulations are laid down by the Commission, but enforcement by member states is very uneven.

The common agricultural policy is, of course, especially bad. I invite the House to look at the very useful reproduction of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said on 21 October about how the Italians and, to a lesser extent, the Spaniards and Greeks, had failed to implement a quota system for the production of milk. That failure goes back to 1989. The House kicked up a bit of a row about it before it considered the European Communities (Finance) Bill. Now, when we ask our right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is happening in those three countries, we are told that they were let off most of the fine, they were given a great big rocket, they said that they would do something about it and they have done nothing.

Italy, particularly, has a different attitude towards the implementation of law; a rather more Italian attitude towards the rule of law; a rather more relaxed and sophisticated attitude towards fraud than we have in this country. Fraud and non-enforcement of European regulations are an absolutely inescapable part of any European programme. It would apply especially to a single currency. We would have to have a vastly enhanced regional and social fund.

I shall vote for my former party tonight and I hope that some of my hon. Friends will do so as well.

Mr. Gill: Not a chance.

Mr. Budgen: Well, I hope that they do so for openly political reasons. The Tory party needs to unite before the local elections—*[Laughter.]* I think that my party is in some difficulty—*[Interruption.]* The time to be unpleasant to one's party is when it is arrogant and successful. The time to come to its aid is when it is in difficulty. I hope that we may be able to unite in future in believing that what we want is a less federal structure in Europe. We do not want any of these fraudulent and wasteful European socialist mechanisms such as the common agricultural policy. We do not want a single currency and we do not want an enhanced regional and social fund. We want an enhancement of the role of the nation state and the resuscitation of my former party, the Tory party.

7.35 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I hope that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) will forgive me for not pursuing his line of argument. I am sure that we all enjoyed his mental contortions in telling the House that he was prepared to throw away his principles on the basis of self-preservation. We thoroughly enjoyed the way in which he justified that to his own conscience. We shall see which Lobby he goes through eventually and whether it is with a smile or a frown on his face.

The price proposals in the common agricultural policy this year represent the final stages of the implementation of the MacSharry proposals. Although they do not greatly change prices or other matters, we must address a number of concerns. I shall do so from the point of view of farmers in Wales. I stress, however, that although the MacSharry proposals were highly criticised because they did not go far enough and because they preserved many of the old common agricultural systems, at least they recognised, in their final form, the importance of maintaining the structure of small family farms and of ensuring rural employment.

I accept, as some hon. Members have said, that it is important to consider agricultural policy in the wider context of rural policy, but it is also important to recognise that people live in rural areas and that if we are to maintain a viable rural economy farmers, who play such an important part in that economy, must be properly supported. I am not saying that they should be supported at whatever cost, but certainly we must maintain a measure of support for farmers who have to farm difficult terrain, in circumstances such as high rainfall and so on, to ensure the viability of our rural communities. That is why I felt that the MacSharry proposals, especially since MacSharry came from such a rural background, understood the effect of significant changes.

We need to look at some of the difficulties that have arisen, especially in the milk sector. Milk quota regulations have been very strictly enforced in the United Kingdom. Year after year—not every year, but for many years—the milk quota allocation has been cut, even though, as several hon. Members have said, the United Kingdom is not self-sufficient in milk and milk products. We know, however, that other countries, such as Italy, are still struggling to implement milk quota regulations. The fact that while we are facing cuts in milk quotas other member states have not yet implemented the quota regulations upsets a lot of farmers. I urge the Government to ensure that there are no further cuts in milk quota allocations in the countries of Britain, at least in the next few years, and perhaps even occasionally to make the case that we should be entitled to even more quota allocation than we have had in recent years.

There are arguments, of which I am sure the Minister is aware—in Wales, for example—that if there are to be more cuts in milk quotas, at least small milk producers should be protected from them. I ask the Government to give some thought to mechanisms to allow that to happen when the matter is discussed in the Agriculture Council.

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

In Wales there is concern about Government pressure to replace individual sheep and suckler cow quotas with regional ceilings. In a country such as Wales, with a predominance of small and medium-sized family farms, such a policy would benefit larger producers at the expense of others. It is important to remember that when considering any change.

The theme has been echoed across the Chamber again tonight, and I too must tell the Minister that we were disappointed that the Government could do no more than maintain hill livestock compensatory allowance payments—indeed, they congratulated themselves on that achievement. I am a member of the Agriculture Select Committee, and when those allowances were introduced the Committee was told by the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that they were compensatory amounts, so that when incomes went up the payments would go down.

The converse must also be true: when incomes go down the compensatory amounts should go up, but the Government have not done that. I urge them not to congratulate themselves on maintaining payments at their current level but to accept the case for increasing them when incomes fall.

As we have already heard, the 1992 reforms must also be seen in the context of the conclusion of the GATT round. Although the impact of the GATT changes will not be significant in the next few years, they will bring about significant and profound changes thereafter. We must recognise that when the GATT agreement was reached it was a major achievement for the industry when it was decided that the compensation for price cuts and set-aside within the CAP reforms would not be subject to further reduction but would be counted as green box subsidies within GATT.

The question remains, however, whether the CAP must face further reforms before the budget is overwhelmed in the event of expansion of the membership of the European Union to the east. There is no doubt that further reform is essential, if only to ensure that support is channelled to those who need it. Far too much within the CAP directs support to farmers and large institutions that do not need it. Instead, the CAP should be used to maintain the fabric of our rural societies.

If any one feature gives the CAP a bad press it is the fact that a handful of farmers seem to get large subsidies while small farmers go to the wall from time to time. We must ensure that farmers who need support get it, even if there is reduced support for others. What farmers in Wales support is better deployment of budgetary resources both in direct support for farmers and in relation to distribution between farmers.

The debate has been interesting, partly because we have heard how much support there is for a decoupling system, moving away from direct aid for production and towards aid in the form of environmental payments. That idea has been greatly welcomed throughout the industry in Wales, and I believe that that is the direction in which the CAP reforms should move. Farmers are the custodians of the countryside, as is recognised on both sides of the House and outside it, and they should be adequately compensated for the work that they do.

I strongly object to the principle of repatriating policy, because if that happened distortions would reappear. Other member states would support their industries at different rates and at different times, and the market would be distorted again. We should at least retain the integrity of one policy throughout the European Union, even if it has to be much reduced because of expansion to the east. That will be vital if we are to ensure that our farmers can compete effectively and continue to succeed in the markets that they have won over the past few years.

I shall briefly confirm another point that has been made tonight. If farmers are to face great changes as a result of further reform of the CAP, it is crucial that they be given the opportunity to adjust to those changes. I hope that the Government will take on board many of the constructive contributions that have been made tonight.

7.45 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I start, as others have, by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his predecessors on the progress that has been made towards reform of the common agricultural policy. Such changes are never easy, and it takes some time for the wheel to turn.

When milk quotas were introduced I went with my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) to the Three Counties show. Farmers had hired an aeroplane that was flying overhead pulling a banner saying, "Jopling turns the milk sour". However, farmers have now turned the quotas to their advantage and made them into a great opportunity, so I am sure that now they could think of another slogan to tow behind their aeroplane. My right hon. Friend has been making life a little sweeter for us in this place recently, so how about, "Jopling makes life sweeter"? I am sure that if we tried to separate farmers from their milk quotas now, they would have something ferocious to say.

I believe that the success of the gradual change in policy can be measured by the enormous reduction in the storage of surplus stocks, even this year. Stored wheat has been reduced by 57 per cent., beef by 80 per cent. and butter by 61 per cent. The good news in that development is that the money is no longer going to the owners of intervention stores but to farmers, who in turn recycle it in the rural community, and that was discussed at length earlier.

Time is the great thing; farmers need time to adjust. How horrendous was the Opposition idea that intervention buying should be stopped overnight. Can we imagine the effect that that would have on farmers' incomes? I hope that all farmers will hear what the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), said about that idea.

When the Labour party was in office, in four and a half short years it had reduced farmers' incomes by 32 per cent.—but that is nothing compared with what Labour's proposals would do this time. Not only do farmers need time to adjust and to take advantage of new opportunities, but the Government should seek to give them opportunities, which we have done through the introduction of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, which is now before Parliament, grants for diversification and marketing schemes.

How much better and more constructive that all is than what I can only presume was the politically correct waffle from the Opposition Benches—*[Laughter.]* I was obviously right; I have obviously scored a hit if what I say is met with such agreement on the other side of the House, especially by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

There is no doubt that agriculture must continue to move closer to the marketplace and become less reliant on subsidy. That is a sea change for farmers, and in many ways it is a nerve-racking process to have to go through, but it provides new opportunities.

Farmers undoubtedly operate at the very beginning of the food chain; indeed their work is an essential part of it. It is their business, in partnership with the food manufacturers, who add value, and the retailers, who sell food to consumers, to satisfy demand in this country. As others have said, food manufacture and retailing constitute one of the biggest businesses in the country.

I shall reflect on a couple of aspects of the debate, the first of which concerns milk and the setting up of Milk Marque. Again, there has been some anxiety among farmers and manufacturers about exactly how that would work out. Was Milk Marque set up to establish a free market in milk, or not? Most thought that it was, and saw it as an opportunity and—up to a point—that is how it has turned out, but it is not quite as clear as that.

Farmers relish supplying a commodity that is in short supply, and they should have every opportunity to exploit that to the full. However, the shortage of supply has given rise to a situation in which manufacturers' difficulties have been compounded by Milk Marque playing its cards close to its chest in the initial stages of bidding. How much milk does it have to sell? How much should such manufacturers bid for, in view of the uncertainty of supplies? How should manufacturers pitch their bids to farmers who are wanting to sell direct? They offered such farmers 1p per litre more because they could save on the bureaucratic costs of a running a brokerage, which Milk Marque is.

If the manufacturers underbought, there was no way in which they could pick up the extra supplies that they needed in a free spot market. That begs the question—how free is this market in milk? We are getting there, but there is some considerable way to go. It is not a genuine free market, because Milk Marque is not acting as a genuine broker. It is seeking to draw to itself extra responsibilities, rather than allowing the market to find its own level.

For example, Milk Marque is acting in that way with regard to transport, milk balancing and service levels. On transport, there is not a free market as manufacturers cannot collect direct from the producer. If people want to collect beer direct from a brewery they can, as it is a free market, but that does not happen with milk. Manufacturers have their own transport and want to use it, but Milk Marque will not let them.

Traceability is also very important to milk manufacturers, who want to know precisely what is in their milk and how it has been handled between the farmer and their depots. They cannot know that unless they use their own transport. With more pressure being applied on the quality of production, it is extremely important that milk manufacturers are able to use their own transport. There are serious difficulties for manufacturers who are vital long-term partners of farmers, and the interests of both parties are closely linked.

The imposition of conditions on the purchase of milk is known as bundling, and is an offence under competition law. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of that, and will not simply say that milk manufacturers should go to court. He must look at the matter closely, and take an active part in unbundling this market. If it is to have a proper future as a free market, it is essential that bundling is undone.

Before leaving transport matters, may I reassure isolated small farmers and milk producers who feel that they may be left out in the cold as a result of the changes that they will not be? No dairy farmer in the country is more than 40 miles away from a processing plant. In south-west England, there is a plant at St. Erth; in west Wales there is a plant at Haverfordwest; in the Lake District there is a plant at Appleby; and in Aberdeen, local manufacturers must compete with dairies in Glasgow to get their milk supplies. There is no way in which any milk producer in this country will be left out in the cold.

Milk is in short supply, and manufacturers and distributors want every drop that is going. It is a home-produced product which cannot satisfy the demand, so a good price is obtainable anywhere. The price is, of course, dependent on transport costs, but that is understandable.

I mentioned that Milk Marque is doing its own balancing. That destroys the free secondary market, which can be a vital fall-back for milk manufacturers. Why should not there be a genuine spot market in milk, as there is in so many other commodities? What currently happens to surplus milk? We have heard today about shortages of milk as farmers cut production to avoid possible fines, but what happens when there is a surplus?

Milk Marque is selling its surplus to Ireland without offering that milk to UK producers, who would have paid more for it than the Irish. Why did not Milk Marque offer it to United Kingdom producers? Why is it so adamant about doing its own balancing?

I also mentioned the different service levels offered by Milk Marque that do not allow for a free spot market and all that goes with it. Why does Milk Marque insist on fixing the price of milk a year in advance with no reference to supply and demand? That is done in Ireland, where manufacture is keyed into supply so that the two are linked. Both parties are then able to take advantage of the least expensive system of production—farmers, because they produce when the grass has grown, and manufacturers because they produce when the milk is available.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to look at Milk Marque's method of operation before the next price round, and to look again at the possibility of having an independent regulator in the market. I do not mean a price regulator, but a regulator who would make sure that the market is operating in a true and fair manner.

There were other matters which I wanted to speak about, including the export of live animals, but in view of the time—I can see that you are fidgeting to get to your feet, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I will stop there.

7.55 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): It is with great regret that I notice that not one Scottish Conservative Back-Bench Member has been present in the Chamber throughout the debate, and no Scottish Tories at all are present now. Given the importance of agriculture to Scotland, that explains why the Tories stand at 12 per cent. in Scottish opinion polls, and why that figure is falling. It may be appropriate that the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is here, as it seems that that Ministry is now determining Scottish Office policy. Perhaps the Minister can answer the Scottish points that I hope to raise.

Mr. Garnier: I could make the same point about the hon. Gentleman's Scottish National party colleagues. Where is the remainder of the Scottish National party?

Mr. Welsh: My hon. Friends will be here to vote. The point I am making is that the Scottish National party is represented here, whereas not one Scottish Conservative Member is in the Chamber. It is a valid point, and I would like to have seen a Scottish Office Minister. *[Interruption.]* I do not wish to digress, but Conservative Members are indicating the Minister of State, who is an English Member of Parliament.

The main objective of agriculture policy must be to maintain supply and demand in balance, while ensuring the economic viability and prosperity of the rural economy. I seek an absolute assurance from the Government that they will not use price pressure or unchecked free market forces as the main determining factors for producing structural change in the agriculture industry. Such a dogmatic policy would decimate the industry, destroy living standards and massively depopulate rural areas in one fell swoop.

Sensible management for change should make use of a sensible mix of supply control measures, environmental improvements and a widened range of income-creating alternatives to supplement straightforward food production. Agriculture is the backbone of Scotland's rural economy, and it must be given every opportunity to retain employment and finance among rural populations. An overall rural area strategy is required to meet the specific needs of agriculture, and that must be combined with the provision of infrastructure designed to raise rural living standards and to keep people in viable and thriving communities. The alternative is continued rural depopulation and poverty of both incomes and opportunities.

What is the Government's commitment to Scotland's rural communities, which dominate the nation's geography? The warnings are clear. If Tory free market dogma is applied in the form of uncompensated price pressure, it has been estimated by the NFU that as many as 40 per cent. of Scottish farmers could be forced out of business.

Mr. Jack *rose—*

Mr. Welsh: The Minister will probably point out that the Scottish Office Minister has returned, and I am happy to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the debate, most of which he has missed.

If up to 40 per cent. of farmers are forced out of business, with them will go the agriculture supply industries, transportation, vets and others. There would also be the inevitable school closures and the exodus of people, and that must not be allowed to happen. I would seek an outright assurance from the Government that uncompensated price pressure will not be the chosen means for agricultural restructuring. Can the Government guarantee that future European Union measures will not simply follow French agri-politics and target support measures towards smaller farms? Scottish farmers have created larger, more efficient production units. They have a right to expect a clear declaration of support and understanding from the United Kingdom Government in their negotiations within Europe. The success of Scottish farmers in creating larger, more efficient units should never be used as an excuse to discriminate against them or for the United Kingdom Government's failure to recognise their needs and fight for Scottish interests.

Will the Minister ensure that Scottish pig producers are not placed at a continuing disadvantage in the face of illegal state aid to their French direct competitors? What is the Minister doing to ensure that the reduction in European Union agricultural output required by the GATT agreement is spread fairly throughout the EU?

What reassurances can the Government give about the effect on Scottish farmers of the entry into the European fray of central and eastern European countries? Past problems, for example, for Scottish raspberry growers, will be as nothing compared with the unfettered effect of those countries' low-priced, less sophisticated agriculture industries on European countries. What strategy do the Government propose to adopt to deal with those exact problems? I hope that the steps taken will raise central and eastern European farm incomes and not lower Scottish and EU levels of income and affect methods of production.

Will the beef special premium scheme, with the ceiling on claims in Scotland, be reassessed to reflect the increased number of cattle eligible for the premium? What steps are the Government taking to reduce the bureaucracy and time wasting inherent in the cattle control documentation system? I know from my constituency that the sheep quota rules pose problems for partnerships. Will the Minister consider attaching the quota to the partnership rather than to the individual, as happens with the suckler cow quota?

Although, thankfully, farm incomes have risen this year following a series of poor years, major problems nevertheless remain for pig farmers and hill farmers. I ask the Government to end their complacency about the hill livestock compensatory allowance. No change this year must be put in the context of the 29 per cent. cut in HLCA values in the past two years. There is a past income deficit to be made up in a section of the industry that is very vulnerable.

I deeply regret that the Government killed off the marketing boards, which have served both consumer and producer well in past decades. I especially regret the end of the potato marketing board, given the importance of the seed and ware markets to Scotland. Short-termism has replaced long-term thinking. The unique, world-renowned Scottish system of agricultural research is in danger of being broken up and managed from research councils based in the south of England.

Scottish Office Ministers can only sit and watch, as is happening tonight, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food takes decisions at European level. In European negotiations, I expect the Government to argue more strongly for specific Scottish interests, although that could be guaranteed only by independent Scottish representation in Europe in our own right. In addition to ensuring that specific Scottish interests and the distinct structure of the Scottish industry are fully registered, it is important that the strongest possible case be made for the extension of objective 1 status to the whole of Scotland. I wonder whether the Government are prepared to argue for that.

It is clear that Europe now decides the future of agriculture policy. Without independent Scottish representation, our industry is vulnerable. The Minister added injury to insult by ignoring the Scottish Office in the formation of the United Kingdom CAP policy advisory group. In creating a United Kingdom CAP group that does not include anyone who has an active role in the Scottish farming industry, the Government have excluded Scotland from the CAP policy group in spite of the significantly greater importance of agriculture to the Scottish economy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): The hon. Gentleman will know perfectly well if he reads the press or has heard any of the statements that I have made that decisions on the CAP are made by Ministers, not by any CAP advisory group.

Mr. Welsh: Even the Minister in his complacency cannot ignore the fact that no Scottish farming interest is represented on that advisory group. I presume that it was formed to advise the Government, so its views will be taken into account. It was formed without any Scottish input. That cannot be a sensible way in which to treat the Scottish industry.

Mr. Jack: In view of the hon. Gentleman's interest in submitting his party's views on CAP reform, will he submit a paper to my right hon. Friend's group in due course?

Mr. Welsh: I am sure that that will happen. We shall be happy to let the Minister know our views. The important point is that the Government, acting on behalf of the United Kingdom, formed an advisory committee on CAP reform without including anyone who was active in Scottish agriculture. That is no representation and no way to treat one of Scotland's most important industries. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is making noises. I regret that he did not make more noise when the arable acreage in Scotland was settled. The Minister has not explained how the Scottish Office reached its figures or why it took the east Germans and the German industry to reduce the penalty imposed on Scottish cereal farmers. The Minister has a great deal of answering to do. He has not given answers in the House. If policy is determined—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8.5 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I disagree with the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), who seems to want agricultural policy to be decided at the European level. I feel that the best place to decide it is at home.

I have an interest to declare. I have an interest in land. I am also in receipt of European subsidies. I believe that the vast amount of money that is given by this country to Europe makes it almost a patriotic duty for those of us who can claim it back to get as much as we can. Why do I want to repatriate our agricultural policy? It is simple. It is because the common agricultural policy is bad for Britain. It is bad for the consumer. One aspect of the CAP that is mercifully being reduced is the threshold price. That means that if we want to import feed or foodstuff from elsewhere, we have to pay more for it. So the housewife has to pay more than she would otherwise have to pay.

Secondly, the CAP is bad for the British taxpayer. Our net contribution to the European Union will be about £3,000 million a year. About two thirds of European expenditure is on agriculture. Therefore, the CAP costs this country £2 billion a year net. That is money—cash—down the drain into a fraudulent hole somewhere in the centre of Italy.

Thirdly, the CAP is bad for the British farmer because he is probably the most efficient farmer in Europe. Many people would say that the British farmer is the most efficient farmer in Europe. The rules and constraints of the CAP mean that if the British farmer is to receive the same levels of subvention as his European cousin, he has to set aside, thereby not farming more of his land than any other farmer in Europe.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, the British farmer is allowed to produce only 85 per cent. of the milk that is required for consumption in the United Kingdom. The most efficient milk producer in Europe is not allowed to produce enough milk even to satisfy his own public. Britain is the most natural environment for producing sheepmeat—lambs, ewes and the rest of it. Yet we are quota-restricted. If we are to compete on level terms, we are restricted by the quota. So we are discriminated against. The best farmers in Europe are the most heavily discriminated against.

The CAP rips off the housewife, plunders the taxpayer and discriminates against the British farmer. Any red-blooded British Government would seek to get out of it and would do so now.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has pointed out that the farmers are hooked on the CAP. They are hooked on milk quotas. It is absurd that that artificial creation is worth more than farmers' land, livestock, house and business put together. Milk quotas are not going to last. They are an agricultural version of the dock labour scheme. They cannot endure. I warn my farming friends that they will not exist for ever.

Secondly, British farmers are hooked on the power of the so-called French peasant. They are sure that if French farmers want more money, they will go on to the streets and stop the traffic and prices will go up. But little by little, the interests of the French peasant will diverge from the interests of the British farmer. Small farmers in France, bigger farmers in Britain. The Union is moving towards giving relatively higher payments to the smaller farmers. The British farmer will again be left on one side.

There is distrust of British agricultural policy controlled by Her Majesty's Treasury. Look what is happening to the European budget at the moment and what is likely to happen to the direction of that budget if Europe enlarges towards the east. I would rather put trust in my Government and the British taxpayer than I would long term in the European taxpayer.

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

My right hon. Friend the Minister said that British farmers had done well recently. Since 1979, farm incomes have risen in real terms by 10 per cent. If the income of any other section of society had risen by only 10 per cent. since 1979, would not those people now be on the streets rioting? British farmers have not done as well as the rest of the British community.

All the fear about having our own agricultural policy and coming out of the CAP is misplaced. People say that there would be no subsidies, but if we controlled our own affairs, we would have at least as generous a system of support for agriculture. First, in a free market in Europe, which we would still have, everybody else would have such a policy and it would be politically unacceptable not to support our farmers if everyone else's farmers were being supported. Secondly, for any business to thrive and prosper requires an element of predictability. With agriculture, the climate is an additional element of unpredictability, so unless we have a support mechanism for agriculture, we shall not have sustained output. Thirdly, one of the jewels of Britain—the reason why so many people come here—is the beauty of our countryside. Even the hard-hearted mandarins of Her Majesty's Treasury would want to ensure that our countryside was properly maintained. Without adequate support for agriculture and the villages in our countryside, that could not continue.

Let us look back at the track record and the times before the CAP. British agriculture was more prosperous then than now. We spend £3 billion net a year on the European budget, two thirds of which goes on agriculture. That is £2 billion that the Treasury could retain within the United Kingdom, part of which could be used to subsidise agriculture, on top of the subsidies that we are already getting—if necessary. Instead of going to the Mafia in Italy or low-grade and fraudulent Greek tobacco producers, that money could be used for people in this country.

How do we move to a British agricultural policy within Europe? First, it goes without saying that we believe in free trade, so the raw materials for agriculture could come in without a threshold price. Secondly, we would have a single market within Europe, as we have at present. That allows free trade within Europe and a single price throughout Europe. Thirdly, we would return to the old system of deficiency payments. Cereal is the basic commodity of agriculture. It is used as foodstuff and feedstuff, which is then moved on to the livestock sector. If we keep world market prices low and have a standard quantity for cereals, we can tell farmers that, for that standard quantity, they will get whatever price is necessary to sustain agriculture. If the world price goes down, farmers receive a deficiency payment that makes up the difference, and if they go beyond that standard quantity, the surplus is sold off at world market prices. That has the great advantage that, as British farmers are efficient, they do not have to take land out of production. People are concerned about that great obscenity. Farmers can then produce as much as they efficiently can.

The same applies to milk. We should have a standard quantity of milk with a price attached to it and farmers would receive a guaranteed price for that. But over and above that quantity, the milk could be usefully used by our manufacturing industry, so that the output of British agriculture and the British food industry could be increased greatly to the benefit of Britain.

Mr. Jack: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marlow: I really have not enough time. I wish that that were not so.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said, the CAP is absurd. It is European money of which national Governments regulate the expenditure, and it is a recipe for fraud. The only sensible policy for Europe as well as Britain is to repatriate agricultural policy, which would be better for consumers, housewives, taxpayers and British farmers. It can be done. All that is needed is for my right hon. Friend the Minister to have the willpower to do it.

8.14 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): For the past 16 years I have had the privilege of representing in the House Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, a large rural area of 800 square miles.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Too long.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman was named by Madam Speaker earlier. He would be better advised to keep quiet.

During that time, I have come to understand the importance of farming to the rural economy and the rural environment in general. I have also come to realise the need for a fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy. To take just one example, it is immoral to pay millions of pounds in set-aside to farmers not to produce food while 24 people in the third world die every minute from hunger. That fact alone argues the case for fundamental reform. With enlargement and the entry into the European Union of eastern European countries, we face further problems.

May I tell the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) that I am a long-term supporter of the European Union but that does not mean that I support every aspect of it—quite the reverse. I feel much more able to criticise it as a supporter. Criticism that comes from enthusiasts for the European Union is regarded as much more genuine than criticism by people like the hon. Members for Northampton, North and for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), which always seems to have an underlying motive. I am always suspicious of their motivation as they seem to seek to undermine the European Union as a whole rather than make a genuine point.

There is no point in my repeating the excellent arguments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and others on the general issues, with which I concur. In the minutes available to me, I shall raise one or two specific issues that have been raised with me by my friends in the executive of Cumnock National Farmers Union, whom I met a week last Monday. I hope that the Minister of State will reply. If he cannot do so when winding up the debate, I shall understand and look forward to a letter subsequently.

The first issue is waste disposal, about which farmers are understandably concerned because of increased requirements from the European Union. In my area, the Clyde river purification board is, understandably, imposing those regulations strictly. Yet while those new stricter regulations are being imposed, the Government have removed grants for improved waste handling facilities for farmers. That seems absolutely crazy to me and my constituents.

When I visited Auchincruive agricultural college in my constituency recently, with my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who happen to be former students of that distinguished college, it was pointed out to me that agricultural waste is extremely toxic compared with domestic waste. It seems sensible that the Government should help farmers to dispose of such waste and it is crazy to withdraw the grants.

Secondly, I want to deal with a point raised by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh). I am glad to see that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), is in his place. I have great respect for him as he has the interests of agriculture at heart, even if he cannot always implement them because of pressures from elsewhere. I am concerned about the beef special premium scheme. As the hon. Member for Angus, East said, the regional ceiling on claims in Scotland needs to be reassessed as more cattle are now eligible and there is an overshoot. I understand that Italy and Greece have been granted an extra allocation and I do not see why Scotland should not be granted one, too.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) raised the question of hill livestock compensation allowance payments. He pointed out that, in the past couple of years, the real value of HLCA payments has gone down by 8 per cent. and this year farm incomes on the high hills are less than £10,000 on average. That is appalling.

As the hon. Member for Ynys Môn said, the idea of HLCA was that, when farming incomes decrease, compensatory allowances should, by definition, increase. I hope that the Ministers will consider that further, especially as that has resulted in changes in environmental conditions that have created special problems on wetter and more exposed land. As the hon. Member for Dumfries will know, in the past few months the south-west of Scotland has been especially exposed and especially wet. I hope that special consideration will be given to that.

Fourthly, I want to discuss milk, not the aspects of marketing that were dealt with earlier, but the milk intervention board, which is in a shambles, as I was told by the Cumnock branch of the National Farmers Union of Scotland. Scottish farmers experience problems—delays—in quota transfers. I hope that the hon. Member for Dumfries might whisper in the ear of the Minister of State, to mention with approval the possibility of a Scottish intervention board, which would deal with Scottish applications. I know that that would find favour with the hon. Member for Angus, East, and that would bring decisions much nearer to the farmer.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): The milk marketing board.

Mr. Foulkes: Not the milk marketing board; this is the intervention board. That would bring decisions much nearer to farmers in Scotland.

Fifthly, I want to ask a question about the licensing of heavy goods vehicles. I know that that is perhaps more the responsibility of the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Secretary of State for Transport, but the Agriculture Minister should have a special interest in that. I am worried that the hugely increased costs of licensing HGVs will result in farmers choosing not to license their heavy goods vehicles, and using tractors and trailers instead. As the hon. Member for Dumfries will know, as we both drive on roads in the south-west of Scotland, there are already enough tractors and trailers to hold up all the traffic. It would create special difficulties if there were increasing numbers of them on the roads. I hope that the Minister of Agriculture will make representations in relation to that.

Those were the arguments made to me. An additional matter was mentioned at the end of the meeting, and it has been mentioned subsequently. I know that it is not the direct responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but there is great disquiet in Scotland that the BBC has stopped its Scottish farming programme. I notice the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland nodding. I hope that the Government will make representations to the BBC to restore that vital service for farmers, which was very much appreciated.

I greatly respect the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is probably enjoying his dinner at the moment, but unfortunately he made a gratuitous attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East earlier. All those of us who are genuinely anxious about the reform of the CAP, the improvement of the countryside and the development of the rural economy look forward to the day when my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East is installed in Whitehall place. It cannot come too soon, and until it comes I look forward to joining my friends in the Lobby tonight to vote against this discredited Government.

8.22 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I shall not insult the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), because he might not buy me a drink again, and that would never do. However, I shall thank my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his team for the work that they have done so far in achieving reforms of the CAP in a measured and sensible way. There is no need for hysterics, but there is a need for firm and sensible negotiations in Europe, and I think that we have had evidence of those in the past few years.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team for the way in which they have persuaded the Treasury to allow the capital taxation regime to be equalised so that let land is dealt with in the same way as land in hand. That, together with the reform of the agricultural tenancy system under the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, on the Committee of which I was sitting a few minutes ago, will do a great deal to ease the letting of land in rural parts of our country.

I want to draw on one or two of the arguments that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). It is a technical subject, but it is worth emphasising the arguments for modulation of agricultural support payments. There has been some discussion of the subject, but I wish to give one or two reasons why the Government should resist any movement towards that type of reform of the CAP.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

It has been suggested that there are good reasons why agricultural support payments should be "modulated", as it is called—adapted—to reduce the amount of support being paid to large farms and to increase the amount of support to small farms. I suggest, however, that there are very good reasons why that policy should not be supported and is certainly not advantageous to farmers in our country. It is important that the issue is closely examined, and I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will do precisely that. I want to suggest one or two reasons why that type of adjustment is not good.

First, owing to the farm structure in our country, any modulation of support payments would fall much more heavily on our country than on any other European Union member state. The average size of farm buildings here is about 69 hectares, that is to say, about four times the European Union average. Any policy of so-called modulation would cause a redistribution of support away from the northern member states, and especially from the United Kingdom, towards the southern member states, such as Greece and Italy, where the farm structure is, as we all know, hardly the same as it is in this country.

Secondly, it is strongly arguable that employment will be affected if modulation were introduced. In our country, large farms employ more labour per hectare than small farms. If we are anxious to sustain rural employment, and I am, and to ensure that providers of labour are properly paid, and I am, the European Union must not discriminate against larger farms. Concentrating resources on smaller farms will serve only to reduce employment opportunities and may also stimulate a demand for off-farm employment, for which there is currently very little supply, as small farm operators seek to supplement their incomes from non-farm sources.

Thirdly, the development of farming enterprises may be hindered by modulation. A farm that becomes aware of the opportunity to expand into a new market may be discouraged from doing so if it means that the farm is no longer eligible for subsidy payments or receives substantially reduced subsidy payments. Any economic gain would therefore be lost. Artificial farm division may also be encouraged, which would undo any economic gains based on past decisions.

Fourthly, small farm businesses do generate lower net farm incomes when compared with larger farms. However, some small farm operators are vulnerable to variability in farm income. When other sources of income are taken into account, their position is greatly improved and can often be at a level comparable to, or greater than, that of larger farmers. I speak as a Member of Parliament whose constituency contains, not only large estates, but some small farms.

However, there is no direct relationship between farm size and efficiency which would support the argument that small farmers could not exploit economies of scale and should therefore have favourable treatment under the CAP. One only has to consider the Danish and Dutch farming position, where there are smaller holdings but high production levels, to realise the force of that suggestion.

Sixthly, there is no evidence to suggest that small farms are more environmentally friendly than larger ones. I suggest that a farm's impact on the environment has much more to do with the objects, style, techniques and outlook of the manager than with farm size. As smaller farms tend to have smaller incomes than larger farms, the resources available to smaller farms to produce environmental benefits are much smaller than those available to larger farms, so the introduction of any modulation against larger farms will severely disadvantage them and have a bad effect on their ability to devote resources to environmental management. That is a narrow argument, but it is worth making in the context of the debate.

I ask the Government to lose no time in forcing our opinions on our European counterparts. We have witnessed the expansion of the European Union into the EFTA countries which entered on 1 January 1995, and we shall shortly, in the next 10 or so years, consider applications from the Visegrad four—Poland, Hungary, the Slovakian Republic and the Czech Republic.

The financial impact on the CAP and the cohesion and structural funds will be enormous. The impact upon our funding will be about 50 billion ecu, of which 15 billion ecu will go on the CAP expenditure and 35 billion ecu will go on structural funds and so on. The applications from the Visegrad four and other eastern and central European countries to join the Union will be the source of considerable tension within the United Kingdom among taxpayers and throughout the current member states of the European Union. I do not want that to happen and we should anticipate that by ensuring that the CAP is reformed now to meet the best farming interests of the northern Europeans. We will, of course, meet strong arguments from the southern Europeans, who currently benefit from the cohesion and structural funds—the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Greeks and to some extent the Irish—but we must resist complaints from them. We must make sure that any reform of the CAP takes into account the future difficulties from which we will suffer as a result of the enlargement of the Community to take in the former Soviet Union and its former areas of influence. In that way, the financial strains of enlargement will be anticipated well in advance.

It is argued that the period of transition to encourage those new countries to join the Union is expected to be about 20 years. That is far too long. A negotiating arrangement whereby the Visegrad four have up to 20 years to come to terms with their financial responsibilities is simply too long. I therefore urge my right hon. Friend to produce a policy that takes that into account.

My hon. Friends have already spoken with great feeling and knowledge of the British farming industry. I wish to put on record my support for our farmers. I find it extremely sad that in every debate on rural and agricultural matters in the past few weeks the Labour party has put forward either some fellow from an inner-city area, who knows precisely nothing about the subject, but is prepared to lecture us all about it, or someone who is damaging to the interests of the rural economy.

Mr. Morley: What on earth is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Garnier: I urge the Government to play the strongest possible hand in supporting our farmers, who have been the greatest supporters of the Conservative party for many years. *[Interruption.]* I urge my hon. Friend on the Front Bench to ignore the rather tiresome and silly sedentary remarks from the Opposition. That is typical of the Opposition's stance on the issue. They will barrack, complain, whinge and nag, but they fail to produce one positive policy. All they do is complain, whinge and carp. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to stand up for British farmers.

8.32 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In introducing the debate, my right hon. Friend the Minister made an excellent speech from his perspective as a Minister of the Crown. Of course he joins a long list of Ministers who have stood at the Dispatch Box and assured the House that fraud will be dealt with. I do not wish to dwell on that point now, but I hope to speak equally well from my own perspective on agriculture. The House will appreciate that I do so without the benefit of a central office brief.

I shall oppose the Labour party amendment for the very good reason that it is pie in the sky to believe that a Labour Government would be any more successful than a Conservative one in negotiating a better deal for Great Britain within the constraints of the existing CAP.

I am pleased to take part in the debate, which would be an important one if either the arguments deployed or the vote could change anything. The reality is that nothing that is said or done in this Chamber changes the CAP one iota, unless there is a qualified majority of Ministers in the farm Ministers Council. The insanity of the CAP is exceeded only by the absurdity of the situation that we face this evening as a result of which the CAP will be totally unaffected by the outcome of the 10 o'clock vote, yet that same vote is seen to have deep significance for the future of our Government.

Before I proceed further, I should like to declare my interests. First, as a butcher and a farmer, with a lifetime's experience on both sides of the farm gate, I declare an interest in the subject of the debate. Secondly, as a lifelong Conservative, I declare my interest in the substance of the debate and the contradictions that it poses for my right hon. and hon. Friends.

If I was asked whether the CAP has assisted me as a craftsman, the answer would be an emphatic no. If I were asked whether the CAP had helped me as an independent business man, the answer would be, "Most certainly not". If those same questions were put to other craftsmen and other entrepreneurs and elicited the same response, where is the comfort for the Conservative party? If the Conservative party chooses to accord greater importance to the institutions of the European Union than it does to the interests of its natural supporters in the food and farming industries, it will get its just desserts.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench not to dismiss out of hand the terms of the amendment standing in the name of a number my hon. Friends and myself, four of whom are, incidentally, farmers. My right hon. and hon. Friends should recognise that the CAP is unsupportable, unsustainable and incapable of sensible reform.

The failure of the CAP to date is characterised by several features—the incalculable damage that it has done to the pastoral economies of the third world; the damage that it has done even to the agricultural industries of some member states of the European Union; and the massive fraud perpetrated within it, to which several right hon. and hon. Members have already alluded. Nearer to home, anyone with his feet on the ground knows that the average age of our farmers is increasing well beyond 55 years, which is not a healthy sign, nor is it indicative of a healthy industry. We have an unprecedented suicide rate among farmers; low incomes in the farming industry; a minefield of rules and regulations; and we are suffering from abattoir closures. Perhaps the House will bear with me if I draw on my own experience.

My company used to slaughter hundreds and thousands of cattle and sheep. We gave that up a few years ago and no longer slaughter any cattle or any sheep because no one in my business was clever enough to best-guess the whims of the intervention board and the other aspects of political interference in cattle and sheep, which suddenly altered the whole buying and selling equation.

Even the pig sector is not entirely immune to such interference. The president of the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers recently wrote to the European Commissioner for Agriculture and said:

> "We would be grateful for an explanation of the Pigmeat Management Committee decision . . . to introduce a private storage aid scheme for pigmeat, with effect from Monday 6 February.
>
> This seems an extraordinary decision to take as pig numbers continue to fall, and as the market is beginning to improve after last year's difficulties.
>
> That the Commission should act in a way that so strongly conflicts with the instincts and experience of industry appears to us as incomprehensible".

A civil servant from the Ministry replied:

> "We entirely agree with what you say. The scheme will take supplies off a tightening market and distort the market again in three months time when the meat is released. I pressed your points at the Pigmeat Management Committee on 30 January and voted against the proposal. But all too to no avail."

That is rather like the other report that I read in the briefing paper that we received from the European Commission dated 23 February. In the context of the Agriculture Council meeting that week to discuss animal welfare conditions for the transport of animals, it said:

> "After lengthy consultations, however, the meeting ended without agreement".

I am afraid that that is all too typical of what happens when we argue our case at the heart of Europe. In the intervening period, hundreds of abattoirs have closed and we face the prospect of hundreds more closures in the very near future. That fact of life is being accelerated by the plethora of rules and regulations—not all of which have emanated from Brussels; they have been assisted by our own MAFF—which are putting the craftsmen and the master butcher on the scrapheap. The House should ask itself how that helps the welfare of animals, the future of the independent business sector, consumer choice or the risk of cross-contamination, as slaughtering is concentrated in fewer but larger abattoirs.

Conservative Members should ask themselves how that squares with the principles and philosophies of the Conservative party. To avoid any doubt, I remind the House that I am a lifelong Conservative and a capitalist. I believe that capitalism is the most effective means of identifying, supplying and satisfying markets. The House is being asked to support socialism in the form of the common agricultural policy. Any regime which determines centrally what should be produced, in what quantities, to what standards and at what price cannot be described otherwise.

The irony of the present situation would be laughable if it were not so desperately serious. A Conservative Government are apparently prepared to go to the stake for

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

a socialist principle. They are prepared to turn their back on their own values and beliefs in order to keep faith with other members of what has become the world's most expensive club. The Government are buying their enemies at the expense of selling their friends.

More and more people are concluding that if they must have socialism they would rather have it from socialists than from Conservatives. That is not to say that there is no market for true Conservatism. I hope that my right hon. Friends will recognise that fact and start to deliver it before it is too late.

Finally, on the question of live exports, will the Minister give the House an unequivocal assurance that mass protests which seek to prevent the industry from going about its lawful business will be met in future with the same response as they would get in other countries—the water cannon?

8.42 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am inclined to say, "Well, follow that." However, I am delighted to make a contribution to the debate. I was heartened by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who I believe is widely respected in all sectors of agriculture and the food industry. He is doing an outstanding job.

I was deeply disappointed by the contribution of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). He had his chance to reform the common agricultural policy in the 1970s when he was Minister for Agriculture. He failed miserably then and he wants to have another attempt. Why does he think that he would be more successful now? I think that the House would conclude otherwise.

I was even more disappointed by the contribution of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who is the king of the cliche in hot pursuit of a soundbite. I intervened during his speech to talk about the countryside management contract. He responded by saying that my remarks were premature and that he would return to that subject. Sadly, he did not do so.

No doubt the hon. Gentleman was wriggling with embarrassment at the thought of imposing a system on our farmers which would be regulated by local authorities and linked to Liberal Democrat proposals for regional government. The farmers of Devon and Cornwall would be dictated to by Liberal Democrat councillors in Bristol. That is not a recipe for attracting the farming vote in the far south-west.

Very few people like the CAP or the common fisheries policy. There are those who would advocate that they be torn up, abolished or abandoned. Many of us might be attracted emotionally to such terminology, which we may find appealing superficially. In this world of tabloid values, I am sure that many people would support that approach.

However, there are at least two fundamental flaws in such an approach. First, the common fisheries policy—I will refer to it only briefly—is largely about conservation. If it did not exist, we would need to introduce some other national policy in order to conserve our fish stocks. If the common agricultural policy did not exist, we would need a national price support mechanism to support our agricultural industry.

Before Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1972, I remember how my father, who was a dairy farmer, enjoyed what was then called a "Channel islands premium" for breeding and milking Jersey and Guernsey cows and selling their milk, which had a certain cream content. Those sorts of support mechanisms were in place well before we got anywhere near the then European Economic Community.

We need to subsidise and support agriculture for many reasons which have been referred to this evening. If the countries with which we compete continue to support their food industries financially—in the way that America supports its cereal, beef and sheep industries, for example—what chance will our farmers have when low-priced imports flood into this country? Our industry would be wiped out. The only alternative would be to raise tariffs and turn our back on the free single market that we are moving towards gradually.

The second fundamental flaw in the all-too-easy argument for tearing up the CAP and the CFP is that they are part of our treaty obligations. They are part and parcel of our membership of the European Union. If we were to tear up the CAP or the CFP we would be tearing up the treaty of Rome also.

If we are pushed into artificial political integration in Europe faster than we would like or further than we are prepared to go, the time may come when, as a nation, we must consider the issues sensibly. I am mindful of the Bible verse which says:

> "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?"

Agreed on what? We should be agreed on the destination, route and pace of change. There are times when we should examine our relationship with our European colleagues and ask ourselves whether we have agreed on the destination for Europe; have we agreed on the route and the pace of change? Perhaps there are occasions when we conclude that that is not the case.

The time may come when we must consider the issues very carefully. However, I argue passionately that that time is not yet here. The argument in relation to the CAP, CFP and Europe generally hangs in the balance. We have the opportunity to shape and to embrace the future of the European Union. We have the opportunity to reform the CAP and the CFP by working from within. Therefore, I believe that it is a pragmatic and sensible policy to continue the drive to reform the CAP.

We have had some success in that regard. It is encouraging to note that intervention stocks are falling. Between December 1993 and December 1994, surplus wheat stocks fell by 57 per cent., surplus beef stocks fell by 80 per cent., and butter stocks fell by 61 per cent. Those figures show that we are heading in the right direction. The overall cost of the CAP has fallen. There have been real savings for our consumers based on reduced support prices. We have taken some very sensible initiatives on fraud which should be welcomed. It is a modest start, but it is an important one. We must recognise that working from within the CAP affords us the best opportunity of entering the longed-for single market in farm goods and agricultural products.

The greatest opportunity to reform the CAP comes from the enlargement of the European Union, particularly the inclusion of the central and eastern European nations, which will drive us inexorably to the conclusion that the CAP must be reformed.

One of the greatest opponents of CAP reform is France, which is involved in the European Union primarily for reasons of defence. There is no doubt that continual enlargement of the Community helps defence. The day must come when the French must choose between the overwhelming need to create a union of states in which there is security and the decision always to kowtow to the agricultural lobby.

The process of enlargement affords a great opportunity to reform the CAP. We should be in no doubt that if we take on board the central and European nations, the CAP will be unaffordable.

I had lunch recently with a former colleague at one of the largest law firms in the city. He is in charge of its eastern European department and spends much time in the eastern European nations. Those countries are getting their act together to overcome the technical and legal difficulties that they have encountered as a result of being involved in the Soviet Union. They are beginning to work their way through those problems and produce more agricultural foodstuffs.

The basis of intervention policy is that the more one produces, the more one is paid. The cost of more countries coming into the CAP makes it unaffordable, yet the political momentum for enlargement is irresistible. It is the irresistible force meeting the immovable object and something has to give. I suggest that what will give will be the common agricultural policy as we currently know it.

I have no doubt that the changes will be hard fought and in true Community fashion there will be cliffhangers and last-minute decisions, but the momentum is in the right direction for reform and enlargement is the single greatest incentive for change.

There is now an opportunity—the greatest for many years—to see the unwieldy monster that we have created the in past few years reformed in a sensible and welcome manner.

8.52 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) asked whether the nations of the European Union have agreed on a route forward for both the common agricultural policy and the future of the European Union. The answer to that important question is no, we have not, and it is not reasonable to expect us to do so, but that is the excitement and the challenge of the European Union of which the CAP is such an important and sensitive part.

One of the sad things about the present state of British politics generally is that we have lost the vision of the creation of the European Union as a totally new structure. It is not the United States of America written on a European scale, nor is it a new-style British or German commonwealth. It resembles nothing that previously existed, so my hon. Friend was certainly right to ask that question. However, we must also understand that there are any number of answers or no answers, but that should be the excitement and the challenge to which Britain responds positively. Sadly, however, not all Members of Parliament on the Government or Opposition Benches respond in that manner.

More often than not, our regular debates on the common agricultural policy turn into a ritualistic moan and carp at the CAP and the European Union. We have had at least four or five examples of that from both sides of the House today. It is time we started to throw more light on the subject and certainly to bring more honesty to the problems and the success of the much-reviled common agricultural policy. In particular, we should bring much more honesty to our own attitude and that of all right hon. and hon. Members to our continued membership of the European Union. As those of us who regularly participate in the debates on Europe are painfully aware, we are treated in one speech after another to a litany of criticisms. The Christopher Booker monologue is trotted out time and again—be it the CAP, fisheries policy, or whatever alleged iniquity has been inflicted on us by those wicked gentlemen and ladies from Brussels. The benefits of the European Union—and even the dreaded common agricultural policy—are deliberately obscured.

This is a take note debate. It should not be a great party political battle, but a careful examination of the problems, what has been achieved and what remains to be achieved.

Mr. Budgen: It has been made up to be a great debate because the Conservative Whips have tried to describe it as a test of loyalty. That is how the debate was introduced to the public. As usual, it is a gross distortion.

Mr. Whitney: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's invention. As a former Whip, he will know a great deal more about the ways of the Whips Office than I would claim. I could not rival him in expertise in the ways of Whippery.

No right hon. or hon. Member would deny that there are serious problems to be solved with the common agricultural policy, but I should point up one danger, or pitfall into which we are in danger of falling—and, dare I say it, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) may be leading the charge to fall into the next pit. It is widely accepted that one of the reasons why we have been wrestling with the problem of the CAP for so many years is that we in Britain denied ourselves the possibility of being in at the beginning to devise and design a sensible structure for agricultural support in the then European Community, and so the CAP emerged as the bane of all our lives thereafter. If we followed the advice of some hon. Members, and of some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and denied ourselves the opportunity to be in at the beginning of what may or may not be the emergence of a single currency, we would make yet another mistake—and one that we might rue even more bitterly than we have, over many years, rued not having been in at the start of the CAP's construction.

It is important to keep in perspective the origins of the problems and the terrible gloom to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West cheerfully contributes whenever he has the opportunity and which is shed on all things European by a handful of people—reinforced and amplified in geometric proportion by the media's avid attention. We all know the game that is being played, although I am not sure whether the media understand the game that they are playing.

Ever since Britain became a member of the European Community—late, but we finally made it—we have been pressing for reform of the CAP, and progress has been made. I was a diplomat at the Foreign Office for most of the time of the last Labour Government. They tried—feebly and not very successfully, but they tried. I invite the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), in

[Mr. Whitney]

view of the remarks that he makes now, to look back on his own record and that of his former ministerial colleagues when they were in office. If he did, silence might reign thereafter on the Labour Front Bench.

Times change and things improve. In 1988, the CAP was costing 70 per cent. of the EC budget. Thanks largely to pressures exerted by Conservative Ministers, the cost has reduced to 50 per cent. We should rejoice in that progress, and I am sure that I carry my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West with me in that.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend is making an amusing, interesting and vastly self-confident speech, but all that happened was that other aspects of the budget were enhanced. That had the effect of reducing the proportion accounted for by the common agricultural policy. My hon. Friend is wrong to make the assertion that he does. He used to be a distinguished commentator. Not only have the Whips tried to hype the debate, but they have introduced my hon. Friend at a time when he is ill prepared.

Mr. Whitney: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend's flattery, but flattery from that quarter makes one rather nervous. I repeat that if anyone knows the ways of the Whips' Office, it is my hon. Friend. Admittedly his sojourn—

Mr. Budgen: The Whips should have given my hon. Friend more time to prepare.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The House knows my views on sedentary interventions, and that applies to all hon. Members.

Mr. Whitney: I allowed myself to be distracted from the CAP and I will endeavour to return to the strait and narrow.

As my hon. Friend said, the budget is increasing and we are doing our best to keep it under control. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister achieved much in that regard at Maastricht. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West and the House acknowledges the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The cost of the CAP is 50 per cent. of a greater sum, but that overall aggregate is steadily being brought under control—as is CAP spending.

I remind the House that significant progress was made with the 1992 reforms and that much of that success was contributed by British Ministers. There were reductions in support prices and in incentives for overproduction, and much greater transparency in agricultural support payments. We should not allow ourselves to think that no progress was made. Since the Government came to office, considerable progress has been made, not least because of the success of the GATT negotiations. The British Conservative Government can take great credit not only for what they achieved for agriculture but for bringing the whole enterprise, after many long and difficult years, to a successful conclusion. In that successful venture great tribute is due to our friend Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner in charge of the negotiations.

The other impact of the GATT agreement was that, for the first time, agriculture was brought within the rules on multilateral trade. I certainly hope that people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, attached as he is to free trade, would accept that bringing agriculture, difficult though that is, within the realms of normal trading arrangements is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

That excellent record of achievement should be acknowledged. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell) said, neither Front Benchers nor anyone else should continue to make these highly exaggerated claims about the cost of the CAP to British families. I would accept the figure that my hon. Friend suggested of about £15 per week per family. As the Minister rightly pointed out, however, world prices also have an impact on this highly complicated equation. It might be argued that it is not even susceptible to serious analysis.

The fact is that, whatever system applies, some sort of agricultural price support would be needed in any country. So the claims and criticisms made by those who continually attack the European Union, to the effect that the CAP is hugely costly to our constituents, are ill founded. Most people agree that there is a need for a CAP of some nature. By all means let us improve its nature, but the alternative would be to break up the world once again into competing and distorting systems of national agricultural subsidies. Anyone who knows what happened in the 1920s and 1930s will know the sort of dangers to which such systems led.

The CAP has been reformed and must be reformed significantly further. Many hon. Members have pointed out that the enlargement of the EU, with the entry of the Visegrad countries, will lead to new opportunities in that regard. I do not say that progress will be easier, but it will perhaps be less difficult to achieve the sort of reforms that most of us want. Let us not fool ourselves, however, that the process can be painless.

I believe that there is a strong case for adopting a much more free-market approach to agriculture. I know a number of farmers in my constituency who are increasingly of that view, so we should be open-minded about it. Instead of spreading more gloom, we should acknowledge that the entry of the Visegrad countries offers fresh opportunities to us all. Certainly, the Germans are as interested as we are in ensuring that change moves in the direction that we want. That, at any rate, is the challenge.

We need an end to the negativism and destructiveness with which we have become so familiar. Often the people who spread these criticisms have no great interest in the CAP as such. They probably also recognise that the burden of agricultural support payments is well nigh inescapable, whatever the means adopted. That type of criticism comes from people who want us out of the European Union but do not have the guts to say so. I offer this challenge to any right hon. or hon. Member on either side of the House: let them for goodness sake nail their colours to that particular mast if that is where they are. It is not, of course, a colour that I personally would strike, because I believe in the future of the United Kingdom and I am sure that this country, our industry and our agriculture can live and survive in a positive and constructive co-operation with our European partners. I believe that those who wish to walk away from that, far from being nationalists or patriots, are little Englanders who do not have the national self-confidence that all the other 14 members of the European Union have.

I urge the whole House to take a positive and constructive approach to understanding what has been achieved in our reforms of the common agricultural policy, while recognising that we still have a long way to go.

9.10 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It has been an interesting debate. Every year, many hon. Members highlight the problems of the CAP, yet depressingly little progress seems to be made with it. Although we have heard some sensible speeches, much nonsense has been spoken, and doubtful figures have been bandied about with regard to the CAP. A quite amazing attempt has been made to blame the excesses of the CAP on Labour Governments of more than 16 years ago. That is going it a bit.

It was somewhat unreasonable and bad mannered for the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) to accuse my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) of being an inner-city Member of Parliament who has been put up to represent the Labour party. My hon. Friend was born and raised on a farm. He is a distinguished agricultural scientist and was an agriculture Minister serving in Governments when the hon. Member for Harborough was probably throwing bread rolls around at a Young Conservatives' dinner.

The wording of the Government motion is amazingly complacent. It congratulates the Government

"on its robust negotiating stance . . . since 1979".

That is going it a bit, quite frankly.

The cost of the CAP is still rising and is expected to reach £32.4 billion in 1999—a huge increase, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) quite rightly pointed out. There has not been much evidence of any control in bringing the CAP to heel. There are still fundamental objections to the CAP in its present form. The costs to consumers are still artificially high. The consumers in Europe group estimates that between £16 and £20 per family per week is spent on supporting the CAP.

The CAP puts a block on the future expansion of the European Union to embrace eastern Europe. It is quite clear that we could not possibly expand the European Union and take the eastern European states into the CAP in its current form.

The CAP is still open to massive fraud, and we have seen examples of that. Indeed, the Minister gave some examples. It is fair and reasonable, however, to pay tribute to the European Court of Auditors, which has been astute in identifying and tracking down those frauds. The CAP still distorts world trade and has a negative effect on developing countries. Far too much is still spent on intervention, storage and transport. Again, the more one spends on those aspects, the more scope there is for fraud.

The CAP, by its very nature, its scale and the way in which it operates, is an extremely bureaucratic structure. I have a document here that lists all the publications that have been written on the European Union in the past year. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is not here, as it is the type of document that he likes to read out in debates, particularly during private Members' Bills, as he is so addicted to publications such as telephone directories.

Even the MacSharry reforms, which were meant to move away from product price support, have not been as successful as we were led to believe. Set-aside and quotas have not been popular and have provided only short-term relief. Milk quotas are traded and leased. Some 70 per cent. of milk quotas are in the hands of people who are no longer producing. A large amount of money is being given to people for nothing. Quotas distort the market. Those who have quotas are in a fortunate position.

Arable payments have inflated land values and assisted the larger farmer at the expense of the smaller farmer.

Mr. Budgen: I am interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say about quotas. Would an incoming Labour Government be in favour of abolishing quotas, presumably without compensation?

Mr. Morley: We certainly favour phasing out quotas. There is no doubt about that.

Mr. Budgen: Without compensation?

Mr. Morley: People within the quota-controlled market know very well that it is likely that the day will come when the quota regime will end. It is not so much a question of compensation but of the need to give adequate notice. The various forms of support and intervention methods cannot simply be switched off; they must be phased out.

Mr. Budgen: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that for the average dairy farmer, for example, the quota may be worth as much as £200,000. They would very much like to know whether—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is about to say something very carefully—on taking office a Labour Government would immediately give notice that quotas were to be phased out, say, within two years without compensation. *[Interruption.]* I do not have any milk quota.

Mr. Morley: I shall certainly not be drawn on such issues, but in the past the Government have cut quotas without compensation.

The levels of various forms of support are enormous. Income from oilseed production is 64 per cent. subsidy. About 40 per cent. of arable farmers' net incomes comes in subsidy. Despite that, about 20,000 farmers are expected to leave farming by the beginning of the next century. Therefore, the CAP is not altogether successful at keeping people on the land.

There is an argument for support for small farmers and for keeping people in farming and it will have to be considered in the future. Some Conservative Members have argued for limits to the amount of subsidy paid to farmers. That is an interesting idea, but it has disadvantages for individuals. However, the argument is worth considering.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: With respect, in the European context it is dangerous to refer to small farms because what is a small farm in Britain is a large farm on the continent. One must be careful to define what one means by such terms.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I am aware of the average size of United Kingdom farms compared with European farms. I shall say a word about European farmers later.

[Mr. Morley]

There have been problems with headage payments, which have led to overstocking and distortions within the livestock sector.

It is also hard to justify the fact that some agricultural sectors are heavily subsidised while others are not. That again distorts the market and means that there is no free market in agricultural products. It is hard to justify subsidies for the dairy, beef and sheep sectors while the pig and poultry sectors receive no subsidy.

Such subsidies also influence the debate on the transport of live animals for slaughter. It is a scandal that continental veal producers are often linked to dairy producers. The unnatural liquid diet on which veal calves are force fed comes from generously subsidised milk powder from surplus milk production. Such distortions and abuse should be stopped. I hope that the Minister will argue for such changes within the CAP regime.

Producers such as Welsh sheep farmers who have been so unfairly critical of the NFU in recent months should remember that up to 75 per cent. of the net income of those in the less-favoured areas comes from subsidy.

Some people have called for disruptive action in response to the demonstrations about live exports. They should stop and think about what that would do to their image, and about the support that they receive from taxpayers—some of whom are demonstrating against live exports. They should heed the wiser counsel of organisations such as the NFU, which know the most effective ways of lobbying and putting the farmers' case.

The same applies to the dairy sector, which the CAP supports to the tune of about £230 per year per cow. As has been pointed out, those who have received milk quotas have received a substantial free capital asset. I am not saying that farmers should not have the right to demonstrate and to put their point of view—or, indeed, that fishermen should not have the same right, although I have every sympathy with the Minister.

The unsubsidised pig sector has had a difficult couple of years. It currently faces the cost of phasing out stalls and tethers. The sector should be congratulated on the positive way in which it has approached animal welfare, but it would not be unreasonable to give it some support at this difficult time. Grant aid is being offered to Northern Ireland producers; why cannot that aid be extended to the rest of the United Kingdom?

Why should we not consider 100 per cent. first-year tax allowances for the cost of replacing stalls and tethers? Why should we not consider enabling capital allowances for buildings with a short lifespan to be written off over their useful lives? Why should we not consider allowing losses to be carried for three years for income-tax purposes, in line with the arrangements for corporation tax? I hope that the Minister will raise those points with the Chancellor, and that they will be dealt with in the Finance Bill.

I must comment briefly on the export of live animals for slaughter in the context of CAP reform. CAP regimes distort the livestock sector, as the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) pointed out. I must take issue with the hon. Members for Hexham and for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway): the export of live animals for slaughter exports jobs from the rural economy, quite apart from the attendant welfare problems.

Of course problems are involved in, for instance, calf production. If we are to restrict the export of calves in veal crates, we must consider supporting the production of rose veal in this country, and providing marketing aids. We must consider the production of lightweight beef, and selective breeding. The Labour party has discussed those issues with the Meat and Livestock Commission, and with the industry.

There is less of a problem with sheep exports. Currently 80 per cent. of the sheep trade is carcase trade, and I am sure that the remaining 20 per cent. could be absorbed by further carcase exports. In its recent report "UK Live Animal Exports: the Implications of a Significant Reduction in the Trade for the UK Meat and Livestock Industry", the Meat and Livestock Commission considers the issue of live exports in some depth, and from the producer's point of view.

The MLC examined the effect on lamb prices of reducing the number of exports, and found that prices at market had generally been rising as a result of reduced lamb slaughtering following this year's reduced lamb crop. There have been some improvements in the French market price, possibly as a result of fewer live sheep imports, and a 3 per cent. fall in the value of sterling. The MLC said that there were

> "real opportunities for the expansion of the export market for lamb and there is scope for extending the home market. These will be major challenges for the industry and will require the maximum amount of support from MLC and Government."

Mr. Stevenson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the ability to develop a home market in meat is compromised by the lack of licensed abattoirs? According to the MAFF report there are about 1,400 licensed red-meat abattoirs, approximately 800 of which are on temporary derogations and could close at the end of the year unless they are brought up to structural standards. The Government seem oblivious to the problem

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The closure of abattoirs is certainly linked to the problem to which he refers. Although, overall, there is spare capacity in abattoirs in this country, the major problem is where they are. A regional policy should certainly be considered. We can and should be adding value and concentrating on the first-class meat export business trade, not on a second-class live animal for slaughter trade.

There seems to be a case for arguing that there should be a European fund to provide capital grants for moving towards high-welfare production systems. That would include the pig and poultry sectors. I recently visited the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service experimental farm at Gleadthorpe, looked at various systems of egg production and talked to United Kingdom egg producers. It is only fair that I put on record the tremendous work that the poultry sector is doing in developing a more welfare-friendly system. It is, of course, concerned that, in Europe, little progress seems to be being made in comparison to this country in the development of welfare-friendly production schemes.

One way to deal with that problem would be to argue for the establishment of a European fund, to which any producer in any member state could bid for capital assistance. I am quite confident that, given their excellent record, British producers would make the majority of applications to that fund. Again, the Minister may care to consider that in any reform of the common agricultural policy. A number of budget headings could be diverted to fund such a scheme—scrapping the tobacco regime would certainly be one of them. I am sure that better options for rural employment can be provided than the tobacco scheme.

We in the Labour party believe that much of the support schemes, quota arrangements and intervention buying is expensive and wasteful and is damaging the development of a strong agricultural market. We want to phase those schemes out in an orderly and structured way—not overnight, as the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) said. It has to be done sensibly and, of course, by negotiation in the European Community.

We also want to ensure that production matches demand. We have already heard examples of the proposed reforms for the sugar regime. It would be quite unacceptable if our quota was cut even though the UK is not self-sufficient in sugar production.

The idea of decoupling support from production and intervention is supported and accepted by most of the main farming organisations such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and other countryside organisations. Indeed, as far as I can remember, every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate supports such reform of the CAP. Questions lie in the form, application and speed of that reform. If we can achieve that decoupling, there is great potential for redirecting the savings towards a more constructive use in the countryside.

We want progressively to increase support for environmental land management schemes, as we progressively reduce support for production. It is quite unacceptable that the agri-environmental package in the CAP accounts for a paltry 1 per cent. of the total UK CAP budget. We need to move towards a more integrated land management policy. We need to support research and development, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East rightly pointed out, especially on non-food crops.

We need to identify socio-economic factors, such as upland and isolated communities. Farming in the rest of Europe, such as that under the cork forests, in eastern Europe, especially in Poland and Czechoslovakia, on the Spanish steppes, which are threatened through ploughing and open irrigation, and in the Greek olive groves are part of a very rich bio-diversity. If we are to have a CAP structure, I for one would much rather that it supported that range of European bio-diversity and the many communities that farm with such methods than the move towards large-scale farming that we seen over recent years.

We need to have basic environmental protection, which should be an obligation on all land users. Important areas should be protected by statute, but where there is a need for management such agreement should be available on a voluntary option basis. There must be co-ordination between European schemes and GATT. Set-aside should have a clearer environmental role, including a forestry role. I have said before that I very much welcome the progress that the Minister has made in negotiating that. We need to ensure that environmental conditions apply to all support payments in all agricultural sectors. The treaty of Rome should, indeed, be amended at the 1996 intergovernmental conference to reflect that.

Diversification should be encouraged within a rural and land use policy framework, and we need to encourage a sustainable and prosperous rural economy, recognising the important role of agriculture as a principal land user.

There are several ways of achieving those objectives, but repatriation is not really one of them. That would simply distort any agricultural market within the European Union and lead to unfair competition. If the individual elements of CAP contributions were given to member states what control would there be, for example, of France's support for its pig industry and Holland's support for its dairy sector? It would be impossible for there to be any kind of fair agricultural market on that basis.

We could have repatriation only within a strict framework of environmental support agreed through the European Union, so that support for the agricultural sector was based on land management objectives and not used as a production subsidy.

There is widespread recognition of the failures and distortions of the CAP, and our amendment reflects the mood of the House and of the country. I was sorry to hear the arguments of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) about why he feels that he must vote for the Government. At least he was honest when he said that this was not the time to attack the Government. According to him, the time to attack them is when they are arrogant and popular—so presumably, according to his argument, when they are arrogant and unpopular it is not the time to attack them.

The hon. Gentleman seems to offer us one of the first cases on record of a rat jumping back on to a sinking ship instead of deserting it. How will he be able to hold his head up again when he talks about the European Union, after voting for a motion that

"congratulates the Government on its robust negotiating stance on the CAP since 1979",

and on

"its leading role in achieving reform of the CAP",

although we know that prices have increased, fraud continues, farmers are still leaving the land and consumers are still paying far too much?

The hon. Gentleman intends to vote for that Government motion and not for our amendment, although our amendment stands not only for what we have argued for but for what he has publicly argued for. He is entitled to his own opinion, but he is not entitled to argue one thing and vote for another, which is not what some of his hon. Friends have said they will do. I do not think that we shall take what he says about Europe very seriously any more.

It is time for a constructive debate on Europe, such as we are trying to have on CAP reform. It is not good enough constantly to attack Europe in a negative and damaging way, as the hon. Gentleman does. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) was right to say that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West should publicly say that we should leave the EU. He should campaign for that instead of constantly sniping and fuelling the civil war in his party, because all that is affecting public perceptions of the EU and of the positive aspects that we in this country should support.

There is a case for criticism and for arguing for reform, and we have been making that case tonight, but there is also a case for recognising the benefits of the EU for the agricultural and food sectors and for the rest of the

[Mr. Morley]

economy, and we should think about that when people embark on xenophobic, irrational and ill-considered attacks. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West intends to support the Government tonight, I hope that in future we shall hear less of those attacks and more of his defence of the European Union and of the Government's position.

9.33 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): This has been an interesting debate, and I am grateful for the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell), for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) and for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), who in their own ways all touched on the many dimensions and aspects of the common agricultural policy as seen by Conservative Members.

I shall deal with the remarks of the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) in due course, but we also heard some comments from the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I shall have more to say about those hon. Members in a moment.

The problem for some Conservative Members is that there is perhaps a temptation to give some credibility to the amendment tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Anybody with the type of analytical skills displayed in this debate who reads the thin diet which stands for an Opposition policy on agriculture will see that the Government are truly addressing the issues of reform and modification of the common agricultural policy in the interests of the food industry, consumers and farmers, while the Opposition are out on a fishing trip for some kind of short-term political gain. We have credible policies, as outlined in the excellent speech by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow, for Northampton, North and for Wolverhampton, South-West have their own way of looking at the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow says that the common agriculture policy cannot be reformed, and says that he talks as a craftsman and a farmer. I would say to my hon. Friend that I earned my living in the horticulture industry before coming to the House. I also have first-hand experience of what it is like to operate in a sector that effectively has no direct intervention. I know what it is like to live on my wits to serve the needs of customers. But I also know what it is like to operate within a European market where having, for example, common standards in terms of grading means that I can operate Europewide and worldwide in agri-food products. The reality of the debate is that we cannot instantaneously change the common policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow has a unique view of the matter, and he knows that, at the end of the debate, we will not be able to trigger the type of reform that he seeks. The ideas which we have put forward provide a solid and sensible way of dealing with some of the problems of the common policy, and I hope at least that he will see favour in the line that we are taking. He is right that we must make the common policy more responsive to the needs of the marketplace. He also mentioned the pig meat regime. We voted solidly against that proposal—the regime has now ended—as it was not something with which we could agree.

My hon. Friend also talked on the subject of abattoirs, the problems of which are affecting a number of my hon. Friends. At a time when the consumption of red meat is under pressure, when matters of hygiene and quality are of uppermost concern and when meat is being dominated by the supermarkets which seek the highest standards, some of the enormous investment that has been made to ensure the highest possible standards must be supported by those in the meat trade to safeguard an important industry for our farmers.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Northampton, North is not in his place. *[Interruption.]* He has shifted places. I see that he has put his hand up at the back of the class, and I recognise him. Unfortunately, I cannot sustain the same benevolence to him as I did to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow for his arguments on the subject of repatriation. His argument would cause significant problems of distortion, and that view is shared by Members on both sides of the House. Nobody seriously supports repatriation because of the potential for distortion and unfairness which could creep in.

In discussions on the common policy, one often hears people seeking reassurance that things will be fair and that the rules will be implemented. Repatriation is a short route against that. I do not understand my hon. Friend for Northampton, North who, on the one hand, was advocating a free market approach, but, on the other, started to talk about standard quantities of milk and some form of intervention system. That did not seem entirely consistent with the freeing up of the market that he wanted.

Many hon. Members have tried to put the matter into perspective. Let us consider the costs of the common policy. If we convert into 1993-94 prices the amount of money that we spent on agricultural support in the financial year 1958-59, the figure is £2.8 billion. We spent £2.7 billion in 1994-95. That is not an excuse not to reform. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, one of the great drivers of change will be the expansion of the Community and the pressure that enlargement will put on the budget. However, I ask my hon. Friend to keep the amounts in perspective.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend has made various points—

Mr. John Greenway: He is not your hon. Friend.

Mr. Marlow: Of course he is my hon. Friend. He is all right. My hon. Friend said that there had been no great change in agricultural support. May I remind him that we contribute net to the Community budget a further £3 billion, some of which could be spent on agricultural support. My hon. Friend said that what I suggested would be unfair to the British farmer. Is it fair that the British farmer can produce only 80-odd per cent. of the milk required in the United Kingdom, that we cannot produce as much lamb as we possibly could because of quotas and that we have to take more of our land out of production than any other Community country?

Mr. Jack: The Government understand those frustrations. We seek in the long term to remove the barriers to letting the excellence and efficiency of our farming operation have its particular way. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe adduced in his remarks, had we been a member of the Community at the beginning, we could have designed a system that did not have the restrictions to which my hon. Friend refers. Now is the time to back the Government, who take reform seriously in a properly presented way.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, in his own forensic style, intervened in the debate on several occasions. He was right when he talked about the need to make the CAP more market-driven. On that point, we agree with him. I was delighted with his comments because he reflected well on what my right hon. Friend the Minister said about our desire to reform.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West asked some specific questions about the implementation of the milk quotas. Spain has now fully implemented milk quotas. There will be a report from the Commission by 31 March on Italy's efforts to implement the quotas. If it has not done so, it will face further penalty. My right hon. Friend will have an opportunity to raise those matters in the Agriculture Council.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale set an example for the House in his speech. He did what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East singularly failed to do. He worked out a plan of campaign. Opposition Members shake their heads as if they had not heard his sage words. Let me remind the House what my hon. Friend said. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn could perhaps associate himself with it. My hon. Friend said that change needed to be well thought through. He was right. He said that if we were to change from one thing to another we should not tip the baby out with the bathwater. He was right. He said that change should be gradual. He was also right about that.

This morning the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East told the *Financial Times* what a mess the CAP was. Then, as he sought instantaneous change, he also told us that we needed gradual reform. He is possibly one of the most inconsistent people. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale is entirely consistent. My hon. Friend went on to talk about the need to move the CAP closer to the market. On that point again, he was right. He said that the CAP should be non-discriminatory. Absolutely. If there is to be fairness, all the talk of repatriation must be set aside. Otherwise, we shall fall on to a discriminatory track.

My hon. Friend mentioned environmental benefit. Given that in the financial year 1996-97, when our full agri-environment package is up and running, we will spend about £100 million, I agree with him.

One of the areas for reform that must be explored is that to which the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe alluded in his speech. At least he had some ideas that we can debate. I searched for them in the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, but could not find any. Environmental cost compliance is an important area for the future of the CAP. Those prepared to debate reform sensibly yearn to see the common policy develop more environmental credentials. That will be an important theme as we develop the debate on reform.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said that we should have regard for the food and drink industry. I could not agree with him more. One of the great missing elements on the Opposition Benches is a regard for the purpose of the agricultural industry, which is about producing the raw materials for our competitive food industry. If it is to remain competitive, Conservative Members' idea of dispensing with the unnecessary burdens and costs of the social chapter will allow our food industry to triumph in Europe, rather than fail as it would under Labour policies.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important that we should do everything that we possibly can to export excellent produce from this country? Furthermore, does he agree that the Food From Britain campaign has had tremendous success? Will he tell the House how much he has invested in that programme?

Mr. Jack: We are putting some £6 million into Food From Britain, which is an excellent organisation. For example, I am about to announce an export seminar to encourage tremendous development in horticulture. My hon. Friend is entirely right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale went on to discuss matters connected with retaining the security of food supply, which is also important to the food industry. His plan was a blueprint that should be listened to by hon. Members across the House—*[Interruption.]*—despite the carping voices opposite.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West drew attention, in his unique style, to some of the problems of Milk Marque and invited me to comment on those. The Office of Fair Trading and the European Commission can be used if questions of abuse of competitive position arise. That was made clear during the passage of the Agriculture Bill and subsequently. Milk Marque will have noted carefully what my hon. Friend said, as will others in the milk industry, because commentary at this stage is particularly valuable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton recognised an important point when he said that some form of agricultural support is inevitable. In a perceptive speech to the Oxford Farming conference, my right hon. Friend the Minister reminded the industry that any change would inevitably be gradual and that the rest of the world, with the possible exception of New Zealand, would not easily give up its present support because it knows that it is an important negotiating tool when it comes to further rounds of the general agreement on tariffs and trade. My hon. Friend also pointed his finger at enlargement, which I shall discuss in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough paid tribute to our pioneering work on the inheritance tax changes in the context of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill. It is notable that such a pioneering measure, which is designed to bring new blood into the farming industry, should be so vehemently opposed by the Opposition.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: No, I do not think that I will—not to the hon. Gentleman. I want to talk to my hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Jack]

for Hexham, who asked what Labour was all about in this debate. We are still searching for the answer. He developed the theme of world competition, and agriculture is a world competitive activity. We have a great deal of good techniques that are much demanded outside the shores of this country, and we support the industry's export activities.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the Minister is not giving way, so the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham also discussed animal welfare, to which I shall return in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe provided us with a useful background, giving us the context in which to regard the subject, which is the wider debate on Europe. I think that he is right to try to do so, to place in perspective the important agricultural matters that we are considering.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North took us through some important parts of the discussion on the subject of—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House again about sedentary interruptions and what I would call running commentaries.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North takes a considerable interest in the costs and expenditure of the common agricultural policy. However, the latest figure that we have—we have deposited a report in the Library to that effect—is that the cost of agriculture per person in this country is £4 per week. That is the most authoritative and definitive figure that we can have. My hon. Friend was right, however, to caution the House not to place too much weight on some of the figures about relative savings that could result if there were no common agricultural policy, because it is extremely difficult to predict what the shape of world prices would be compared with European prices if there were no common agricultural policy. He did the House a service with his arguments in that respect.

Mr. Welsh *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I want to comment on the speeches of several hon. Members and, in fairness, I shall comment on the arguments of the hon. Member for Angus, East in due course.

It is quite nice to see the hon. Member for North Cornwall in the Chamber this evening. Your absence was noted, you are quite right, in the debate on the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, and your absence from the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] Your absence from the animal welfare—

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman's absence.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman's absence. I appreciate that. The absence of the hon. Member for North Cornwall from the Agriculture Tenancies Bill debate and from the animal welfare debate and parliamentary questions was duly noticed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Having suffered 31 minutes of him in the debate on hill livestock compensatory allowance, only for him to be ruled out of order by the Chairman, I think that he probably did us a service by not being there to give us his opinions.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall agreed with us about repatriation, and I was grateful for that support. He also spoke on the subject of a common rural policy. His is an over-bureaucratic approach to that. Ours is the suggestion of having a rural White Paper. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my noble Friend Earl Howe and I have chaired a series of seminars throughout the country to listen carefully to all those who have an opinion about the development of the rural economy in this land.

The Conservative Government are consulting as widely as possible. We have received about 300 submissions already about that matter. There is overwhelming interest in the way that we are developing a rural approach to policy.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall chastised me on the subject of hill livestock compensatory allowance and the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and for Angus, East discussed that. I draw their attention to the fact that we do have to take into account the total position of the subsidy incomes that will be paid in terms of hill farmers.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: Would the hon. Gentleman allow me to answer the arguments that he made in his speech before he comes back?

In 1994, the total subsidy going to hill farmers was about £550 million. That increased to £600 million. In its third report the Agriculture Select Committee said that it did not see anything sinister in a switch in the source of funding from the United Kingdom Government to the European Community. It noted that we could rightfully take those matters into account. I discussed the hon. Gentleman's other argument in my remarks about non-farming incomes.

Mr. Tyler: Does the Minister now deny the facts that he has laid before the House this evening—that hill farmers had reductions in their income last year and will have a further drop in the current year? If the compensatory allowances are to mean anything, surely he will compensate for those reductions?

Mr. Jack: I am adverting to the fact that there is an increase in moneys going into the hills, not necessarily from the hill livestock compensatory allowance, which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food held constant against last year. I have told the hon. Gentleman that there are other subsidy increases. He also seeks to ignore the support that we are able to give as a Government through objective 5b status—about £620 million—to help strengthen those difficult parts of the country. We understand the problems of the hills. We will continue to consider those problems carefully and we are trying to strengthen the economy in those areas.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall, in common with other hon. Members, spoke about pigs. The Ministry has held a seminar with leading members of the pig industry to try to find a way forward. The hon. Member for North Cornwall spoke about Northern Ireland. I should say that, under objective 1 status, Northern Ireland has the ability to use some of its moneys for a limited scheme of help with investment in sow stalls and tethers, but only for the smaller pig herd. The important point to remember is that 60 per cent. of our pig herd is already in loose accommodation. Those who have made that change may be rather worried about the possibility of funding those who have not already done so.

I was somewhat surprised by the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. He took us on a statistical magical trip around the CAP, but all Conservative Members were left desperately searching for some indication of Labour party policy on agriculture. None of us was able to find one iota of Opposition policy.

The hon. Gentleman was continually probed about that by my hon. Friends, but he failed to come up with any suggestion of Opposition policy. Having listened to his remarks, that is not surprising. He has, after all, singularly opposed the sensible changes that we have made. When it came to developing the future of agriculture with the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, the hon. Gentleman led the charge against it. He does not acknowledge the thinking on how to review the CAP, but my right hon. Friend has appointed a group to do that. Where is the Labour party's policy?

The hon. Gentleman has failed to acknowledge the lead that we have given to the reform of the CAP. He fails to understand the dynamics of the enlargement of the CAP. My right hon. Friend was right when he pointed out that it is external pressures on the CAP which are the main driver to change. The hon. Gentleman fails to give any weight to the efforts that the Government made to ensure that the MacSharry proposals have led to a 30 per cent. reduction in cereal support prices; a 15 per cent. reduction in beef support prices and a greater move towards the market driving the CAP. Those are Conservative achievements, but the hon. Gentleman offered us not one iota of similar Opposition policy. In every way he has tried to frustrate sensible debate on change to the CAP.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe had the nerve to start talking about animal welfare. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has already put before the House a six-point plan on ways in which we are trying to safeguard the meat trade in this country; safeguard a European solution on animal welfare as well as safeguard the veal industry by developing rose beef in this country.

I should point out what the hon. Gentleman said recently about bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the export of animals. His comments were reviewed in *Farming News*, which said that he made irresponsible remarks and that his contribution represented

> "good political point scoring perhaps, but the tempting conclusion has to be that politicians would do better to concern themselves with Britain's agricultural economy than the minuscule threat to the welfare of European consumers."

Because of his remarks, the hon. Gentleman put the meat trade at risk. He has also done a great disservice to the Government's efforts to deal sensibly with issues connected with the welfare of animals.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Mr. Jack: No, I will not give way, because every hon. Member should appreciate that it is the Conservative party that takes reform seriously. We have seen from tonight's debate that the Labour party is not the farmer's friend. The Opposition have little understanding of rural life and no clear agenda for the future shape of the CAP, as their amendment shows. It is Conservative Members who have the ideas about renegotiating the CAP and who live in the real world of food and farming. We are taking forward new thinking and new ideas about the rural economy. We are moving forward in the fight against fraud in the context of the common agricultural policy, and we are seriously considering the question of enlargement as the key to the much-needed reforms that we advocate. I urge all hon. Members to support us in the Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 305.

Division No. 106] [10.00 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John

Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver

Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard

Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John

Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *put forthwith the main Question, pursuant to Order [17 March].*

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 277.

Division No. 107] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*

Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert *(Harrow West)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
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Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
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Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin

Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams Alan W. *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. John Cummings.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5097/95, relating to agricultural prices for 1995-96 and related measures; congratulates the Government on its robust negotiating stance on the Common Agricultural Policy since 1979, its leading role in achieving reform of the CAP, its continuing pressure for further radical reform and its determination to ensure that EU agricultural spending is effectively restrained; welcomes the Government's key role in the negotiations which secured an effective agreement on agriculture in the GATT Uruguay Round; endorses the Government's drive to spearhead urgent and continuing efforts to combat fraud and illegal state aids throughout the EU; notes that UK farm incomes rose by 6.9 per cent. over the last year and that Government spending on hill livestock compensatory amounts and agricultural research and development has been maintained; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate an outcome on the 1995-96 price proposals which takes account of the interests of the United Kingdom, producers, consumers and taxpayers alike.

PETITION

10.31 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It is my pleasure to present a petition from the members of the governing body of Pentrehafod school, the Pentrehafod Association, and staff, parents and friends of Pentrehafod school, Pentremawr road, Hafod, Swansea.

The petition shows that the school opened in 1976, with the promise that the third phase would be built in 1978 or 1979. That plan included the provision of a drama hall, music rooms and other key facilities.

In later years Swansea City Council promised to extend the community provision in partnership with West Glamorgan County Council and the Arts Council. This provision was to include a multi-purpose sports, Drama and Recreation Hall. Neither of these promised and intended necessary extensions have been built—

to the great frustration of the 892 signatories.

In March 1992 the Lower School was destroyed by fire. The Director of Education, other officers and County Councillors promised publicly those who attended the various meetings that the final phases of the school were to be built within eighteen months to two years.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will request the Secretary of State for Wales, and the County Councillors for the County and City of Swansea to expedite the necessary proceedings to ensure that this work is undertaken and completed within two years of the establishment of the new Unitary Authorities. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Habitual Residence Test (Newham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.33 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am grateful for this opportunity to bring the habitual residence requirement for income-related benefits before the House. Ten days ago, I received a letter from the Newham docklands citizens advice bureau which expressed its alarm at

"clients who we think have acted in a reasonable way but who are in danger of becoming destitute as a result of the habitual residence test".

I share its alarm. I am deeply concerned that the habitual residence test is lacking a coherent basis at any level, is being implemented in a haphazard and arbitrary way and is in danger of driving into destitution dozens of British citizens living in the London borough of Newham. I think that the test will have to be scrapped, but I urge the Minister at least to give immediate consideration to making available urgent payments to people who are awaiting the outcome of an appeal against failing the test.

There is one far-sighted member of the Government who accurately predicted the impact of such a test and who rejected it in 1986 on the basis of

"all our habits and history".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 February 1986; c. 537.]

That was the present Prime Minister speaking as a Social Security Minister. It is a tragedy for Britain that the Prime Minister's warnings were not heeded by his Ministers before they introduced the test last year.

The habitual residence test was introduced at the beginning of August. In the first six months of its operation, 15,564 people were refused benefits because of it, 2,599 British citizens were among them and 73 were in the London borough of Newham. Welfare organisations across the country have been making representations about the chaos which has resulted, but it was not until last month that the House had the opportunity to discuss it, other than through questions.

A serious constitutional point must be considered when the Secretary of State can, for the first time, exclude British citizens in this country from access to benefits, without any serious deliberation in the House, until almost seven months after the event, and only then as one of six separate orders which were allocated less than two and a half hours of parliamentary time.

The Government have said that the habitual residence test was introduced to end the mischief of "benefit tourism", but they have failed to provide any evidence that that is a significant problem. The Prime Minister said in his speech in 1986 that the number of people involved was a "tiny minority" and I believe that he was right. Certainly, the Government have conspicuously failed to provide any evidence of the scale of the problem other than on two occasions in Parliament, on which they resorted to quoting from an article which appeared in *Time Out* magazine. That is no basis for formulating a policy which is driving hundreds of people towards destitution.

In any case, before the test, had young Europeans claimed benefit when they were not economically active, they would have been excluded on the basis of existing law. Why was it not possible to proceed on that basis? As the Prime Minister pointed out in 1986, the appropriate remedy was already available. Why not use it and save the distress which is now being caused to thousands of others?

Newham rarely enjoys visits from European tourists. A benefits administrator in my constituency told me rather sadly:

"We do not have benefit tourists in Newham."

Instead, we have people in genuine need who are being refused benefits.

The problem is not only that there is no basis for the introduction of this test, but matters are being made much worse by the chaotic way in which it is being implemented. Consider, for example, successive Department of Social Security estimates of the administrative costs involved. Originally we were informed that the cost would be £368,000 a year. Earlier this month, I was told in a written answer that the costs were now expected to be substantially higher than £800,000 a year.

The result of it all in Newham is that advice agencies are overwhelmed and the Benefits Agency, which in Newham is admirably ready to respond to the problems raised by the advice agencies with which it deals, and which has been getting on top of its previous administrative problems, seems to be losing ground again as habitual residence tests and appeals clog up the system.

Had the Government been willing to listen, they would have anticipated the crisis. The Social Security advisory committee warned that just such a situation was likely. It said about the test:

"The costs of administration and the aggravation and anxiety caused for the many claimants who would be required to face the test, but who were never the target of our proposals, may well turn out to be too high a price to pay in order to provide a solution to a relatively small issue."

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the chaotic reality of the test is provided by the appeals process—and it appears that almost all the failed applicants are lodging appeals. The Minister has not been able to tell my hon. Friends or myself about the results of appeals against the test, but it appears that at least half and perhaps three quarters of all appeals are being upheld. That must be a reflection of the fact that the benefits staff implementing the test in the first place do not know what criteria they are supposed to apply.

The Stratford office of the Benefits Agency tells me that the average length of time between failing the test and the date of the appeal hearing is approximately four months. That is four months during which people, over half of whom are ultimately found to be habitually resident in the United Kingdom, are deprived of all means of subsistence. That is a shambles on a national scale, and I urge upon the Minister the fact that it requires a response from him.

In Newham the burden of a new income maintenance function has fallen on to the council's social services department, which is making payments to needy families under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Those are families with children, who, because they have failed the habitual residence test, would have no means of subsistence at all, so the local authority has no alternative but to step in so that at least the children can be fed.

However, the section 17 system is not designed for payments to families over a long period; and social services departments are hard enough pressed already, without having to set up new functions duplicating those of the Benefits Agency. The care of children, which is the proper responsibility of social services departments, will inevitably suffer as a result.

I shall concentrate tonight on the unprecedented plight of British citizens subjected to the habitual residence test. In a debate on the issue in another place, eloquently initiated by Lord Russell, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, on behalf of the Government, conceded that the Government had been forced to broaden the regulations to include British nationals so as to avoid conflict with European legislation. So it seems that it had not been the Government's intention to include British citizens within the scope of the test.

What I find extraordinary, however, is the complacency with which the Government nevertheless embarked on what the Child Poverty Action Group described as the effective downgrading of British citizenship. British citizens are being left destitute in their own country by their own Government. No other European Union country makes its own citizens destitute by excluding them from subsistence benefits in that way. The British Government maintain that they have had to do so in order to avoid breaching European law. How is it, then, that no other European Government have deprived their own citizens of the means of subsistence within their own country?

If the numbers from the first six months of the habitual residence test are projected forwards, more than 5,000 British citizens will be refused income support in the first year of the test. The Government tell us that those people belong in a new category of scrounger—the undeserving British national with little or no contact with this country. Canadian or Australian backpackers were recently cited as examples. However, again the Government have not been able to tell us how many such people there really are. The policy is based on anecdote and prejudice, not on fact.

Let me describe for the Minister the position of a real-life victim of the test who lives in my constituency. Mr. Pierre Bevis, a British citizen whose father was a British service man, went to live in Germany when his father was posted there in the 1970s. Since 1983 Mr. Bevis has had spells working both in Germany and in the United Kingdom, and he obtained a heavy goods vehicle licence in the United Kingdom.

In 1994, after three visits to seek work in the United Kingdom, he moved back to take up permanent residence in London, bringing with him his wife, all his belongings and a letter inviting him for an interview with a London construction company. When that job fell through Mr. Bevis applied for income support in October, and in November, having taken a habitual residence test, he was told that he was not deemed habitually resident in this country. Mr. Bevis was absent from this country for a time because his father was serving in the British forces overseas. Is it really the policy of the Government now to penalise people because their parents served in the forces overseas? How have we come to this?

When Mr. Bevis sought an explanation for the shabby treatment which he received, all he could find were profoundly offensive references on the part of the Secretary of State for Social Security to him and others like him as "benefit tourists" or, on 23 January, as "Canadian backpackers". What have the families of British service personnel done to deserve being insulted by their own Government in that way?

Mr. Bevis is not an isolated case. The cases of many British citizens in similar situations—none of whom are Canadian backpackers—have been brought to my attention. There is evidence that British citizens from the ethnic minority communities have been disproportionately affected, and such cases must cause deep concern to all hon. Members. The result is that hon. Members are, for the first time, being faced with constituents who have literally no means of subsistence.

Mr. Bevis has been given food by a reporter on the *Newham Recorder* who has been covering his plight. Was that the Government's intention in introducing the measure? I understand that Mr. Bevis's appeal was due today, but on arriving at the appeal he was told that a decision had been made by somebody last week that he was habitually resident—some four months after his benefit was stopped—and that his appeal therefore did not need to proceed.

On 12 December the Minister told the House that someone in extreme circumstances had the right to apply to the social fund for a crisis loan, and it appeared to me that that might be an answer. I investigated, but found that crisis loans are available only to those with the capacity to repay them, which someone with no means of subsistence clearly does not have. I have asked the Minister how many people failing the test have been given crisis loans, but he does not know. In Newham, the Stratford Benefits Agency tells me that

> "there have only been a handful of crisis loan applications and they have been unsuccessful".

That is why welfare organisations and citizens advice bureaux are in despair. Experienced workers say that no other change has caused so many real cases of hardship. Even people whose appeals were later upheld have been left destitute for months.

Last week, I received another despairing letter from a constituent whose appeal was upheld five weeks ago, but who has still not received a penny in benefit. The Newham Docklands citizens advice bureau has written to me, saying that even if clients get income support as a result of winning appeals, they still have to survive for two to three months without any money after the appeal.

In 1986, the present Prime Minister said:

> "What is clear from all our habits and history is that when people are in desperate need it has never been the fashion in this country . . . not to provide assistance that is sorely needed."

But that provision has not been made. The Prime Minister's implication—made, as he said, on the basis of all of our habits and history—that not even a Conservative Government would be willing to see their own citizens pressed into destitution, has been cast aside by this measure. The Prime Minister's confidence in habits and history has proved valueless.

The Prime Minister—who was then a Social Security Minister—also said:

> "A costly administrative system would have to be set up to deal with people who failed to qualify for benefit, yet who were in need, that we would not in practice ignore".

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

I am sad to say that that need has, in practice, been ignored.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that the problems which I have raised are real, and that they have been raised with the desire to see positive action taken for those in real need. In particular, I ask him to address two immediate proposals to mitigate the damage being caused by the test.

First, urgent payments should be made available through the Department for those awaiting the outcome of an appeal against failing the habitual residence test. Secondly, the Government should seek thorough information about the impact of the test, and that information should be made public. In future discussions, Members on both sides of the House should not have to rely on anecdotal evidence—as we do now—nor on articles in *Time Out*, which have been relied upon by Ministers. I believe that in due course the legislation will be scrapped, as other errors in the past have been scrapped. The poll tax and the flaws in the Child Support Act 1991 come to mind.

It is astonishing that all the problems to which I have referred were foreseen by the now Prime Minister in his remarkably prescient speech in 1986. He said that such a test would be too rigid, too cumbersome and perhaps too unfair. He said that it could penalise British citizens returning from abroad, United Kingdom citizens on work contracts returning home and missionaries who had been abroad for a long time. He said that the test would have enormously disproportionate administrative costs and could become an administrative nightmare. He said that it would be contrary to all our habits and history not to provide assistance that was sorely needed. The Prime Minister was absolutely right.

Of course the test that was being debated in 1986 was slightly different from the one which has been introduced now, but the Prime Minister's warning about that test are all being fulfilled now in reality in a remarkable way. I commend the Prime Minister's speech to the Minister and urge that, for all the reasons that he spelt out in 1986, the Government repeal the test now rather than wait for months or years until the damage to thousands of our citizens is beyond repair.

10.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on raising important points about what is undoubtedly a most serious issue. It obviously affects the particular constituent whom he mentioned and other constituents and it is an issue of general concern.

I begin by dealing with a theme that ran throughout the hon. Gentleman's speech, that is, the observations made in 1986 by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he was Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. The hon. Gentleman has taken my right hon. Friend's words out of context. The proposal that was rejected in 1986 was that none of the benefits should be paid to anyone who had not been resident for at least 12 months. That is a very different creature from the habitual residence that we now contemplate.

The hon. Gentleman quoted in his closing remarks the example of people returning from abroad, bringing their families and all their possessions with them. On any basis, such a case is much more likely to become immediately or very shortly a case of habitual residence than that of someone who was subject to an arbitrary ban of 12 months.

The test that we have implemented was introduced because before 1 August last year work seekers from the European economic area could claim income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit for up to six months. Estimates made at the time suggested that about 5,000 EEA nationals did exactly that. I do not wish to swap stories of the type that the hon. Gentleman dismissed, but clearly there was considerable concern about the matter. It must be appreciated how difficult it is to tackle such an issue.

The hon. Gentleman fairly asked why the British Government had taken a course that appeared to be different from the situation that he described in other European countries. Perhaps he has not focused on the unique nature of the benefits system that we have in the United Kingdom, compared with arrangements in other European countries. For example, if a country has a benefits system based on an insurance or contributions principle, the issue does not arise because people have to be resident for some time to make the contributions or pay the insurance.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): The Government are abolishing the contributory benefits system.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), even from a sedentary position, occasionally causes me to laugh. Whether it be an insurance or contributions-based benefit, which classically the Bismarckian systems on the continent involve, the issue does not arise. The nearest equivalent of income support in the other European countries is locally administered and highly discretionary in character. Income support is a direct descendant of what the Labour Government did in 1966. They made supplementary benefit, now income support, a matter of legal entitlement, provided the conditions were met. That is a unique feature of income support. Prior to 1 August 1994, people coming from the European continent could make a claim and, provided that the conditions were met, they were treated on exactly the same basis as people who had resided in this country all their life.

That problem was unique to Britain. It was not faced by other European countries. The question that faced the British Government then and still faces us—it would face any Government who sought to introduce an alternative proposal—is how, in accordance with European law, we could alter that classic situation. I suppose that we could go down the radical road, which I cannot believe the Opposition would want, of scrapping legal entitlement to income support. One way or another, however, if the measure is to be consistent with article 6 of the treaty of Rome, we must introduce a proposal that does not discriminate on grounds of nationality. At first blush, it would be attractive. It would be powerfully attractive as a matter of rhetoric to say: why not exclude returning British citizens from abroad entirely from the test? One can understand why that question seems so straightforward to constituents faced with that problem.

They feel that there can be only one answer to that question but, regrettably, the answer is the converse: that cannot be done under European law.

So the point that faced the Government at the time and still faces us is how to introduce a rule that prevents this country from being the honeypot of the world for people who come here and accept our benefits as a matter of legal entitlement, while introducing some moderation to that excess, which most British taxpayers perceive to be excessively generous. The logic of the habitual residence test is that it does not discriminate on grounds of nationality but, to a great measure, meets the question fairly and reasonably. Clearly, returning British citizens, because of their connections with this country, will find it much easier either immediately to establish the links that amount to habitual residence or to establish those links over a much shorter period than somebody arriving from Spain, Canada or Australia with no immediate links with this country.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): If the habitual residence test is so soundly based, will the Minister answer the question which he failed to answer when we debated the regulations and which the Secretary of State failed to answer yesterday at Social Security questions: how many people have won their appeals against refusal of benefit for habitual residents, and what were the reasons for winning those appeals?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman knows the global figures full well as his question has been answered on a number of occasions. We have broken it down into the different categories concerned. As the system is computerised, without a disproportionate manual exercise of checking every appeal, we cannot tell him the reason in each specific case. I appreciate that he wants that information, but it is not possible to produce it by ordinary practices.

This is not a case of downgrading British citizenship. To prevent an unsatisfactory state of affairs, some action had to be taken and we believe that, within the limited constraints of European law, this test is a fair and reasonable way to do it. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East made a powerful appeal to British citizenship, but we have already seen in the Immigration Act 1971, which was not repealed by the Labour Government of 1974-79, that British citizenship does not necessarily involve all the incidents and privileges that people associate with that status, a classic example being the right of abode. We must take the matter issue by issue in a practical way.

Obviously, I accept that British nationals who have failed the test are a matter of concern, but taxpayers generally and the people of Newham would not be content with a system that simply swept away the test, as the hon. Gentleman contended. He has not proposed, and I am not aware of anyone else proposing yet, what might be described as a plausible alternative arrangement.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The rules as used by the appeal panels.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman spoke from a sedentary position. I did not hear precisely what he said.

The key is that there must be a principle that can be practically applied. It is true that we know a certain amount, but we do not know a great deal of detail on the merits of individual appeal cases. However, it appears that, contrary to the anxieties that were expressed, those people are in general not returning business men coming home after the end of contracts, or students who have done admirable voluntary service overseas, or people returning home who have been nursing elderly relatives. We have simply had to draw the line here and, classically, sadly, some of the people who have turned up on our shores are those who have arrived with their children, who are penniless and who do not appear to have given a thought to their responsibilities, but have expected that the British taxpayer will bail them out.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East, with his usual courtesy, gave me notice of Mr. Bevis's case. Obviously, a system of deciding benefits claims such as ours puts great reliance on the quantity and expertise of our benefit and adjudicating officers, but it also has a long stop by way of an independent appeal system, which is there to ensure that people obtain what the law passed by Parliament entitles them to. Inevitably, with such a process of adjudication, which we believe generally has the confidence of the country and of the people who run the system as the best way of doing that, an appeal will take some time.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East made much of the workings of the scheme. That administrative system matches staff to work load, which has led directly to the marked increase in spending from £368,000 to £800,000. That is a result of sensible management planning and of dealing with the matter properly and efficiently.

Obviously, Mr. Bevis was ultimately held under that process to be, as he believes that he is entitled to be, habitually resident. I appreciate that there was anxiety about delay, but the story of Mr. Bevis has at least that satisfactory conclusion.

I am slightly surprised that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East has been worried about the lack of information held by the Department of Social Security. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) also mentioned that to me.

I have been asked specifically by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East about the proportion of people who have failed the test who are students or pensioners. He also asked how many of the British nationals who have failed the test have one parent who is a British national and one parent who is a national of another country. He asked many further detailed and perfectly proper questions.

The difficulty is that the system is nowadays computerised, and in order to find the answer, a clerical check would have to be undertaken, because the Benefits Agency collects only information necessary for its purposes. To collect more costs more, and there is no justification in collecting information about a claimant's antecedents or occupation when the test depends on individual circumstances.

I sum up by saying that we believe that there was an abuse. That abuse had to be dealt with; otherwise it would obviously increase. It was a serious problem that we were an attractive place for benefit tourism. I have explained that, although it appeared attractive at first blush to introduce an arrangement that gave British citizens a guarantee that they would pass the test, under the arrangements that we have come up with, we have a system in which the test is passed by the vast majority of

[Mr. Evans]

British citizens because they can demonstrate a commitment to the country. At the same time, it has stopped what was clearly becoming unsustainable.

I end with this. It is attractive to say, when first considering the matter, that there should be special arrangements for urgent payments in those cases, but the Government's opinion is that it would be wrong in principle to single out one class of claimants in the benefits system for special status or special treatment. There are a variety of arrangements—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 March 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Falkland Islands

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.4 am

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate the Falklands, and I count myself fortunate that I was able to visit the islands in January this year. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and I received an extremely warm and friendly welcome, and it is a trip which I am certain neither of us will ever forget.

The first thing that strikes one about the islands is the remarkably strong British character which runs through the way of life of the islanders and their approach to international and national affairs. The population of about 2,200 is almost exclusively British, and many inhabitants are fifth and sixth generation islanders. From 1883, there was uninterrupted British administration until the 1982 invasion by Argentina.

The invasion left very deep scars, and it is clear that the people of the islands will never forget that 250 British service men gave their lives for their freedom. There is a deep distrust of Argentina among the islanders. After all, Argentina is still making public claims on the Falklands. Only a few months ago, President Menem said:

> "The Malvinas will be ours by the end of the century."

The people of the islands do not want any formal relations with Argentina until it has given up its claims of sovereignty for all time.

The people of the Falklands fully understand the commitment of the Government and this Parliament to their defence. Indeed, the islands provide a magnificent opportunity for training Her Majesty's forces, particularly the RAF. I attended one meeting with some farmers at which the low-flying Tornado aircraft were discussed. The farmers were asked what they thought about the Tornados zooming all over the islands at ground zero and making a lot of noise. One of them got up and said, "Thank God for the sound of freedom." That lesson might go home to one or two people in this country who whinge and moan about the low-flying training which the RAF must do if it is to maintain the peak of efficiency that we require from our armed forces.

During the visit of myself and the hon. Member for Woolwich to the islands, we were also involved in a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference of a group of dependent territories, including the Isle of Man, Gibraltar, Malta, the Channel Islands and St. Helena. I dare not let this debate go by without mentioning St. Helena, because the representative from that country effectively presented his case for an airstrip on the island. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will make note of that, and perhaps it will not be long before that little island has an airstrip, as it is totally cut off at present.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My hon. Friend is wrong to say that St. Helena is totally cut off because it has the excellent services of the Royal Mail ship St. Helena which, I am proud to say, is operated from my constituency by the Curnow shipping company. St. Helena is not totally cut off, although the case for an airstrip is overwhelming.

Sir Andrew Bowden: I am delighted to hear that the ship is in operation. I believe that there were considerable troubles with it. That is in no way the responsibility of my hon. Friend or anyone in his constituency. There is also a need for an airstrip on the island.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I support the hon. Gentleman because the Government have a role to play in the matter and they are not playing it. The St. Helenians wanted a shuttle ship from St. Helena to Ascension so that they could have a more frequent service than once every seven weeks. The Government killed that. They were looking for a service. They gave a lame excuse for not finding one and now nothing will be done for two years. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will press the Minister to do something about it and ensure that St. Helena has a little more communication with the outside world.

Sir Andrew Bowden: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment at the appropriate time on what the hon. Gentleman has said. I shall return, before I land myself in trouble with you, Madam Speaker, to the Falkland Islands.

The economy of the islands is making steady progress. The islands have been self-sufficient economically since 1983. That excludes defence. There have been massive improvements in the infrastructure—airports and roads—in the past 10 years.

The fishing industry now brings the islands an income of £25 million a year. I was encouraged by the responsible way in which that fishing industry is run. Of that £25 million, between £4 million and £5 million goes on research and protection. Those who are issued with licences operate under strict terms and conditions. The islanders understand that they would be crazy to fish those waters out and, therefore, that the stocks must be carefully managed and husbanded.

There are mixed feelings on the island about oil. Seismic testing has been done on an extensive basis. It is possible that test drilling will take place towards the end of this year or early in 1996. One can understand why the islanders are ambivalent about whether they want oil to be found or not. Clearly, if it is found in large quantities, it will bring massive wealth to the islands. But it will change them in a fundamental way. The type of living and society that they have had will inevitably be fundamentally changed. If oil is found we can safely say that their security will be protected in perpetuity.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Does my hon. Friend agree that if oil is found in the Falkland Islands, which is likely, it will bring a whole set of new pressures on the Falkland Islands in relation to Argentina? Does he accept that it is therefore to be wished that the relationship between Argentina and the Falkland Islands will be

[Dr. Michael Clark]

normalised before oil is found so that Argentina might be able to have some hand in the exploration, but that that can be done only when the Argentine regime withdraws its claim to the Falkland Islands?

Sir Andrew Bowden: I endorse what my hon. Friend has said. As he is aware, there are contacts with the Argentine Government on both oil and fisheries. The islanders say that they do not want formal relations until the Argentines have accepted categorically that they have no case for sovereignty over the islands.

There is an exciting future for the islands, but they face many problems. Some colleagues may have read the memoirs of Admiral Sandy Woodward, who was the commander of the South Atlantic force. He used the following words:

> "Those who die in battle always pay too high a price but in the South Atlantic as in so many other wars they died for the ideas we stand for."

The islanders are intensely loyal to the British Crown. They want only to live in peace and freedom in the country of their birth.

10.14 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), who has told us this morning about his recent visit to the islands together with the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker). The House is indebted to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The debate should be a signal to our fellow British citizens in the Falkland Islands that, although they are far away, their interests are never far from our thoughts in the House.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown, I have visited the Falkland Islands. My first visit was with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1981. I visited again after the conflict when the islands were celebrating 150 years of continuous British administration. I went there again two years ago at the invitation of the Falkland Islands Government. I know how important it is to Falkland islanders to see and hear their interests debated on the Floor of the House.

On this second wonderful day of our British spring, the signal should go out to the islanders, from Stanley in the east to Port Howard in the west, from Salvador to Goose Green and to the remotest parts of the great plain of Lafonia, that the House is thinking about the Falkland Islands and debating their interests today.

I speak in the debate as chairman of the Falkland Islands group of the CPA. I shall concentrate my remarks on future relations between the islands and the Argentine republic. I do so because I believe that good relations with Argentina are important to the future of the people of that country as well as to the islanders.

If I look ahead to the future—to the next century, which is such a short time away—I see Argentina as a major player on the world stage. It is a major trading partner with the United Kingdom and the European Union which desires to export its goods to Europe and import many important finished products from Europe. Those developments can take place successfully only if Argentina's preoccupation with the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands is put on the back burner and preferably dropped altogether. If, instead of pursuing territorial claims to a group of islanders, Argentina concentrates on good international relations and on trade and friendship, that will be the way forward for Argentina, the Falkland islanders and the British. I want to make some comments today which I hope will contribute to that process. Some of them are difficult, but they need to be said and said on the Floor of the House.

First, I hope that Argentina will recognise that there cannot be any basis for negotiations with the United Kingdom which will lead to the transfer of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands to Argentina. Much of the Argentine case for sovereignty rests on its claim that it inherited the rights which Spain abandoned. Those rights are held to be based on the papal grants of 1493 and 1494, in which Spain claimed dominion over all south America except parts occupied by Portugal. The sheer generality of such claims weakens their validity. When Spain withdrew its settlement on east Falkland in 1811, it left for all time. It has never assumed any on-going rights to the islands.

A second argument that Argentina uses is based on geographical location. That would be valid only if the Falkland Islands were inhabited now or had been inhabited without continuous administration by a resident power.

In any event, mere proximity—in this case about 300 miles—would embarrass many countries, including the United Kingdom, if it were to be considered as the basis for ownership. Nor can it be argued that the islands are a symbol of British colonialism and that they should be decolonised, if that implies land taken from a native people, as that was never the case in the Falkland Islands and there was no indigenous population.

Moreover, any idea that the United Kingdom should agree to the effective transfer of sovereignty on the basis that the Falkland Islands would become an integral part of the Argentine republic, perhaps retaining its membership of the British Commonwealth, even with the supposed benefits of special status, cannot be a realistic proposition. That kind of on-going charm offensive, as it is called in the Falkland Islands, by Argentina is making it very difficult to make the progress that we all want in good relations with that huge country, which occupies so much of the south American continent.

In some quarters, the suggestion of an autonomous status for the islands has been mooted, with special taxation and education regimes, with respect to special residence and property rights. Again I think that that is unrealistic. Any idea that may have taken root in Argentina of its flag flying in the Falkland Islands can lead only to further difficulties in what is a sensitive and difficult relationship and should not be pursued. From my knowledge of the islanders, they are not likely to give favourable consideration to any plans that Argentina may have for proposing financial compensation to each islander and property owner to persuade them to accept the transfer of sovereignty. Their sovereignty and British citizenship, which the House confirmed only a few years ago, are more valuable than any financial compensation that Argentina could offer and it is important for the Argentine Government to recognise that fact and give up their sovereignty claim, so that relations can develop and blossom in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

Argentina is a big country and has a big man as its president. I hope that President Carlos Menem, his Government and the citizens of Argentina, many of whom derive their origins from this country and notably from Wales, will be big enough to give up their claim and to pursue the huge advantages of trade, not only with the Falklands but with our country and the rest of the European Union.

Let there be no doubt about it, the House will never forget the people of the Falkland Islands—our fellow British citizens 8,000 miles away, many of whom I dare say are listening to my words at this very moment. They are the people not of an old-style British colony, but of a self-governing country, and they have the right to determine their future. They will do so in two ways: by maintaining their sturdy independence, and by developing good relations with their south American neighbours by pursuing joint exploration of hydrocarbon deposits and co-operation on activities such as fishing. I say to Argentina, "Make 1995 the year to be the big country that you are and forget the claim, based on understandable emotion and feeling but rooted in the past, which offers little hope for the future."

I share the feelings of my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown for the young British service men and women involved in the task force operation, but I also think of the Argentine war cemetery on the Falkland Islands, which I have seen on a number of occasions. I think of their young men who gave their lives for what they believed at the time to be right. Five hundred young men are buried in the islands and our country and the Argentine republic owe them a debt. We have a responsibility to them to find a better way of resolving our differences of opinion and of working together and finding a new future, which will be to the benefit of both countries. I very much hope that that will be possible in 1995, and that any thoughts of a transfer of sovereignty by 2000 will be banished for ever.

10.25 am

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) referred to the visit that he and I made as representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and I should add that, although that was a long trip—an 18-hour journey in a TriStar with a slight delay at Ascension—it took place at the end of January and the delegate from St. Helena had to leave there on Christmas eve, which demonstrates the communication problems that that island suffers, so I endorse the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

I welcome the opportunity that this debate affords to put the Falkland Islands back on the public agenda. I hope that the debate will give some reassurance to the people of those islands. Many of the islanders whom I met considered it unfortunate that they have been viewed in some quarters as a Tory trophy and I hope that the debate will provide a different perspective.

I appreciate why the islanders feel insecure. Many were led to believe by the noises that they were hearing from British Ministers, even before the invasion in 1982, that Britain was prepared to negotiate with Argentina on sovereignty. That insecurity was undoubtedly heightened by the visit in 1980 of Mrs. Thatcher's most trusted ally, Nicholas Ridley. Many people in the islands believed that the signals given out at the time encouraged the Argentine invasion, or at least led Argentina to believe that British resistance would not be as robust as it was.

British Governments successively failed to ensure political or economic development and progress for the islands before the invasion. In 1975, under a Labour Government, my noble Friend Lord Callaghan asked Lord Shackleton to carry out an economic survey of the islands. Important though that survey was, regrettably little action was taken to implement the recommendations. Had they been implemented, it is at least conceivable, and I believe likely, that the Argentine invasion would not have taken place.

Dr. Marek: I hope that my hon. Friend will not forget that, under a Labour Government in the 1970s, when invasion was threatened the Foreign Office took immediate advance action and there was no invasion. It was only under the Conservative Government in 1982 that, because of cost cutting and efficiency savings, HMS Endurance was withdrawn, allowing the invasion to take place. Does he agree that some Governments have looked after the islands' safety and economic development?

Mr. Austin-Walker: My hon. Friend has a valid point. The concern shown by the Callaghan Government can be identified from the Shackleton report. Its recommendations involved changes in agriculture, including land ownership, the establishment of a fishing industry, to which the hon. Member for Kemptown referred, and investigations into hydrocarbon development and tourism. Shackleton also recommended, among other things, improving communications by building a suitable airport and facilities.

It is true that the islands never featured high on the British agenda and that there was a general impression abroad that Britain saw them as an economic drain. Ridley's visit in 1980 confirmed that view. Indeed, the Government deprived many Falkland islanders of their rights of access to British citizenship by introducing the British Nationality Act 1991. By the time that Argentina invaded in 1982, six years after Shackleton's report, hardly any of the recommendations had been implemented and the economy was in decline. The position was made much worse by the subsequent conflict, which destroyed much of the infrastructure of Stanley, including the power supply and sewerage system, but since the invasion and liberation, the islands' economy has been dramatically transformed. The Shackleton report was updated and most of its recommendations have been implemented.

Some people have referred to the Falkland Islands at that time not as a dependent territory but rather a private company characterised by absentee landlords. That was certainly the case before the invasion. One of the most beneficial changes post conflict has been the transfer of agricultural land from expatriate landlords to local ownership, and 99 per cent. of all farms are now in island ownership. It may be of interest to some of my hon. Friends to know that the Falkland Islands Government own a third of farm land, farmed through the publicly owned Falkland Landholdings company. Agriculture has been diversified, and there is now some meat production.

It is worth noting that, although British service personnel can visit Stanley or Camp and dine on superb local mutton, they cannot eat it on base as no abattoir meets European Union standards or Ministry of Defence requirements. The forces do not appear to have suffered ill effects from eating local produce off base, and I see no reason why the island cannot help to feed the forces on

[Mr. Austin-Walker]

base. Perhaps some investment in upgrading the abattoir would be of mutual benefit to the armed forces and the UK economy, as well as the islands' economy.

Perhaps the most significant change in the economy is the development of the fishing industry. The establishment of a 200-mile limit and the creation of a fisheries conservation zone and a licensing system to control the level of fishing and conserve stocks have been of enormous success, producing a net income of some £15 million a year. We should pay tribute to the Falkland Islands Government on their success in conserving fish stocks and their policy of protecting wildlife in general.

Other hon. Members have referred to major improvements in the infrastructure, not only the international airport at Mount Pleasant but the development of adequate power and water supplies and good educational and medical facilities, which did not exist before the invasion. I pay tribute to staff at the King Edward hospital in Stanley and was pleased to note their close links with the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwich.

Naturally, the islanders become nervous when Britain talks about the cost of maintaining the Falklands, but we do not take into account the millions of pounds that were repatriated from the islands to the United Kingdom by absentee landlords. Far from being a drain on our resources, the islands have been more than self-sufficient for most of their history. Since the conflict, great strides have been made in economic and political development and it is appropriate to pay tribute to the elected members of the legislative council. "Dependent territory" may be the Falklands' legal status, but the islands are effectively and essentially a self-governing and self-sufficient democracy. Not only is their economy in surplus but, by a policy of transferring revenue to the reserves, they now have reserve funds of some £67 million.

There are arguments about the cost of maintaining what has been termed "fortress Falklands" and the garrison. I have seen estimates of £60 million to £70 million but those figures do not take into account what it would cost to maintain that force anywhere else in the world. No one, on either Front Bench, would suggest that, if Britain withdrew from the Falklands, the services would be reduced by the size of the present garrison. It is there to protect and give security to the islands but also to serve Britain's wider strategic interest in the Antarctic and the southern Atlantic. The real additional cost of having forces in the Falklands rather than elsewhere in the world is probably nearer to £20 million, and the Falkland Islands Government already contribute to that cost in a number of ways, including by providing housing and recreational facilities and subsidised internal travel for the forces.

However, so long as the Argentine Government maintain their bogus claim to sovereignty, the islanders will wish to have a continued British military presence. Discussions and negotiations must be held with Argentina. The Falkland islanders recognise their geographical location and their need for economic and political relations with their neighbours. They have developed such relationships with Chile, to their mutual advantage. The islanders need to talk to Argentina about fish stocks, conservation, possible oil exploration, and economic co-operation in the region, but such talks cannot progress satisfactorily so long as Argentina claims sovereignty over the islands.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) set the historical claim in context. The Falkland islanders are not some oppressed and subject people under the heel of a military dictatorship; they are a free people who have openly declared their desire to move towards even greater self-government with the goal of secure independence. The islands are not some colonial territory where natives have been killed, expelled or oppressed. There was no indigenous population as the islands were uninhabited. Between the mid-18th century and 1831, there were successive British, Spanish and French settlements but, as other hon. Members have said, since 1831 there has been continual British administration, with the exception of the invasion in 1982. The islands have never been part of Argentina and the current population is almost entirely of British descent, some of it eighth generation.

The fact that the Falklands did not have an indigenous population is in marked contrast to Argentina, where the original tribes were slaughtered by European settlers in an act of deliberate genocide. The islanders are right to query the Argentine philosophy, which suggests that killing the local population provides more secure territorial rights than settling empty islands. The right of self-determination for the Falkland islanders is a valid objective that deserves British and international support.

Finally, I shall raise some issues on which I may be at variance with the Falkland Islands Government. While I appreciate their desire to encourage tourism, I fear that the encouragement of tourism may serve to destroy the very thing that tourists will want to see: some of the most wonderful wildlife anywhere in the world. I am also concerned about oil exploration. I appreciate the islanders' nervousness about fish stocks and fluctuations in income from that source, but in addition to the two distinct squid stocks serving markets in Europe and the far east, they have an opportunity to develop the fin-fishing industry, with its own fishing fleets from the Falkland Islands, and possibly develop processing so that the islanders can benefit from added value.

Given the islanders' concerns about the fragility of fish stocks, the fall in wool prices, and defence costs, it is natural that they should regard oil as their salvation. I am concerned that further oil developments will threaten climate change. The burning of oil contributes 44 per cent. of atmospheric carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas. The framework convention on climate change signed in 1992 by 160 Governments, which became law in the UK in 1994, commits Governments to reducing carbon dioxide to a level that does not threaten eco-systems or the viability of food supplies. The Spring ozone hole discovered in 1985 has continued to grow and is now a huge eclipse extending over the entire continent of Antarctica and the southern tip of south America.

Now is not the time to search for additional oil supplies in the world. Particular problems exist with oil exploration in the south Atlantic. The Falkland Islands are a major wildlife area with a rich variety of endemic species, flightless birds, seals, fish, whales and dolphins, all of which could be threatened by oil exploration activities, including seismic testing. Other problems are extreme weather and depth of water, stretching the limits of both technology and logistics. In such remote situations, operators will probably pay only lip service to conservation measures and, because of climatic conditions, any oil spills or operational accidents will take decades to degrade and could wipe out sensitive species.

I realise that the islands are as far from the south pole as London is from the north pole and that the oil rigs off Shetland are much closer to the northern polar region than the Falkland Islands are to the Antarctic. But the Antarctic is the only unspoilt continent and although the Falklands and south America are outside the world park, does it make sense for oil rigs to mark the limits of that world park? I am aware that the wildlife of the islands is as much threatened by risks from oil tankers rounding the Horn, but we should look to other ways of progressing. With their wind and their ocean, targeted investment into research, and development of renewable energy supplies, the islands could become self-sufficient in energy and world leaders in creating a sustainable and affluent economy. Perhaps those countries that have oil reserves should be financed by the rest of the international community not to exploit those reserves.

Whether the Falkland Islands Government take my view on oil exploration or not; whether they opt to exploit that oil or not; they have the right to live at peace with their neighbours, to determine their own future and to determine and pursue their own democratic way of life.

10.39 am

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and to congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) on securing the debate. It is timely, because we have not had a debate on the Falklands for some while.

I remember vividly that Friday in April 1982 when the invasion took place. I was in the television studios of Grampian in Aberdeen when the news came through. At first, we could not believe it because it was so utterly incredible. At that time, I was foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal party, which was, in turn, in alliance with the Social Democrats. It was rather difficult being the foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal party when the foreign affairs spokesman for the Social Democratic party was a certain doctor, who was known for what one might describe as a muscular approach to politics. Because of the somewhat spurious reason that he had previously been Foreign Secretary, he was always called about 15 times before me. That was one of the crosses one bore.

The House sat on the Saturday and it was a great occasion. I remember Michael Foot's brave, clear speech and the speeches of many others who struggled over the rights and wrongs involved and with their consciences. In the end, we all decided on the right path. It should not be forgotten that some people were not in favour of intervening in any way. If their argument had prevailed, the Falkland Islands would still be occupied by the Argentines and it is more than likely that the junta then in control would still be in control. Hon. Members who took that stand-back position should perhaps remember that.

It is also worth remembering that the junta's action was popular in Argentina—practically the most popular thing that the junta ever did. That is one of the difficulties that we must face. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who chairs the all-party committee that tries to keep some interest going and takes some care of the interests of the Falkland Islands in the Houses of Parliament, touched upon that. The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right about establishing good relations with Argentina, but to imagine that somehow one can change an emotional approach quickly is a mistake. It will take a lot of time, patience and persistence to establish good relations and there is no way round that. We must make it absolutely clear that it is not our intention to give up sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. Equally, we must talk to Argentina and remember that, sometimes, there is some honour in politics; although, given the way in which politics is written about these days, one would not imagine that that is so.

At the time of the invasion, I remember that *The Guardian*, of which I am a great admirer normally, was not in favour of Britain taking any action. It contrasted British trade with Argentina with the fact that there were just 1,200 islanders. It argued that it was not in British interests to endanger that considerable trade and possibly offend other south American countries. There were, however, big question marks over that argument even at that time.

Although the lady was not a lady whom I loved, she was right on that occasion. The strategy adopted was a high-risk one. Good heavens, one remembers the pictures of the Canberra, like a huge white whale in San Carlos water, which was such an easy target. That high-risk strategy, however, came off. A lot of people died and that was sad. All war is sad. I hope that we will stick by the results of that strategy.

I readily admit that there are islands and enclaves all over the world that are the debris of empire. The French, however, have somehow managed to treat the business rather better than us. The Minister may smile disarmingly and shake his head, but consider how Martinique, Réunion and various places around the world are integrated into metropolitan France. That policy has been successful when applied to small French territories and it has been accepted by the populations involved. It should be stressed that we have a residual responsibility.

I am sure that the Minister will speak about fishing policy in the Falklands, which, as successive hon. Members have suggested, is of much more immediate importance than any speculation about hydrocarbon resources. Two species of squid are fished around the Falklands. One is more or less confined to the Falkland waters, as defined by the 200-mile limit, while the other species is also found in Argentine waters and so is more vulnerable. I understand that Sir Crispin Tickell's team said that it thought highly of the conservation measures adopted by the Falkland Islands Government. We know, of course, that the Falkland Government do not deal directly with the Argentine Government—that is done by the British Government. An observer from the Falklands has been appointed to the joint committee, but, essentially, it is an intergovernmental committee of Britain and the Argentine. I would like the Minister to tell us how that committee is operating. Is the atmosphere within it good? Is the co-operation reached good? How does he see its future?

The debate is a short one, so I shall not delay the House. I have said what I think. Like others, I believe that, few as the Falklanders are, they are the indigenous population. They have the right to determine their own future. In turn, we have a responsibility, inherited from history, to do all that we can to guarantee that future.

10.47 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Hon. Members will recall that I am secretary of the British-Latin American parliamentary group and, in that context, I should like to make a few comments.

As long as the islanders wish to remain British, we should underwrite that and they should continue to be so, not least because Argentina's claim to the islands is based on dusty legal texts going back to the beginning of the last century. Those texts are ambiguous and unclear. Lawyers could, at great expense, debate for hours who has proper sovereignty over the islands, according to dusty documents.

We must consider the matter in the context of the Argentina of today. It is becoming successful in reclaiming its place as a nation of significance on the world stage. After all, it now has its second elected President, Carlos Menem, who has created a stable economy, which that country has not had for years. If one visited Argentina, one would discover a capital city, Buenos Aires, of maturity and culture, which makes it the greatest capital city of Latin America. It can rank with, and rival, Milan, Madrid or any of the other great cities of Latin Europe.

Argentina has got over its 50-year nightmare of populist Peronism—a populist Peronism that has done immense damage to that country since the second world war. Let us hope that the ghost of Peronism has been laid to rest at last. We should never forget that Argentina was considered to be the great white hope of the 1920s and 1930s, a country that was rapidly coming up to take its place in the world among the great players. Peronism destroyed Argentina's chance of taking what could be argued to be its rightful place in the world. Today, Argentina is retaking its place in the world. Its armed forces have served alongside ours in various United Nations activities in the Gulf and in Cyprus, and have acquitted themselves with honour and professionalism in so doing.

Argentina is once again showing maturity in general. What pains me, as a friend of Argentina, is that it has failed to do so in one specific way. I highlight the unwise claim of President Carlos Menem that Argentina should retake the islands, as he puts it, by the year 2000.

If Argentina claims parity of consideration in international affairs with a country such as Canada, it should consider the example of the Canadians, and the case of the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. Those islands have a population of about 6,000, three times that of the Falkland Islands, and are situated only a few miles off the coast of Newfoundland, in the mouth of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, yet they remain French territory. They are the only remaining territories that France holds as direct descendants of the extensive land holdings that France had in north America. Indeed, the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon have been a colony of France since 1816.

The Canadians are not hung up about those islands. They have close relations with them. There are flights from those French islands in north America to Montreal and to various airports alongside in Newfoundland. Let us remember that those islands are only a few miles from sovereign Canadian territory, surrounded geographically by Canada, yet Canada has the maturity to live in peace alongside those people, who have a different cultural inheritance. Argentina should consider that case and learn the lessons.

If we were to follow the Argentine precept of saying that our territory extends 300 miles offshore, where would that leave us? Should we reclaim Calais and the dukedom of Normandy? Conversely, should the French claim the Channel Islands on the basis of geographical proximity? Should Venezuela claim Trinidad? Should Italy claim Malta? Should Malaysia claim Singapore? All those islands are much closer to the mainland than are the Falklands. I urge the Argentine Government to grow up and show maturity over that issue, just as they have over so many other issues in recent years.

If Britain owes some obligation to the Falkland Islands to underwrite their entitlement to self-determination and security, surely the islanders owe an obligation to this country for the blood and treasure expended on their relief. They should do nothing to irritate the good relations between Britain and Argentina. We have long-standing relations with Argentina, those of trade and investment and indeed, those of blood ties between families in Argentina and this country. Any rhetoric from the Falklanders against Argentina, although understandable because of the wounds of the conflict, so few years ago, is extremely unhelpful. It is far better that we gradually rekindle relations between Argentina and the Falkland Islands.

With other hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I have been involved in the Argentine-British conferences. There have been four such conferences, bringing together politicians, business men, journalists and the like. Two of the conferences were held in Argentina and two in the United Kingdom. The fifth such conference is due to take place in England in September.

I was at the last such conference in Mendoza, close to the Andes, in Argentina. I found it moving that Falklanders came to that conference. Because of the vagaries of politics, they had to enter via Chile, a friendly country, and cross the frontier to come down to Mendoza. I found it moving that Falklanders could speak to Argentines about the realities of life today. The conference was closed by an embrace between an Argentine senator, the chairman of the conference, and those visiting Falklanders.

In the foyer of the conference centre was a large, colourful exhibition mounted by the Falklanders about the wonders of the island. I almost winced at their forwardness in staging that exhibition, but I was touched by the way in which the Argentines looked at the exhibition and came to have greater understanding.

I gather that, at this very moment, two leading Falklanders are carrying out what might be termed a lecture tour in Argentina to speak to people. They have been to Buenos Aires, to Córdoba, to Mendoza and into Patagonia, where there are the Welsh communities in Puerto Madryn and Trelew. They have also visited Comodoro Rivadavia, the town which the Argentine air force used to provide the air link to the Falkland Islands. They are talking to the Argentines about the real Falkland Islands and the real opportunities for the future.

I would, however, take issue with the comments of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), because I regret the fact that British party politics were brought into the debate. I well remember the anti-Falklands rhetoric of the Labour party in the many years that have passed since the conflict. Members of the Labour party could not bring themselves to refer to the Falkland

Islands, and it was fashionable for Opposition Members to refer to them as the Malvinas. I thought that that was highly inappropriate, as did the islanders. Indeed, when the Labour spokesman for the islands first visited the islands, he was greeted with a vast piece of graffiti in 6 ft lettering painted on a hulk in Falkland sound, which, in earthy language that you would not allow me to repeat, Madam Speaker, told him to leave the islands somewhat abruptly. I do not think that there are party political marks to be scored on that matter. We want wounds to heal gradually.

Fishing and oil cannot develop properly in that region without Argentine-Falkland Islands co-operation. The illex squid are no respecters of international political boundaries. They move from the high seas to Argentine waters to Falkland Islands waters. Unless there is co-operation, those very large factory ships from Korea and Japan will continue to hoover up the illex, to the detriment of the environment, the fish stocks and the prosperity of the islands. They need control; they need co-operation.

The same goes for any oil that is discovered in those waters. For oil to be extracted properly, a large base is needed, for processing, for servicing the industry and for refining. If the Falkland Islands cares about its environment, it will not want those vast disfiguring industries on the islands. That is where Argentina, with its long coastline, its industry and so on could be of assistance. We want working together, co-operation and the gradual healing of wounds. That way lies the future prosperity of that important region.

10.58 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I welcome the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden). Indeed, I was in the Falkland Islands at the same time as the hon. Member for Kemptown and my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), although I was not there for a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visit.

I arrived, not after an 18-hour journey on a Tri-star aircraft, but in a luxury cruise liner called the Hanseatic. I must tell you, Madam Speaker, that envy is an ugly sight, especially when one confronts it on the faces of one's two colleagues. However, as I told the hon. Member for Kemptown, come the socialist millennium, we shall all ride around in Rollers and wear top hats and drink champagne, although of course it will start with me.

I should like to take the opportunity to record my thanks to the governor, David Tatham, and to the chief executive, Andrew Gurr, for their hospitality and for the information that they gave me. My two parliamentary colleagues stayed much longer—we were just, as it were, a ship that passed in the night, or during the day as it turned out—but I am sure that they received the same kindness and the courteous information that I found very valuable. We had an excellent working breakfast with the governor. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), I was not keeping a note of the cost so we shall not be reading about it in *The House Magazine*.

I have given the subject careful consideration and I agree with every speech that I have heard so far that Argentina's territorial claim to the Falkland Islands is weak and thoroughly unacceptable. I endorse the fact that we need to continue to talk to the Argentine authorities and people. I am glad to hear that some people from the Falkland Islands are touring Argentina now and discussing matters. There seem to be many misconceptions, particularly on the part of Argentine nationals, about what is going on in the Falkland Islands.

I was told—I do not know whether it is true—that a number of Argentines seem to think that the Falkland Islands are full of Argentines, people of Spanish descent, who are being treated badly. If that is what they believe, the matter must be sorted out. One way to do that would be to allow a greater element of tourism from Argentina to the Falkland Islands. I see that some Conservative Members are shaking their heads, and I understand that that is the attitude of many Falkland islanders. The ship, the Hanseatic, could not put into the Falkland Islands on one of its previous visits, and decided to move on through, because there were too many Argentine nationals on board. That damaged the Falkland Islands economy. I can assure hon. Members that those on board the luxury liner were paying a lot of money to be there—all except myself. There is such a thing as a free lunch and I found it on the Hanseatic—I am nothing if not honest.

I must take issue with some of the points made by Conservative Members about the heroic way in which the Falkland Islands were recovered. Signals were sent out that could have led Galtieri and the Argentine Government to think that they could walk into the Falkland Islands and take them over, signals that were ignored by the Foreign Office and Ministers. It is reliably reported that the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Nicholas Ridley, said in the Falkland Islands that thought was being given to handing over the Falklands to Argentina. That caused much concern in the Falkland Islands and may have sent the wrong signals to Galtieri. We must never forget that 255 British service men and 1,200 Argentines died in a war that could have been avoided if the Ministers of the day had been listening to the signals sent to them from the Falkland Islands, including from the governor.

The signs of war are still present in the Falkland Islands. It was worrying to hear about kids being told where the minefields were. It is also worrying that bomb disposal personnel are still removing Argentine mines from the area. I hope that the Minister will say what further assistance is being given to the Falkland Islands authorities and what additional resources are being given to our military to continue to remove mines and make the place entirely safe.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Did the hon. Gentleman notice that the minefields that have been wired off in the Falklands to stop humans or donkeys straying into the area are functioning as a good nature preserve because the penguins are breeding marvellously as men and other predators cannot get into those areas? The penguins are too light to fire off the mines.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman, as he knows, has touched me on my weakest point, but even in my most conservationist mood I would not suggest laying minefields around breeding colonies of penguins to protect them. I shall think about that suggestion, but I do not think that, even in my wildest moments, I would do so. That is merely a way of demonstrating that it is an ill wind that blows no good.

[Mr. Banks]

One aspect that grated on me slightly was the name of one of the roads, Thatcher drive. Frankly, the fact that the Conservative Government ignored the signs at the time and the way that their popularity in this country was plummeting—Mrs. Thatcher looked as though she would be a one-term Prime Minister—meant that Galtieri's invasion of the Falkland Islands saved the Conservative party's bacon. In tribute to Galtieri for that, Mrs. Thatcher should have named Downing street Galtieri street.

In the remaining moments of my speech I shall return to the subject of the Falkland Islands and their future. My hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich mentioned the enormous potential of the Falkland Islands in economic terms, especially for tourism. Wildlife, particularly sea mammals, abounds in the Falkland Islands. There are more than 20 species of great and small whales, as well as sea otters and seals. I saw penguin colonies further down in the Antarctic and the rockhopper, gentoo, magellanic and macaroni penguin populations of the Falkland Islands are prospering well—perhaps thanks to the Argentine land mines. I think that the flourishing wildlife has more to do with the sensitive conservation attitude of the Falkland Islands Government.

There is the possibility of over-fishing in the area. We have heard much about the money earned—in 1994, £25 million—through the selling of licences by the Falkland Islands Government to various countries to fish there. Unfortunately, when I look at my pie chart I see that the greatest contributions come from Japan, Korea, Spain and Taiwan—perhaps four of the most unreliable and untrustworthy fishing nations on earth. That is why we should be careful.

The monitoring of fishing is carried out, under contract, for the Falkland Islands by Imperial college and the British Antarctic Survey. I have heard such stories before and I am not satisfied that people so far away can properly monitor what is happening in terms of the percentage of escapes. I do not find that convincing. I hope that when the Minister winds up he will say what additional resources he might be prepared—on behalf of the Government—to provide to the Falkland Islands to ensure that licences and quotas are adhered to and that illegal fishing in the area is restrained by all possible means.

I was worried when I heard the governor talking about the number of fur seals, particularly on South Georgia. We can see the situation developing as venal, greedy fishing fleets hoover up the sea, put pressure on the stocks and begin to destroy them. They then look round at the mammals and say that the seals are taking too much so they must wipe them out.

I have been delighted to participate in this morning's short debate. In conclusion, I send my greetings to the regulars at The Globe pub on Stanley harbour front. I hope to join them for another beer soon.

11.7 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I must be one of the few to speak in this morning's debate who has not yet had the opportunity of visiting the Falkland Islands. Had I done so, I might have had the same specialist wildlife knowledge as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) on securing the debate. For one reason or another the Falkland Islands have never been far from the news in the past 15 years. In the early 1980s the reasons for their prominence were sombre. Today, with our improved relationships with Argentina, we live in more optimistic times.

We welcome the opportunities presented by democracy in Argentina, especially since 1989. The junta that had ruled that country came to our national attention with the invasion of the Falklands in 1982, but the people of Argentina had already suffered for many years. Opposition Members have been vocal in opposing the human rights violations perpetrated by the right-wing dictatorship in the years preceding the Falklands conflict.

I live in hope that British Governments will be more consistent and vigorous in challenging human rights violations in other countries. Perhaps we will learn the lessons of history eventually, rather than allowing our arms manufacturers to trade with evil regimes only to see our own people suffer as a result at a later date.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Does she recall that, before the last general election, her party released a foreign policy paper which said that the Labour party believed that the future of the Falklands should be the subject of unconditional discussions with Argentina? Will the hon. Lady clarify Labour's current position and make it abundantly clear that there is no question of having unconditional talks with Argentina as that would undermine the sovereignty of the Falklands?

Mrs. Clwyd: If the hon. Lady is a little more patient I will be delighted to clarify the situation. I make it clear that the paper was not a policy statement; it was an individual statement which did not form part of the Labour party's policy.

The Falklands war played a major part in ending military rule in Argentina, although its intention was limited to the liberation of the islands. On an occasions such as this, it is appropriate to remember all of those, both British and Argentine, who lost their lives in the south Atlantic in 1982. In the following year the radical Government of President Alfonsin were elected, but differences over the issue of Falklands sovereignty prevented discussions between our two countries. Since the election of President Carlos Menem in 1989, British and Argentine relations have improved. The new president recognised the importance of restoring relations with Britain, especially if Argentina was to develop a satisfactory relationship with the European Community.

Diplomatic relations were restored and a new framework has allowed the lifting of the Falkland Islands protection zone which has removed much of the tension from the area. The United Kingdom is now in the process of developing a co-operative relationship with the present Government. I know that I speak for all hon. Members when I offer my sincere condolences to the President on the death of his son last week. Carlos Menem, who was 26, was killed in an air crash after his helicopter hit overhead power lines.

Areas of co-operation between the UK and Argentina include peacekeeping and counter-terrorism. British and Argentine troops are working side by side in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and in Cyprus. In the trade area, British exports to Argentina grew by 50 per cent. in 1993 and more investment opportunities are available. That is very welcome. Of course, the new relationship must also recognise that the rights and the wishes of the people of the Falkland Islands are paramount.

We desire cordial and constructive relations with the elected Government of Argentina. Provided democracy continues in that country, Labour in government will continue to talk to the Argentine Government to try to find a long-term solution to the Falkland Islands dispute. However, we emphasise that sovereignty is not an issue in current discussions with Argentina.

The future of Britain's military presence in the south Atlantic will depend on the evolution of UK-Argentina relations. However, for the foreseeable future, we do not propose or envisage a withdrawal of the UK military presence.

The major question about the Falklands' economic future involves oil. Perhaps the Minister will inform the House about any plans to commence drilling and what the revenue position would be if there were substantial oil finds, given the UK's considerable defence expenditure in the Falklands. The social and environmental impact of an oil bonanza would be enormous, and the matter clearly needs much thought. I share the concerns that my hon. Friends have expressed this morning. What plans are there for protecting the local environment, particularly plant, animal and marine life?

It is in Britain's interests to be realistic about any possible oil industry development in the south Atlantic. Effective exploitation of oil would clearly be difficult without Argentina's co-operation. It is logical to assume that oil and gas would be pumped ashore to the Latin American mainland for refining, particularly as the Falklanders—who are naturally very concerned about protecting their environment—have apparently rejected the idea of any onshore activity.

I understand that the question of oil exploration will be a matter for joint UK-Argentina discussions, which will take place along similar lines to existing dialogue on fishing and military security. Will the Minister confirm that? I ask that because, when the question was discussed in another place, Baroness Chalker said:

> "it will be up to the islanders—and only the islanders—to agree the manner in which the oil industry will develop"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 February 1995; Vol. 561, c. 1114.]

What is the true position? I am sure that the Minister will bear in mind the reality of the situation in the south Atlantic and will work to ensure that all diplomatic means are pursued in order to foster a healthy relationship with Argentina in the area of oil exploration and elsewhere. More specifically, it would be helpful if the Minister could tell us when drilling is likely to commence and precisely how the oil management team is functioning.

The Government of the Falkland Islands have long made it clear that they wish to pay the costs of maintaining the garrison at Mount Pleasant, which at present are met by the British taxpayer. They also say that they wish to repay the British Government for the capital costs of the military infrastructure on the islands. Perhaps the Minister will give us some information about those matters.

In addition, the development of an oil industry around the islands could bring employment benefits to the United Kingdom. If the industry develops, the Government of the islands will look to our oil supply industry for equipment provision. The wind-down of the oil industry in Aberdeen, which is beginning, could be compensated for by the discovery of Falklands oil.

It is somewhat ironic that the discovery of oil in waters thousands of miles away could lead to employment creation in the UK when our own North sea oil revenues were squandered in paying the costs of unemployment during the failed economic experiment of the 1980s. I understand that bids for oil licences to develop the most promising offshore areas are expected to open this month. Perhaps the Minister will inform the House which UK companies are likely to be in the running for those licences.

We are pleased to see positive developments in the areas of fishing, agriculture and land ownership taking place in the Falkland Islands and we hope that the continuance of democratic government in Argentina will allow for a gradual strengthening of co-operation between our two countries. The links between Wales and Patagonia—or Y Wladfa, as Patagonia is known colloquially in Wales—have been mentioned already. Those links have always been strong, and Welsh and Spanish are the two main languages of Patagonia.

Finally, there is one area about which we have long been concerned. We are pleased that Argentina has offered to pay a third party to clear the 30,000 Argentine anti-personnel mines that are believed to remain in the Falkland Islands. I am sorry that we do not have more details about the mines that remain. I also pay tribute to the four British service men who were seriously injured when clearing anti-personnel mines in the immediate aftermath of the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: I am sorry, I do not have time. That is yet another example of why the international trade in anti-personnel mines must be stopped. Following the Prime Minister's inadequate response yesterday on that issue, I appeal again to the British Government to support such moves when the inhumane weapons convention is reviewed in September.

11.19 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): In the brief time available, I shall endeavour to answer the questions raised by various hon. Members. Let me start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) on obtaining this important debate. He referred to his visit to the Falkland Islands with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I know from reports that it was a fruitful series of meetings and a worthwhile trip, as we also heard from my hon. Friend. I am grateful to him for undertaking the visit and for taking the opportunity to inform the House of those proceedings.

As my hon. Friend will have noticed, there is an increasing air of confidence and self-confidence in the islands. The money from fishing licences, which a number of hon. Members have mentioned, has been wisely invested—both publicly in infrastructure and higher standards of health and education, and privately in increased direct involvement in fishery and in the sub-division and purchase of farms.

[Mr. David Davis]

The Falklands is not just a very British society, but a society which is going places. A sign of that self-confidence has been mentioned in the debate—the two young islanders who have gone to Argentina to tell the Argentines politely but firmly that while the islanders want good neighbourly relations with them, that will be impossible until the Argentine Government drop their claim on their country.

The two young islanders—one male and one female—are currently in the middle of a two-week privately funded lecture tour, during which they are telling Argentines about life in the Falklands today. Their audience will realise that the islanders are as British as Members of the House. Once the Argentines accept that the islanders are British and have their own right to self-determination, relations can be built on a normal basis.

I am sure that, like me, the CPA visitors and others came back from the Falklands with a resounding message from the people of the islands that they are British now and they want to stay that way.

Contrary to the perceptions of many people, the history of the islands did not start in 1982. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), whose expertise and commitment in this area is legendary, put it precisely in its historical context. Many islanders trace their roots there back five or six generations. It is not a transitory population; they have been there without interruption since 1833 and have chosen throughout all that time to remain under the British flag.

As hon. Members will know, the Argentines continue to lay claim to the islands. My hon. Friend noted that their President goes so as far as to say that the Falklands will fly the Argentine flag by the year 2000, but the islanders have no intention of becoming Argentine.

We were particularly disappointed by the decision of the Argentine Constituent Assembly, which in 1994 inserted in its constitution for the first time a clause asserting that the Falklands were part of Argentina. Assertions that the Falklands will become Argentine are highly objectionable to us and to the islanders and we reject them and will continue to do so at every opportunity.

Despite our differences over the Argentine claim, however, our bilateral relations with Argentina on other matters have developed well since we reopened diplomatic relations in 1990. In a wise speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) spoke with knowledge about Argentina. We now co-operate in many areas and agreements have been signed on visa abolition, cultural co-operation, investment protection and promotion, anti-narcotics and air services. A double taxation convention was initialled last year and we hope to sign it later this year.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have only just enough time to make my speech.

Our soldiers have served together with United Nations peacekeeping forces, as has been mentioned, and there is a regular high-level dialogue.

Political progress has been matched by closer commercial links. In 1994, our exports totalled £225 million. As the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, exports were up 25 per cent. on 1993.

Since the resumption of diplomatic relations with Argentina in 1990, we have been able to discuss matters of mutual interest and have agreed with President Menem's Government that we should discuss such issues without reference to sovereignty. That approach works well, but when the issue of the Falklands arises, we point out to the Argentines that they should respect the wishes of the Falkland islanders.

We have no doubt about the sovereignty of the Falklands and the right to self-determination involves respecting the wishes of the people of the Falklands. The wishes of the islanders could not be clearer, as was reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge. Most recently, a MORI poll in the islands, conducted at Argentine instigation, found that 87 per cent. of the islanders were not prepared to discuss the issue of sovereignty with Argentina under any circumstances.

That figure of 87 per cent. is a stark statement of the islanders' wishes and of the fact that they wish to remain British. We are committed to the defence of the islanders' rights. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said when he visited the islands last April, we fought 12 years ago to sustain the wishes of the islanders to remain British, and we would do so again. There can be no compromise on that commitment.

The maintenance of the garrison at Mount Pleasant is an expensive operation. Building the port and the airfield cost some £300 million. In addition, it costs the British taxpayers some £67 million a year. We do not undertake such expenditure lightly, but we shall not be deterred from the task. So long as there is a threat, we shall commit the forces necessary to the defence of the islands.

Apart from defence, Britain is now responsible only for the islands' external relations. We lead in talks with their neighbours, Argentina, on matters of wider interest to the south Atlantic, such as fish and hydrocarbons—two issues that have been mentioned today.

In all other respects, the islanders run their own affairs through their elected councillors, and they do it well. We enjoy close and fruitful relations with the councillors, both through the governor and through exchanges of visits between London and Stanley. We also liaise closely with Falkland Islands Government officials on a whole host of matters. We appreciate those contacts, as I believe do the islanders, and we look forward to them continuing.

The economy of the islands was traditionally based on wool. That part of the economy has suffered a recent decline due to the worldwide slump in wool prices in 1990. However, the islands still produce 2,000 tonnes of wool a year and income from that source shows signs of increasing as the wool markets recover ground. The income has been sensibly invested and the return from those investments makes up another important element of the islands' economy.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the fishery. The establishment of the squid fishery has generated considerable income for the islands. The sale of fishing licences began in 1987 and has since then been the mainstay of the Falklands economy. Income until now has been from the sale of licences to foreign vessels.

Falklands companies have done well out of brokering and the provision of services, but this year has seen the first Falkland-flagged vessels entering the business. That is an excellent development and will add further to the Falklands success story. One British and five foreign trawlers have now been re-registered in the Falklands, three of them during February. The Falklands now composes one of the most significant deep-sea fishing fleets by tonnage under the red ensign anywhere in the world.

As was mentioned by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) the fishery has been excellently managed. It has been commended for its approach, its concern and its technique in handling conservation issues. It is managed by the Falkland Island Fisheries Department, which I was shown round in January by the able Director of Fisheries, Dr. John Barton. It is also assisted by the valuable research facilities available at Imperial college London. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I know his commitment to the issue but I do not agree that those people's distance from the position in any way undermines their expertise, their commitment or their skill.

In the management of the fishery, it is obviously desirable and sensible to talk to the Argentines with whom the islanders share stocks—a point raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. The illex, to which he referred, is a particularly fragile squid stock. A co-ordinated approach means that both countries ensure that stocks are conserved for the benefit of future generations. However, we would welcome greater transparency in Argentine licensing procedures.

On oil, the prospects for exploring for hydrocarbons in the sea bed around the Falklands are a highly topical subject in the islands. It is mildly controversial in terms of its effects. I talked it over with councillors and others when I was there.

No one knows for sure whether there is oil or gas. The signs are encouraging, but no one knows for sure. Seismic surveys took place in 1993. The Falkland Islands Government passed legislation in November last year permitting further exploration. They expect to announce this summer that a licensing round will open later this year inviting companies to bid for areas they wish to explore. If oil is discovered, it could boost the economic prospects of the Falklands. The Government are actively helping the islanders to benefit from that prospective resource.

There is also an Argentine dimension. The Argentines are the islands' neighbours in the south Atlantic, and one does not embark on major projects without discussing them with one's neighbours. There will be a need for co-ordination on matters such as safety, air-sea rescue and the environment. We are discussing the possibilities of co-operation with the Argentines. We would prefer to go ahead with an agreement but that is not a precondition. At the end of the day, that will be a matter for the Falkland Islands Government.

There will be scope for the provision of equipment and services from Argentina, Chile, Brazil and neighbouring countries. The Falkland islanders also want a significant role in such support services, and we will encourage that. We will continue discussing co-operation with the Argentines, and we are of course keeping Falkland Islands councillors fully informed.

Unfortunately, I must conclude. I am delighted that we have had this opportunity—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The Minister must conclude even before he thought that he would.

Training and Enterprise Councils

11.30 am

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): This debate must be placed in the context of decisions made in the 1993 Budget, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced proposals to cut £500 million from the Department of Employment's programme over the next three years. The training and enterprise councils' national council immediately announced that would inevitably lead to training cuts of between 10 per cent. and 28 per cent. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It is not appropriate for hon. Members to gather in little knots while the House is sitting.

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful to my Front-Bench colleagues for emphasising the extent to which last year's cuts in training places severely damaged TEC programmes throughout the country.

One year later, the knock-on effects that are part and parcel of the Government's retreat from training are also clear. The sum of £170 million was cut from training for work projects. As a result, this year there will be 55,000 fewer adult places in that programme.

TEC budgets around the country have collapsed. Calderdale and Kirklees have lost £7.5 million, or 25 per cent. of their training budget. Staffordshire lost £7 million, Teesside lost £6.5 million, Merseyside lost £15 million, and Devon and Cornwall lost £11 million.

The Minister might argue that such cuts represent progress rather than being a retrograde step. I suspect that his response will have three themes. One will almost certainly be a repetition of the argument made by the Secretary of State for Employment in the 1993 Budget debate, when he said that

> "TEC budgets are being determined by outputs—by what is achieved—rather than by what is spent."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1360.]

That is the "output, not input" argument.

The second defence will elaborate on that theme, with the claim that setting a target of 40 per cent. of trainees securing jobs marks another improvement. The third will be that 27 per cent. of trainees should be drawn from the disadvantaged—refining the quality of aid rather than stressing the quantity. The problem is not the aspirations behind targeting but the emptiness of the programme, which makes the Government's position dishonest.

We are invited to forget the cuts and to accept that there is an improved targeting regime that is the best of all worlds for the best of all programmes. Even the most cursory examination of the programme reveals that the underpinning of that argument is a lie, a folly and fraud.

I will support my claim with the example of the TEC that I know best, which is the one in Greater Nottingham. Other hon. Members will, no doubt, refer to their own areas. This year, a cut in Greater Nottingham TEC's budget from £20 million to £17 million has been announced. In Government terms, that is a mouthwatering and modest 15 per cent. reduction, but in relation to the achieved spending last year it amounts to a cut from £24 million to £17 million, which makes it a cruel and cynical 30 per cent. reduction.

The immediate impact on staffing is even harsher. The TEC has been compelled to reduce its staff from 75 to 47—a cut of 38 per cent. The Minister might argue that when unemployment falls, one can expect a commensurate cut in programmes that address the needs of the unemployed and long-term unemployed. In Greater Nottingham's TEC catchment area, 30,000 people are unemployed, 18,000 of whom are long-term unemployed. Unemployment in the city is 16 per cent. For those 18,000 long-term unemployed, the TEC will be able to deliver no more than 800 training places.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Gentleman paints a distorted picture because he does not take into account the Government money that is being ploughed into Nottingham through the city challenge project. Is not that going a long way to help training schemes and the people in that area?

Mr. Simpson: I will deal with that point later, but Nottingham's experience of other Government training programmes is that increasingly they are turning into a dog's breakfast of non-co-operation between Departments and cynical manipulation of funding, to deny the city money for bids that are among the best in the country. I will address the role of civil servants in that cynical process of stealing money from meretricious projects.

TECs were flagged up as the centrepiece of Government training initiatives. If one focuses only on the long-term unemployed in Nottingham, one sees that at the current rate of funding it will take more than 22 years for this year's long-term unemployed to gain access to a training place. It may seem capricious of the Government to approach training in such a way that many long-term unemployed are likely to have an entitlement to retire before they are given a right to training. That is hardly the brightest picture of the dynamic market economy that the Government like to paint.

The Government may argue that although there are many long-term unemployed in Nottingham, they are not among the most disadvantaged in the country, but we must look a little closer. Of the gross unemployment figure, 48 per cent. of long-term unemployed in Nottingham are Afro-Caribbean. The city is home for 37 per cent. of all ethnic minority communities in the east midlands. A study of disadvantaged areas in Nottinghamshire showed that, of all of the wards in the county, 14 of the worst areas were in the city itself, in the area covered by Greater Nottingham TEC.

It may be argued that Nottingham is part of an underlying upward trend and that people will find their own prospects of employment. I refer those who want to hide behind that argument to the 1994 urban trends report of the Policy Studies Institute. In relation to employment change over the past decade, it says:

> "Leicester and Nottingham . . . suffered the general decline in the proportion of full-time employees but did not share in the general increase in part-time employment—in Nottingham it actually declined."

That is hardly a picture of a dynamic expansion of work opportunities.

What about discrimination? Every TEC and trainer in the country says that all the evidence shows that the area of greatest resistance in taking on the long-term unemployed is among small and medium-sized enterprises. Those enterprises are not necessarily being run by people who are deeply prejudiced. It may simply be that, in terms of this leaner, fitter Britain, many of them are running on the bare bones. The problems—getting the long-term unemployed back into work—which those enterprises and trainers understand, require considerable personal and financial support. If that is so, one must devote additional resources where there are a disproportionate number of small firms in an economy.

In the Greater Nottingham area, some 15,000 enterprises offer employment on different scales, but 93 per cent. of them employ fewer than 25 people. That is the marketplace in which the long-term unemployed must be placed if they are to have job and career prospects. The support needed to deliver stable and workable training programmes for those people is greater because of the propensity of the city to be dependent on small and medium-sized enterprises. Just when we have the greatest problems and the biggest backlog of difficulties in meeting the needs of the long-term unemployed, the training budget is cut by 30 per cent., and support and staff by 38 per cent. That nails the lie to the Government's argument about a serious commitment to training.

The farce is that underfunding of training turns programmes into cruel jokes. Nationally, we know that 58 per cent. of youth trainees leave training schemes early. Fewer than half are in full-time work. Only one in 20 gets part-time work, and one in two leaves without a qualification. Instead of investment to raise standards and qualifications, cuts are made, which turn farce into fraud. I say that because there is great pressure among TECs simply to look at the outcomes that are required and to tailor the "masquerading" of training into meeting targets that simply deliver the cash. We know already that training providers have fiddled qualifications to secure funding. We also know that there is great pressure—it is recognised in the TECs themselves—to train only the trained. If the trigger point for funding is a qualification, there is growing pressure to look for people who already have qualifications, who can be put through quickie courses to meet the next stage of a national vocational qualification, thereby releasing money.

The problem is that that creates a cynicism gap in the programme. That gap is not being filled by genuine training schemes for people with special needs, who face long-term prospects of unemployment. We know that the least qualified—the most vulnerable people in the work force—have extra needs that can be met only by extra costs and extra support. Instead, TECs will be under pressure to provide short courses that lead to junk jobs. What we will see—and I have talked this through with the TECs—is that a number of employers will come up with offers for TECs to meet the target needs by offering the most cynical employment contracts or opportunities afterwards: short-term contracts, irregular hours, perhaps even finding ways of getting zero-hour contracts recognised as a job without work. The most vulnerable people outside the work force will be cynically exploited simply to trigger the cash to keep training programmes on the road.

In many ways, the new rules also reward underactivity and underperformance. The TECs that have spent their budgets on delivering training are precisely the ones that are most vulnerable to cuts. They have no reserves left to cushion cuts from one year to the next. Nor do they have the cushioning needed to do precisely what the Government often ask them to do: to get into partnership funding, whereby they have to provide matching moneys. This is particularly important in relation to European funding. Without a cash reserve, a TEC will not be in a position to offer matching funding as part of the more generous offers of additional project-based activities, to which the Government will often lay claim. The TECs that are doing the most will be the most vulnerable to punitive cuts in their funding.

This country is systematically short-changing the unemployed. The average time that an adult receives on a skill-training course in the United Kingdom now amounts to just 20 weeks—the shortest in Europe. It does not surprise me that we see stories in the papers about hospital porters being asked to help in hip operations. We are systematically short-changing ourselves not only in the skill training that we offer but in the job security and the proper staffing needed to run the services in which we are supposedly training people to work.

The United Kingdom is also the meanest of funders around Europe. If we compare the United Kingdom, France and Germany, we can see that, in relation to labour market training as a percentage of gross domestic product, the United Kingdom spends 0.14 per cent., France, 0.39 per cent.—two and a half times more than the UK—and Germany, 0.55 per cent., which is four times as much as the UK. For the entirety of its training budgets, the United Kingdom spends 0.5 per cent, France, 1 per cent. and Germany, 1.6 per cent. This country spends less than half the average for all EC and EFTA countries on training programmes. It is little wonder, therefore, that the chief executive of the Greater Nottingham TEC should write to the Secretary of State, warning him that he is in danger of creating two-tier TECs, where only those that have cash reserves can prosper, whereas those that do not, but have been delivering decent training programmes, are in danger of being driven to the wall.

This country needs a complete rethink of our approach to training the unemployed. First, we need a commitment from the Government that they will restore funding to training programmes. I say that at a time when the country knows, even though the Government will not admit it, that the Chancellor sat on a windfall bonanza income last year when constructing his Budget. Rather than investing that money in training the unemployed he has been stuffing it in his pockets to facilitate a "bung" Budget before he makes a dash for the next general election.

Secondly, we must restore local accountability. Elected representatives of local authorities must have a say in the shaping of local training programmes. The transfer of responsibilities to unelected civil servants has been a disaster.

Thirdly, bureaucracy must be reduced. The delivery of training is now in a dreadful mess, not only in my area but throughout the country. The granting of arbitrary powers to various civil servants, allowing them to create mayhem, is a cynical joke.

I am currently dealing with the case of a young person who is on a training course to become a joiner. The college says that he will pass with flying colours; the Benefits Agency has supported him. Unfortunately, the Department of Employment has subjected him to considerable pressure, telling him that unless he takes a course in office skills his benefits will be cut. When he asked about that course, he was told that it mainly involved answering the telephone. He pointed out that he was training to become a joiner and did not envisage spending much time on the office telephone, but the

[Mr. Simpson]

Department was adamant, and has now reduced his benefit entitlement because he would not go on the office skills course. There are similar absurdities throughout the country: I am sure that other hon. Members can give examples, both absurd and tragic, of the way in which the system is falling apart.

Finally, we must restore a system in which local needs are targeted. Areas must be able to identify realistic job opportunities—examining the specific needs of their labour forces and labour markets—and find ways of tackling the backlogs caused by discrimination and disadvantage. The system must be locally accountable, rather than being run by unaccountable civil servants and bureaucracies.

I cannot describe my anger at the way in which the country and the Government have treated the unemployed. Those who currently have almost nothing can expect to receive even less.

This debate is taking place at a time when the press seems obsessed with the notion of "outing". Let me tell the Secretary of State and the Government that they themselves cannot expect to remain immune from such "outing" much longer. They have produced a succession of policies that have amounted to little more than a belief in getting their leg over the long-term unemployed: they certainly have not been giving the unemployed a leg up into decent jobs.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's language is less than elegant. May I ask him to rephrase what he has said?

Mr. Simpson: Perhaps it is sufficient to say that the Government's policies have been less than helpful in returning the long-term unemployed to secure and prosperous jobs. Before too long the Government will find themselves being judged by the public: they will be "outed" in the most responsible way that I can imagine—at a general election, when the public will "out" the lot of them.

11.53 am

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): My area contains the Southern Derbyshire TEC, and abuts the area containing the Greater Nottingham TEC, about which the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) has spoken. I must tell him that I do not share his pessimism about training and the job that TECs do. I believe that TECs do an excellent job, and my belief is confirmed by the experience of all who are involved with Southern Derbyshire TEC.

It is not only the Government's function to fund training; it is the function of employers as well. When I ran a company, before the advent of TECs, we organised and paid for the training ourselves.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Does the hon. Lady support the cut of nearly £2 million in Southern Derbyshire TEC's budget in a single year? Does she approve of the fact that training in her area has been cut by 9 per cent. in one year?

Mrs. Knight: I am aware of those figures, and I shall deal with the hon. Lady's points shortly. If she will restrain herself for a moment and allow me to deal first with Greater Nottingham TEC, I shall deal with Southern Derbyshire TEC a little later—and perhaps reveal another set of figures that may prove an eye-opener and make the hon. Lady wish that she had not intervened.

Who pays for training, who receives it and who benefits from it? Those issues involve a group of people and organisations. Let me inform the hon. Member for Nottingham, South that it used to be common for companies to pay for their own training; the advent of TECs has considerably assisted both those companies and the people who require training—people who are either working for the companies concerned or trying to improve their skills in order to enter the jobs market.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the length of courses. He should hesitate before deciding that long training is good training. When I was involved in training, I found that one of the difficulties was persuading young men, in particular, to remain at the college for any length of time. They wanted to learn their skills as quickly as possible, leave the college and the day-release courses and return to full-time work. Making courses too long does such people a disservice; flexibility is the key word. Training must meet the abilities and aspirations of those involved.

Before the debate, as my TEC is adjacent to that of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, I looked up the most recent report of Greater Nottingham TEC. The chairman introduced the report with a statement that strikes me as considerably less pessimistic than what we have heard this morning:

> "As Nottingham starts to emerge from recession, GNTEC has streamlined and rebuilt its operation . . . we now have the right team and the right partners to position Nottingham as one of the country's foremost regional centres."

That implies that the chairman is looking ahead positively.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The hon. Lady knows a good deal about the Greater Nottingham area, and about training in the east midlands generally. She has quoted the chairman of the Greater Nottingham TEC. Does she subscribe to his view that a £3 million cut in the budget was a retrograde step, and that the Secretary of State for Employment should reinstate the former budget?

Mrs. Knight: That is an interesting intervention. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South gave a different set of figures; perhaps he and his hon. Friend should discuss the matter.

Let me point out to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) that unemployment is falling substantially in both Nottingham and Derbyshire, which has benefited all who live and work there. Both TECs are becoming involved with other organisations, and gaining access to funds from organisations outside Government—and, in the case of the Greater Nottingham TEC, funds from Europe. Employers are funding more training in the areas. We should consider the funding of training in a wider context and examine the consequences of training, the way in which people benefit and the number of jobs that are being created in both our areas. Again, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that those issues are touched on throughout the Greater Nottingham TEC report, as is the number of long-term unemployed people whom the TEC is getting back into work. The figures are an excellent recognition of the quality of its work, the sort of funds that it is levering out of organisations now and the sort of funds that it is hoping to lever out in future. He and I are looking at something of a success story across our part of the east midlands, with that region being hailed as the strongest-growing region in the country. It is a significant success story, to which the TECs are contributing.

Mr. Simpson: I should be grateful if the hon. Lady would simply accept yesterday's statement by Greater Nottingham TEC. It states that the cuts that it is having to deal with lead, first, to a serious undermining of the quality of training that it feels it can deliver, secondly, to the almost complete erosion of the basis on which it is able to lever additional funding because of the lack of reserves, and, thirdly, to the most enormous questions being raised about the partnerships that it is able to enter into with the private sector in relation to special needs training of people who have been out of the work force the longest.

Mrs. Knight: I too have a concern about partnership funding and the way in which that helps local economies. I am aware that Southern Derbyshire TEC did very well in obtaining additional funds to assist specific groups, such as those that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, because it had exceeded its targets, whereas Greater Nottingham TEC was not as well able to perform against its targets and, therefore, did not receive the additional funding that it needed for those priority groups. In relation to those specific groups, the message to Greater Nottingham TEC is perhaps that it should consider what Southern Derbyshire TEC did to benefit from its experience of how to target those groups.

On funding, clearly I cannot comment on a letter that the hon. Gentleman has seen and that I have not, but I am aware that, in the coming year, one of the key objectives of Greater Nottingham and Southern Derbyshire TECs is to obtain funds from other sectors and not just to look at Government as the one and only source of finance for training. They are not the only source. We must get away from looking down that narrow road and should consider the broader field. Certainly, small, medium and large companies outside Government consider training in a broader way, as do the further education colleges. We must also do that and accept that, as unemployment falls, funds to help the unemployed will tend to change accordingly.

Training is a partnership for all the people involved and is not just something for Government. I recognise that the Government put substantial funds into training and a great many people have benefited from that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and in mine.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Knight: If the hon. Gentleman would excuse me, I intended my remarks to be brief. I have taken three or four interventions. I wanted to speak about Southern Derbyshire TEC rather than Greater Nottingham TEC. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not for any hon. Member to challenge another as to whether they do or do not give way.

Mrs. Knight: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) will accept what I have said and enable me to concentrate briefly on Southern Derbyshire TEC, which covers a number of local authority areas, of which Erewash is one.

Southern Derbyshire TEC has, in many respects, had many difficult jobs to do. The region's economic profile is usual for the east midlands, but perhaps unusual for the country. Southern Derbyshire's industrial history is strongly linked with many traditional industries. The region has been at the forefront of transport development. The names of Rolls-Royce and Asea Brown Boveri Ltd. are renowned world wide. Rolls-Royce has been feeling very much the competition from around the world in its field of expertise. As hon. Members well know, ABB has felt the draught of competition as well. But there has been substantial investment in the region's traditional industries, which balances the equation somewhat. Toyota built a £700 million production plant for cars. It announced last week that it was going to build another massive car plant in the region. Although there has been a shift away from traditional industries, and employment has fallen in those industries as a consequence of technology improvements, investment has continued in the region's manufacturing industry—to such an extent that manufacturing still employs about 41 per cent. of all people in jobs in the region. The number of people in the mining industry is relatively small, but the number in the services sector is starting to increase.

The region's employment pattern shows marked differences from national trends. The people employed in the engineering and textiles sectors amount to 22 per cent. of people working in the region, compared with a national total of 11 per cent. As with Nottingham, many of those people are employed in small businesses. The latest calculation showed that 83 per cent. of firms employed fewer than 10 people, which illustrates small business' powerful economic role, both in southern Derbyshire and elsewhere.

Southern Derbyshire TEC has been up and running for about four years, but people in the region still ask what the TECs do. One of the reasons why that question is asked is that the use of the word "TEC" is synonymous with so many of the old technical colleges, but another reason is that the TECs' involvement is wide and various—it takes place through so many other organisations—so it is not necessarily known that they are involved in a particular area.

Southern Derbyshire TEC has been involved in training people from school age right the way through to the older age group. It has been involved in setting the region's economic revival on a sound footing with such developments as Derby Pride, which is similar to the Nottingham city challenge scheme. It has been involved in the single regeneration budget and in putting the Derby and Derbyshire chamber of commerce on a sound footing. The TEC, therefore, has a wide involvement in the local economy; it is there not only actively as a trainer, but as a force to move and shake. But the worth of an organisation is not measured just by calculating how much is put into it. It must be measured by what comes out as well. The hon. Member for Woolwich is agitating dreadfully. I shall give way.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Is the hon. Lady satisfied that, in the region covered by Southern Derbyshire TEC, less than one third of the people completing training find their way into full-time employment?

Mrs. Knight: I am slightly surprised at that. The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that, out of the 82 TECs in the country, Southern Derbyshire TEC comes second in

[Mrs. Knight]

helping unemployed people find jobs. Last year, it helped some 2,000 people find work and the figure is rising substantially. When considering some of the other criteria against which a TEC's performance is judged—what is happening to the people whom it trains—we find that Southern Derbyshire TEC comes sixth in helping young people obtain qualifications. Last year, 1,340 young people gained qualifications. That information is from Southern Derbyshire TEC. It is more accurate than the information he received from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the Opposition spokeswoman on employment.

I give this TEC the credit which does not seem to be coming from Opposition Members. All the hard work that it has done means that, overall, it is in 15th place among TECs. It is often common for people to think of Derbyshire solely in terms of the green and pleasant land of the Peak district, but southern Derbyshire is not like that. It is far more of a traditional industrial region. The Salford index measures the quality of life in the regions covered by TECs. Against that index, Southern Derbyshire TEC ranks about 30th, so it is placed just above half way in terms of the quality of life in the region. For it to be in 15th position when it comes to ensuring that those whom it trains find jobs and go on to do what they want to do is a creditable performance of which it is justly proud. It helps the people in the area.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Knight: I intended to make a few brief points about Southern Derbyshire TEC. I have been talking for about 15 minutes and have taken half a dozen interventions. Our constituencies are a long way apart and, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I should like to continue with Southern Derbyshire TEC.

Another aspect of the work of TECs, which has not really been touched on so far, is helping new firms get off the ground. That is fundamental to growing jobs in an area. The Government do not create jobs by waving a magic wand. The job creators of the country are businesses. The figures provided for me by my local TEC show that in the last year for which it has records—about six or seven months ago—it helped to start more than 400 firms, which is twice the number it got going two years previously. It monitors those firms to see how it can continue to assist them and keep them growing. Helping new firms get off the ground and encouraging existing companies to grow is fundamental to ensuring a strong economy and more jobs for the people of southern Derbyshire.

The recent unemployment figures for the area covered by Southern Derbyshire TEC show a substantial reduction. In my area, unemployment has fallen by nearly 16 per cent. compared with this time last year and by about 20 per cent. since 1992. There are similar falls in unemployment in the other constituencies and local authority areas covered by the TEC. That shows how jobs are being created in the area and how well the TEC is performing in training people to take up the jobs that are provided.

Another aspect of the TEC's work is the Investors in People award, which was touched on earlier. It has received the extra cash for good performance, particularly when it exceeded targets for finding jobs after training for people with disabilities and for people from the ethnic minority community. I emphasise the phrase "exceeded targets for finding jobs after training" because that is what training is all about.

I make two points relating to the Southern Derbyshire TEC and to TECs generally. First, there was an amalgamation of Southern Derbyshire TEC with the Derby and Derbyshire chamber of commerce. That amalgamation was necessary because the chamber of commerce was in financial difficulties, which was not to the benefit of the business community and the long-term prospects of businesses in the area. However, I am concerned about amalgamations in general.

I hope that any proposed amalgamation between a TEC and a chamber of commerce is considered carefully. The independence of a chamber of commerce is vital for the business community. The jobs done by TECs and by chambers of commerce are not wholly separate from each other, as they obviously cross over at the edges. However, I do not think that they will benefit from being wholly intermingled. There may be areas such as mine where it is necessary to do just that, but as a long-term policy for the business community, as represented by the chambers of commerce in this country, it would not benefit them especially well.

My second point relates to the ability of partnerships set up by the TEC. The business link is now starting to move well in the local area, as is the link between schools and companies and the involvement of lecturers with businesses. Those areas are all showing improvement and they require money. I am concerned that we are looking at capping the amount of surpluses that a training and enterprise council can generate. For example, the allowable profit margins on TEC programmes are capped at or around 7.5 per cent. I am not advocating dependency on the Government for those economic partnerships because I recognise that there must be an all-round contributory effort. However, in the early years of economic partnerships in particular, and the other partnerships that develop and assist in an area, there may be a need for more financial assistance than at later times. I hope that it will be possible at some time to look again at those allowable profit margins and at some of the constraints on TECs relating to their involvement in economic development in an area. By looking again at those rules, perhaps we will continue to assist job creation, which I am sure is what everyone wants to see.

12.15 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I have about five minutes, which is not long in which to accuse the Government of, at the very best, a lack of financial rectitude, and, at worst, of fraudulent trading in relation to South Thames TEC. My argument is that the Government should fund South Thames TEC and every other TEC that finds itself in similar difficulties to discharge the debts that they incurred up to such time as creditors were put on positive notice that the TEC would not be able to discharge its obligations.

The Government set up South Thames TEC in 1991 and it went bust just before Christmas 1994 with debts of several million pounds. For instance, it owes over £800,000 to my local Lambeth college—5 per cent. of its budget. It owes money to many local schools, including primary schools, as well as to organisations for the disabled and Age Concern. It left in the lurch 6,000 trainees when it went bust. As I have said, the Government should meet those debts until such time as people were put on notice about those losses.

I accuse the Government of acting in the sort of way that deserves to put them on the BBC programme "Face the Facts". I accuse them of, in some ways, acting no better than those who run disreputable phoenix companies and conmen and spivs who use the method of a limited company to deprive creditors of what is due to them. Can one imagine what would happen if ICI or one of our leading banks was to wholly fund a subsidiary company, as almost the sole source of its funds, and let that company go into liquidation leaving the most vulnerable people to pick up the pieces and face the debts?

What is more, the Government have not simply walked away from this. If there is any wreckage left in the shipwreck of South Thames TEC, the Government are grabbing it as the preferred secured creditors of that organisation. That is absolutely disgraceful. It is an example of a complete lack of financial rectitude.

The matter is even worse than that. I believe that the Government are liable for fraudulent trading under section 213 of the Insolvency Act 1986, which makes any person who is responsible for creditors being defrauded responsible for those debts in full. Why do I say that? The Government said that this was a private enterprise matter, run by private enterprise. It was not. The director, Mr. Hansen, was a former civil servant. He was in my private office when I was a Minister at the Department of Employment.

When the financial director left in August 1994 the Government knew that the TEC was in difficulties. They knew from their financial inspections between August and November 1994 that something was seriously wrong. However, they went on funding the body completely, apart from a little money from the European Union, and holding it out as discharging the Government's responsibilities. If anybody else does that, it is an act of fraudulent trading. It involves giving comfort and support to an organisation from which vulnerable people and groups—primary schools and organisations for the disabled—can derive the reasonable conclusion that the debts are being met. For the Government to grab every penny that was available from the shipwreck is disgraceful. I suppose that it is privatisation, but who would buy a second-hand policy from this Government which came originally from the Adam Smith Institute? I do not believe that any other responsible organisation would have behaved in that way.

The Government should fund the debts incurred for this reason. The TEC was not simply a trading organisation, but an organisation formed to discharge the Government's functions. One of the purposes of a Government is to look after children when they leave school, and also to educate and train people to sustain the economy. The Government have walked away from the wreckage they have created by allowing a TEC to be run badly when it was known to be in a high-risk area, and they disguised its demise in the run-up to the Christmas holiday.

I do not make the allegations of fraud, mismanagement and a lack of financial rectitude against the Minister personally, as he has come here to carry the can. I do make those allegations against the Government. I know of no creditor, from the *South London Press* to Lambeth college, who believes that the Government should leave people stranded as they have done. I hope that the Minister can say that the Government accept the same degree of responsibility for this fiasco as any other reputable organisation would accept for a subsidiary.

12.20 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): There is a fairly straightforward approach to measuring a TEC's performance in relation to its funding. We can measure how successful it has been in providing training which leads to new skills and in helping to tackle long-term unemployment.

To date, the results are disturbing. Nearly half of all those who have taken training for work schemes through TECs remain unemployed some six months after leaving the schemes. Nearly 60 per cent. of those leaving training for work schemes leave without achieving the minimal qualification. The root of the problem is not so much the management of TECs as the funding policy on which they are supported. Hon. Members may remember that the present funding system was described to the Employment Select Committee by Professor Bennett of the London School of Economics as "daft".

For example, demanding that TECs make surpluses from training programmes to fund enterprise schemes for small businesses was a classic case. The effect of that was to encourage TECs to cream off those people who were easier to train, thus achieving their target outcomes. At the same time, those with special training needs—those who, I would argue, perhaps deserved greater attention—were losing out, and they continue to lose out.

The danger is that the swingeing cuts that are planned will provoke mass resignations from business representatives unless the budget policies are looked at again and, I hope, reversed. Business people will become disaffected if the only function of TEC boards is to dispense state funds to pay for training schemes for the unemployed. We must remember that the central mission of TECs was that they should be employer-led bodies for economic regeneration, and that central mission will be fundamentally compromised without adequate funding support for the innovative local initiatives that they should be equipped to produce.

I shall give a quick example of my local TEC in Hampshire, the area with the highest dependence on the defence industry of any region in the country. The Hampshire TEC must develop schemes for diversification in the local economy, and has been given the task to help the workers who, in many cases, are highly skilled but who need to diversify their talents into other industries. The TEC is working well within its own abilities and resources, but it is constrained by a lack of support and, perhaps, understanding from the Government.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is not it a fact that, like my local TEC, the hon. Gentleman's local TEC is deeply demoralised by the cut in enterprise allowance, because that stopped it from helping new businesses to start? The TEC wanted to help people to start their own business and to go on to employ other people.

Mr. Chidgey: I cannot speak for the hon. Gentleman's TEC, but that is certainly a key problem. There is a need for innovation in funding and a need to look beyond the immediate task of dealing with the long-term unemployed. In that sense, the hon. Gentleman and I are on the same lines.

[Mr. Chidgey]

Given that background, it is hardly surprising that the Secretary of State for Employment reportedly said:

> "Some TECs lack credibility with the business community".

That is an important issue which must be addressed by the Government.

The Government continue to pursue funding cuts, with another £280 million forecast to be lost in the next two years. At the same time, funding for youth training and the modern apprenticeship schemes—vital investments in our future skills base—will barely keep pace with inflation.

The Government are proposing an increase in the percentage of training for work leavers gaining jobs from the present 36 per cent. to 50 per cent. in 1997-98, and that is a welcome, if modest, aim. We must question what appears to be the prime aim, which is reducing the average cost per job from about £6,500 to £4,500 over that same period. Improving efficiency of training for work programmes is clearly a responsible target for any Government, and I would endorse that, but withdrawing money that is saved from the budget instead of reinvesting it in better-quality high-skill training is not responsible.

British companies are already constrained by skill shortages as the economy is improving. With the United Kingdom facing widening skills gaps when compared with our competitors, it is the worst example of short-sighted short-termism not to invest efficiency savings from the improvement in the performance of TECs in the development of the high-skill base which is essential to our future prosperity. The drive for lower unit costs brings further threats to training quality.

Clearly, we all agree that the performance of TECs must improve, but without some form of regulatory system, the pressures of payment by results can encourage abuse. We have heard examples of that, and no doubt those pressures will lead to an increase in that abuse. There may be a temptation to take short cuts, and the potential for corrupt practices also increases.

There is widespread concern within industry and commerce about the validity of some of the national vocational qualification assessment techniques, and a reduction in funding will only heighten those concerns. Nothing can make that point more effectively than the Government's own forecasts for NVQ outcomes. In 1994-95, the estimated proportion of leavers of the training for work schemes who will have NVQs is 39 per cent. That is hardly a figure to get excited about, but the forecasts for 1995-96 and 1996-97 show that the proportion will fall from that low figure of 39 per cent. to some 30 per cent. in each of those years.

The vast majority of those NVQ qualifications will be in levels 1 and 2, neither of which is an intensive, high-skill qualification. NVQ level 1 is the equivalent of five GCSEs at a modest level, and NVQ level 2 is slightly better. The Government are predicting that, in the next two years, fewer than one in three of those leaving the training schemes will achieve a skill qualification of the standard of an average secondary school leaver. By no stretch of the imagination can that programme be described as equipping the country with the skills base that we need to compete in the world market. In that context, Professor Bennett was absolutely right to describe the TEC funding policy as "daft". The Government's failure to reinvest efficiency gains from TEC budgets in high-quality training is selling the country short.

I shall return briefly to the effectiveness of TEC funding in tackling long-term unemployment, which is a key area of the Government's policy. The economy is held back by mass long-term unemployment. Throughout 1994, the very long-term unemployed represented close to 40 per cent. of the overall total of unemployed. That is a higher proportion than at any time in the previous four years. There is no clear sign of a significant reduction in that percentage in the coming year. Therefore, the improvement in the economy has made little, if any, difference to the long-term unemployment quota. That demonstrates that long-term unemployment will not be tackled by market forces alone. We need sound, properly funded policies to develop and extend the skills base.

Some of the Government's policies have been successes, and I welcome and endorse those. The workstart pilot programmes have shown remarkable success, with employers taking on long-term unemployed people into permanent jobs. However, instead of concentrating resources and targeting cost savings on those programmes, the Government are starting more pilots. From my correspondence with the Department, it is clear to me that the Government's main aim is to reduce still further the costs of training the long-term unemployed and equipping them for meaningful employment. The schemes are training on the cheap. All the while, the long-term unemployed continue to represent some 40 per cent. of the total quota of unemployment.

There are ways in which we could tackle that problem. We could invest in benefit transfer systems to encourage employers to give meaningful training to the long-term unemployed to make them productive and worthwhile employees who can be taken on as an asset to a company. Long-term unemployment is a major challenge to TECs, but without more support and flexibility, they will lose the battle. All the while, each long-term unemployed person costs the economy £9,000 a year in benefits paid and taxes forgone.

TECs' reliance on short-term funding and the requirement that they comply with central Government restrictions discourages long-term planning and investment in high-quality training. TECs need to be restructured so that local accountability can be improved. Industry needs to continue to play a lead role. Companies must be encouraged to take responsibility in identifying and meeting local training needs, but TECs must also be more broadly based to draw in the support of small as well as large businesses.

TECs need to work in partnership with local authorities and educational and community interests. It is important to note that many small firms involved with TECs now have had no experience in training. They need to be involved to develop the knowledge and skills that go with training employees. TECs must reflect the requirements of small firms in a sector of our economy which has the greatest potential for job creation. TECs need to develop closer links with chambers of commerce to minimise duplication. They need to consult more widely with unions and local authorities.

TEC boards should be more broadly based. Members should be brought in who represent a wider section of the business community, local authorities, trade unions and the voluntary sector. We need to get a local dimension in our TECs. They need to have the flexibility to meet local needs. Ministerial controls on TEC funding need to be lessened so that we have TECs which are more responsive to local requirements.

We need to remove the anomalies in the financial support of different groups. Above all, TECs need rolling funding. They need to be enabled to plan for longer-term targets. They need to be able to concentrate on the provision of skills training for those in employment—one of their fundamental remits—and on giving support to new and growing businesses.

12.33 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I wish briefly to reinforce the position of the Greater Nottingham TEC. Let us look at the headline figures. In the current year, the gross budget is £24 million and the core budget is £20 million. Next year, it will be £17 million. At the lowest, that can be classed as a cut of £3 million or 17 per cent. That is on top of a cut in the previous year of £3.2 million or 15 per cent. Put another way, the budget of Greater Nottingham TEC has fallen since 1 April 1993 by 34 per cent. Unemployment has fallen, but by only 15 per cent.

I am worried about the cuts, which will affect the Greater Nottingham area. I fear that the business start-up scheme will consist of counselling only and that no finance will be available. Some £1 million has been lost to new small businesses—a sector which I thought that the Government were trying to encourage. I am particularly unhappy that the local initiatives fund will not continue next year. That brings me to my key point. TEC budgets across the country were cut from a peak in 1993-94 of £1.97 billion, by 12 per cent. in 1994-95 and by 21 per cent. in 1995-96. Budgets are being cut, but TECs are doing more. As other hon. Members have said, outputs are increasing. The consequence is—this is the contradiction for TECs—that although they are doing more for less money, their flexibility and ability to meet local needs is handicapped and hampered.

If we want TECs to be engines for change, to add value to the local economy and create jobs, we have to give them more flexibility. There are ways in which that could be done without spending any extra money. TECs ought to be allowed greater virement—perhaps up to 10 per cent.—between budget heads. There should be a refocusing on European social fund contributions and how they are handled. ESF money comes in at both national and local level. There is often confusion. If we refocus that money at local level, we could obtain extra added value. I hope that the Minister will consider that point.

We ought to work towards a single training for work budget. At present, the training budget and the allowance budget are separate. They are not both managed by the TEC. Integration could provide better impact, efficiency and value for money. A range of flexibility measures could be taken which would not cost money. They would give TECs the flexibility to act. The Minister ought to listen to this. He ought to listen to private sector TEC directors, who say to me that they are in a Catch 22 system. They want things to happen. They want change in their area, but they do not want to be merely the deliverer of the youth and adult training programmes. They want to do more and to add value to their area. They can do that only if they are given flexibility.

I wish to raise a point about a local issue affecting my North Nottingham TEC. If the Minister cannot answer today, I hope that he will write to me about it. As part of its adult training for work scheme, the TEC runs a excellent scheme called jobskills. In the past three years, 6,000 people have been through it. They have had employed status. In October, the Department of Social Security's central adjudication service ruled that participants on the scheme were trainees. Given that such trainees pay national insurance contributions, that seems most odd. They had employed status in the past, which enabled them to claim family credit. Participants or potential participants now cannot claim family credit so fewer people now go on the scheme. Far from being a successful scheme, the rate of take-up is now 20 per cent. down.

I understand that the Minister's officials are talking to other Government Departments about the matter. It is a good scheme, and it would be easy for the Government to resolve the matter. I hope that they will look into it and take it forward.

TECs are important. They are about investing in people, in education and training and in the future. We want to compete with the best in the world—with Japan and Germany. Let us invest in the TECs, give them flexibility, move forward and work for real change if and when we come out of the recession.

12.38 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the opportunity of the debate provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson). It is a pity that many Opposition Members who had important speeches to make—there is a great deal of concern on this side of the House—were not able to speak because of shortage of time and the padding speech by the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight). That is a shame.

The Opposition believe that training is vital for everyone. High skills mean reasonable prospects and low skills mean insecurity and, all too often, the dole. Everyone knows that one needs skills and one needs to be constantly upgrading them to get a job and to get on in a job. Everyone also knows that these days unemployment is not so much about why one lost one's last job, but about why one did not get the next. How long it takes to get a job depends on one's skill level. There is a clear correlation between lack of skills and long-term unemployment, so high skills are vital for everyone.

High skills are also essential for our economy as a whole. We need them to compete in today's global market, as is well recognised by businesses in this country and by other countries with more successful economies. Before the advent of information super-highways and the dramatic improvements in transport, the success of an economy, and what our economic success was built on, was access to capital and raw materials. Now, capital can cross the world at the touch of a button and raw materials can be moved anywhere.

The skills of a country's people are what gives it its competitive edge and it is because skills are so important that the wholly inadequate state of training in Britain today is so disastrous. This country is second from the bottom in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development international skills league table and we have four major problems, which I shall highlight and to

[Ms Harriet Harman]

which I want the Minister to respond. Those are: cuts in training courses, the poor quality of training, the collapse of the South Thames TEC and the inadequacy of training provided by employers for their employees.

There is a clear link between long-term unemployment and lack of skills, so why have the Government cut the training for work programme, which is intended for unemployed people and is supposed to give them the skills to help them get back into work? Last November, the Budget cut the training for work programme by a quarter. Those cuts will condemn the unemployed to even longer on the dole.

By the Government's own admission, there will be 55,000 fewer training for work places in the year beginning in April than there were in the current year. The Secretary of State for Employment says that, despite the cut, more people will come out with qualifications and jobs at the end of the programme. His plans, which he believes and says will improve the efficiency of training for work, do not necessitate cuts. He should be aiming to improve the quality for all people on training for work, not for 55,000 fewer trainees.

I reinforce the argument of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) about training for people with special needs. There is mounting concern about such training. By definition, they are the people who have the most difficulty finding and keeping jobs. They also need greater support during training. That must be done, otherwise they will simply be thrown on the scrap heap and their problems will be made worse.

The inflexibility of output-related funding means that it will flow to the quickest results, which means that training will go to those who can achieve and get qualifications the quickest and who can find a job the easiest. That institutionalises a bias against those who need help most—those with special needs, the long-term unemployed, who have most difficulty getting jobs, and women who want to train and work in occupations that are traditionally male. In short, it means that training for those who pay the bills fastest will take priority over training for those who need the help most.

On the variable difference between regions, the Government's figures show dramatic and unacceptable differences in funding and achievement between different parts of the country. Let me take the Minister through some of his figures and hear his response. First, on funding, let us look at training and enterprise council spending per unemployed person in the area. The TEC with the lowest funding, North London TEC, gets only a quarter of the amount that the Government give to the highest funded, South and East Cheshire. The latter gets £1,600 funding per unemployed person, whereas the North London TEC gets only £476 per unemployed person.

The top five best-funded TECs are all in areas that are represented by Conservative Members of Parliament: Cheshire, East Lancashire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Suffolk. The bottom five are all in areas represented by Labour Members of Parliament in London. The Minister has some explaining to do and I hope that he will take the opportunity to do so today. Whether one gets training and the quality of that training should depend on one's needs and not on where one lives. It should certainly not depend on whether one lives in a Tory area that is favoured by the Government, or a Labour area that is not.

On success rates, the figures must be examined with some care because the Government's definition of a success rate begs the question of how difficult the task was in the first place. Let us consider the Government's figures. Overall, the success rates for training for work and youth training are lamentable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South said, 58 per cent. of youth trainees do not even complete the scheme. Half of those who complete it do not find a job at the end and half have no qualifications at the end of the scheme.

On training for work, only one in four trainees leaves to go to a full-time job. Those figures are lamentable, but on top of that there are very worrying regional variations, as 42 per cent. of trainees in North Nottinghamshire TEC programmes leave to go to full-time work—less than half—whereas in the North West Wales TEC and the Essex TEC areas, only 16 per cent. find full-time work when they leave.

What is especially worrying about the training for work and the youth training programmes is the clear gap between the success rates for black and white trainees, and we must have a response from the Minister on that. Although the results, both on training for work and youth training, are very poor, they are doubly bad for people from ethnic minorities. In London, 45 per cent. of white youth trainees leave to go to a job—less than half—but only 18 per cent. of black youth trainees leave to go to a job, which is less than one fifth. Something is badly wrong there. Government training is failing black people—the people who find it hardest to get a job. Is it any wonder that 60 per cent. of young black men in London are unemployed? Training is failing them. The picture is just as bleak on the training for work scheme for unemployed people. Overall, 24 per cent. of white people on such schemes leave to get a full-time job, but only 18 per cent. of black trainees get a job at the end of their training.

The funding has been cut, results are patchy and training is failing—it is failing black people in particular—but there is worse to come. The South Thames TEC has gone bankrupt and I totally support all the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). Some colleagues, who represent Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, have been present for the debate and are very concerned about that TEC.

The Government allowed the South Thames TEC to go bankrupt and there is now no training organisation for Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth or Greenwich. Centec and Solotec, which were supposed to pick up the pieces, have not done so. There is no contract for training in those boroughs and all the training schemes are in limbo. Millions of pounds are owed to providers who have paid out on training allowances for unemployed people on Government training schemes. But, when the TEC collapses, the Government jump back and say, "It's nothing to do with us. Everyone else will have to pick up the bill." That is a disgrace.

Southwark college is owed £400,000 and the Government say, "That's just your hard luck." Springboard Southwark, a small private training organisation, is owed £170,000 by South Thames TEC and the Government say, "Nothing to do with us." But, it is something to do with them. They set up South Thames

TEC and it was running Government training schemes, so they cannot wash their hands of responsibility for training simply because they have allowed it to go wrong.

The Government have also failed to ensure that employers train. The old training levies have been abolished for all except the construction industry and many employers do not train at all, while some train only their top managers. An invaluable research project commissioned by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers from the university of Leeds showed that, even where employers spend money on training their employees, most of it is wasted. Two thirds of employees said that the training did not help them to do their job, and half said that training did not give them skills that would help them in their future career development.

New attention must be paid to training by employers. All employers should be required by law to contribute to training their work force, and employees should receive training that they find useful. The heart of the problem is that the Government do not believe that they have a role in providing training or ensuring that businesses train. They believe that it should all be left to the market, but our people and the economy are now paying a price for that failed ideology.

12.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): It is traditional to congratulate the hon. Member who has gained the opportunity to discuss an issue in an Adjournment debate, and I willingly congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on that. However, that is where my congratulations end, because rarely have I heard such a diatribe, punctuated only by headlines, allegations of fraud and corruption by Ministers, civil servants and anyone else who happened to get in the firing line. His speech was totally dissociated from the reality of what is happening in training. It was in stark contrast to that of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) who, while clearly concerned about funding aspects, at least put forward some carefully thought-out proposals, to which I hope to respond briefly in the few moments that I have to reply.

This debate takes place against the background of TECs having been in operation for about four years. In that time, the benefits of changing the method of delivering Government training programmes and the range of other TEC remits have clearly borne fruit. Since the instigation of TECs, the proportion of young people leaving training programmes with a recognised qualification has doubled to 67 per cent., which is considerably more than the 50 per cent. which the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) bandied about, having grasped the figure out of the air. The cost of achieving a qualification has fallen by 22 per cent., which clearly benefits everybody concerned, and the cost of getting adult trainees into jobs or further training has fallen by 25 per cent.

Although I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), his point about reducing the cost of getting a job was one not of funding but of mathematics. If the number of people getting jobs increases, the cost per job automatically declines.

A second aspect of the debate is money. This year, TEC budgets nationally, excluding allowances for training for work, will rise by some £19 million in cash terms, from £1,100 million to £1,119 million. In the next two years, expenditure is expected to rise to £1,217 million and £1,236 million respectively. I stress that those figures exclude training for work allowances. It is important to make that distinction, because TECs have no control over allowances. They are set by my colleagues in the Department for Social Security and are not part and parcel of the budget over which a TEC can exercise flexibility.

Within those totals, the increase for young people in modern apprenticeships is £117 million, which is a considerable increase in expenditure. I admit that the training for work budget has been reduced by some 13 per cent. when the allowances aspect is excluded, but what is important is the fact that we are keeping up output. It is planned that 4 per cent. more people will get jobs in the coming year out of the training for work programme. We aim to increase the current 33 per cent. to 50 per cent. by 1997-98, as none of us believes that 33 per cent. is satisfactory. Hon. Members have referred to the low achievements of the training for work programme and I happily accept that criticism, which is why we are concentrating on driving up the result to at least 50 per cent. I was encouraged by the suggestion by the hon. Member for Eastleigh that that target was not high enough. It may redouble our efforts to look more closely at the target.

A further point about budgets applies particularly to the Greater Nottingham TEC, Southern Derbyshire TEC and many other TECs to which reference was made in the debate. As no contracts have yet been signed with TECs and all the figures that have been quoted are under discussion, it would be wrong of me, at this stage, to comment on individual TECs' budgets or contracts that have not been finalised.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I am afraid that I do not have time.

Linked to that point is the fact that the total figure of £1,119 million includes considerable sums that are not allocated at this time through the contracts being discussed, the most significant sum being £41 million from the European social fund. That money, for which TECs are competing, will come into the frame. I know that Greater Nottingham TEC is competing for it, but I cannot yet foresee whether it will receive the money.

Another aspect is known as the work-related further education budget, which is some £60 million. None of that is disappearing from the training budget and £30 million has now been redirected to colleges, so although it may have come out of TECs, it has not come out of training. The other £30 million now goes into competitiveness and development funds for which TECs will bid, so it comes back into the TEC equation. In addition, some regions are keeping back small sums as contingency funds to respond to individual TECs' specific needs or exceptional performance.

Another important point is about the single regeneration budget. I was disturbed to hear the hon. Member for Nottingham, South accuse civil servants of stealing money. That is a horrendous, scurrilous accusation to make against civil servants, who judged the bids for the SRB extremely carefully. I well understand Greater Nottingham TEC's dissatisfaction about achieving no benefit from the SRB this year, but it was clearly because regional office officials believed that better bids were

[Mr. Paice]

made. Nothing stops further bids being made in the second round this autumn, when an extra £40 million will be available.

A point made several times in the debate is that the move towards output-related funding will somehow penalise those with special needs and difficulties. Hon. Members naturally draw that conclusion when they do not bother to find out what goes on, and I am afraid that that was clear in the case of the hon. Member for Peckham, with her diatribe on that subject. In reality, we have protected those with special needs. First, despite the reduced numbers overall in the programme, which we readily accept, we are ensuring that the number of starts by people with special needs will be maintained and will increase as a proportion of the total. Secondly, the funding allocated to people with special training needs is substantially enhanced. I do have time to go into all the details, although I am happy to provide them. In many cases, funding is double the amount that goes to someone without special needs. It must be recognised that, in this contract round, measures have been taken to protect those with special needs.

The hon. Member for Sherwood wanted me to respond to two or three points. The first was about rising outputs, the need for flexibility and greater virement possibilities. We will consider those matters. I am anxious to ensure that TECs have all the flexibility that we can possibly give them, commensurate with our accountability to the House for public money. I was interested in what he said about a single training for work budget. I also agree that TECs are not just for deliverers of training—they have a whole enterprise culture to develop.

I am rapidly running out of time, but I should like to reply briefly to what the hon. Members for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and for Peckham said about South Thames TEC. I have put it on record in an earlier Adjournment debate that no trainee has been left in the lurch. Every trainee has been able to continue his or her programme. It was complete nonsense for the hon. Member for Peckham to suggest that we have ditched trainees. We have made the future of training programmes absolutely central to our policy.

Housing (Uttlesford)

1 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate the debate. It is a tale of unwanted housing, which has arisen from an airport, which was, at least in the beginning, unwanted.

Opinions about the value of Stansted airport may have changed in the intervening years. Many people are grateful for the work opportunities that it provides. Others are finding it convenient to start some of their journeys from that airport. I pay tribute to the airport's operator, BAA plc, for its efforts to build links with the local community, so that the airport is more accepted than it was when the prospect of major development was first suggested.

There is absolutely no doubt about the steely determination throughout the district of Uttlesford that the rural nature of our district, which is undoubtedly the most picturesque part of north-west Essex, should not be scarred as a result of urbanisation. For that reason, the very term "airport-related housing" raises hackles throughout the district.

I have three questions to put to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. First, the amount of airport-related housing currently prescribed in line with the projected development of Stansted airport is now undoubtedly subject to question. What is the scope of Uttlesford district council's options in terms of whether it is entitled to seek a second inquiry in relation to the final determination of the matter? Is the overall system for the inspection of local plans totally fair to all the parties affected by them? Had the decision taken by Uttlesford district council been different from that which is now subject to final comment, I would still be asking almost identical questions on behalf of other constituents to those that I have just posed. No one throughout Uttlesford district is particularly keen to have a large number of houses built, especially when those houses are deemed to be airport related.

There is no doubt that memories have faded since the original airport inquiry took place. After all, it is now 14 years since the issues were first discussed. One of the principal reasons for our original opposition to large-scale development at Stansted was that it would lead to urbanisation. We knew that it meant more housing would need to be built. Now that hard decisions must be taken about the amount and location of that housing, I am getting many inquiries about whether, after those intervening years, and given what we now know, the need is still as great as it was when the issue was first discussed and argued. It was originally determined that 2,500 houses would be needed if Stansted is given permission by the House to increase the number of passengers it handles from 8 million per annum to 15 million per annum. That housing was designated for Uttlesford alone, although other houses were to be built in neighbouring districts. That figure was later adjusted to 2,175, only by virtue of adding 325 houses to airport-related development decreed for Dunmow, as part of the first tranche of airport development.

Many of my constituents, in whatever part of the district they live, now question the scale of airport-related housing which was originally determined. They question whether the assumptions about the productivity at the airport are still valid and whether the proposed urbanisation is still required. They also ask whether the ideas propounded in planning policy guidance 13, published as recently as March 1994, suggest that so much housing should not be as close to the airport as originally planned when the figures were first worked out.

It was decided at regional level that the east-west axis of the A120 should be the general location of the airport-related housing. That was in contradistinction to the north-south axis of the M11, which was seen purely as a corridor of communication, not as a corridor of development. Had the A120 even been started, let alone built by now, that would have given greater credibility to the sites discussed—whether subsequently rejected or proposed—for airport-related housing. I would be encouraged if my hon. Friend could put the squeeze on his right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Transport, so that we can be more certain about when the new A120 will go ahead. Without it, some of the decisions that have had to be taken about housing seem even more mysterious to the people affected.

The second major issue to which I want to draw my hon. Friend's attention is the way in which Uttlesford district council has dealt with the problem. It is the most invidious task that it has had to face in years. It knows that even if it had consulted all the parishes within the district on how they would like to contribute to an agreed solution to the problem of where to place those 2,500 houses, it would have been impossible to come to any decision. The decision had to be taken by the elected members of the district council and they tried do so as objectively as possible. First, they asked their planning officers to present a scheme to cope with the proposal. That resulted in the original suggestion of 1,400 houses at Felsted and 1,100 houses at Takeley. Naturally, that was bitterly resisted. An amended plan from the council included two other sites and reduced the number of houses designated for Felsted and Takeley. At the crucial council meetings, those alternatives were rejected in favour of putting all the 2,500 houses—later amended to 2,175—at a single site, Easton Park. That proposal formed part of the local plan, which was subject to inspection.

As a result of the inquiry, and because the inspector recommended that the council should reconsider a four-site solution, although a slightly different one from that originally considered, many of my constituents in the affected areas are now asking whether further consideration should be given to the proposal, so that they can have more of a say. It is a question of how one interprets the guidance published by the Department of the Environment. The crucial passage is as follows:

> "The Secretary of State advises planning authorities to hold an inquiry where objections raise matters which were not at issue at all at the earlier stage. This may arise, for example, if it is proposed to substitute an entirely different proposal for one which was in the plan as considered earlier, so that the objections made to the proposed modification include new evidence."

It is not apparent to me whether that means that a recommendation by an inspector upsetting what was in the original plan constitutes the new evidence, or whether that refers to something wholly different in the plan. However, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would throw some light on whether Uttlesford district council interpreted the guidance correctly in respect of its decision about holding another inquiry into placing houses on the four sites instead of the single site.

The third issue is the system as a whole. I have aggrieved constituents who feel let down by the system for the examination of local plans. Some of the most pertinent questions that I have been asked came in a letter from one of the district councillors for Felsted and Little Dunmow, Mr. John Berry-Richards, and which he also asked the Secretary of State. May he please be told who draws up the terms of reference for such an inquiry? Is it usual to decide that some representations are rejected at the pre-inquiry meeting? Is it usual for the inspector to make specific recommendations in the event of his being unable to support the preferred options? In the event of the inspector making recommendations that affect those people not permitted to make representations, what recourse is open to them?

There are other letters, whether they come from Takeley, Birchanger, Little Dunmow or Felsted, saying more or less the same thing. Although the inspector allowed the proponents of the Felsted development to make their case, he refused to hear representations from the communities that would be affected.

> "Living where I do,"

says a lady,

> "I would be pleased to be able to put forward my views as would many other people living in"

the area,

> "since we were not allowed to have our say at the Enquiry in 1993."

Felsted parish council could be speaking for Takeley parish council or Birchanger parish council when it says:

> "One of these sites . . . will have an enormous impact on our village and yet neither this Council, nor any of its residents, were allowed to question the evidence presented to the Public Inquiry".

The words "undemocratic" and "unfair" pervade a great many of the letters that I have received. Those people in the districts where it is now determined that the airport-related housing will be did not have their own opportunity to express their feelings about the matter directly, orally, to the inspector at the inquiry. It is understandable that they feel that they should have been heard, in the light of the undoubted impact that they believe that such housing would have; anyone else in the district would feel exactly the same if the decision had gone against them.

I am asking my hon. Friend the Minister to satisfy my worried constituents that the need for airport-related housing remains valid on the original assumptions, that Uttlesford district council has correctly interpreted the guidance from the Department of the Environment, and that the system not only allows justice to be done, but allows it to be seen to be done. At the moment, many people in Birchanger, Little Dunmow, Felsted and Takeley are not convinced.

1.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I welcome the opportunity to discuss a difficult local problem. Uttlesford district council is planning to provide for housing that would be needed for the expansion of Stansted airport and the jobs that it will bring to the district.

I am abundantly aware, as is obvious, of the great anxiety of my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) and many of his constituents about that issue, and I congratulate him on the explicit and emphatically clear way in which he has expressed

[Sir Paul Beresford]

those anxieties in his speech. He made an apposite point when he said—I forget the phrase—something along the lines of, "People always express considerable concern when the decision goes against them."

Before I respond to the anxieties described by my hon. Friend, it may be helpful if I briefly provide the background to the issues and mention some of the matters that my hon. Friend mentioned as background.

The Government are committed to a planning system that tries to ensure that land is used for purposes that meet the wider public interest. The key to that is the development plan. Our national planning policies underpin the whole system. A framework of regional planning guidance is built on that basis. Within that framework—in the shire counties—county councils construct strategic plans and district councils develop those strategic visions into local planning policies, some of which allocate specific sites for specific purposes.

We believe in involving local people in the process, not just those concerned with promoting development or specific interest groups in the plan area, but the local people who will be affected by the plan's proposals. To aid that, the plan-making process allows for formal public consultation at several stages from the first draft to the final amendments. I shall follow the Uttlesford local plan through those stages in a moment, but every local plan, as Members are aware, is a jigsaw of interlocking needs and choices over forthcoming years, and often represents a balance between a range of interests and viewpoints.

Once adopted, the development plan gives a measure of certainty to local people and would-be developers about what types of development are acceptable in specific districts. Planning applications must be decided in accordance with the development plan unless there are very strong reasons why they should not.

As we have chosen a system that encourages consultation, we must accept that, as a result, plans can take several years to progress from first thoughts to adoption and use for development control decisions. However, it is in everyone's interests to put the development plan in place. We have committed ourselves to complete coverage of local plans in the shire counties and unitary development plans in the metropolitan boroughs by the end of 1996. To date we have much more than 60 per cent. coverage, so I am confident—or reasonably confident—that we shall get close to the target.

I therefore welcome the progress that has been made on the Uttlesford district local plan, although I understand very well the specific worries expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden and some of his constituents about the allocation of substantial numbers of new houses to meet projected future needs. That is the major issue in that local plan.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden said, the need for housing in Uttlesford is closely linked with the projected expansion of London Stansted airport. As London's third main airport, Stansted is intended, in part, to relieve pressure on the heavily used Heathrow and Gatwick airports.

Stansted has already grown significantly since its terminal complex was opened by Her Majesty the Queen in 1991. By August 1994, it welcomed its 3 millionth passenger of the year, and it has the capacity to handle 8 million passengers a year.

Four thousand extra houses are already planned to meet the needs of airport workers and related businesses, spread between Uttlesford, with 900, Harlow with 1,100 and Bishop's Stortford, with 1,000. Many of those have already been built or are under construction. Even more growth at Stansted is expected and planning permission has been granted for the second phase of growth, from 8 million to 15 million passengers per year. However, that is subject to approval by both Houses of Parliament of an order increasing the current limit of 78,000 air traffic movements per year.

We recognise that the airport is currently expanding at a slower rate than was first expected. The planned increase to 8 million passengers per year is unlikely to take place before the end of the 1990s.

In October 1994, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced his unilateral decision to allow United States and United Kingdom airlines to operate unrestricted transatlantic scheduled flights from all UK regional airports, and urged the US Government to respond positively to the offer. The decision could bring substantial benefits for London Stansted airport, among others. Several US airlines have expressed an interest in using Stansted, and the airport's managing director has predicted that that relaxation of the rules governing transatlantic scheduled flights might lead to a big increase in the number of people employed at the airport.

It is, as I think has been outlined, a picture of expansion, of enhanced job prospects and a boost to the local economy, but that projected growth would have consequences that local planning authorities cannot ignore. It is estimated that, in time, a further 6,000 houses would be needed to accommodate those who would take up the jobs that the continued expansion would provide. It has been suggested that, because the growth of Stansted has not been as rapid as initially predicted, that housing may not be needed after all. We recognise that nobody can put precise figures on future growth, month by month and year by year, because it depends on demand for flights and controls over air traffic movements. But if we encouraged the county council and the district councils to defer considering the consequences of the national decision on airport expansion, we would be acting irresponsibly.

Forward planning is essential, and it is clear that suitable provision needs to be debated and identified through the local plan process. The Essex county structure plan's first alteration proposed to spread the provision between Uttlesford, with 2,500, Bishop's Stortford, with 1,500, Braintree, with 1,000, Chelmsford, with 500, and Colchester, with 500.

Uttlesford district council put its deposited draft local plan out to public consultation in April 1992. That plan looked ahead to the year 2001. It proposed that the 2,500 dwellings needed for the future growth of Stansted airport should be grouped in a new settlement at Little Easton, to be known as Easton Park.

As my hon. Friend is aware, a public local inquiry was held into objections to the plan between May and October 1993. The inspector who conducted the inquiry was in no doubt about the importance of Stansted to Uttlesford. In the introduction to his report he says:

> "In the Airport Uttlesford contains an economic engine-room of previously unparalleled local proportions".

He continues:

> "I would hazard a guess that there is no other comparable rural area currently engaged in the local plan system which is obliged to consider the promise of such rapid change".

The inspector who conducted the inquiry was not convinced that the small new settlement proposed was the best solution. He recommended instead that the housing be distributed among four smaller sites—650 dwellings at the Felsted sugar beet works, 825 at north-east Takeley, 400 at Rochford nurseries and 625 at Buildings farm, Great Dunmow. It appears that he reached that view after hearing evidence on the Little Easton proposal and alternative sites. As my hon. Friend has said, the inspector declined to hear counter-objections to the alternative sites that were put forward. But he did take into account the written evidence presented. His report discusses the merits of all the sites in some detail.

The inspector is clearly aware, as his report says, that

> "Felsted and Takeley are keenly opposed by local people".

He draws attention to the nature of the various sites, whether high-quality agricultural land in the case of Easton Park or more neglected commercial, or even brown, sites in the case of Felsted sugar beet factory and Rochford nurseries. He considers the nature of existing settlements, development pressures, environmental conditions and traffic impacts.

The inspector reaches the conclusion that the four-site solution is consistent with the principles of sustainable development, and is fair in the sense that the impact of the additional housing would be spread across a wider area of the district at a scale which would not be significantly out of step with the most directly affected communities. He says that, of all the options before him, the combination of the four sites would cause the least intrinsic damage to the range of wider public interests that the planning system strives to protect.

The district council accepted the inspector's recommendation and published modifications to the plan, which provided for the housing associated with the growth of Stansted to be located in the four areas identified by the inspector. Those modifications introduce new policies into the local plan which require the layout and phasing of development at each of the four locations to follow principles set out in an overall master plan, which would form the framework for the consideration of planning applications. Each plan is to be approved by the council only after full public consultation, which means that local residents will be given the opportunity to express their views on the details of the development proposed for each site. That requirement for public consultation is not a suggestion buried in a footnote somewhere; it is built into the text of the policies.

Objectors to the proposed modifications wanted a second public inquiry to reopen the debate on the alternative housing sites. However, after considering those objections, the council decided that no new matters had been raised and a second inquiry would not be justified. That is probably correct, in that it was a local plan and the local council, the local people's representatives, should make the decision. The council has now given formal public notice of its intention to adopt the modified plan on or after 14 April.

As my hon. Friend explained, objectors remain dissatisfied with the council's decision. They also question whether the first inquiry was conducted properly. The conduct of the inquiry is a matter for the inspector and evidence is heard at his discretion. Local plan inspectors report to the local planning authority, not to the Secretary of State, so he has no formal jurisdiction over the procedure adopted at the inquiry.

My hon. Friend draws attention to our planning policy guidance note 12, which provides advice on the conduct of all stages of the local plan process. That guidance has been reproduced in a booklet "Development Plans: What you need to know", which is aimed at the general public who want to be involved. That guidance considers the circumstances in which a second public inquiry may be necessary into a local planning authority's proposed modifications to its local plan. That is an important issue.

The guidance states:

> "an inquiry into objections will be necessary only in exceptional circumstances, and it will not normally be necessary to hold a further inquiry into matters already considered. That includes instances where there are objections to modifications not proposed by an authority in response to the Inspector's report. The Secretary of State advises planning authorities to hold an inquiry where objections raise matters which were not at issue at all at the earlier stage. This may arise, for example, if it is proposed to substitute an entirely different proposal for one which was in the plan as considered earlier, so that the objections made to the proposed modification include new evidence."

I hope that that answers some of the points that were raised.

The guidance does not say that a second inquiry should be held in every case where a different proposal is substituted for one in the original plan. It all depends on the extent to which there is new evidence—that is the crux of the matter. In every case where that question arises—and it arises not only in Uttlesford—we must decide whether the issues are "matters already considered" or

> "matters which were not at issue at all".

Of course, there is not always a straightforward answer of yes or no—in fact, the phraseology is not too straightforward either. It may well be a matter of degree—was the consideration given to an issue satisfactory and sufficient? While my hon. Friend has concerns on such issues, it is clear that the inspector was satisfied that he had sufficient information to make a recommendation in favour of the four sites, and that Uttlesford district council considered the written objections to those sites before reaching the conclusion that a second inquiry should not be held. But those objectors, from Felsted and elsewhere, did not have the opportunity to cross-examine on the case for development in their villages.

My hon. Friend asks whether we can help his constituents and for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to intervene in the Uttlesford district local plan. The Secretary of State has the reserve power to call in all or part of a local plan for his determination and to arrange a further inquiry. That power has not, to date, been used. I think that my hon. Friend would agree that such action would cut across the thrust of the planning system. We want to take the local plan process out of the hands of the local planning authority only in extreme circumstances.

It might be suggested that the issue is a national one that justifies the Secretary of State's intervention because it springs from national decisions about airport capacity. I accept that there may be a measure of truth in that. But once such national decisions have been taken, it is surely right to leave it to the local people—in this case, the local district council in particular—to determine how those decisions should be implemented locally.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

I understand and sympathise with the concerns of those of my hon. Friend's constituents who consider that they have not had the opportunity to express their views in public debate as well as in writing. Irrespective of what the outcome of that debate would have been, I can understand that the experience has left them unhappy with the local plan process. But I am not persuaded that the formal intervention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the Uttlesford district plan would be justified.

There are two possible avenues for those who are unable to accept the modifications which the council has made to the district plan. They may be unable to accept the modifications over the allocation of Stansted-related housing, either because they oppose one or more of the four sites chosen, or because they positively support the original Little Easton site. The first is to seek redress in the courts, either to prevent the council proceeding to adopt the district plan or by mounting a legal challenge to its adoption. I believe that some are contemplating that, and they will of course want to take legal advice before they proceed. I recognise, of course, that legal action is not an avenue which everyone will want, or can afford, to take.

Some might prefer the Government to short-circuit the process by saying that the local planning authority's decision was flawed. But we have no powers to do that; and in any case we have no locus to substitute our judgment on these complicated issues for that of the local authority.

The second course of action is to seek to influence the development briefs for the individual housing sites when they become available for public consultation.

Baby Milk

1.30 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the important subject of the advertising of manufactured baby milk. I do not propose to speak for every minute of my allotted time because I have agreed that it would be appropriate to allow a contribution from the Labour Front Bench. That means that I shall not give way during my short speech.

As a male Cow and Gate baby, I speak on this subject with some diffidence. However, I recognise the importance of the subject, and particularly the pressures that women often believe are placed upon them in connection with it.

In 1981, the British Government signed the World Health Organisation international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes. The purpose of the code is to ensure that all carers, health workers and especially mothers receive totally impartial information and are protected from commercial pressures, to enable them to make informed decisions about feeding infants. It should be recognised that that information must include appropriate facts about artificial milk products, as not all mothers are able to breast-feed their babies successfully.

In 1990, the Government signed the Innocentri declaration, which committed them to

> "taking action to give effect to the principles and aim of all the articles of the International Code . . . in their entirety".

It also committed the Government to enacting

> "imaginative legislation protecting the breastfeeding rights of working women . . . by the year 1995".

The Government White Paper "The Health of the Nation" called for an increase in the rate of breast-feeding in the United Kingdom. That call was widely welcomed. The Government continued to pay lip service to breast-feeding promotion by supporting the World Health Assembly resolution No. 47.5 of 9 May 1994. We were given one last reason to trust the Government's concern for breast-feeding over bottled formula when they released a proposal for draft regulations in December 1993. The proposals came close to meeting the criteria set out in the international code, although not completely.

However, the true measure of a Government's commitment is in the legislation that they pass. According to that standard, the Government have fallen far short of the promises and alleged commitments that they have made over the past 14 years in their 1995 regulations—Statutory Instrument No. 77—which have been in force for three weeks.

The proposed regulations met with mostly positive responses, despite some calls to strengthen them. The only calls for the draft to be weakened came from baby food producers and their advertising agencies. The Government answered their call with the present regulations, which allow advertising to mothers via

> "publications specialising in baby care and distributed to women through the health care system".

Advice was obtained from 48 health, consumer and development organisations, including UNICEF, the British Medical Association, the British Paediatric Association, the Health Visitors Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, the National Consumer Council and the National Childbirth

Trust. However, their views were dismissed. The international code, to which I referred earlier, provides in articles 5.1 and 6.3 that

> "There should be no advertising or other form of promotion to the general public of products within the scope of this Code . . . No facility of the health care system should be used for the purpose of promoting infant formula or other products within the scope of this Code".

However, the international code does not preclude the dissemination of information to a very restricted group—health care professionals.

Regulation 17 of the new law flatly contradicts that code. It states:

> "No person shall publish or display any advertisement for an infant formula except in a publication specialising in baby care and distributed only through the health care system".

That is very different from disseminating information only to health care professionals. For example, leaflets may be picked up in any doctor's surgery, clinic or hospital.

Putting aside the Government's policy U-turn, it is correct in this debate to address the reasons why internationally agreed restrictions on milk advertising are necessary or advisable. The most important reason is that breast milk is significantly better for infants than manufactured formula. In 1994, the standing committee on nutrition of the British Paediatric Association stated:

> "evidence convincingly indicates that . . . significant advantages in cognitive assumption have been associated with breast feeding".

Gastro-enteritis and other common infections are less likely among breast-fed babies. Breast-feeding is also better for mothers as it may reduce the risk of pre-menopausal maternal breast cancer. They are just three examples of the many advantages of breast-feeding which are set out in scientific evidence.

The manufactured baby milk industry spends quite a lot of money on advertising. According to the information available to me, it spends between £5 million and £7 million. That translates to about £6.40 per baby. The Government spend between £100,000 and £150,000 on promoting the advantages of breast-feeding, which translates to a measly 20p per baby. It is not a very equal contest.

If the Government were to persuade more mothers to breast-feed, it would save a lot of money. Based on the widespread health benefits of breast-feeding, UNICEF estimates that the national health service in England and Wales would incur an additional cost of £560,000 for treating infants with gastro-intestinal illness for every 1 per cent. reduction in the number of women electing to breast-feed. In other words, breast feeding saves the NHS a lot of money.

The new regulations permit advertisements for formula in

> "publications specialising in baby care and distributed to women through the health care system".

One presumes that the Government would argue that that allows mothers access to information on the relative contents of different brands of formula and thus enables them to make an informed choice. However, one has only to look at the information that is provided to see that that is not so. If the scientific information were disseminated widely, it would tax the most expert on the subject. That is why it is important for advertising to be restricted to those professionals who are best qualified to advise mothers on an objective basis.

That a ban on the advertising of baby milk formula would make a significant difference to breast-feeding rates is evidenced by the three European countries which have little or no advertising of manufactured baby milk products. The breast-feeding rate in Norway is 99 per cent., in Sweden it is 97 per cent. and in Denmark it is 98 per cent. On the other hand, in countries where the bulk of information about breast-feeding and formulas comes from the manufacturers of those formulas, the rate of breast-feeding is alarmingly low. In Scotland it is 50 per cent., in France it is 50 per cent. and in Ireland it is a miserable 31 per cent.

The advertising of infant formula in the health service is simply unacceptable. The national health service is no place for mothers to be turned on to a product that is not as good for the baby as the mother's own breast milk and not as good for the mother as giving her own breast milk.

Brand name advertising is selective. It reaches mothers at an early stage with information packs, free gifts and even videos going to maternity wards. Manufacturers provide only the information that they want to be known, and it is not impartial. It is the responsibility of the health service and of the Government to provide impartial and unbiased information. We must keep it in mind that a ban on advertising would not deny anyone the right to buy baby milk if they chose to do so; it would just make it more likely that they would seek balanced, expert and professional advice before they chose to use manufactured milk.

Our responsibility is to protect the best interests of those people who are unable to exercise their own personal choice—the babies. That is the reason for this debate.

1.40 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I was astonished to discover that I have to speak from the Back Benches in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that Adjournment debates are Back-Bench debates.

Mr. Jones: I was not challenging your decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has allowed me some time in his debate because he has raised an extremely important issue. He made a very good case and I endorse everything that he has said in his peroration. However, I should like to add one or two points, which need stressing.

The Government's draft proposals found favour, with virtually no dissent. I understand that, out of 231 letters sent, 216 replied in favour of a ban on advertising baby milk. It seems odd that the Government should carry out a consultation exercise and then not listen to the views of the professionals, which include 48 major health and consumer bodies, among them such organisations as the British Paediatric Association, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Midwives and the Health Visitors Association. All those organisations are concerned about the health of the infant and not about selling baby milk. They are concerned about giving women an informed choice, thereby providing them with the opportunity to give their children a better start, better health and all the other advantages of breast-feeding.

[Mr. Jones]

Article 6 of the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes produced by the World Health Organisation, which was mentioned by the hon. and learned Gentleman, states:

> "No facility of a health care system should be used for the purpose of promoting infant formula or other products within the scope of this Code."

That is precisely what the infant formula follow-on regulations do—they allow the advertising of products for sale within the health care system and during the most vulnerable period for mothers who do not have the opportunity to exercise an informed choice.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Last year, I visited the special baby care unit in my constituency and I was horrified to discover that, although the mothers of those babies were able to express sufficient breast milk to feed them while they were in intensive care, as soon as they went home the majority of mothers stopped breast-feeding. Women are under great pressure not to breast-feed, and advertising which juxtaposes slogans saying that breast-feeding is best with the logo of the baby milk company is effectively saying, "Breast milk may be best, but you cannot harm your baby by feeding our formula." That is the wrong message. The message should be, "Feeding breast milk substitutes harms you and your baby."

Mr. Jones: Obviously, in some circumstances it is necessary for a substitute milk to be used, but they represent a tiny minority of cases. The vast majority of babies do better and gain advantages from being breast-fed.

By producing the regulations and not banning the advertising of formula milk, the Government have ignored the demands of 48 major United Kingdom health and consumer bodies. They have broken their agreement on the 1981 World Health Organisation code and, more importantly, they may have created serious dangers to the health of babies. The latest evidence suggests that breast-feeding not only protects babies against gastro-enteritis but affects long-term brain development, with a significant difference between the brain development of breast-fed and baby milk-fed children.

We are not anti-choice. Mothers must be given information, but it must be unbiased and mothers must take decisions based on the health of their children and on their own future well-being. We have heard how much money is spent on promoting breast-feeding, which I thought was nearer 9p per nursing mother, but baby milk manufacturers spend more than £6. That is ridiculous, but it shows how much pressure is being brought to bear on mothers to give their babies baby milk rather than to breast-feed.

Finally, we demand a full debate on the matter at the earliest opportunity. It should at least be considered in Committee, so that all the issues can be fully discussed, rather than in Adjournment debates, in which we are happy to take part, but which cannot fully examine all the pros and cons. The Government have made a serious mistake. They should change their mind and ban infant formula advertising as soon as possible.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): Perhaps I should begin by declaring an interest in that I am a mother and a mother-in-law. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) for raising the subject. As a self-confessed Cow and Gate baby, he seems to have been nourished by, and thrived well on, the product. There is a great deal of interest about the subject. United Kingdom regulations, which include controls on the advertising of baby milks, were laid before Parliament on 16 January and came into force on 1 March.

I find it ironic that today the Government have been criticised for not going far enough because they have failed to ban the advertising of infant formula. Only last April, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who was previously responsible for these matters, replied to a debate in the House and was criticised for going too far in proposing in the draft regulations to ban the advertising of infant formula to mothers.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), who initiated that debate, represented the constituency in which Cow and Gate had its factory.

Mrs. Browning: That simply proves what a marvellous product it was for the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery.

Having been criticised from both sides, it seems that the Government have steered the right course in the regulations. With that in mind, I should like to set out for the House some of the background to the issue before I deal with the specific points that the hon. and learned Gentleman raised.

The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the World Health Organisation code. The United Kingdom fully supports the aim of the code, which is to contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants by the protection and promotion of breast-feeding and by ensuring the proper use of breast milk substitutes.

I should clarify the fact that we totally endorse the need to encourage and inform on breast-feeding. We accept that it is the ideal method of feeding new-born babies. All mothers have to choose when to switch their babies from breast milk to powdered milk and, as the hon. and learned Gentleman admitted, some mothers cannot breast-feed. Adoptive parents and other small minority groups have also to be considered. I would not wish those women to be stigmatised or made to feel second-class mothers by any of the comments in the debate today.

Individual countries were left to decide how best to implement the recommendations of the WHO code. The UK Government decided that that could best be done through industry self-regulation. Following consultation with interested parties, a voluntary code of practice drawn up by the industry, in consultation with my Department and UK Health Departments, came into being in 1983, which gave effect to the WHO code's aims and principles. However, in the mid to late 1980s, the European Community started to consider the introduction of legislation, which is much tighter than a code. In 1991 the EC adopted directives on the composition, marketing and export of infant formulas and follow-on formulas.

While the EC directives implemented the aims and principles of the WHO code, they do not adopt its provisions in every detail. More importantly, the UK is required to implement the terms of the EC directive, not those of the WHO code. In the usual way, the Government considered the terms of the EC directives and drafted regulations to give effect to the directives in the UK, and a draft of the proposed regulations was issued for consultation in December 1993. The consultation generated a considerable response, most particularly about the extent of proposed controls on the advertising of infant formula.

Article 8 of the EC directive, which deals with advertising, states:

"advertising of infant formulae shall be restricted to publications specialising in baby care and scientific publications. Member states may further restrict or prohibit such advertising."

That article's implementation led to this debate.

In July 1992, long before the draft regulations were issued for consultation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, in answer to a written question, announced:

"The Government are committed to ensuring that the existing restrictions on marketing and advertising are, at least, maintained."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. *680*.]

Bearing in mind that commitment, the Government thought it only right at least to explore other options in the draft regulations.

The draft regulations proposed that the controls on advertising should be far reaching, allowing advertisements to appear only in magazines whose intended readers would be professionals involved in maternal and baby care. It was no surprise that these proposed controls generated a considerable number of responses to the consultation from the public and from many hon. Members. In fact, the regulations were the subject of an Adjournment debate last April.

In the main, reaction was split between two opposing views. One view was that, while supporting the advertising controls proposed, the Government should go even further and use the directive's option to its fullest extent to ban all advertising of infant formula. The opposing view was that we should not use the option at all and should stick to the minimum controls required by the directive.

The latter view drew attention to the Government's policy of deregulation and to the thrust of my Ministry's legislative programme—to introduce regulation as a last resort. There was also a strong feeling—one that I share—that such strict controls would impinge on a mother's right to have access to information. I emphasise that, in essence, we are putting into statute a provision that has existed in voluntary form for some time. That means professionals will give the advice.

Mr. Martyn Jones *indicated dissent*.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Does he not think that midwives, health visitors and similar people are professionals? They are the people who will vet whether material is appropriate to be sent to mothers. My colleagues in the Department are working hard to ensure the success of the campaign to put before mothers the positive benefits of breast milk, and that is the right way to go. However, the debate denigrates that part of a woman's body from her shoulders to the top of her head. It assumes that women do not have the intelligence or the nous to form an opinion for themselves. Most of the professionals giving that opinion are also women.

Are Opposition Members who contributed to today's debate really saying that midwives and health visitors should not be allowed to see an advertisement for a product that is on sale in every chemist and Tesco branch in the country? One would think that it was a banned substance. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery comes from a party that is constantly asking for deregulation of banned substances. He seems now to want to ban a substance that is available to anybody to purchase in any shop in the country.

Mr. Alex Carlile: That point was rather unworthy of the hon. Lady, particularly as I am personally opposed to the deregulation of the substances that the hon. Lady has in mind. She has been a little less generous than she should have been, given the spirit of the debate. My case is not that mothers are unintelligent or that professionals will not receive the information. It is that, under the regulations, it will be possible for freely available advertising material to lie about unsupervised and unadvised in doctors' surgeries, clinics, dentists' waiting rooms and so on. Surely the Government did not intend that.

Mrs. Browning: I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that any publication placed in a doctor's or hospital waiting room will have been vetted by the professionals upon whose expertise we rely in giving advice to mothers.

Mr. Carlile: That is being complacent.

Mrs. Browning: Not at all. That is the restriction imposed by the directive. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman not trust health care professionals to vet an advertisement for a product that is freely available? I have not had occasion to buy the product in question for many years, so I made a point of examining its packaging and the claims made for it. I would be concerned if anything on the packaging said that the mother should stop breast-feeding and change to milk powder-feeding, but it does not say that.

Dr. Lynne Jones: It is more subtle than that.

Mrs. Browning: Women are subtle, and they are subtle enough to make intelligent, informed decisions for themselves. They do not need hon. Members to elevate their judgment above that of millions of mothers in this country. While we all agree on the benefits of breast milk-feeding, to assume that hon. Members have better judgment than mothers when it comes to the interests of their babies—

Mr. Carlile: I do.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. and learned Gentleman says that he does have better judgment. Good luck to him. I hope that he will take his advice to maternity units around the country and put it to the test.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I remind the Minister that the bodies to which the material will be submitted are the same organisations that are asking her to ban infant formula advertising.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman is right when he says that the representations made by professional bodies

[Mrs. Browning]

were in opposition, but when independent research is undertaken of professionals at the sharp end—health visitors and midwives—there is a different result. They are the professionals, and they say that they are the right people to give advice, and I agree. It is absurd of the hon. and learned Gentleman to put his judgment above that of an experienced midwife or health visitor. He should acknowledge the professionalism of those experts—mainly, but not exclusively, women—who advise women.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Browning: No, because I have only a few more minutes and the hon. Lady merely intervened—it is not her Adjournment debate.

As I said, we were fully committed to supporting the promotion of breast-feeding, and therefore conscious that to adopt only the minimum in the directive would have meant controls less restrictive than those already in place under the voluntary agreement with the industry. We decided that that would not provide the support that the promotion of breast-feeding deserves.

After careful consideration, we concluded that the option that best served that dual purpose was the one that has been operating voluntarily and successfully since 1983. Under the voluntary code of practice, infant formula advertising that is to be read mainly by mothers and pregnant women is not permitted unless it is disseminated under the supervision or care of the health care system. I assure hon. Members that it will remain for the judgment of the professionals concerned. The regulations give statutory effect to the existing voluntary requirements, which means that infant formula advertising will continue to be allowed, but only in baby care publications distributed through the health care system, scientific publications and certain trade journals not seen by the public.

I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for initiating the debate. We share his concern about, and his enthusiasm for, breast-feeding, but I have to tell him that the women of this country, the mothers of this country and the professionals in the health service are able to make rational judgments. They do not need to be protected from something that is in daily use and that will continue to be so.

Septrin

1.59 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I have called this debate on the drug known as septrin, or bactrim, as I am horrified by what I have learnt about the possible side effects of this commonly prescribed antibiotic.

The significance of the drug goes beyond the horrendous suffering that it has caused a considerable number of those who have taken it, to wider questions about the effectiveness of our regulatory system for drugs and medicines. I have called the debate for two reasons: first, to ask the Minister urgently and thoroughly to review the licence of the drug; and, secondly, to draw the attention of the House to my concerns about the framework for licensing drugs, and the need for change.

I first became aware of the issue of septrin, the generic name of which is co-trimoxazole, in January this year. My constituent, Kate Reid, a young woman in her 30s, came to my advice surgery. She told me that, eight years ago, she visited her general practitioner, as she had a sore throat. She was prescribed septrin. After two days of taking the medicine, she collapsed, her tongue having swollen so badly that she could hardly breathe. She was rushed to hospital. Six weeks followed, during which she continued to suffer because of her allergic reaction to the drug. The skin over her whole body blistered horribly and completely fell away. Her vagina closed up. Her finger and toe nails fell out, and she was unable to walk or talk. She was very lucky to have survived at all. Her suffering has, of course, continued and she will never regain her good health. The physical scars will never disappear, nor will the mental scars.

Not only has Kate Reid had to endure numerous skin grafts and surgery, but she is left unable to walk properly because of the pain in her feet left by the blistering. Her tongue remains black and blistered. He body has stopped producing saliva or tears. Her finger and toe nails have never grown back. She has lost her job and lives on benefit. Her relationship with her boyfriend fell apart and she has had to have psychotherapy to come to terms with the trauma. As one can imagine, when she told me all this, I was horrified at the suffering that this woman had endured as a result of a drug prescribed for a sore throat. At least, I thought, it must be a one-off. Surely such an horrendous reaction must be almost unique.

Tragically, that is not the case. As I have discovered, more and more people are coming forward following recent publicity about septrin. As many as 700 people who have suffered, or whose relatives have suffered similar reactions to those experienced by Kate, after being prescribed septrin for minor ailments such as sore threats or cystitis, have contacted either journalists or one of the septrin action groups. Most of those people are women, as women more commonly get urinary tract infections.

No one knows precisely how many people have died as a result of having taken septrin. A recent report to the Committee on Safety of Medicines in England says that deaths linked to the sulphonamide component of septrin have so far reached 137. The same committee's research, however, shows that 10 times as many cases go unreported. As septrin has been one of the most popular antibiotics since the 1970s, the total figure may well be much higher, and, of course, there are thousands of people like Kate who suffer in varying degrees because of its side effects.

What I have tried to do, as a layperson, is to see whether there is a case for reviewing the drug's licence. I submit to the House that the Department of Health cannot continue to ignore the evidence of totally unnecessary human suffering resulting from the inappropriate prescription of septrin. The Department is failing in its duty if it does not call for an immediate and thorough review. More people's lives will be destroyed and more families may lose loved ones in the future.

Septrin was first marketed in 1969 and has been a highly successful commercial product for the Wellcome Foundation. Worldwide sales are said to be worth up to $5 billion. Since it was first licensed, however, extensive medical research has shown that only one of its ingredients, the sulphonamide component, causes those horrific side effects. Furthermore, in most cases, that ingredient is not necessary. Giving patients the other ingredient, trimethoprim, on its own, would be just as effective and much safer.

I am aware that septrin may have a very important role to play in certain circumstances, for example in the treatment of people with acquired immune deficiency syndrome—AIDS—where trimethoprim has not been shown to be as effective as septrin. However, all the major studies have shown that, in most circumstances, trimethoprim alone is just as effective as septrin and much safer. What I cannot understand, therefore, is why the data sheet, which licenses the use of septrin, has not been changed to limit its use to the few circumstances where no other treatment will do.

The case of septrin shows up the failure of our drugs regulation system. The evidence against the wider use of septrin has been around for 20 years, but it has not resulted in a change in the drug's data sheet or licence. Why not? What is in our regulatory framework that can lead to an appalling failure to protect people? First, the system is governed by secrecy. Section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 basically gags the experts involved in regulation from revealing information on drugs beyond that specifically contained in the data sheet; so the experts cannot tell us, the public, or even the doctors, that septrin should be prescribed only in certain circumstances. That is particularly dangerous because the Medicines Control Agency, which regulates drugs, is totally funded by the pharmaceutical industry. Its members mostly have an interest in the products on which they advise. Indeed, almost all research in this field is funded by the drugs industry itself. One is left wondering whether the financial interests of the industry have too great an influence at the expense of safety of the patients.

Which? magazine recently undertook a telling piece of research. It sent duplicate requests for information about septrin to the US Food and Drugs Administration and the United Kingdom Medicines Control Agency. The FDA sent the equivalent of 300 pages of detailed data on the drug, including its side effects. The MCA, our agency, took longer to reply and could send a mere 22 pages. The Government's refusal to repeal section 118 is, in my view, misguided and seems to put the interests of industry profit above those of patient safety.

My second point is that patients need better access to authority to complain about the side effects of drugs. At present, they can speak only to their doctor, who may not want to hear that their prescription is responsible for the side effects that the patient has suffered. My constituent, for example, was so persistent that the GP finally removed her from his register—perhaps that is another story. Again, precisely because there is no channel for complaints, the GP will be unaware of similar cases and may presume that it is a one-off, not to be taken as a reflection on the drug as a whole. We need a proper system to monitor openly all cases of side effects. The Committee on Safety of Medicines is a watchdog that never barks. At the very least, there should be patient representatives on it to beef it up so that cases like septrin are taken seriously and are not swept under the carpet. We also need a system under which patients can seek redress for the harm done to them. We seem to have learnt nothing from the thalidomide tragedy. Incredibly, the success rate of legal claims against drug companies in Britain is zero. I hope that the Select Committee on Health will examine the position.

A third change to the regulatory system would have prevented much of the suffering related to septrin had it been introduced 20 years ago. We need a proper, stringent and thorough review of drug licences when they are renewed. The Medicines Act requires the renewal of licences every five years, but I understand that the reviews are generally conducted by administrative staff at the Department of Health rather than by experts, and tend to go through almost on the nod. We can only presume that that happened with the renewal of the licence for septrin; how else can the licence have been renewed time after time with no change in the rules governing its use?

In its report last summer, the Select Committee on Health made precisely that point to the Government. It recommended a national prescribing list of medicines for the NHS, with drugs being reviewed stringently every five years for inclusion in the list. In a vast and ever-changing market, it is essential that the Government accept the Committee's recommendations: regular reviews of drug licences are essential to determining which drug is the most appropriate, in terms of both effectiveness and cost.

The final change that I consider crucial to the safeguarding of patients is for the Department of Health to take responsibility for informing doctors when a drug's licence has changed. At present, even if the information were getting through to the Medicines Control Agency and drug licences changed when they should, GPs would be unlikely to be aware of the change. That is borne out by evidence that most hospitals have largely abandoned the use of septrin, other than for the treatment of people with AIDS. GPs have not followed suit. There are so many products on the market that GPs tend to use those that they have heard of—those that drug companies have promoted heavily, or tried and tested products that they are used to.

Just one example is griseofulvin, an anti-fungal medicine. Last year, the data sheet for griseofulvin was changed, stating that it should not be prescribed for men who expect to father a child in the next six months. There was no announcement of the change to GPs. How many have continued to prescribe griseofulvin in exactly the same way as they always have, unaware of any change in the data sheet?

If the Government made the changes that I have recommended to tighten drug regulation, tragedies such as those that have befallen my constituent and countless others might be avoided in the future. The onus is on the Government to reassure the British people that their concern lies with the health of the patient, not the health of the drug industry. The evidence on septrin itself

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

overwhelmingly suggests that the sulphonamide component increases both the danger and the cost of the product. I call on the Government to change the licence for the drug with the utmost urgency, before any more people suffer as Kate Reid has suffered.

2.13 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) for allowing me to speak, and for the detailed way in which she put her case.

My interest in septrin began when a constituent, Mr. Beddows, came to see me in November last year. He had been prescribed the drug for bronchitis, but when he took it his skin peeled off and he blew up like a huge balloon. He was in a dangerous condition, and had to go to hospital. Moreover, he could cite other cases among his small circle of friends. A child had lost skin off both legs; an adult had suffered from internal bleeding; another had experienced low blood pressure. According to Mr. Beddows, an action group had established that as many as 25 per cent. of users of septrin were suffering from adverse effects.

Having heard all that, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health and received a reply from the Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Cumberlege. I thought it rather complacent: although she admitted that there were adverse side effects, she suggested that they were a matter for GPs, who knew their patients. I wrote to Mr. Beddows, who came to see me again, bringing with him the case against septrin that had been prepared by Professor Richard Lacey—an extremely detailed case.

I wrote again to the Minister, whose reply went a little further this time. She repeated her view that, although dangers existed, they were a matter for GPs; but she also took up Professor Lacey's suggestion that trimethoprim, taken on its own, was the answer. She claimed that that, too, had side effects, but admitted that clinical practice was changing in relation to the prescribing of antibiotics, and that "in some situations"—I believe that in this regard she was following Professor Lacey to some extent—clinical practice

"favours the use of single rather than combination antibiotic therapy."

She added:

"The Medicines Control Agency is reviewing whether the licence for Septrin should reflect this."

I wrote to the Minister again on 2 March, and am still awaiting a reply. In my letter, I asked what evidence there was that serious side effects from co-trimoxazole—septrin—were rare, and what evidence there was that trimethoprim also had side effects. According to Professor Lacey, those side effects are minor in comparison, and trimethoprim would be much safer to use. I hope that the Minister will mention that when he replies.

More and more people are joining the new action group, saying that they, too, have experienced adverse effects. It is time for a complete review of the drug, and if it is found to have serious side effects, I hope that it will be withdrawn from the market without hesitation.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): The safety of medicines is an enormously important topic. Many medicines have serious side effects, and many people suffer without knowing that their suffering results from an adverse reaction.

The story of Kate Reid, related to us by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), is very harrowing. I have visited hospitals and seen people who have been badly affected by drugs, including antibiotics. It goes without saying that there is an element of risk in all medicinal compounds, however many efforts are made to test them and avoid side effects; a balance must always be struck.

As the hon. Lady said, co-trimoxazole has been sold as septrin by Wellcome and as bactrim by Roche Products Ltd. Some 100 generic licences for the production of the compound have now been issued. Since 1969, 85 million prescriptions for co-trimoxazole, under its different names, have been issued in this country. Some 3,500 adverse reactions have been reported to the Medicines Control Agency, and 137 deaths have been linked to the use of co-trimoxazole. However, before coming to any conclusions on that, we must assess whether those adverse reactions and the tragic deaths were attributable to co-trimoxazole or to one of its constituent parts. It has been alleged in the press recently—and, I think, implied by the hon. Member for Barking—that sulphamethoxazole, the other constituent, has mainly been responsible for the adverse reactions. I, too, speak as a layman and I am informed by the Medicines Control Agency that no difference exists between the pattern of adverse reactions to co-trimoxazole and the pattern of adverse reactions to trimethoprim alone.

It has been fairly widely alleged that it would be safer to use trimethoprim. I understand that not only is the pattern of adverse reactions to the compound and to the substance similar but a comparable pattern of adverse reactions exists across the range of widely used antibiotics. That takes the debate much wider into the question of the use of antibiotics and how widely they are used, but we are talking specifically about whether a case exists for a review or, as the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) said, for withdrawing co-trimoxazole from the market. I understand that such a case does not exist because, as I said, the pattern of reactions is comparable across the range of antibiotics.

A body of expert literature exists about this subject. It confirms the Medicines Control Agency's advice, which it arrives at through its yellow card system of adverse drug reactions reporting, that no special degree of risk is associated with co-trimoxazole. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, a study has been carried out recently by Dr. Hershel Jick at Boston university, who is a much-renowned expert on drug reactions. It has considered the prescribing data on tens of thousands of people and compared the adverse reactions of co-trimoxazole with those of alternative antibiotics. That work, which I suspect will be published soon, has been made available to researchers and professionals in advance of publication. It confirms that the risk of severe adverse reaction from co-trimoxazole is not only low but comparable with that from other widely used antibiotics.

It has also been said during the debate that a lack of information about medicines exists for patients and doctors. Recently, the Medicines Control Agency was asked for the information about co-trimoxazole and it gave 22 pages of the precisely relevant data. I am not aware that anyone has made a case that anything is missing from that data. The equivalent body in America produced 300 pages simply because it handed over the entire file on the product. One cannot measure relevance or efficacy of information by the weight of paper. As far as I know, all the relevant data were made available on that occasion.

The *British National Formulary*, which is supplied free to all doctors, clearly states the side effects of co-trimoxazole. There is an alarming list, as there often is on antibiotics and many other drugs. It starts with nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, glossitis, rashes and gives a list of Latin names which I shall not go through. No one is in any doubt that there are adverse reactions to the antibiotic, as there are to most others. A large number of adverse reactions, and indeed deaths, are associated with the range of penicillins, but, if one considers the pattern, it is broadly similar. Clearly, therefore, no simple answer exists, except by raising the question of the use of antibiotics.

Co-trimoxazole still has a place. It is less widely used than it was, and trimethoprim is more commonly prescribed than co-trimoxazole.

Ms Hodge: If it is true that co-trimoxazole is less well used than before, will the Minister please just listen to the speeches that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and I made today? Instead of coming here with a prepared speech, will the Minister go away and really do a thorough review? The reason that it is used less often is that a safer alternative drug is available which can deal with many of the common ailments. He should consider limiting the licence under which septrin is marketed so that it is used only where it is absolutely necessary.

Mr. Sackville: I have not used a prepared speech. I have some notes that I made during the hon. Lady's speech, but I happen to have spent some time with the Medicines Control Agency to try to find out the detail of the argument. A reason still exists for co-trimoxazole to be in the *British National Formulary*. The hon. Lady referred to drug resistance. It is well known, and a great body of evidence exists on this, that trimethoprim, given alone, leads to greater resistance to antibiotics. There is a great deal of data to suggest that, in some parts of the country—I have a letter from a leading paediatrician to prove this—there is up to 30 per cent. resistance to trimethoprim given alone. There are cases, and she cited one of them—pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, or PCP, among AIDS victims—where it is clear that trimethoprim given alone leads to too much resistance and quickly becomes ineffective. Other practitioners will tell us that much larger doses of trimethoprim must be given if it is given alone, and that it is possible to give a much smaller dose if it is accompanied by the other constituent of co-trimoxazole.

Clearly, antibiotics have been one of the great advances of modern medicine. Thousands, if not millions of lives, have been saved by them, but, like many other medicines, they have an attendant risk. What we have to be clear about—this is germane to the debate—is whether co-trimoxazole has a higher level of risk than antibiotics generally. The evidence that has been given to me is that that is not the case. The hon. Lady mentioned that there should be a five-yearly review. She will forgive me if I say that the Select Committee was talking about the efficacy and value of drugs rather than safety. Safety is reviewed all the time. There is a yellow card system of adverse reactions reporting in this country which, I hesitate to say, is the envy of the world because it is such a comprehensive system. The Medicines Control Agency advises the Secretary of State about drug safety. That body is also widely respected as probably the agency with the greatest professionalism and probity of any in the world. I challenge the hon. Lady to find another country with a more efficient system.

I can assure all those who are concerned about co-trimoxazole that that drug and all others like it are constantly under review. Drug leaflets will be issued with all drugs in future. Since last year there has been a rolling programme for all medicines to have a drug information leaflet and one has already been approved for co-trimoxazole. We have a high-grade system for the monitoring and licensing of medicines and I can assure the hon. Lady that drug safety will continue to be of the highest priority.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

1. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the quality of management of health service trusts and fundholder practices in Scotland. [13626]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The quality of the management of NHS trusts and GP fundholding practices is assessed through their performance in delivering quality patient care. They have been most successful: more patients have been treated, waiting times have fallen and new services have been developed.

Mr. Wray: Does the Under-Secretary agree that fundholding practices in Scotland are a disgrace and that we do not want them? The Government have recommended that there should be 11,000 fundholding practices, but the amalgamation of some of them has brought the number down to 4,000. In fact, there are only 107 fundholding practices out of the 1,000 practices in Scotland. Trusts have turned the health service into a greyhound service. One of my constituents was taken to hospital with a heart attack at 3 o'clock in the morning. He was sent home alone, in a taxi dressed in just a robe. He was taken back to the hospital at 8 o'clock and died at 10 o'clock. That is a disgrace. The health service should be cleared up.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On the unfortunate death of Mr. McGowan in January 1994, the three main recommendations addressed to the Government are being considered by the NHS executive. There are 22 intensive care beds in Glasgow hospitals. Following a review by Greater Glasgow health board, a further four beds have been funded and all aspects of the sheriff's findings at the fatal accident inquiry are being addressed.

We believe that trusts bring a great many benefits. Record numbers of patients have been treated. There are shorter waiting lists and waiting times and more information and choice is being given to patients. There are new services and improvements. GP fundholders have greater freedom and improved communications. They are providing more services and are developing new or improved services. At least 30 per cent. of the Scots population will benefit from their GP being involved in either standard fundholding or primary care purchasing.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my hon. Friend aware that the majority of people of Tayside believe that our health service in Tayside is second to none anywhere in the world? A number of our GPs are fundholders and they, too, believe that they are providing a service that is second to none. Is not it time that we began to talk up the value of our health service and those who are dedicated to it and work in it instead of constantly attacking it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I can announce today that for the relatively few cases where there are serious complaints, we are putting in place a new complaints procedure from April 1996 so that there will be a response from the provider of the service, the opportunity for a review of the complaint by a panel with an independent lay chairman and recourse to the health service commissioner. We feel that that will greatly assist in the few cases where there are legitimate complaints.

Dr. Bray: The public have a duty not to abuse the health service, but will the Minister keep an eye on any tendency by fundholding practices or other general practices to purge patients from their lists in a wholesale manner?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We believe that there are substantial benefits to be gained from GP fundholding. We believe that it will result in a better service for the patients concerned. We do not want to see a deterioration of service, which is the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. McAllion: Are we still dealing with the management of a genuinely national health service? If we are, how can the Minister justify the introduction of local pay bargaining, which means that nurses and midwives in one part of Scotland will be paid less than those in other parts? Since that cannot be justified, will the Minister take the opportunity to announce that he is scrapping local pay bargaining and instructing the management of every NHS trust in Scotland to pay the full 3 per cent. to all nurses and midwives, with no strings attached? If he is not prepared to announce that, will he attend one of the rallies to be held across Scotland on 30 March by nurses and midwives, at which he will be able to explain to them face to face why national pay bargaining in the NHS is good enough for consultants and doctors but not for nurses and midwives?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman should be clear that under the management allowance for GP fundholders some 2 per cent. of overall funds for patient care are managed by fundholders. It is not a payment for GPs, but a reimbursement of their administrative costs. Obviously, those at the sharp end of the health service should be paid the going rate for the job.

Lockerbie

2. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who (a) required the bodies found and pronounced life extinct by Dr. David Fieldhouse, Bradford police surgeon, to be re-examined for signs of life in the presence of witnesses at a later stage, as described on page 36 of the determination by Sheriff Principal John Mowat QC in respect of Lockerbie and (b) ordered that two days, or a substantial part thereof, should be allowed to lapse between Dr. Fieldhouse's confirmation of life extinct and the subsequent confirmation and certifications; and for what reasons many bodies were left out in the fields for that period of time. [13627]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): In the immediate aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster Dr. Fieldhouse found and pronounced life extinct in 58 bodies. Sheriff Principal John Mowat QC concluded in his determination on the proceedings at the fatal accident inquiry that Dr. Fieldhouse verbally related information concerning his activities to a senior police officer at 7 pm on 22 December 1988. Although this information was also relayed in a letter from Dr. Fieldhouse to the police dated 23 December 1988, the letter was not received at

Lockerbie until 27 December 1988. The sheriff principal concluded that the verbal information given by Dr. Fieldhouse had, as a result of the circumstances obtaining at that time, been understandably overlooked. In the intervening period arrangements had been made to recover the bodies of the victims by a systematic and meticulous search and recovery operation and all the 58 bodies dealt with by Dr. Fieldhouse were recovered before his letter arrived. The process of search and recovery, unfortunately and inevitably, took some time.

Mr. Dalyell: Was any dead body taken from the scene, thereby avoiding its inclusion in the official list of those who died?

Mr. Lang: No.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the change in the number of unemployed since December 1992. [13628]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): Between December 1992 and February 1995, seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland fell by 41,700.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that that substantial reduction in unemployment is partly due to Scotland's success in attracting new industry? Does he believe that inward investment would be encouraged by Scotland signing up to the social chapter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—adopting a national minimum wage—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.]—or having a tax-raising Scottish Assembly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.]? The cheers of Opposition Members show how blinkered and stupid they are.

Mr. Kynoch: I agree thoroughly with my hon. Friend, and Opposition Members' cheers unfortunately show that they are out of touch with the realities of business.

My hon. Friend referred to inward investment. In 1993-94, Locate in Scotland and the Scottish Office Industry Department helped to attract 95 projects involving planned investment of £588 million and the creation or safeguarding of more than 11,000 jobs. If the United Kingdom signed the social chapter or if Scotland had higher taxes than the rest of the United Kingdom, many of those jobs would be put in jeopardy.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Minister share the concern of the people of Scotland at the loss of high-skill jobs at the BBC in recent weeks? Will he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State organise an urgent meeting with John Birt, Director-General of the BBC, to ensure that there are no further job losses, as there will come a point when BBC Scotland will become incapable of carrying out its role as the major broadcaster in Scotland if it loses more skilled staff?

Mr. Kynoch: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but, with due respect, it is up to Mr. Birt to decide how best to run the BBC. I have a lot more faith than the hon. Gentleman in the skills and expertise of the BBC in Scotland in making its case for maintaining a sound, professional and positive presence in Scotland.

University Budgets

4. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with vice-principals of universities to discuss their budgetary requirements. [13629]

Mr. Lang: I met the committee of Scottish higher education principals in June 1994. We discussed a number of matters, including the funding of higher education.

Mr. Griffiths: Is not it a pity that the Secretary of State did not listen to the committee? Does not he realise from the settlement last week that not only are students now driven to poverty but universities and colleges in Scotland find that they cannot make ends meet? Why does not the Secretary of State listen to the distinguished principals of the Scottish institutions and reverse the cuts that he imposed on the vast majority of them last week or tell them where his so-called efficiency savings have come from?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Funding for higher education institutions has been increased by £25 million to £618 million for next year—an increase of 4.2 per cent. What is more, resources available to students through grants and student loans have increased by 19 per cent. in real terms since 1989-90.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some 33 per cent. of those in the relevant age group are now in higher education in Scotland compared with some 17 per cent. under the last Labour Government? Does he agree that that has not been at the cost of any drop in quality? For example, the independent teaching assessment placed four Scottish universities—Edinburgh, Glasgow, Strathclyde and, of course, St. Andrews—in the "excellent" category.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right on both points. Not only has participation doubled in the relevant age groups since the Government took office but, as he points out, there has been no loss in the quality of the performance of our best universities. No fewer than 30 per cent. of the departments appraised have been categorised as excellent.

Mr. Wallace: In the light of what the Secretary of State has just confirmed about the increase in student numbers, will he comment on the remark made by Professor John Arbuthnott, the convener of the committee of Scottish higher education principals? In the aftermath of the announcement last week, he said that this was expansion on the cheap which would further threaten the ability of the institutions to maintain quality. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to repudiate the suggestion made yesterday by Professor Donald Leach of Queen Margaret college that students should take out loans to pay modest fees for the courses on which they have embarked?

Mr. Lang: Happily, higher education principals are rather more positive and sensible in their attitude to these matters than the hon. Gentleman suggests. As for the funding of students, even the National Union of Students is now looking at more positive and creative ways of achieving better funding for students.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Secretary of State consider how local enterprise companies could help get the evil drug temazepam off the streets in Renfrewshire? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the local enterprise company could play a role—

Madam Speaker: Order. I wonder whether I am reading the question correctly. It is about the budgetary requirements of universities: we are on Question 4.

Mr. McMaster: Could the LECs work in tandem with universities to use their research facilities to examine how temazepam could be taken off the streets? It would be of great advantage to the police in their efforts to get the drug off the streets if the Secretary of State made it a schedule 3 rather than a schedule 4 drug.

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the relevant bodies will have heard the hon. Gentleman's subtle, inventive and creative question—perhaps a university or higher education institution should establish a course on the matter.

Mrs. Fyfe: In this week of science, engineering and technology, will the Secretary of State tell us which of his Government's policies he thinks contributes most to higher education, and particularly to courses that cost more to take but are essential for our economic revival? Could it be the policy of making higher education institutions do more with less money for each student? Could it be the fiasco of the Student Loans Company, which puts more energy into chasing debts than awarding loans? Could it be the Government's recent decision—contrary to that of all previous Governments, both Conservative and Labour—to withdraw the allowance for mature students and to force who knows how many into giving up courses for which they have worked and sacrificed to gain entry? Our students are trying to learn, but when will the Government ever learn?

Mr. Lang: I can assume only that the hon. Lady's question is prompted by embarrassment at the Opposition's lamentable record on higher education when in government, compared with the record that we have achieved in the past 15 years. Perhaps she did not hear me point out that the number of students partaking of higher education has doubled since this Government took office and that the quality of the education that they are obtaining is in many cases excellent; that funding next year is up by 4.2 per cent.; and that there will also be a record number of more than 118,000 places in Scottish institutions next year.

Local Enterprise Companies

5. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the new boundaries for local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement. [13630]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend will make an announcement on new boundaries for local enterprise companies after he has received and considered recommendations from Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Hogg: Why are the Government taking such an inordinate time to reach a conclusion on what should be a relatively simple matter? Should not Members of the House, who are responsible for the funding of Scottish Enterprise and the enterprise companies, be consulted? The Government have not consulted the House properly, and are they not trying to draw up boundaries after local government reorganisation? They should have known their intentions in this important matter a long time ago. How does the Minister explain the Government's incompetence?

Mr. Kynoch: I must give the hon. Member full marks for his persistence because he has been a firm advocate of certain boundaries as regards his area. He will be well aware that, with his colleagues, he visited my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) when he held office, to discuss the subject, and that he has had discussions with Scottish Enterprise, as have local enterprise companies, the new town development corporations and many other interested organisations, including local authorities. There has been very wide consultation on the subject and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want to ensure that all aspects are covered before a decision is reached. I understand that we are close to receiving recommendations from Scottish Enterprise. When those are forthcoming, we will inform the House.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware that, under the boundary change that will take Helensburgh into Argyll, socialist Labour-controlled Dumbarton district council is carrying out a massive asset-stripping exercise in Helensburgh, right down to removing glasshouses from gardens? Is not that absolutely disgraceful and does it not ignore the fact that people in Helensburgh have paid for the assets through their council tax and community charge in recent years?

Mr. Kynoch: I think that my hon. Friend might be talking about local government boundaries, as opposed to local enterprise companies. I am sure that he will be aware that there have been significant consultations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the distribution of assets, and that the matter is still under discussion.

Mr. Worthington: The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) does not know his local enterprise company from his local authority.

When we met the Minister's predecessor, he agreed that any proposal for Dunbartonshire that involved Clydebank and Dumbarton being linked with Renfrew was absurd and that any absorption of Clydebank or any other authorities into Glasgow would be absurd. He also agreed that the present boundaries for the LEC were sound. Does this Minister agree, or will he also be changed soon?

Mr. Kynoch: I believe that the hon. Member made representations to my predecessor and to Scottish Enterprise. I am rather more patient than him: I want to await the results of the other consultations to ensure that a proper argument is presented and that the decision that we reach is based on the widest possible consultation.

Scottish Assembly

6. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from businesses with regard to a Scottish Assembly. [13631]

Mr. Lang: It is clear from what Scottish business men and women tell me that they believe that the Labour party's proposals for a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers would, if implemented, immensely damage Scottish business. They fear that it would raise costs, undermine confidence, jeopardise investment and inward investment and destroy jobs.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that businesses go further than that and are threatening to pack up and leave Scotland, taking jobs and investment with them? They fear the proposed Scottish Assembly with its tax-raising powers of 3p in the pound, which will affect every family in Scotland to the tune of £4 a week.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the considerable dangers that would flow from the creation of a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers. Although 3p in the pound would amount to more than £6 a week for the average family, it would be only the beginning of what the Labour party would seek to achieve through a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, as it would account for only some 2 per cent. of the present Scottish Office block. The burden of higher taxation, which Scotland alone would face under a Scottish Parliament, would penalise the Scottish people and drive industry away.

Mr. Graham: The Secretary of State is now aware that the people of Ireland will have the right to a referendum. Why do not the people of Scotland have that right?

Mr. Lang: The people of Scotland had a referendum in 1979, in which they failed to support the Labour party's proposals.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In an effort to foster greater understanding of how the House deals with Scottish business, will my right hon. Friend consider holding a series of seminars on the way in which the House operates? As a matter of urgency, will he invite the Leader of the Opposition to the first one, as on Sunday he showed an alarming ignorance about how the House deals with Scottish business?

Mr. Lang: If the Leader of the Opposition does not know how the House of Commons handles Scottish legislation, how on earth is he in a position to say how a Scottish Parliament should do so?

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Secretary of State list the representations received from businesses in Scotland about the current policies exercised by this Unionist Government? For example, will he explain why the tourist and whisky industries are now subjected to substantial pressures as a result of the mothballing of three distilleries, and why the fishing industry, which is vital to communities in north-east Scotland, is not protected by the Government within the European Union?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady has managed to ask three questions about three different industries. I shall answer in the context of the question that was tabled, which relates to a proposed Scottish Assembly. The creation of a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, adding another burden of taxation and bureaucracy on the people of Scotland, would damage rather than help the industries to which the hon. Lady referred.

Mr. George Robertson: Is the Secretary of State aware that one of the roles for a Scottish Parliament—the Labour party will deliver a Scottish Parliament after the next election and it will be universally popular among all sections of the Scottish people—will be to take back into full democratic control Scotland's water supplies? Today, on the anniversary of the 97 per cent. bloody nose that people gave the Secretary of State for Scotland in the Strathclyde referendum, will he recognise that his quangoisation will transform Scotland's water, which is among the safest, cleanest and cheapest in the world, into among the most expensive in Europe? Why does he not recognise the folly of his arrogant refusal to listen to the people of Scotland and abandon that plan now?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is lamentably ignorant about the facts of the matter. I have no doubt that the creation of those new water and sewerage authorities will lead to a more efficient delivery of water and sewerage systems in Scotland at the least extra cost to the Scottish people. I am concerned about the capacity that a Scottish Parliament would have to abolish the uniform business rate, whereby businesses in Scotland now pay rates averaging 43p in the pound compared with the 76p in the pound that they would otherwise pay.

Value-added Indicators

7. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made in incorporating value-added indicators in the performance data available in Scottish schools; and if he will make a statement. [13632]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Her Majesty's inspectors already provide schools with tables showing the value added in the upper stages of secondary schools. Work is now under way to develop additional measures of value added for use in both primary and secondary schools, and those measures will be tried out in a number of schools this year.

Mr. Robertson: Does my hon. Friend agree that despite the scaremongering and the misrepresentation of the Opposition, Scottish parents have come to value the information given by schools? Does he further agree that information should not be restricted simply to examination results, but should cover as many areas as possible in the life of a school, so that parents, teachers and pupils know as much as possible about what is going on, and how it is achieved, in schools in Scotland which are, after all, the centre of so many of our communities?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The British social attitudes report published last year showed that no fewer than 73 per cent. of the public supported the publication of examination results, which the Opposition originally opposed. I also agree with my hon. Friend about making more information available about extra-curricular activities. We already encourage schools to publish in their handbooks information on achievements by their pupils in sport, music and the arts. I am also glad to say that we have made more information available on truancy by publishing the relevant results. They showed that authorised and unauthorised absences averaged about 6 per cent. in primary schools in 1993-94. That is roughly the same as each primary school missing two school weeks out of 38 and 10 million half-days lost. There is therefore a heavy responsibility on parents to keep a close eye on school attendance in the interests of their children. We are making more information available, not less.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister believe that there is a direct, inverse or no relationship between the value added by schools and the spending on them?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We must spend the necessary sums on schools. We believe that the value added should be additional to information about exams and that that information must be made available. The COSLA working party and the Scottish Office Education Department are taking that matter forward.

Mr. George Robertson: Is it not undisputed that the performance of all Scotland's schools will be affected by the costly, unwanted and ill-prepared reorganisation of local government? The creation of 32 education authorities, where previously there were just 11, is bound to have a disruptive effect on the education system. Why should Scotland's children pay the price in a damaging disruption to their education, on the basis of a reorganisation that was not wanted by the Scottish people, is far more costly than the Government pretend and was designed simply for the convenience of the Scottish Conservative party? Does the Minister agree that two weeks tomorrow, when elections take place across Scotland, the gerrymandering in which the Government have indulged will boomerang because they will win not a single council in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Member is wrong on every count. Let us take, for example, Borders regional council, which is one of the smallest regional authorities in Scotland. It has an excellent education service. I must tell him that the last time local government was reorganised, 18,000 extra local authority officials were created in two years, which made the whole process much more bureaucratic. We believe that simplifying the processes of local government will make it more responsive to local democracy, which we wholeheartedly support.

Private Residential Homes

8. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the ownership and management of private residential homes for the elderly. [13633]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the past six months, my right hon. Friend has received four letters about standards in residential care homes.

Dr. Godman: Does the Minister agree that it is entirely unethical for a medical practitioner who owns such a home to act as the general practitioner to his own residents? Does he agree that confused, elderly people, particularly those suffering from dementia, should have ready access to independent medical assessment and treatment? When will he introduce a statutory code of practice to outlaw medical practitioners, lawyers and accountants from acting in a professional capacity vis-à-vis residents of their own residential homes?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is correct that nothing currently prohibits the arrangement that he mentioned. That will be considered by the Scottish Office working group. There have been calls for changes in the legislation and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Scottish Office officials are considering such issues in general as a result of the disturbing incident at Glenglova. We are determined to see the highest standards imposed. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the registration of residential care homes is in the gift of a local authority and if those high standards are not maintained, registration can be withdrawn.

The hon. Gentleman asked about appeals. There have been about six appeals and, in the vast majority of cases, high standards are maintained and the local authorities have the necessary powers. However, we are carefully considering whether the time scale should be altered, as has been suggested. That is one of the issues that is currently being considered by the working group.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Is the Minister aware that, because those residential homes are very expensive, costing about £300 to £400 a week, many people who were persuaded to buy their council houses must now sell them to pay for their care in a residential home? How does that equate with Mrs. Thatcher's famous wealth trickle-down theory, whereby everyone was to be able to have their house and pass it on to their children and grandchildren? I can tell the Minister that, as I am sure that he is aware, the people feel very betrayed as they witness more and more geriatric care beds disappearing from the national health service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not clear from the tenor of the hon. Lady's question whether she is demanding tax relief or what solution she would propose. It has always been the position, under successive Governments, that elderly persons who live in residential homes can be charged when circumstances warrant it.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Minister will know that many dedicated men and women do not want their loved ones to go into homes when they get dementia and Alzheimer's disease; they want to support their loved ones in their own home. Yet the Minister must know that care in the community is only words—it is non-existent. The Government should be doing more to support organisations such as the Alzheimer's Association for Scotland, which can support relatives who look after their loved ones.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are providing substantial sums for care in the community. The Government have provided a further £55 million this year for community care infrastructure. Obviously, the resources must follow the patient and the hon. Member is correct to say that many families have a strong preference for looking after their relatives in the community. There are also various grants; we are giving about £15 million a year for bridging finance and we shall ensure that the necessary resources follow the patient.

Scottish Economy

9. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has recently had with the chairman of Scottish Enterprise on the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement. [13634]

Mr. Lang: I regularly meet the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to discuss a variety of issues relating to the Scottish economy.

Dr. Reid: The performance of the Secretary of State on the Scottish economy can be summed up in two words—

Mr. McMaster: Which two?

Dr. Reid: They are not the two that my hon. Friend is thinking about—they are Rolls-Royce.

I remind the Secretary of State that, although Ministers may have forgotten Rolls-Royce, Opposition Members have not. Does he realise that there will be, not only a loss of jobs, important though that is, but a potential loss of skills at the forefront of technology from Scotland and the United Kingdom to Germany? If the Secretary of State is not prepared to do anything, will the Government and the bunch of pathetic Ministers who have sat idly by while Rolls-Royce has been sold down the tube in Scotland move aside and make way for those of us who will do something about it?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lang: If that is a threat that the next Labour Government, if ever elected, would interfere in every commercial decision made by every company in this country, I am sure that the electorate will take note of that and react accordingly.

Rolls-Royce, like all companies trading internationally and needing to trade competitively, has to take commercial decisions to adjust its dispositions, the activities in which it is involved, the people it employs and the places where it employs them, to ensure that it does that in the most effective and competitive way. That does not alter the fact that 4,000 employees will remain at six Rolls-Royce sites in Scotland.

On the economy in a broader sense, I hope that the hon. Gentleman is encouraged that unemployment in his constituency has already decreased by no less than 650 in the current year.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that Rolls-Royce, among others, has made massive investments outside the United Kingdom? Does he further recognise that Rolls-Royce has recently acquired Alison Engines in the United States, thus making Rolls-Royce one of the three largest, if not the largest, aero-engine manufacturers? That can only be good for Scotland, but it could all be put at risk by the nonsense of an assembly with tax-raising powers that would drive further jobs away from Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. Rolls-Royce operates in an international, competitive marketplace. Its two major competitors, General Electric and Pratt and Whitney, have had massive job cuts, including the 14,000 redundancies announced in 1993. At the same time, Boeing announced 80,000 job losses. It is an inevitable part of the developing economic situation and the competitive nature of those industries that they have to adjust the size of their work force from time to time.

Mr. Watson: The description of the economy that the Secretary of State and his friends give would not be recognised by any of the 4,339 people in Glasgow, Central constituency who are unemployed and eligible to claim benefit. That figure constitutes 15 per cent. of the working population, and at a cost of £9,000 per person that means that £39 million is paid per year to keep those people in my constituency on the dole. When will the Government understand that, instead of talking about the so-called flexible labour market, which means part-time jobs and insecurity, they should start spending money on the economy, on training and on infrastructure, to get people back to work instead of keeping them on the dole?

Mr. Lang: That is what is happening. The number of people in work in Scotland has risen by 60,000 in the past decade. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, since January 1987, unemployment has fallen by 3,400. Unemployment in Scotland is now, for the first time since records have been kept, lower than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, which in turn is more than two points lower than the European average.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a subject which is on a different scale from Rolls-Royce, would my right hon. Friend welcome the reputation of Lanark blue cheese? No food poisoning cases appear to have been attributed to that cheese and we must try to ensure that there is no interference in that good Scottish enterprise.

Mr. Lang: I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's commendation of that fine Scottish product. It is one of many fine Scottish food products that are gaining an increasing market share outside Scotland. I am sure that my hon. Friend's remarks will have been heard by those responsible for handling the matter.

Mr. Salmond: When will the Secretary of State take action to protect Scotland's economic infrastructure? Is he aware that last week his colleague the Secretary of State for Transport compared the subsidy to Motorail and sleeper services in Scotland to the subsidy for passengers in the south-east of England? Will he inform the Secretary of State for Transport that £1.5 billion was spent on capital and investment grants in Network SouthEast and London Underground in this financial year compared with, at most, a few million pounds on the sleeper and Motorail services in Scotland? What hope is there for a consultation exercise when the rolling stock is stuck up a siding, the Secretary of State for Transport has already made up his mind and the Scottish Office team is in a state of paralysis, unable to defend Scottish interests?

Mr. Lang: I suppose it demonstrates the narrowness of the hon. Gentleman's horizons that he cannot understand that cash invested in rail infrastructure south of Scotland also benefits Scotland. The £300 million upgrading of the east coast main line benefited Scotland and the £600 million investment plan for the west coast line will benefit Scotland. The other resources that have been brought into Scotland benefit Scotland. It is a measure of the short-sightedness and narrow-mindedness of the Scottish National party that it does not understand the benefits for Scotland that accrue from the services such as Mossend and the channel tunnel. Those are economic infrastructure developments that have been made under this Government for Scotland's benefit.

Mr. McFall: The Secretary of State will be aware that Scottish Enterprise has trumpeted the strategy of high-quality, high-skilled jobs. When he next meets the chairman, will he discuss the scandal of low pay in Scotland, where one in 20 of the working population works for poverty pay? Does he think that it is fair that

107,000 people in Scotland work for £2.50 an hour while the heads of privatised utilities like British Gas earn £250 per hour? Has not that unfairness, whereby the rich are getting richer on the backs of the poor, resulted in the rejection of the Government's economic policies? When will the Secretary of State start to do something in economic terms for the ordinary people of Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The people of Scotland will not recognise the picture painted by the hon. Gentleman. There are many high-paid and well-qualified jobs in Scotland in a far richer and more diverse economic infrastructure than ever existed under Labour. Perhaps that is why net disposable incomes in Scotland are among the highest in the United Kingdom.

Road Improvements

10. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent to date, including land acquisition costs, on (a) the A7 Falla Hill to Heriot improvement, (b) the A7 Bow Straight widen and regrade and (c) the A7 Whin improvement. [13635]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total expenditure, including land acquisition costs, on the A7 Falla Hill to Heriot improvement, the widening and regrading of the A7 Bow Straight and the A7 Whin improvement is £49,811, £5,405 and £35,523 respectively.

Sir David Steel: It would be helpful if the Minister could inform the House when the decision is likely to be taken about detrunking roads such as the A7. Does he accept that it would be intolerable if the cost of the improvements that he has outlined were to fall on the new Borders council without a guarantee that extra funds will be provided for that purpose?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions will be made shortly about the trunking or detrunking of various roads in Scotland. The three schemes that I have mentioned are old schemes which will provide overtaking opportunities. Each of the three jobs will cost £1.5 million, making a total of £4.5 million. Primarily for environmental reasons, we believe that it would be more beneficial at present to spend that sum on the A68. The sum, approaching £100,000, which has been spent so far is not necessarily lost or wasted as the new authority can take it forward if the road is detrunked.

Scottish Economy

11. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the Scottish TUC to discuss the problems of the Scottish economy; and if he will make a statement. [13636]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress from time to time to discuss a range of matters concerning the Scottish economy.

Mr. Galloway: It is apparent from their answers so far that none of the three stooges opposite has any idea what is happening in the Scottish manufacturing sector. In washing their hands of the haemorrhage of high-skilled, high-tech and high-paid jobs from Rolls-Royce and the BBC, they fail to see that they are presiding over the creation of a skivvy economy, where workers warehouse and sell other people's manufactured goods and run after tourists trying to sell them hamburgers and ice creams. Why do Ministers persist in equating temporary, low-paid jobs like that with the kind of jobs that we used to have in Scotland which involved making things, building things and mining things? When will they clear out and give the Scottish economy a chance?

Mr. Kynoch: I expected the hon. Gentleman to come out with that sort of rubbish. Unfortunately, he does not spend enough time in Scotland to see the success stories. Scottish business is enjoying record exports, record output and significant inward investment. If he were only to visit the Dunfermline area and see some of the new jobs that have been created—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) has asked his question and he must listen to the answer.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Member does not realise that business in Scotland must adapt to what the market requires. There is no point in trying to push old companies and old manufacturing practices in a new marketplace. Scotland currently has a significant share—35 per cent.—of Europe's personal computer manufacturing sector. That is an on-going industry. Industry in Scotland has changed and the sooner the hon. Gentleman wakes up to that and starts living in the future rather than the past the better.

Mr. Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Scottish Trades Union Congress is a great deal more realistic than Opposition Members, judging from the nonsense that we have heard from them this afternoon? Does he agree that manufacturing productivity is a key figure? Each person employed in the Scottish manufacturing sector now produces more than £30,000-worth of manufactured goods. Is that figure not a great deal better than those in not only the rest of the United Kingdom but in countries such as Japan?

Mr. Kynoch: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Business can succeed only by achieving the best possible levels of productivity in order to compete in world markets. That is what Scottish business is doing. Scottish business is looking up while Opposition Members are looking backwards and down.

Mr. Connarty: When the Secretary of State meets representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, will he explain to them what he will do to correct the wrong that interference by the Scottish Office has done to the celebrations for VE day in Scotland? The Department of Employment has confirmed a bank holiday on 8 May in addition to the traditional 1 May spring bank holiday. Yet correspondence between the former Scottish Office Minister responsible for industry and the CBI has led to the totally nonsensical situation whereby some Government agencies, such as Scottish Enterprise, the Benefits Agency, banks and schools will be on holiday on 8 May because the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has declared that extra holiday, but the Post Office in Scotland is threatened with industrial action because it is stealing the traditional May holiday.

The Secretary of State has a letter dated 5 March from his own trade unions asking him to give the Scottish Office an additional holiday for VE day. When are we going to celebrate VE day rather than denigrate it by making workers pay on 1 May for the extra holiday they should have had on 8 May?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman has not pointed out that VE day is a bank holiday in Scotland. He wants extra holidays and that is totally against the line of trying to achieve extra productivity. Every holiday has to be paid for, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not denigrate VE day by making it into a party political issue.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware of the importance to my constituents in Ayrshire and other Ayrshire Members of the M77 link with the M8? Does he deplore the activities of those who would stop construction work on that road and does he welcome the excellent letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which sets out in detail the benefits of that particular route? Will he encourage my right hon. Friend to pass a copy to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) as his support would be welcome also?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend made it perfectly clear that he backs Strathclyde regional council in ensuring that the road is completed on time.

Mr. Chisholm: Did the Minister see the report in one of this morning's newspapers that in the last nine months of last year 7,600 full-time jobs were lost in Scotland? That was not balanced by the creation of 9,900 part-time jobs. It may seem to be a reduction in unemployment, but although part-time jobs are welcome to some people, they are mostly low-paid and insecure. Is it any surprise that thousands of Scots without jobs or on low pay know only about the feel-bad factor and not about the feel-good factor?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the definition of part time includes working as many as 30 hours a week. He should also be aware that the majority of people working part time do so from choice. The statistics show that only 14 per cent. of those reported in the autumn 1994 labour force survey as working part time wanted full-time jobs.

Highlands and Islands

12. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the economic prospects of the highlands and islands in the coming financial year. [13637]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The prospects for continuing growth towards long-term economic prosperity in the highlands and islands look very encouraging. This is due in no small measure to the continuing success of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Macdonald: Given that land is the basic economic resource of the highlands, is it not profoundly wrong that large estates continue to be sold on the open market to the highest bidder without any consultation or agreement with the local communities who live and work on the land? That is especially wrong, particularly when the local communities have expressed a preference to take on the ownership and management of the land. Given the uncertainty over the sale of the Isle of Eigg, will the Scottish Office explore with local communities ways in which the goal of community ownership can be realised, perhaps with the help of the National Trust or other similar organisations?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand the concern of local residents on the Isle of Eigg, but interference in land sale would paralyse the land market and deny large areas of Scotland the benefits that many far-sighted landowners bring to the land they own. We believe that the way forward is through partnership, as recently evidenced by the Cairngorms Partnership, involving owners, local authorities, conservation bodies and community councils. I piloted the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991 through the House to protect the Scottish countryside and wildlife, but excessive regulation would be as inadvisable as the EC directive to bring back wolves to the wilds of Scotland.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Does the Minister acknowledge that the economic prospects of the area are hardly likely to be improved by the cancellation decision that the highland region is facing in respect of the jobs and enterprise training units, or JET units, as a direct result of the capital squeeze by the Scottish Office? Following the discussions that have taken place between the three Members of Parliament representing the highland seats, the trade unions involved, the regional convener of Highland regional council and the chief executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, will the Minister back the call that at the next meeting next month, when the matter is to be especially considered by the regional council, there should be a one-year moratorium on a decision? In tandem, is he prepared to meet a delegation from the area to discuss the problem in detail to see whether a way through the funding impasse can be found in the next 12 months? Will he agree to do that and does he support that approach?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will certainly see a delegation led by the hon. Gentleman. This year's Highlands and Islands Enterprise budget has increased to £77.4 million. The hon. Gentleman might not think that relevant, but it helps a lot with training, and we want the best possible training in the highlands and islands. The hon. Gentleman appears to agree.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister accept that Labour wants increased rail investment in every part of Britain because we acknowledge that that will mean better communications for Scotland and manufacturing jobs in Scotland? That is just common sense. As to the specific issue of sleepers and Motorail, does the Minister accept that all hon. Members realise that consultation after services have been withdrawn is a fraud? Is not he aware that anyone who knows anything about the subject realises that figures adduced to prove a ludicrously high subsidy for sleepers and Motorail are also a fraud? Will the Minister use Scottish Office powers to provide whatever subsidy is necessary only for the short period that would allow full and proper consultation? It is within the power of the Scottish Office to ensure real and honest consultation, but it is also within its power to condemn services without a trial. Which will the Minister do?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot agree to divert funds from education, health or social work for the purpose that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. As to the figures, the subsidy for highland sleeper and Motorail services in 1993-94 was £2.6 million excluding infrastructure, or £6.6 million including infrastructure—a subsidy met by the taxpayer of £180 and £450 respectively. The regulator made it clear that any final decision on minimum service level is for the franchising director after his consultation on ScotRail's public service requirement later this year. Before the hon. Gentleman dismisses that consultation, I emphasise that the franchising director has undertaken to examine timetabling flexibility in daytime connections. That will be important for day services to Fort William, which will tie up with other services, including the new sleeper service between Glasgow and Paris early next year.

Hospital Construction Costs

13. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the capital costs of building an NHS maternity hospital capable of coping with 3,000 births per annum. [13638]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no current plans for a new maternity hospital of a 3,000 births per annum capacity in Scotland that would provide the basis of a meaningful costing.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister will be aware that Glasgow health board is trying to close the most modern maternity facility in its area, at Rutherglen. That is despite the example set in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), where a similar closure led to the loss of lives. Bearing in mind the capital costs of replacing throughout Scotland stand-alone hospitals not located on the same site as acute services, will the Minister tell Glasgow health board to leave Rutherglen maternity hospital alone?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have no proposal before us, so we cannot make an exact estimate of the costs of another hospital providing maternity services—but we envisage that they will be in the range of £7 million to £12 million. The board will make its final recommendations once it has considered the outcome of the consultation that ends on 30 April. The board recognises the importance of organising maternity care with close access to the full range of support acute facilities. Any suggestion of closure would have to be put before the Secretary of State. In making a final decision, Ministers would have to be satisfied that a better service was being put in place.

Ms Rachel Squire: Does the Minister agree that his Government's policies on maternity services are leading to the removal of good, locally based services from hospitals? Does he further agree that the centralisation of maternity services, as has already happened in Fife with the closure of Dunfermline's maternity hospital, can lead to increased risk to mothers and babies? That was tragically demonstrated in my constituency 10 days ago when an unborn baby died as he and his mother were being transported from Dunfermline to Kirkcaldy. Will the Minister listen to what the communities have to say and keep Rutherglen open and restore maternity services to Dunfermline?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I must repeat to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire)—she raised many of these subjects in an earlier Adjournment debate—that the medical profession considered it extremely important to have close access to the full range of acute facilities. In making certain that the high standards are maintained, it is, of course, very necessary to ensure that mothers have access to all the necessary services. I should like to examine the circumstances of the very distressing case that the hon. Lady mentioned, and I shall bear her comments in mind.

National Parks

14. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage to discuss national parks. [13639]

Mr. Lang: I have not met the chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage to discuss national parks. However, my ministerial colleagues and I have regular meetings with the chairman. On a number of occasions, we have discussed the management of the countryside.

Mr. Galbraith: Is it not time that Scotland had its own national parks, to look after the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond, Ben Nevis and Glencoe? Why does the Minister persist with the voluntary principle, which, as Scottish Natural Heritage's own corporate plan says, is too costly and unworkable? Is not it time, therefore, that the Minister started to protect the countryside rather than his friends the landowners?

Mr. Lang: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has so little faith in the local authorities in the area, or in their capacity to work together in the interests of their area. The fact is that the national park concept is not an unqualified success south of the border. Indeed, Scottish Natural Heritage supports the voluntary principle and the proposals that working parties have developed separately for the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. Our response has been to accept the recommendation of the working party, and I believe that it can be made to work successfully.

Mr. Robathan: When my right hon. Friend next meets the chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage, will he raise the question of the spread of mink throughout Scotland from the national parks in England and Wales, and now, indeed, to the outer Hebrides? The impact that those animals are having on the ecology, the wildlife and the economy based on fishing, in Scotland as elsewhere, is extremely damaging.

Mr. Lang: I am sure that my hon. Friend may well be right about that. It is not a new phenomenon, however. Mink first escaped from captivity many decades ago, and I am confident that every effort is being made to contain them and the damage that they do.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the importance to the local borders heritage of the special bridge built by Rennie straddling the Tweed at Kelso? Will he look urgently at the recent decision to refuse capital consent to build a replacement road bridge across the river to save and protect the bridge for the natural heritage of the borders in the coming years?

Mr. Lang: I know that that is a matter to which the council attaches considerable importance, and it comes under regular consideration. It has to compete with other priorities, but I will invite my hon. Friend with responsibilities for these matters to have another look at it.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Secretary of State aware that some of the finest countryside in Scotland will be spoilt if Scottish Power is allowed to go ahead with its interconnector to Northern Ireland? Is he also aware that local people are deeply concerned that Scottish Power had unlimited resources to present its case, while the objectors were severely inhibited by a lack of resources and by the fact that Mr. James McCulloch, the senior reporter, seemed to be bending over backwards in favour of Scottish Power? I hope that the Secretary of State will take that into account when he considers the report from the reporter.

Mr. Lang: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern, but, as he will know, the matter is currently before a public local inquiry, and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment.

Fishing

16. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are estimated annually to fish in Scottish waters (a) commercially and (b) for personal or other reasons; what quantity and value of fish is caught; and if he will make a statement. [13641]

Mr. Kynoch: About 9,400 commercial sea fishermen are employed in Scotland, of whom about 1,300 work part time. Fish landings at Scottish ports in 1993 amounted to some 519,000 tonnes, at around £278 million in value.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend enjoy Scottish fish—particularly Scottish salmon—as much as I do, and as much as the rest of the world? What measures is he taking to increase the supply of Scottish salmon, bearing in mind its great value to the Scottish and, indeed, the British economy?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend properly addresses his question to one of those who know about the matter. In fact, the best Scottish salmon come from the River Dee.

There is much debate about how to preserve salmon stocks in Scottish rivers. Many people are worried about the effect of the north-east drift nets. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, has made representations to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ensure that every effort is made to preserve and increase fish stocks in Scottish rivers.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 98(5) (Welsh Grand Committees),

That the matter of health care in Wales, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Some of the lawyers representing families in the Ayrshire child abuse case have been quoted in the press as saying that Members of Parliament should not raise matters on behalf of their constituents. I represent seven of the social workers involved, and I consider that the action taken by those lawyers constitutes intimidation: they are trying to stop me performing my role as their Member of Parliament. I hope that you will make it clear, Madam Speaker—today or on some other occasion—that not even the most distinguished Scots lawyers can stop Members of Parliament looking after the interests of their constituents.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that, like every other hon. Member, the hon. Gentleman is not intimidated by any such comments made outside the House. All hon. Members have a duty to carry out their responsibilities on behalf of their constituents, and they will certainly be able to do so for as long as I am Speaker.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware, as we all are, that one of the most distressing experiences that our constituents can have is having their homes burgled. Have you seen this morning's report that 1.5 million burglaries take place in Britain every year—more than in any other country in Europe? According to the report, the chances are that, every year, 65 in every 1,000 homes will be burgled, compared with 37 per 1,000 in Holland and 30 per 1,000 in Germany. Is it not time that the Home Secretary dealt with that disgraceful position? Has he asked permission to make a statement to the House?

Madam Speaker: The answer is no. What the hon. Gentleman has raised with me is by no means a point of order; it is a matter that he must pursue through the normal channels.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it possible to quote, in an early-day motion, the words of a respected Member of the other place, who said today:

> "This lot are a complete shower. . .and one of the worst Governments I can remember"

under the Prime Minister's "feeble leadership"? That was said by Lord Whitelaw—

Madam Speaker: Order. I certainly will not give a ruling without notice and without seeing the full context of what the hon. Gentleman intends to put into the early-day motion. If he will let me see that, I shall give my ruling.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Given that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is directly responsible only for the Metropolitan police, has he asked to make a statement about the success of Operation Bumblebee, which has substantially reduced the number of domestic burglaries in London?

Madam Speaker: As I explained to the hon. Gentleman and the House only yesterday or the day before—certainly this week—if any statements are to be made in the House, they will be on the Annunciator screen by lunchtime so that we are all aware that they are going to be made.

School Transport Safety

3.34 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to improve the safety of school transport by imposing stricter standards for school vehicles; by providing for the licensing by local authorities of such vehicles and their drivers; by requiring the supervision of children travelling in school vehicles; and by permitting controls on heavy goods vehicles on school transport routes.

The School Transport Safety Bill is about saving lives—children's lives. First, I want to record my appreciation of the national Belt Up School Kids group, whose secretary, Pat Harris, does an excellent job in campaigning on this issue, and my local branch of that organisation, the Carnwath and Biggar branch, led by Sherley Gallant, the chair; Helen McKenzie, the secretary; and John Pate, the treasurer. I should like to give a special thanks to Shona Cousins, who is also a member of that group. Shona is the mother of Tony Cousins, a young boy who, along with his school colleague Francis Scorgie, died in a school bus accident in my constituency on that terrible and tragic day, 17 February 1994.

My Bill will make seat belts compulsory on all vehicles transporting schoolchildren. It will end the obscenity of three children in two seats. It will empower local authorities to license vehicles and, indeed, to license drivers. It will require supervision of children travelling to and from school in coaches other than by the driver of the vehicle. Equally important, it will control heavy and awkward vehicles using school routes in rural areas where children are travelling to and from school.

The date of February 1994 will live with me for the rest of my life. Two children in my constituency received injuries that caused their death. Those two children left home at 8 o'clock in the morning, as they had done hundreds of times before, but, unfortunately, on that day, they did not return to their families. There has been a great national campaign on the issue and great concern has been expressed about seat belts and the safety of children travelling to and from school. In response to that great concern, on 19 July the then Secretary of State for Transport stated, in answer to a written question, that the Government intended to act ahead of the European Commission and to legislate to make seat belts compulsory on minibuses and coaches. That was welcome. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Minister with responsibility for such matters at the time, is here to listen to the debate.

Unfortunately, eight or nine months have passed since that statement and little or nothing has been done. I am Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation. It set up a Sub-Committee to consider the transport safety aspects and the competency of member states vis-à-vis the European Commission's proposals. We took evidence from the former Minister way back in July. Because nothing had happened, we decided to call the Minister for Transport in London, whom I am pleased to see present, to give evidence. By coincidence, lo and behold, the day before the Minister appeared before that Committee, another statement was issued by the Department of Transport. It mirrored what had been said nine months previously. As happened nine months ago, I did not scorn that statement too much because I welcomed any move that would help to deal with the problem, but I say to the Minister that it is the same as the statement on 19 July. It is too little, too late and it promises to deal with the problem in another 18 months. God knows how many children will lose their lives in that time.

I have argued that seat belts will save lives, but I am not arguing that seat belts are the only thing that we need to have to save those lives. That is why my Bill addresses the problem of supervision. If we have seat belts in coaches, the wearing of them has to be enforced in some way. When there are 30 or 40 children on a coach or bus going to school, they have to be supervised.

It is important to look at the problem of licensing vehicles and it is necessary to have vehicles that are properly designed for the purpose. Equally, it is necessary to license drivers to ensure that they are competent to carry out their task. It is also important to look at the problem of traffic management, especially in rural areas such as my own in Clydesdale, where there are miles and miles of narrow roads on which cumbersome coaches transport children. We have to get rid of the nonsense, the obscenity, of overcrowding where three children sit in two seats. My Bill addresses those points.

I shall close as I began, by saying that the Bill will save lives. In the memory of Francis Scorgie and Tony Cousins, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, Mr. Adam Ingram, Mr. Nigel Griffiths, Mr. George Foulkes, Mr. John Austin-Walker and Mr. Jimmy Wray.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT SAFETY

Mr. Jimmy Hood accordingly presented a Bill to improve the safety of school transport by imposing stricter standards for school vehicles; by providing for the licensing by local authorities of such vehicles and their drivers; by requiring the supervision of children travelling in school vehicles; and by permitting controls on heavy goods vehicles on school transport routes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 88.]

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Jobseekers Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Ordered,

That the Jobseekers Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely New Clauses except New Clause 6, Amendments to the Bill, New Schedules, Amendments to the Schedules to the Bill, and New Clause 6.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

New clause 7

EXPEDITED CLAIMS FOR HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

'.—(1) This section provides for the making of regulations to enable—

(a) information to be passed between authorities, and

(b) priority to be given to certain persons,

with a view to claims for housing or council tax benefit made by or in respect of persons who cease to be entitled to a jobseeker's allowance or income support being dealt with quickly.

(2) In the Administration Act, insert after section 128—

> "*Expedited claims for housing and council tax benefit*
> *Disclosure of information by authorities*
>
> 128A.—(1) Regulations may make provision requiring the disclosure by one authority ("the disclosing authority") to another authority ("the receiving authority"), in prescribed circumstances, of information of a prescribed description obtained by the disclosing authority in respect of persons who have been entitled to a jobseeker's allowance or to income support.
>
> (2) The regulations may in particular provide for—
>
> (a) information to be disclosed—
>
> (i) at the request of the receiving authority;
>
> (ii) at the request of any person who falls within a prescribed category; or
>
> (iii) otherwise than in response to such a request;
>
> (b) the period within which information is to be disclosed; and
>
> (c) information to be disclosed only if it has been obtained by the disclosing authority in the exercise of any of their functions in relation to housing benefit or council tax benefit."

(3) In section 63 of the Administration Act (adjudication of claims for housing benefit or council tax benefit), insert after subsection (2)—

> "(2A) Regulations may make provision requiring authorities to whom claims for housing benefit or council tax benefit are made by, or in respect of, persons who have been entitled to a jobseeker's allowance or to income support to give priority, in prescribed circumstances, to those claims over other claims for any such benefit.".'.—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause deals with the mechanics of implementing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's November uprating statement that housing benefit and council tax benefit would run on for four weeks after returning to work for those unemployed or lone parents who have been on jobseeker's allowance or income support for six months or more. It is the Government's intention that that run-on should begin from the outset of the implementation of JSA becoming payable in April 1996. For the purposes of the period beginning in April 1996, it is envisaged that six months on unemployment benefit or income support previously would count.

This is designed to deal with the major concern of those who are moving off benefits and on to work as to whether they will be able to pay the rent in the initial period of their return to work. This is quite an expensive measure. It will cost £50 million a year and it is anticipated that it will benefit about 440,000 individuals a year.

If this measure is to work, the mechanics must be in place to ensure that there is a smooth run-on. The first two subsections of new clause 7 deal with the situation that occurs when jobseekers move from one local authority where they have been receiving housing benefit to another local authority to obtain work. The purpose of the two subsections is to give a regulatory power to require information to be exchanged between local authorities.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Under-Secretary confirm that the measure will give protection to share fishermen, who may have to wait some time before they receive their share—in other words, their wages—from the landings of a vessel? The hon. Gentleman may smile. I am talking about only a few men, but this is important.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman sees me smiling, but I mean no disrespect towards the problems of share fishermen. They have received special treatment throughout the passage of the legislation, as they have for many years. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman off the top of my head the precise way in which the rule applies to them, but I shall write to him on the issue.

The first two subsections of the clause deal with the regulatory power to require information to be exchanged and the third with the regulatory power to require authorities to give priority to jobseekers. Local authorities are already under a legal obligation to determine all housing benefit and council tax benefit claims within 14 days of receipt of the necessary information. The powers in the clause will not change that, nor will they prevent local authorities from treating any particular claim as a matter of extreme urgency. They will afford a general priority for determining claims by jobseekers.

To complete the picture, I should explain that we also plan to introduce a financial incentive and penalty scheme to encourage all local authorities to process quickly new claims from those claiming this most important run-on. Additional or reduced subsidy will be paid to local authorities according to whether they process claims effectively.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I shall be brief, as I do not wish to delay the Report stage. This is not the place to go into the detail of the new jobseeker's allowance. We welcome the measure, which will speed up the administration of benefits for people moving in and out of work. A major bone of contention has been that delay has often led to financial difficulties—particularly, as the Under-Secretary said, with rent payments—and any measure to speed the process up is welcome.

I am also pleased about the Under-Secretary's assurances that subsection (1)(b)—which enables

"priority to be given to certain persons"—

does not in any way undermine the general administration of benefit claims. One may feel on seeing words such as "priority" that other people are being de-prioritised and pushed down a waiting list. I welcome the Under-Secretary's assurances that the Government intend to ensure that all such claims are dealt with speedily and efficiently. I am sure that local authorities throughout the country will respond to that request.

There are good and bad practices in such administration, and we want to ensure that all authorities use the best possible good practice. This measure in no way seeks to undermine that intention. People who clearly need a speedy response from the benefit system must not get that response at the expense of other people who have an equal need for such a speedy response, and we must ensure that we do not bring hardship to particular claimants. I am pleased that the Government have introduced the new clause, the need for which they identified in Committee.

Mr. Roger Evans: I confirm that share fishermen will be among those eligible to benefit from the proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 2

SICK OR DISABLED PERSONS

'.—(1) Regulations under section 4(5) shall provide for the applicable amount, in a case where as a result of a physical or mental disability the claimant has to incur additional costs for the purpose of complying with the terms of a jobseeker's agreement or a jobseeker's direction, to include an amount in respect of those costs.

(2) Regulations under subsections (2) and (3) of section 6 may, in particular, provide for any difficulties or discrimination faced by disabled persons in seeking or obtaining employment to be taken into account.

(3) Regulations under section 6(2)(a) and (c) may, in particular, provide that a person who has made and is pursuing an appeal against the determination of an adjudication officer that he is not incapable of work and whose medical practitioner, or another person with a prescribed qualification, supplies evidence of his continuing incapacity for work shall be treated as available for and actively seeking employment pending the determination of his appeal.

(4) For the purposes of sections 7 and 8, in any case where—

- (a) the claimant's availability for employment is restricted as a result of a physical or mental disability or partial incapacity, or
- (b) it was determined in accordance with the provisions of Part XIIA of the Benefits Act that he was incapable of all work for any period during the eight weeks preceding his claim,

the employment officer, as defined in section 7(15), shall be a person designated by the Secretary of State as a disability employment adviser.

(5) Regulations under section 16(3) may, in particular, provide for an income-based jobseeker's allowance, which would otherwise be prevented from being paid by section 15, to be payable at a prescribed rate where the claimant or his partner is sick or disabled.

(6) In this section—

- (a) "jobseeker's direction" has the same meaning as in section 15;
- (b) "partner" has such meaning as may be prescribed; and
- (c) "sick or disabled" has such meaning as may be prescribed.'.—*[Mr. Bradley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Bradley: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 2 deals with some of the problems which thousands more disabled people who will be expected to sign on for jobseeker's allowance will face as a result of the more restrictive test for incapacity benefit. It would help the Employment Service to administer the new system.

[Mr. Bradley]

It is important to put our concerns in context. It is estimated that 190,000 disabled people will come off invalidity benefit and that an additional 55,000 people will fail to qualify for incapacity benefit in the first year of the jobseeker's allowance. That means that an additional 245,000 who have substantial disabilities are expected to sign on as unemployed and claim JSA. Not only will many of those people face a lower level of income than they would have received under incapacity benefit, but many will receive less than they would have received under the current unemployment benefit. For example, for a 40-year-old woman there is a difference of up to £18.60 a week between the higher rate of incapacity benefit at £65.05 and unemployment benefit, currently at £46.45.

Let us consider why many groups of people will be worse off under JSA than under unemployment benefit. The Labour party believes that there are five key reasons for that. First, contributory JSA will be paid for only six, instead of for 12, months. That is at the heart of the Bill. It is an attempt to cut contributory benefit from 12 months to six months and to move people after six months on to means-tested benefit, so extending the poverty trap and forcing people to be means-tested earlier. At the same time, the Government are increasing national insurance contributions from 9 to 10 per cent. In other words, people will pay more and get less out of the national insurance contributory system.

The rationale for the change is that the majority of claimants have only a short spell of unemployment lasting six months or less. However, the evidence strongly suggests that that is not the case for disabled people. Research by the social and community planning research department found that half of the disabled people who were actively looking for work had been doing so for a year and that a further third had been doing so for three years. That hardly bears out the Government's view that people come off the dole within six months.

Secondly, contributory JSA will be reduced pound for pound where people receive an occupational or private pension of more than £50 a week. Previously, that applied to pensions of more than £35 a week paid to people over the age of 55. The new rule could adversely affect some disabled people who are taken off incapacity benefit if they receive payment from a previous employer in recognition of their ill health or disability. Contributory JSA could be reduced or lost completely. A 50-year-old man with an occupational pension of £60 a week will lose £10 a week from his contributory JSA. Under unemployment benefit, the payment would not have been reduced because he was aged under 55.

Thirdly, no increase will be payable for a non-working partner unless the partner looks after children or is aged over 60. Removing the dependence allowance for a non-working spouse or partner means that contributory JSA will amount to a personal allowance only. Another good example is that of a 34-year-old man who has an injury at work which prevents him from working, for which he receives a lump sum compensation of £20,000. He has two children and a wife who cares for the children. He would receive £127.45 per week incapacity benefit, which includes an allowance for adult and child dependants.

If that person moved to unemployment benefit, he would receive £74.50, which would include an allowance for his wife. Under the jobseeker's allowance, however, he would receive only the basic rate of £46.50—a staggering difference of £80.96 per week between incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance. His savings of £20,000 as compensation for his injury would preclude him from the means-tested jobseeker's allowance, leaving him with only his six months contributory jobseeker's allowance.

Fourthly, the contributory jobseeker's allowance is limited to six months, thus bringing in means-tested benefits sooner. An earlier means test could bite especially hard for people with income or savings above the limit. The change could affect disabled women disproportionately, especially if they are leaving incapacity benefit, as they are more likely than male claimants to have a partner who is working full time, which would exclude them from the means-tested jobseeker's allowance. The savings limit of more than £8,000 could exclude disabled people with capital from compensation for personal injuries.

Fifthly and finally, on the rationale, disabled people may incur additional costs in their job search because of their disability. In Committee, Ministers said that they would consider the extra expenses incurred by disabled jobseekers and I will return to that matter later.

That is the context within which our new clause is framed. It is an attempt to tackle the consequences of those fundamental changes in unemployment benefit and the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is odd for the House to be debating this issue, which affects the sick and the disabled in particular, at the same time as the Government are proclaiming their conversion to new rights for disabled people in their flawed Disability Discrimination Bill, which will be coming before the House next week?

Mr. Bradley: Throughout our deliberations on Report, we shall be looking closely at the interface between people with disabilities and unemployment and at the Government's Bill on discrimination, which clearly does not go any way towards tackling the real needs of disabled people in the workplace, especially as regards small employers. We shall consider that carefully and in detail as the day progresses.

The purpose of the new clause is to alleviate some of the consequences of the new Bill. First, it will help with additional costs in complying with the jobseeker's agreement or direction.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): How much?

Mr. Bradley: Since I have not uttered one word about what the proposal is intended to do, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to proceed, I shall return to that question.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman said that there would be a figure for additional costs and I am asking what it would be.

Mr. Bradley: If the hon. Gentleman reads the new clause, he will see that its purpose is to prescribe in regulations the extent to which the Government will help disabled people. We are flagging up the intention that that should be done through regulation and we do not prescribe the amount in the new clause. To answer the question directly, if the new clause helps disabled people back into employment and gets them off benefits, at worst, its effects will be neutral and the measure will probably result in a saving to the social security budget.

The purpose is to help people with the additional costs of complying with the jobseeker's agreement or direction. Disabled people may face additional costs.

Mr. Heald: What are they?

Mr. Bradley: The costs to a disabled person.

Mr. Heald: Yes, what are they?

Mr. Bradley: I shall explain. If the hon. Gentleman listens carefully when I describe the type of cost that we are dealing with, he might be able to put a figure on it himself.

The additional cost of job seeking for disabled people, compared with able-bodied people, may include travel to interviews, speculative visits to employers or even visits to the Employment Service. For example, people with sensory impairments may need assistance in approaching employers by telephone or letter, or in looking for advertisements. They may need to be accompanied to an interview by a signer. Under the Government's access to work scheme, payments may be made for equipment, adaptation to premises or transport costs to help disabled people in work. However, like the disability working allowance, it is limited to people who are already in work, so offers of help to someone trying to find a job in the first place are not available. In Committee, the Minister of State, Department of Employment showed some sympathy with the argument that disabled people faced additional costs when searching for a job, and I look forward to a positive response from her when she winds up the debate.

4 pm

Secondly, the new clause provides for difficulties of discrimination faced by disabled people in seeking or obtaining employment. In the first year of the jobseeker's allowance, an estimated 190,000 people coming off incapacity benefit will have considerable difficulties in sustaining job search activities. Except for a minority regarded as incapable of work, most incapacity benefit claimants must score at least 15 points in a test of physical or mental functions, or at least 10 points in a test of mental ability alone. The arbitrary cut-off at 15, taking no other factors into account, means that a score of 14, which confirms a substantial disability, would disqualify someone from incapacity benefit.

In addition, DSS research reports Nos. 19 and 20 into invalidity benefit conclude that the constraints arising from disability or health problems disadvantage disabled people in the labour market relative to other jobseekers. Likely to face most difficulty are those over the age of 50 with a background in manual work and no qualifications. Similarly, research by Scope shows that an able-bodied job applicant is six times more likely to receive a positive response from an employer than a disabled applicant.

The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) referred earlier, fails to deal with the extent of employment discrimination as small employers are excluded from its provisions. It is therefore important that both a person's disability and the existence of discrimination be taken into account by the Employment Service when drawing up a jobseeker's agreement, considering what steps should be taken when a disabled person is actively seeking work and in imposing a jobseeker's direction.

Thirdly, where someone appeals against a decision that he or she is capable of work and where evidence of continuing incapacity is provided, the new clause provides that the person should be treated automatically as available for, and actively seeking, work. Currently, people who appeal against a decision that they are capable for work can, pending their appeal, either sign on or claim income support without signing on. Pending an appeal hearing, income support rules allow someone to claim without being required to be available for work where the person's GP continues to supply evidence of incapacity for work.

In Committee on 23 February, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security announced that, as from April 1995, all new incapacity benefit claimants who appeal against a decision that they are capable of work will, if they are not signing on, be subject to a 20 per cent. reduction in their basic rate of income support. That new measure is a harsh, worrying and unnecessary appeal penalty. As well as the prospect of living on an income that will be severely reduced from £46.50 to £37.20 a week for a single person, people in that position are likely to be left with a gap in their national insurance credits unless they win their appeal. Furthermore, that new rule will push more people towards the Employment Service to sign on and have a further impact on the administration of the jobseeker's allowance.

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend may remember that in Committee the Minister said that those who decided to sign on and therefore said that they were available for work would not be prejudiced in their appeal against the original decision that they were fit to work. Has he heard anything since to convince him that that rather weak assurance is worth while?

Mr. Bradley: The silence from the Government on that is deafening. I hope that the Minister will be able to offer us further assurances because disability organisations have been horrified at the new measure. I am sure that they have expressed their protests already to the Department of Social Security, locally and nationally. The benefit penalty is particularly harsh and I am sure that the Minister will be urged by hon. Members on both sides of the House to reconsider it.

Subsection (4) would ensure that where a person's

> "availability for employment is restricted as a result of a physical or mental disability"

or that person was incapable of work in the previous eight weeks before his claim, he should be seen by a disability employment adviser. The White Paper on the jobseeker's allowance and the Department of Employment's press release, dated 14 February 1995, stated:

> "All jobseekers whose physical and mental condition limits their availability will be able to restrict the type or hours of work for which they are available in line with their condition."

However, the current law goes wider than that. The disabled person may need to restrict not just the type or the hours of work, because evidence suggests that a range of factors may be important in restricting the kind of work that someone could reasonably be expected to do.

[Mr. Bradley]

Disabled people signing on may need to place considerable restrictions on their availability for particular types of jobs and the method and distance of the journey to work.

According to the 14 February press release, an additional £71 million will be made available in the next three years as a number of people are expected to come off incapacity benefit and sign on. It is unclear how well those resources will be used. I hope that the Minister will be able to give further details about that when she replies.

Disabled people will need qualified advice and assistance to help with their job search. The new clause would ensure that, from the outset, the person entering into a jobseeker's agreement with the disabled person was someone from the Department of Employment's advisory service. That person would have specialist knowledge of disabilities. Unless more specialist resources are made available, assistance for increased numbers of disabled jobseekers could be considerably reduced, because we are already aware of a waiting list of disabled people seeking assistance from the Employment Service.

Finally, the new clause deals with hardship payments to disabled people. The Bill includes new powers to increase the use of sanctions against people who "break the benefit rules". In that context, it is important that any sanctions are applied fairly and reasonably to disabled people, so that those sanctions do not disadvantage them in any further way. At present, if someone is disqualified from unemployment benefit he receives a reduced amount of income support—up to 40 per cent. less than the designated amount. Under the jobseeker's allowance, there is no automatic payment, even of a reduced amount. Paragraph 4.39 of the White Paper on the jobseeker's allowance states:

> "Although payments will not normally be available during the first two weeks of a benefit sanction, exceptions will be made for disabled people and carers."

The Bill does not suggest how such people could be identified.

In Committee, the Minister said that the Government would use

> "definitions used in the regulations which currently apply to those who fail the actively-seeking-work test in income support. . .all claimants undergoing a sanction, even those in the vulnerable groups, must demonstrate hardship before they receive a payment."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 21 February 1995; c. 530.]

There is no guarantee of payment, even for vulnerable groups, as only 48 per cent. of those applying for hardship payments under those rules were awarded payments.

The new clause allows for provision to be made for sick and disabled people in that context. Given the additional costs that confront disabled people, any reduction in benefit is likely to have a massive impact. It could be argued that benefit reduction should be far less than 40 per cent., or that the benefit rate should be paid in full if the claimant or the partner has a disability.

In conclusion, I can do no better than to quote the opinions expressed by Sir Peter Large of the Association of Disabled Professionals, who said:

> "Rather than seek some open-ended commitment to cover any number of undefined extra costs that a disabled person might incur in seeking work"—

I refer here to the intervention of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald)—the new clause is

> "Government-friendly in that it allows specific additional expenses to be closely prescribed in detail in regulations."

I hope that, in that spirit, the Government will consider the new clause and realise that it is intended to help disabled people return to work and so reduce their dependence on benefits. I hope that, as the measures could be prescribed by the Government in regulation, they will look on it with favour.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends would agree that, as the legislation is framed and the regulations under it are considered, sensitive consideration is needed of the position and needs of the long-term sick and of disabled people. We need to think very carefully about the appropriate interplay between the incapacity benefit system and the jobseeker's allowance.

A great many people will be affected by the changes, and a great many vulnerable people, as the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) told us. It is anticipated that about 220,000 people who are now in receipt of invalidity benefit may fail to qualify for incapacity benefit and about 55,000 new claimants who would have qualified for invalidity benefit will not qualify for incapacity benefit. Perhaps 190,000 people will in due course come off invalidity benefit or incapacity benefit to go on to jobseeker's allowance. We are talking of large numbers of people.

The sick and the disabled have a very real apprehension—it is one that I share—that significant numbers of them will not be sick enough to qualify for incapacity benefit but will not be fit enough to qualify for jobseeker's allowance. They will not be able to satisfy the rigorous requirements for availability and actively seeking work.

The test that is being instituted to enable people to qualify for incapacity benefit has an absolutist character, whereas the realities of the labour market are highly complex. It seems to me that that disjunction of approaches will inevitably throw up difficulties. We cannot realistically isolate, in some objective sense, individuals' capacity to work. Their capacity for work in truth depends on the circumstances in which they find themselves; on the interaction of their life history and their unique configuration of abilities with the circumstances around them and the conditions in the labour market. I am sure that my right hon. Friends will want to develop the system to provide real and effective bridges between those two regimes.

I commend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the suggestion made by the Disablement Income Group, which appears constructive and practical, that the disability employment advisers should be involved in reconsidering cases in which people have narrowly failed to qualify for incapacity benefit as a result of taking the medical test. It would be good if those marginal cases could be reviewed and referred back to the Benefits Agency medical service for another look. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will think about that.

I also hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish—as they suggested they would during our debates last year on the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill—to look systematically at the linking rules. There are generous linking rules for the disability working allowance. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to consider the matter carefully and with open minds.

4.15 pm

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting comparison with the disability working allowance, but surely he will admit that few people have been able to claim that allowance simply because it is available only when they have already overcome the major hurdle of obtaining work. Does he have any views on what problems might be caused in the administration of the benefits by the sheer numbers who will be in the system once incapacity benefit is introduced and both processes begin to bite?

Mr. Howarth: There are, perhaps, two points. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench have been somewhat disappointed by the take-up of the disability working allowance and have taken steps to liberalise the rules for DWA to encourage, and make it possible for, more people to benefit from it. I very much agree with the hon. Lady that, given the numbers of people who will be in the hinterland between incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance, a great many demands will be placed on administration. That is an extremely important consideration.

Last year the Government undertook to look systematically and carefully at linking rules and the progression from one benefit to another of disabled people. I hope that the Government will apply that approach when considering the relationship between incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance. We shall need to have flexibility and it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that there is not a gulf between the two benefits into which vulnerable people can fall and find themselves altogether without benefit.

I am unclear whether the rules that allow sick or disabled people to restrict their availability for work—taking reasonable account of where the job may be located or the conditions of work in a particular employment—are to be carried through to the jobseeker's allowance. Hon. Members must forgive me if the matter has already been dealt with in Committee, but if it has not been clarified, it would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment could cast some light on it.

It is tremendously important that the jobseeker's agreement takes account of the needs of an individual disabled person. The agreement must, of course, take account of the individual needs of any claimant, but that is particularly important for disabled people. I hope that we may have some reassurance on that point. I have a more radical suggestion for my hon. Friend the Minister. I am encouraged to see her turning round in her place and smiling at me. I smile on her and wonder whether, in her present benign mood, with the milk of human kindness coursing through her, she feels able to agree to allow the long-term sick and disabled to receive the contributory jobseeker's allowance for 12 months instead of six.

It is important to recognise that, as we are all too well aware, there are fewer jobs available for the disabled, regardless of discrimination. In the nature of things, it is harder for many disabled people to find work. However arduously and determinedly they look for work, typically, it takes them longer to find work. The hon. Member for Withington cited research carried out by Patricia Prescott-Clarke who found that half of those disabled people who were actively seeking work had been looking for more than one year and that one third had been seeking work for more than three years. Could the Minister find some margin in the public finances which would allow them to receive contributory benefit for 12 months instead of six? It would make an enormous difference to them and to their families.

I would also like a more lenient sanctions regime to apply to the disabled—just as I would like it to apply to many others. Surely the disabled should be able to refuse work or training that is not suited to their needs.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has raised an important point, based on its extensive practical experience in the field, concerning problems that arise with medical evidence. Fundholding general practitioners and consultants are increasingly asked to provide certificates of one sort or another, which we recognise can create practical problems for them. As a result of those increasing pressures, it appears that more of them have begun to charge for the provision of evidence. A report from one citizens advice bureau states:

> "In the last six tribunals I have undertaken for patients of our local fundholding GP a charge of £15 per letter has been levied."

In another case, a GP was requested to provide evidence to support a disability living allowance review. He replied with a 16-line letter giving a brief history of the client's condition and an attached note saying that the fee for the enclosed report was £50. Another rather brief report stated:

> "This patient is suffering from backache."

It was accompanied by a bill for £22.

As I understand it, when the Employment Service seeks medical evidence it will meet the cost involved. However, when an individual claimant wishes to support a claim for restricting his or her availability for work, it is uncertain whether that person would have to pay the cost of producing the evidence in order to satisfy the Employment Service. I hope that the Government will undertake to pay such fees when the Employment Service insists on the provision of evidence.

There is an alternative approach which does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Department of Social Security or the Department of Employment, but is a matter for another Government Department. The terms and conditions of general practitioners could be altered to make provision of that service obligatory for GPs in discharging their ordinary duties. It is an urgent practical point which must be addressed.

The hon. Member for Withington referred to the difficulties that disabled people face in appealing against a decision to disallow disability benefit. They can either accept income support with a 20 per cent. cut or they can sign on to claim jobseeker's allowance. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's point that those measures should be unnecessary. If convincing evidence must be produced at an appeal, that should operate fairly effectively to discourage frivolous appeals. I am concerned that a single person would see his or her income reduced from £46.70 to £37.20 per week.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the prejudice of sick and disabled people's national insurance credits. They face either those penalties or the rigours of actively

[Mr. Howarth]

seeking work when they may be in genuine difficulty and when their appeal may be upheld and they may be accepted as being unfit for work.

In conclusion, let me revert to a point that I touched on earlier. We need to see the system and the needs of claimants as a continuum. I am worried that we shall end up with an all or nothing position in which people are judged absolutely as either sick or fit. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be willing to reconsider another suggestion that the Disablement Income Group has consistently advanced and which has great merit—the case for a partial incapacity benefit. That would help to ensure that we have the necessary spectrum of provision.

At present, there is a real danger that people may fall into a gulf in which there is no protection. Some disabled people may be taken out of the benefits system altogether either because they fall into the gulf between incapacity benefit and the jobseeker's allowance or, because of earlier means testing under the jobseeker's allowance, for reasons that the House well understands, because they end up not receiving jobseeker's allowance.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I also fear that disabled people will suffer under the new jobseeker's allowance. Other hon. Members have spoken about incapacity benefit, but that will be up and running when the jobseeker's allowance comes in. According to the Government's own figures, some 220,000 people will be debarred from invalidity and incapacity benefit and told that they are fit for work.

I am afraid also—and I should like some clarification from the Minister—that people will not be able to get the jobseeker's allowance because they are not available for work, so they will fall between the two benefits of jobseeker's allowance and incapacity benefit. That is already happening with invalidity benefit and unemployment benefit. The citizens advice bureaux in particular have drawn attention to many cases in which people are debarred from getting invalidity benefit and cannot get any other benefit because they are not capable of work.

What does the Minister envisage that the Employment Service will do about the influx of people? Other hon. Members have raised that issue. I do not know whether the Employment Service will be able to cope with the 220,000 people in the Government's estimated figures. How will it cope with the fluctuating physical conditions or mild mental health problems of some of the people who will be applying for benefit?

At the moment, disability employment advisers deal mainly with people with severe disabilities and they are not used to dealing with people with mild mental health problems. A great deal more money will be required to train those advisers and many more advisers will be needed.

The Minister stated that £71 million will be made available for training staff dealing with the jobseeker's allowance. I should like more clarification on whether that money will be only for disability employment advisers or whether it will also include those who will be involved in the jobseeker's allowance. We need to know whether they will also receive specific training. Is the £71 million just for disabled people, or does it go further? We have not had much guidance from the Government on how that £71 million will be split up. I greatly fear that they will make do with the present number of disability employment advisers in order to save money.

We all know that people are falling through the net at present and it would be an absolute disaster for the jobseeker's allowance if it got worse.

We have heard already that anyone who decides to appeal against a decision to withdraw or refuse incapacity benefit is faced with an impossible dilemma. They either get income support at a reduced rate of 20 per cent. or they sign on. We need definite clarification from the Minister as to whether signing on at the employment exchange will mean that they are debarred from getting benefit or that it will hinder their appeal. In Committee, the Minister justified the penalty clause on the ground that it would reduce the number of appeals, but everyone should have the right to appeal against being debarred from a benefit. The Minister did not make it clear whether signing on would count. There have been many contradictory statements, so clarification is needed.

4.30 pm

Disabled people are disadvantaged in society. Next week we will debate the Disability Discrimination Bill—but I do not believe that it will help a great deal. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) spoke of the need to obtain medical evidence to support a claim of being unable to perform certain jobs because of disability. Will the Government meet the cost of obtaining that evidence? Will the Employment Service make an allowance? Otherwise, there will be a disincentive to appeal. People should be made to feel that they can appeal against a decision and not be denied that course because of the cost.

The cost must also be met where a disabled person finds it more difficult to meet the expense of travelling to and from a new job, as well as all the other costs that he or she might incur in meeting a new job commitment. I agree with new clause 2 and hope that the Government will accept it.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) asked a number of pertinent questions, but she could have elicited answers to many of them if she or any other Liberal Democrat had taken the trouble to serve on the Committee that considered the Bill.

Ms Lynne: No doubt the hon. Gentleman is aware that I served on the Committee considering the Disability Discrimination Bill, so was unable to be on two Committees at the same time. As I am my party's social security and disability spokesperson, I should have served on the Committee considering the Jobseekers Bill, but I served on the other.

Mr. Hill: To conclude this slight spat, both the Government and my party were able to place social security and employment spokespersons on the Committee considering this Bill, and I imagine that the Liberal Democrats have an employment spokesperson.

Figures released by the unemployment unit today show that the number of jobless people losing benefit has doubled in the past 12 months, which fully justifies fears repeatedly expressed by the Opposition that the jobseeker's allowance legislation is paving the way to a harsher and more repressive regime in the Employment Service. There is deep anxiety on these Benches that new toughness will work to the special disadvantage of the most vulnerable claimants—the sick and disabled, who will be presenting themselves in vastly increased numbers at jobcentres.

Incapacity benefit will replace invalidity benefit on 13 April, when it is estimated that more than 200,000 ex-claimants will fail the new test of incapacity and will be treated as capable of working. There is widespread evidence that a clampdown is already operating in the run-up to incapacity benefit. Streatham citizens advice bureau has seen significant growth in recent months in the number of cases where DSS medical boards are finding people fit for work and discontinuing their invalidity benefit. Trades Union Congress unemployment centres are reporting a tenfold growth in appeals against loss of invalidity benefit over the past 12 months.

One of the purposes of the new clause is to make some provision for the extra costs that are faced by disabled people, in satisfying the availability and actively seeking work requirements of the proposed legislation. I want to say a word in support of that proposal, but before I do, I ask for a specific assurance from the Government with regard to the costs of supporting medical evidence. I mentioned the experience of Streatham citizens advice bureau, of the recent growth in judgments against invalidity benefit claimants by DSS medical boards. Apparently, where claimants wish to appeal against such judgments, some doctors are now charging for the medical reports necessary for appeal, regardless of the patients' ability to pay. I find that a distressing and unfair development. It does not auger well for the new arrangements under the jobseeker's agreement where a person is seeking to restrict his or her availability for work on health grounds and needs to produce supporting medical evidence.

In Committee, the Minister appeared to offer an undertaking that no charge would be made to a claimant where the Employment Service requested such evidence. That form of words appeared at the same time, however, to exclude provision for such evidence to be free when it is the claimant who requests it. I seek an assurance that where either the Department or the claimant requests evidence with regard to limits on work, on health grounds, it will be free at the point of supply.

I notice that the Minister is shaking her head. I hope that, by the conclusion of my observations on this matter or at the end of the debate, a more generous spirit will have surged through her and that that assurance will be offered.

In more general terms, it is obvious that the sick and disabled usually face greater living costs than other people as a result of their illnesses and disabilities. In Committee, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security offered to consider the possibility of making provision for specific travel, interview or search costs incurred by disabled people in search of work. I hope that the Minister will be able to undertake to include such provision on the face of the Bill later.

The new clause also removes the new appeal penalty that was introduced in Committee, which is explicitly designed to act as a disincentive to appeals against the withdrawal of incapacity benefit. Rather than penalising those who exercise the right of appeal, it seems more reasonable to increase the resources available for dealing with appeals. The truth is that although many will choose to sign on while appealing, not least to preserve their national insurance record, those who feel least able to work will be penalised the most. Not only will the withdrawal of incapacity benefit in itself reduce their income but they now face a further loss of income of at least £9 a week. I commend the proposal in the new clause that will at least ensure that disabled people are treated as available for work for the duration of their appeal.

It is a grave cause for concern in my view to force the sick and disabled out of benefit as a result of illness and on to lower benefits and the highly notional job market. When I visited my local CAB recently, I was told of the pressures experienced by an arthritis sufferer. She had been forced out of her old job by her disability and was told by the DSS to apply for a job as a cleaner. Another client, more than 60 years of age, who had been out of work for years, also because of arthritis, faced the loss of invalidity benefit. Where is the fairness or common sense in that?

Even more worrying is the situation of those suffering from non-physical disabilities under the new arrangements. Let me cite two further cases dealt with by the Streatham CAB in recent months that illustrate the problems that are likely to be faced by those suffering from mental illness. In one case—that of a controlled schizophrenic—the DSS suggested that that person could be employed, again, as a cleaner. It is interesting that in this new world of work that is being opened up and the wonderful, flexible labour market that is being created by the Government, the characteristic job that seems to be on offer to those about to move into the labour market is that of cleaner.

Another case, also passed to me by the Streatham CAB, concerned a severely alcoholic man, part of whose brain had been affected by alcoholism. He too faced the threat of losing his invalidity benefit. The CAB helped both those people to win on appeal, but that is no basis for complacency. People with mental illness are the least able to help themselves, and could be said to suffer from one of the least easily provable illnesses. They are in great danger of being disadvantaged by the new tough regime that the Bill presages.

Ms Eagle: Is not another factor the time that it takes for appeals to be heard, and the disadvantages that someone considering an appeal may suffer in the interim?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend is entirely right. My local CAB has given distressing examples of the enormous difficulties experienced by its clients in obtaining benefits—or any form of income—during that period.

People suffering from mental illness are most likely to be pressurised into job search activity that may be unsuitable or even detrimental to their health. There is a danger that a number of long-term sick and disabled people will find themselves squeezed out of the benefit system altogether. New clause 2 is designed to offer some safeguards against the risk posed by this worrying, repressive and mean-spirited legislation.

Dr. Godman: I support new clause 2. I hope that the Minister will be able to clear up some ambiguities relating to transfer from invalidity to incapacity benefit and thence—in some cases—to the jobseeker's allowance.

The hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said that some 200,000 people were in receipt of invalidity benefit. If I have misquoted either of them, I shall of course give way.

Ms Lynne: According to the Government's own estimate, 220,000 people will be ineligible for invalidity benefit or incapacity benefit.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for that clarification. I wonder whether the statistics include the approximately 80,000 women aged between 60 and 65 whose invalidity benefit has been suspended by the Department until such time as the European Court of Justice offers an opinion in the test case of Mrs. Graham.

Mrs. Graham appealed against the suspension of her invalidity benefit. A commissioner by the name of Skinner—I am sure that he is no relation to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—found in her favour, but the Department challenged his finding and went to the English Court of Appeal, whose judges sent the commissioner's decision to the European Court of Justice. I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify the position; I am sure that she is wonderfully clear about the issue of the 80,000 women who are currently in a curious state of limbo.

In a letter sent to me last week, the Secretary of State assured me, and I believe him, that if the opinion of the European Court of Justice—for that is what it offers: opinions—is accepted by the English Court of Appeal, he will ensure that women caught in this appalling trap will receive invalidity benefit backdated to, I believe, 1 April 1992. I welcome that commitment from the Secretary of State. I know that the Minister cannot speculate on the likely outcome of a case that is to begin in Luxembourg on 6 April, I think, with the oral evidence of Mrs. Graham's QC, a gentleman by the name of Drabble. The Minister will readily acknowledge that the Government have a fairly honourable record in honouring European Court of Justice decisions that go against the legislation, policies and procedures of the United Kingdom.

Of those 80,000 women, some 3,000 or more live in Northern Ireland, several thousand live in Scotland and about 400 live in my constituency. What will happen to such women if they are paid invalidity benefit as a result of the intervention of the European Court of Justice? Presumably, they will be assessed for incapacity benefit, even though some of them are aged between 60 and 65—some of them, of course, will be aged over 65. If those who are aged under 65 years move to incapacity benefit, will some of them then be assessed for the jobseeker's allowance? It would help if that could be clarified.

4.45 pm

A small number of those women have visited me at my surgery. I readily acknowledge that I organised a take-up campaign in Scotland on behalf of such women. I hope to organise such a campaign in Northern Ireland because those women are being miserably treated by the Government.

Incidentally, Commissioner Skinner decided that the Government were in contravention of a European Community directive. I cannot remember its classification, but it was obviously an equality directive. It will help if persons who will be directly affected by the legislation know what the position will be if the case goes Mrs. Graham's way, as, naturally, I sincerely hope that it will, or if the Government's case is accepted by the European Court of Justice.

It is unfair that those women have been treated in this way. I readily acknowledge that, in cases of hardship, such women can have the benefit restored, as has happened to some of my women constituents. Some 800 women throughout England, Scotland and Wales have had the benefit restored on the ground of hardship. A small number of women in Northern Ireland have also had their benefit restored on that ground, which they had to prove. It would be extremely helpful if such women were informed, especially given the imminence of the case. As the Secretary of State told my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) in another letter, no opinion will be offered by the court until July, but those women are coming to hon. Members' surgeries—they are certainly coming to mine—and asking what their likely position will be if the court offers an opinion in favour of Mrs. Graham or, on the bleak side, if it offers an opinion that supports the Government.

This matter is important because we are talking about scores of thousands of women. It would be remiss of hon. Members to ignore their sparse circumstances in a debate on the new clause, which seeks, however directly or indirectly, to protect people who have suffered long bouts of sickness. Also, some of my constituents and many other women in Scotland, who are so affected and who have been in touch with me, have contributed to such benefits. They have a right to demand from the Government some sort of indication of where they will stand in the near future vis-à-vis the test case which will shortly begin its proceedings at the European Court of Justice.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): We have had an interesting debate and I think that there is a genuine shared concern on both sides of the House that we should ensure that when we introduce the jobseeker's allowance, people with disabilities, having been refused incapacity benefit—as it will then be—will not fall between two stools. The main concern that has informed contributions to the debate—with the exception of the specific question raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) to which I shall return later—has been that people should not be caught and fall down some black hole. That was the main thrust of the speech made by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne).

I can reassure the House, as I reassured the Committee on several occasions, that we are concerned to ensure that people do not fall between two stools. It is important to understand—I say this particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth)—that when people sign on for JSA, rather than for income support, they will be able to place restrictions on their availability, on the type of work that they are able to do and even on their job search activities. They will be able to include such restrictions as arise as a result of their condition. I shall go into a little more detail about how we will make those judgments later.

Ms Eagle: When the Minister does go into detail, will she explain how the jobseeker's agreement will tie into that and what would happen if there were no agreement? Will she also refer particularly to whether specialist advisers will be on hand to interpret the practical effects of some conditions which ordinary Employment Service staff may not always appreciate?

Miss Widdecombe: Those are all important questions and I can answer most of them in a positive way which I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome.

In Committee, I made available copies of the draft jobseeker's agreement. I demonstrated that there are questions on that agreement which ask, for example, about the hours that somebody is willing to work. If somebody's condition is such that they are able to do some work—one would presume that to be the case since they have been turned down for incapacity benefit—but are not able to work a full working week, which we define as 40 hours for the purposes of JSA, they would be able to agree with the Employment Service adviser, not the disability employment adviser, some restrictions on the hours. There is then a catch-all section which says:

> "Other agreed restrictions on . . . availability".

That is a section to which people with disabilities might wish to add extra points that are not necessarily to do with hours or the type of work. It is important to understand that the jobseeker's agreement is meant to be tailored.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon said that any applicant should be able to have his circumstances taken into account in all reasonable conditions. That is a view to which we would subscribe. I spent some time during the Committee—as the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) will remember—trying to reassure hon. Members on that point. I shall deal with the hon. Lady's other points when I come to discuss in greater detail how the matters will be managed, and she can intervene again at that point if she is not satisfied.

I shall now address some of the specifics which came up in the debate in relation to the clause and its various subsections. First, we dealt with the question of the extra costs involved in a job search, and the particular difficulties that a person with disabilities might face. Such a person would be able to put restrictions into his jobseeker's agreement, and specialist help designed for each individual will also be available.

Help with travel to interviews will be available, and that will include the costs of an escort to or from an interview. Premiums are also payable to people with disabilities which do not depend on their availability for work, such as disability living allowance, severe disability allowance and mobility allowance. All of those will still be available, and should address the specific problems which people with disabilities have.

The jobseeker's agreement focuses on the steps to be taken, but those steps will have been agreed. There is no single prescription of the steps that should be taken. I sympathise with the point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on subsection (2) when he talked about discrimination. Clearly there is discrimination against people with disabilities, and the Disability Discrimination Bill was introduced to address that. That Bill is where we shall base our help for people who face discrimination.

Mr. Bradley: Why does the Disability Discrimination Bill not include small employers, who may be very willing to take on disabled people?

Miss Widdecombe: If they are very willing to take on disabled people, there is no problem at all. What we have said in the Disability Discrimination Bill is very straightforward. We do not wish to place undue burdens on small businesses. If small businesses find that it is not possible within reason to make adjustments, they must still prove that that is the case if they are caught within the terms of the Bill. They also have to master a fairly complex piece of legislation, and we must bear it in mind that they do not have discrete personnel departments as larger concerns do.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that small firms have been exempted in other countries where such a measure has been brought in. We encourage small firms to take on people with disabilities. Access to work covers large, medium and small firms, and is available to each individual. We have gone a long way towards addressing the particular concerns of the hon. Gentleman.

Ms Lynne: The Minister said that small firms were exempted in other countries. In the United States, firms of 15 employees and under are exempted. Why is the figure 20 and under in this country?

Miss Widdecombe: There is no need for us specifically to follow the United States. We have made a judgment on what we think is reasonable in terms of our legislation and the burdens we are proposing to put on business. The hon. Lady will be well aware that, under the Disability Discrimination Bill, regulations will be able to provide for that threshold to be altered if necessary. We have built in flexibility, and I feel that her point on that issue is not fair.

While on the issue of subsections (1) and (2), this is probably a convenient place to explain the figure of £71 million which has been raised by hon. Members this afternoon. Unemployed and disabled people have priority for places on all main employment and training programmes for which they are both suitable and eligible.

The Employment Service will spend an additional £71 million in the first three years of incapacity benefit on all those who come on to unemployment from incapacity benefit. That £71 million will cover, among other things, in-depth interviews, specialised help from placing assessment and counselling teams—the PACTs to which I referred earlier—and extra provision for job plan, job club and the job interview guarantee. Therefore, people affected by the introduction of incapacity benefit will have early access to the most appropriate provision. The access to work scheme—

Ms Lynne: The Minister gave a breakdown of the £71 million, but did not specify how much more money would be put into the system of disability employment advisers.

5 pm

Miss Widdecombe: There has already been substantial training as a result of the new incapacity benefit. There will be additional training as a result of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance, which will include such things as reasonable restrictions. I shall deal specifically with disability employment advisers when I talk about the particular route that I said that I wanted to follow in more detail.

The access to work scheme, which extended and replaced existing programmes, will also be of use to people who have the difficulties which hon. Members on both sides of the House rightly acknowledge.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understood that the access to work scheme was up for review shortly. Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is here to stay?

Miss Widdecombe: If a scheme is up for review, I shall not prejudice that review any more than I am willing to speculate on the outcome of a court case. However, access to work is recognised as a successful scheme. I am sure that that success will be taken into account when the review is conducted.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): That means no.

Miss Widdecombe: I did not say no. If I had said no, it was not here to stay, I would have been speculating on its demise. I am not doing that. I am saying that when anything is the subject of a review, it ill becomes Ministers to speculate on the likely outcome in the House.

Much that I have already said covers subsection (3) of the new clause. Of course, the individual is not forced on to income support with a 20 per cent. deduction. He has the choice of going on to full JSA, placing restrictions on the hours and type of work and anything else that may be immediately relevant to his disability.

Ms Eagle: This is an important point. Will the Minister confirm that if an individual who wishes to appeal against being disallowed incapacity benefit signs on to JSA, with all the restrictions, no tribunal will regard that as in any way prejudicial to the appeal?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes. I can confirm that absolutely unequivocally. Signing on for work will not prejudice an appeal against a refusal to allow incapacity benefit. I can furthermore say that the courts have made that clear. The chief adjudication officer has also made that clear. Therefore, I do not think that that need be a worry. I know that it exercised several hon. Members who spoke in the debate. I intended to deal with it at a subsequent stage.

Subsection (4) of the new clause would ensure that a person with disabilities receives the advice of a disability employment adviser rather than just an Employment Service officer. We shall ensure that the individual will be able to make a free choice. He may not want to go to a disability employment adviser. There are people who do not. They want to be treated in the main stream. They want to stay in the main stream. One needs to respect that choice, but there will be a choice. Anyone who wants the services of a disability employment adviser and who is eligible through having some physical or mental restriction will be able to receive that advice. I hope that the hon. Member for Withington will accept that assurance.

I can also reassure the hon. Gentleman on subsection (5). Claimants who are, or have partners who are, sick or disabled will automatically be classified as vulnerable and, therefore, will receive hardship payments throughout the sanction. However, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, and I wish to confirm, they will have to establish hardship. As they are in a vulnerable group, it will be assumed that where there is financial hardship, they qualify.

I shall deal now with some of the specific points that were made in the debate. The main thrust of the speech of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow was about women between the ages of 60 and 65 awaiting the outcome of the Graham decision. If the appeal goes in their favour, they will come under the rule which says that people aged 58 or over in receipt of invalidity benefit since 1 December 1993 will be exempt from the all-work test. Accordingly, if they win, they will not move off benefit through the all-work test. They will have their position restored and they will then be covered by the protection extended to those over the age of 58. My understanding is that if they lose, they will be in exactly the same position as anyone else over 60 in terms of retirement pension or income support where the pension is not appropriate, or whatever the case may be. I hope that that clears the matter up.

The hon. Member for Withington was probably slightly confused. I think that I heard him say that access to work and general help was for those in work. I reassure him that the Employment Service can fund the costs of travel to interview, the cost of escorts to and from interview, which are important for people with disabilities, the cost of providing communications for the deaf at interview and other similar measures. For example, when talking about people facing extra costs in looking for work, one can call to mind the blind and whether they can type a CV. The PACTs and the Employment Service can provide such a service.

I said that I would go into the detail of the position of those who cross from one benefit to another. The full detailed arrangements will be set out in regulations, but I can give the following assurances. When a claim is made, Employment Service front-line staff will take the claimant's own evidence about the extent of his condition and the impact that it has on his availability or whatever he seeks to restrict. In many cases, that will be agreed and there will not be any further problem.

Where a claimant has left incapacity benefit and makes a claim for JSA, the Employment Service will have a range of medical evidence available to assess whether the restrictions are reasonable, given the claimant's particular condition. That will include, always assuming that the claimant has given written consent, the incapacity benefit disallowance notice, which will set out the case, evidence provided by the Benefits Agency medical services and specialist expertise within the Employment Service.

Where a claimant has not made a previous claim for incapacity benefit, our front-line staff will have full access, where they need it, to the range of services offered by the disability employment advisers and the PACTs, who have specialist knowledge and expertise on the impact of disabilities on occupations and the effect on a person's prospects in the local labour market. If they have doubts about the reasonableness of the claimant's proposed restrictions, the case will go to an independent adjudication officer. He or she will, in turn, have access to the full range of evidence provided by the all-work test and incapacity benefit, if appropriate, or the expertise of the disability employment advisers and the PACTs. The adjudication officer may also require the claimant to provide further evidence, which could include medical evidence.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon that we expect that to be necessary only in a small proportion of cases. We understand that many doctors will be prepared to provide that sort of evidence free of charge and we do not, therefore, see the need for legislation to provide for any other system.

Ms Lynne: The hon. Lady says that doctors will be available to provide medical evidence free of charge in many cases, but what if no doctor is prepared to do so? She said that she does not want to introduce legislation, but if that were the case it would be essential.

Miss Widdecombe: We expect that the provision will affect only a small number of cases, and within those we would expect many doctors to provide the evidence free of charge. That is not merely a vague expectation, as it is based on the knowledge available to us. If the hon. Lady is challenging me to agree to the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, who is also about to intervene, we do not accept that there is a case for an open-ended commitment from the Department of Employment to fund medical advice in that way. We do not see the need to fund it in that way. First, there is no good reason why we should fund some doctors and not others, and we would have to have an open-ended commitment whereby we would fund all such evidence. Secondly, we must remember that the procedure occurs only in cases of doubt and after all the other evidence that I mentioned has been exhausted. We are not talking about imposing charges at an early stage in the process.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am a little worried that my hon. Friend may be at risk of underestimating the incidence of such charges. We should certainly acknowledge that, where they occur, they bear heavily on people on low incomes and in a precarious situation. While I recognise her difficulty about making a commitment to funding, will she say here and now at the Dispatch Box that she believes that it is right in principle that doctors should not charge to provide claimants with that evidence? Will she also undertake to confer with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to find out whether further steps can be taken to encourage doctors to conform to the standards that I am sure that she and I would both want them to adhere to?

Miss Widdecombe: While there is no reason to doubt the good faith of the claimant concerned, I hope—I can put it no higher, as I cannot lay down ethics for the medical profession—that the doctor would provide such a service free of charge. I cannot undertake to apply pressure on the Department of Health as my hon. Friend suggests, but I undertake to ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, in whose province that falls, to talk to the Department of Health.

I hope that I have given the hon. Member for Withington sufficient reassurances to enable him to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the detail in which the Minister responded to the debate on new clause 2 and for the contributions from both sides of the House. It was always a great sadness to Opposition Members that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) was not selected to serve on the Standing Committee to help us in our deliberations.

We accept the Minister's assurances on certain areas, but the proof will come out in the detail in 1996, after the Bill becomes an Act, when we can judge the interrelationship of its provisions with incapacity benefit in practice. We reserve our judgment on whether the seamless service between the two benefits will be as effective as the Government suggest.

We are concerned that £71 million will not be sufficient to meet the extra demands that will be placed on the Employment Service. On the pertinent question of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon about the access to work fund, which is under review, I can only say that the independent living fund was a huge success and we all know what happened to that, so we will be watching with great interest.

We will look at the operations of the Act in practice and I am sure that these matters may be considered in further detail in another place. With that comment, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 4

AVAILABILITY FOR EMPLOYMENT: THE 21 HOUR RULE

'.—(1) A person who—

(a) is attending a course of education, training or instruction;

(b) would, if he were not attending that course, be available for employment;

(c) is prepared to terminate the course if a suitable job becomes available to him; and,

(d) was for a prescribed period or periods before he first attended the course in receipt of a prescribed benefit or on a prescribed course of training or instruction,

shall be treated as available for employment for the purposes of this Act.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(a), "course" means—

(a) a course of a prescribed description financed by the European Social Fund; or,

(b) a course in the pursuit of which time spent receiving instruction or tuition, undertaking supervised study, examination or practical work or taking part in any exercise, experiment or project for which provision is made in the curriculum of the course, excluding time occupied by meal breaks or spent on unsupervised study, does not exceed 21 hours a week.'.—*[Mr. McCartney.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.15 pm

Mr. McCartney: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I want to set the new clause in context as it concerns one of the issues over which there was great contention in Committee. There was contention for a number of reasons. One was the way in which the Government introduced the measure in Committee and the other was the fact that we believed it to be a perverse and mean-spirited approach to reduce the 21 guided learning hours to 16.

Yesterday, more than 1,000 people representing all aspects of education came to the House to voice their disapproval of and concern about the Government's continuing disinvestment from education. This new clause should be seen in the context of the Government's overall drive to disinvest from education, whether at primary, secondary or tertiary level or, as in this case, from people who are unemployed and require training and further education to get back into the work force.

For those reasons, we opposed the Government's statement in mid-February and submitted a new clause in Committee to reverse the decision back to 21 hours. This afternoon, we are continuing the fight with a further new clause, which contains an additional provision to that tabled in Committee, as the Government did not give any clear indication of the way in which they intended to deal with education and training schemes run under the European social fund.

[Mr. McCartney:]

Up to 80,000 jobless people are using their time on the dole to study. They will be forced to consider giving up their studies to take low-paid, part-time and casual work with no prospects for future career development or educational training.

The present rules allow for 21 hours of guided study or learning, but under JSA rules, the Government will cut that to 16, with five hours or more for private study. In general, the Government are presenting that measure as a continuation of the current scheme, which it is not. As we already know from information received following the Government's announcement, at least 11,500 people each year will be disqualified from taking part in further education because of that cut. It is also believed that that is a gross underestimate.

During discussions on the Minister's statement in mid-February, she said that there would be some losers, but that the Government could not put a figure on it, or were not prepared to do so. The truth of the matter is that the Government are making the reduction to save £40 million. It is not about clarifying the position in respect of the 21-hour rule as regards educational establishments, or pulling it into line with the Government's position on other benefits and access to them; it is about saving £40 million. This Bill is about saving £400 million from the benefits of those who have been put on the dole by Government economic policies.

What will be the result of this swingeing cut? It will undermine training programmes that are run with social fund assistance. It will put at serious risk the viability of further education colleges that specialise in helping the long-term unemployed to train or study.

The Government's meanness seems to move in the opposite direction to the needs and wishes of further education colleges, students, the jobless, teaching organisations, trade unions and employers. All those with a stake in further education and training have argued that, rather than reduce the 21 hours to 16, the Bill should have contained measures to relax the 21-hour rule and make it easier for people on the dole to take up part-time training and study. Yet despite the overwhelming evidence presented to the Government in advance of the Bill, they have chosen not to relax the arrangements but to tighten them up and introduce far more coercion into the system.

This Government are the only western Government with an advanced economy who are now disinvesting in training and further education. Because of changes in both national and international markets, we see a dramatic change in how people are employed in local labour markets. Governments overseas and in Europe are meeting that challenge with massive investment in education and retraining. Only this Government are taking steps both in the Bill and the Budget to reduce overall funding in the education and training budgets. They have cut more than £300 million from training budgets, tightened the rules and undermined people's opportunities to have genuine access to education and retraining to allow them to return to the marketplace and seek employment in their local labour market or further afield in the British or European economies.

In many instances, the current rules provided a genuine open door for individuals who, through sheer misfortune, found themselves out of a job and needing to train or retrain to improve their career chances and job hopes. May I give an example of the type of individuals who will be badly affected by the proposal? In Committee, my hon. Friends and I referred to individuals anonymously. I hope that the Minister accepts that we do so to protect the individuals concerned rather than mislead or deceive anybody about the circumstances.

Mr. P, aged 28, was made redundant from a junior management post and was unsuccessful in obtaining work for some while. He had no formal qualifications and had experience of work only in the retail trade. He took an access course under the 21-hour rule while employed and is now working in a residential care home with the intention of qualifying as a social worker. There can be no guarantee under the new 16-hour rule, which will apply a much tighter definition and a shorter period of learning each week, that that gentleman will be able to escape unemployment and find a route into a worthwhile occupation by retraining.

In Committee, we gave specific examples of individuals who had been denied access to income through unemployment benefit and income support while retraining for the caring professions. Despite that evidence, the Government made no effort to acknowledge that those individuals would be affected in that way or to acknowledge the hardship that their proposal would cause. The Bill is a lost opportunity to invest in people and get them off the dole and into meaningful employment.

The new 16-hour rule comes at a time when the long-term unemployed find it even more difficult to clamber back into the job market. Those with low skills are more likely to be long-term unemployed than highly skilled and qualified people, who find it easier to get another job. The unskilled and semi-skilled are four times more likely to lose their jobs than the average person and less likely to find a new job quickly. Those with few or no qualifications form the majority of the long-term unemployed, 38 per cent. of whom have no qualifications and 58 per cent. of whom have qualifications below O-level standard. Unqualified men are four times more likely to be unemployed than graduate men and eight times more likely to be out of work for more than a year.

Those are not Labour party statistics but figures produced from Government labour force market surveys. Government statistics show that long-term unemployment exists because of under-investment in training. Those trapped in that position find it increasingly difficult to enter the marketplace, which is why the Government continue to pay benefit whereas they should invest in giving people opportunities to be in gainful employment. The Government have chosen to ignore the evidence and have taken steps to tighten up the 21-hour rule to 16 hours.

Skills among the jobless become out of date quickly, which further penalises their chances of getting back to work. In a world of rapid technological change, employees need continually to update their skills. The longer the period that someone is out of work, the less currency his old skills and qualifications have. Labour Members like me who represent former mining, textile and engineering communities have seen that all too clearly. Direct intervention has resulted in the dislocation of our local economies and, almost overnight, tens of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers, mainly men, have found themselves unemployed. Their skills have become redundant because of the changing nature of the local economy, and low-skill, part-time employment has been offered in place of their previous permanent, high-skill employment.

It is precisely those groups of men and women who require the opportunity to study and train under the 21-hour rule to learn completely new skills that will give them an opportunity to get back into the labour market, yet they will be worst affected by the Government's proposals. I sometimes think that the Government do not give a damn what happens to mining, textile or heavy engineering communities because, on each and every occasion, their direct action has led to mounting unemployment and a dislocation of employment patterns in those communities. The employment opportunities of those former work forces are increasingly reduced. Unemployed people are offered part-time menial jobs because we have an economy in which skilled jobs are being replaced by unskilled, part-time, semi-skilled employment. Eight out of 10 new jobs created under this Government are part time. Although the opportunity for full-time employment has been ominously eradicated by the Government's proposals, they intend further to reduce access to training and education.

On numerous occasions in Committee, we attempted to get some information from the Government about why those who attend European social fund courses are treated as second-class citizens. The rules that relate to those courses are radically different from those that relate to programmes directly supported by the Department of Employment. The contrast is stark. People on training for work courses are guaranteed benefit plus £10 a week and are not required to be available for or actively seeking work.

Unemployed people who want to take up a place on a European social fund course and need to retain their benefit payments can do so only under the limits of the 21-hour rule. That means that they cannot participate in a full-time training programme but must remain immediately available for full-time work and show that they are actively seeking work. They must continue to sign on and attend compulsory restart interviews and courses like job plan workshops or workwise, irrespective of whether those courses cut across the European social fund course that they are attending.

If successfully completed, European social fund courses provide individuals with a marketable skill. Despite that, the Government will reduce or stop benefit entitlement if, during those courses, an individual fails to attend a compulsory restart interview or a compulsory job plan workshop. A student who applies for or participates in a course cannot take the course employer or provider to an industrial tribunal on the grounds of racial or sexual discrimination.

5.30 pm

If an unemployed person, who has signed on, takes up a full-time training place through the European social fund, he loses the right to income support and his automatic entitlement to housing benefit and council tax benefit. That person also loses automatic entitlement to free dental treatment and free prescriptions, becomes ineligible for some of the loans available from the social security social fund and must forgo assistance with mortgage interest payments.

Why do the Government take such draconian action against an individual seeking retraining and qualification through the European social fund? For many unemployed people, that fund represents the most practical way back into the labour market, because in many areas of high unemployment the European social fund is providing the practical investment for training and education. Why do the Government insist on treating those trainees differently from those who receive funding through our Department of Employment?

It has been suggested that the European social fund training programmes simply represent the means for the Department of Employment to distribute money and that the arrangement is purely administrative. I find it strange that as a result of a purely administrative arrangement people may be denied a range of benefits, including council tax benefit and income support. In fact, they run the risk of losing access to any income. Surely the arrangement is a bit more than an administrative one. In truth, the Government have always opposed European social fund schemes in, for example, former coal mining communities. When the Government were forced, for political reasons, to accept the necessity of European social funding of education and training courses, they decided to make it increasingly difficult, through the nature of the rules they set, for people to participate in those schemes or to take full advantage of them. We receive additional resources from our European partners in the Community to help retrain and redeploy tens of thousands of unemployed people. It is disastrous that the Government should simply respond by undermining an unemployed person's ability to participate in and complete such a course.

It is important for the Government to say that they intend to integrate the rules governing European social fund courses with those courses under their direct responsibility. It seems only sensible that that relationship should be equitable. After all, the qualification gained from a European social fund course is recognised by the Government as a route back into employment. Despite that, the Government seem intent on continuing to undermine the rights of people who join such courses.

The Government should have used the Bill to deal with the real issue—the 21-hour rule—because they received thousands upon thousands of requests from citizens advice bureaux and other organisations to do just that. Six key amendments are necessary. What is meant by actively seeking work should be defined more clearly. What is meant by being immediately available for work, when many individuals on courses of 10 hours—not 16 or 21—have lost the right to benefit because of the interpretation that local employment officers have placed on those courses and those individuals' availability for work?

That leads on to the problem of arbitrary local decision making. The Minister said nothing in Committee about what she intended to do about that. She failed to mention that, as a result of such decision making, however, individuals on the same type of course, or even on the same course, are dealt with differently by different officers who judge their respective ability to continue a course or their right to receive benefit while on that course.

The Minister has tried to define the difference between full-time and part-time education through her attempts to reduce 21 hours of supervised study to 16 hours. When the problem of that definition was originally raised by

Opposition Members and organisations representing the unemployed, we had supposed that the Minister would not reduce the hours from 21 to 16, but would extend the regulations to allow people to enjoy a full 21 hours of learning rather than run the risk of having their ability to continue on a course undermined by Employment Service officers.

Local DSS officers have different customs and practices, which has led to many people losing their right to benefit, despite the fact that their circumstances are similar to, if not exactly the same as, those of claimants on courses in other parts of the country. There is no clear central guidance from the Department about how individuals should be treated sympathetically.

The Bill is a wasted opportunity on the Government's part. It has undermined the capability and the range of options of many thousands of unemployed people. The proposals are not only mean-minded, but unforgivable. The Government, having first placed hundreds of thousands of people on the dole, are now attempting to blame them for that. They are using coercive measures to reduce funding for the very schemes that would allow unemployed people to get back into work. If the Minister does not respond positively to the debate, we will divide on the new clause.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We all recognise how crucial it is to develop the competences and skills of our people. That is what individuals want in terms of their personal fulfilment and it is absolutely necessary for our economy.

There is no lack of evidence to tell us that the unemployed want training and education. As the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) said, some 80,000 unemployed people are studying while in receipt of benefit. The Employment Service national customer satisfaction survey in 1993 revealed that 60 per cent. of the unemployed people surveyed were interested in finding training opportunities; of that number, 32 per cent. wanted to train for a specific occupation, 27 per cent. wanted to pursue a vocational qualification and 17 per cent. wanted an educational qualification.

My hon. Friend the Minister has recognised that need and addressed herself to the reform of benefit regulations as they bear on part-time study. I welcome the fact that she has modified the regulations in recognition of the ending of the old distinction between part-time and full-time work resulting from the way in which further education courses are now delivered.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that it is increasingly difficult to cling to that distinction for higher education. Open university courses already benefit a considerable number of unemployed people. The increasing move toward credit accumulation and the increasing tendency for higher education courses to be franchised for their delivery to further education colleges suggests that, over time, there is likely to be a blurring of the distinction between further education and higher education in terms of vocational studies.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Minister was kind enough to respond to a number of questions for written answer that I had tabled. I noted her acknowledgement that part-time education

"can enhance some clients' prospects of finding work".

I welcome that recognition as far as it goes, although it was perhaps a less fulsome recognition than I would ideally have wished. We need to adopt a much more positive view of the desirability of providing opportunities and supporting unemployed people to undertake studies so that they can upgrade their skills. Their right to study while drawing benefit is termed a concession. If that approach is carried through from income support to jobseeker's allowance, I fear that it will remain somewhat too negative.

My hon. Friend the Minister has robustly, and rightly, argued that the move from a 21-hour rule to a 16-hour rule in respect of part-time studies is not a cut; those 80,000 people will still be able to study under the new rules. However, not only do we want to preserve the present position but we want many more people to be encouraged and enabled to undertake studies. Policy should encourage part-time study.

Unemployed people often believe that an employer is more likely to rate highly what they have gained from pursuing a course that leads to an academic or vocational qualification than what they have gained from taking part in one of the Government's own courses.

We speak in terms of an Employment Service. That term suggests that it should not always be assumed that the Employment Service knows better than unemployed people what is appropriate for them. I recognise that there is to be a spirit of consultation and discussion in the development of individual jobseekers' agreements.

I submit that an unemployed person should be able to embark on a part-time course confident that she or he will not lose benefits as a result, and should have every prospect of completing the course. However, at the moment it is not quite like that. Far from systematically building in encouragement to study, in too many instances we appear to discourage it.

I was disappointed that the learning for work scheme was so quickly scrapped. That scheme would have allowed as many as 30,000 people to take full-time vocational courses. My hon. Friend the Minister of State may have had good reasons to discontinue support for that programme, but at first blush it appears to be a slightly retrograde decision.

I am also somewhat disappointed that the target under training for work for the numbers of participants to achieve qualifications has been lowered from 39 per cent. to 30 per cent. Training for work is accepted as a positive outcome in respect of restart interviews, but it appears that we are missing an opportunity by not allowing other opportunities for education and training to be treated as "positive outcomes", in the jargon.

That is especially strange, in that signing off from benefits and benefit sanctions are regarded as positive outcomes. They may be outcomes that are justified in specific circumstances, but it is strange to call them positive outcomes. I regretted the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister of State was unable, in her answers to me yesterday, to confirm that part-time study would be regarded as a positive outcome at restart interviews.

I do not know the extent to which my hon. Friend the Minister has already clarified arrangements for incentivising Employment Service officials to discourage—if that is not too strong a word—unemployed people from undertaking part-time education and training. Will she clarify to what extent the system of incentives for Employment Service officials does, in effect, discourage unemployed people from undertaking part-time education and training? My impression is that we are at least moving towards arrangements whereby the remuneration of Employment Service officials is related to their contribution to enabling the service to achieve its business objectives. Among its business objectives are those "positive outcomes", which do not include part-time education and training.

5.45 pm

I also remember noting in the Employment Service agreement that there was a target for challenging benefit claims. Where is the incentive for Employment Service officials positively to encourage unemployed people to improve their skills beyond the opportunities provided under training for work—opportunities that are, sadly, diminishing in number? Jobseekers' directions will reinforce the scope for Employment Service officials to steer unemployed people towards outcomes other than education and training.

We already have a tightened availability test. As I understand it, if unemployed people are to be eligible to receive benefit, they must satisfy the requirement that they should be willing to take time off their course for a job interview, they must be willing to adjust their attendance to fit in with a job and they must be willing to give up a course at once to take a job.

I am especially worried about the latter requirement. Is it really sensible—is it far-sighted—to insist that an unemployed person should abandon a course if a temporary job is offered, or if an unskilled job is offered, when he is developing a higher level of skills, which would enable him, in quite a short period, to contribute more effectively to the creation of wealth in our economy? That appears to me wasteful and short-termist.

I suspect that that is somewhat akin in approach to the thinking that underlies the notion of the permitted period, which is reaffirmed in the new policy. A permitted period, so-called, will be of 13 weeks, during which people claiming benefit are entitled to confine their search for work to work that matches their skills and experience. Thirteen weeks is a very short time to allow for that. After 13 weeks, they will have to accept any job that the Employment Service considers appropriate for them.

I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends that it is prodigal—somewhat too destructive—after only 13 weeks to set aside a person's accumulated skills and knowledge. That approach appears to me consistent with the requirement to give up a course immediately if any job comes on offer. We should value and nurture higher levels of skills more than we do at the moment.

I was surprised to note that revised instructions in the context of unemployment benefit regulations were issued last summer which insisted that people should be disqualified from benefit if they had paid more than £100 to attend a course or if their course led to a qualification needed for the job that they were seeking. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if I am wrong; I am happy to withdraw that point if I am in error. I am puzzled by that measure, because it appears to be almost a surreal policy. Surely it must be desirable that people should pursue courses that lead to qualifications that better enable them to do the jobs that they want to do.

I understand why full-time students should not be smuggled into the benefit system and I well understand the dilemmas that confront my hon. Friends, but how insistent do we have to be—how much on the qui vive do we have to be—to cut off benefit when there is even the faintest suspicion that someone might be a so-called student? We should try to be as flexible and constructive as we can.

Speaking as a Warwickshire Member of Parliament, I must also comment on the dearth of funding for discretionary awards in our county. We have not seen discretionary awards for some years. Every now and again, the local authority is sued by someone who feels that it is only fair that, living in the county of Warwickshire, he, like people living elsewhere, should have at least the opportunity to obtain a discretionary award. But that does not occur.

We should invest in education. I am worried about the collapse of the discretionary awards system. Some of the features of the system which I have been describing seem to discourage self-help and the impulse to self-improvement, values that my hon. Friends often praise. In addition, it does not help that the regulations are somewhat inconsistently applied.

The hon. Member for Makerfield touched on European social fund-funded courses. The Government's position on that subject seems to be curious. As I understand it, they argue that resources for the courses are not payable out of public funds, but they are derived from the European Union, whose funding is derived from the taxpayer. Also, the funds are administered by, among others, local education authorities. That seems to be a quibbling distinction that tends to discourage and take away opportunities.

In one of her answers to me, my hon. Friend the Minister of State said that client advisers would give advice and guidance on part-time education opportunities. I am glad that she has been able to place that on the record. The 1993 survey which I mentioned found that more than half the unemployed people inquiring about vocational qualifications went elsewhere—presumably, because the Employment Service found it difficult to answer them. We were told in the survey that the Employment Service was able to supply information to only one third of unemployed people interested in pursuing an educational qualification. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on her determination to improve on that state of affairs.

On a more general note, abuse by a few should not prejudice the opportunities of the many. Of course, my hon. Friends are right to say that we must police the system to ensure that people are not able to exist on benefit while pretending to be on courses and to be undertaking education and training. That would be unacceptable, but we should not design a system to which that consideration is central. It is a valid factor, but we should do everything that we can to ensure that as many good-quality training and education opportunities as possible are available.

I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench are afraid that if they increase public expenditure, even on education and training, they will be visited by the most terrible retribution by international markets. But that will depend on the quality and purpose of the public expenditure we undertake and on what we fail to do. If we were to degrade our labour force by pursuing a low-skill, low-pay policy, international investors might look elsewhere. Quite rationally, they would become much less interested in investing in our economy. The devaluation of our skills would have just as damaging a long-term effect on our economic fortunes as the devaluation of our money through inflation has had over a previous generation. International investors are more likely to back our economy if we demonstrate that we are investing in human capital.

I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said in the context of her announcement on the 16-hour rule. She recognised the need to focus help where people have poor skills or where their skills are obsolete. I welcome, too, the commitment in her press release to keep the situation under review.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): This is a short debate, so I shall condense my remarks.

I raised this issue at Employment questions and wish briefly to exercise my right of reply. In response to my question of 7 March, the Minister argued that there was no change and that the new position would be the same as the existing one. She said:

> "At present, the 21-hour rule covers both guided learning hours and private study".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 134.]

When I checked regulation 9(3) of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987, I discovered that the reference was to supervised study. There is a crucial difference. Will the Minister admit that 21 supervised hours are becoming 16 guided learning hours? There is a change—will she admit it? I know that, in a sense, the reason why the Minister says that there is no change is that many other mechanisms have been introduced to attack the rights of the unemployed to part-time study and education.

I would refer in detail to Employment Service notice 7/95, issued in January, but I do not have time to do so. It deals with the definition of "student" and tries to define as students more and more people who are studying part time, thus disqualifying them on the grounds that they are students. Employment Service notice 104/94, issued in July—to which the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred—attacked people's rights in terms of their availability for work. I mentioned the subject on Second Reading. Students who pay more than £100 for a course are automatically disqualified from benefit. If the course leads to a qualification needed for the job for which they are looking, they are also disqualified.

The rights of unemployed people to undertake part-time study are being attacked. We opposed those regulations and we oppose the new change, which takes us in the wrong direction. Everyone says that we want to expand the rights of the unemployed to part-time education and training because that will create the skills that the economy so badly needs.

Miss Widdecombe: Once again, the debate has been interesting and once again, there is common ground between Opposition and Conservative Members on the necessity to make it possible for people who are looking for work to undertake courses of part-time study or to undertake training that will enhance their job prospects. That was very much uppermost in our minds when we formed the rules that were to apply under the jobseeker's allowance.

In response to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), I must say that it is simply not true that the Government are disinvesting in further education and training. The reverse is true. There is a planned increase of 25 per cent. in further education starts between 1993-94 and 1995-96. I do not think that an increase of 25 per cent. is a disinvestment. There is a planned further expenditure on further education of £2.7 billion. I am not certain how that can be called disinvestment.

This country stands up extremely well in terms of training investment and its outcomes when compared with its European neighbours. In 1990, 94 per cent. of 16-year-olds were undertaking some sort of education and training—that figure is among the highest in the main developed countries. In 1991, a higher proportion of the United Kingdom's population between the ages of 14 and 49 had recently undertaken a period of education and training than was the case in France, West Germany or most other European Union countries. Our record is a proud one. The Opposition always believe that if we are not spending more, we cannot be doing more. But we are offering the same number of opportunities through our training and our special programmes as we have offered previously—1.5 million.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) is utterly wrong to pick out just one programme of training for work and make deductions from it while ignoring the measures for training in the White Paper on competitiveness, the creation of modern apprenticeships and the large number of other initiatives such as Investors in People. All those factors show our clear commitment.

I shall explain the change. Once again, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) is wrong. Supervised study was a combination of tutored and private study. There was and has been until recently a clear distinction between part-time and full-time education. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon warned me that we may not be able to maintain the distinction in higher education for ever, but for the moment we can, which is why there was no change. But the distinction has become so blurred in further education, where more and more courses are modular and based on guided learning hours, that there is no longer a common definition of what is part time.

The net result was that rules were being applied inconsistently from area to area because there was no recognised definition of "part-time". In seeking to redefine part-time study—I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford has welcomed our efforts—we were guided very much by the view that we should help the same number of people. There has been no reduction in assistance. We currently help about 80,000 people and some 80,000 people will be assisted under the new proposals.

6 pm

Mr. Chisholm: Was not unsupervised study specifically excluded in the 1970s, whereas now it will be included?

Miss Widdecombe: No, the hon. Gentleman has got it completely wrong. I understand that his concern is genuine and I honestly believe that he is confused—I do not mean that rudely. I shall explain it to him later.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I have written to her about a constituency case and, uncharacteristically, I have not received an instant response, so it must be a difficult question. A man in my constituency in his early 30s who is currently studying for 15 hours per week has been told by the Department of Social Security that he no longer qualifies for assistance because he does "homework"—to use the Department's term. That seems quite extraordinary and, judging from what the Minister has said, it must be incorrect.

Miss Widdecombe: I will make the position clear. The person who is studying must not allow that study—be it homework or supervised study—to conflict with his or her availability for work.

Mr. Enright: It does not.

Miss Widdecombe: If it does not, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has written to me about the matter. I will examine exactly what has occurred and reply to him. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not receive an instant response—we are a trifle busy in my Department at the moment. However, I will respond to the hon. Gentleman.

I turn briefly to the question asked by the hon. Member for Makerfield about the European social fund. I am baffled as to why the hon. Gentleman is making such a meal of the ESF. Should we conclude from the Opposition's new clause that they want all ESF courses to be treated in the same way? Would the Labour party undertake that spending commitment?

Under our proposals, ESF-funded courses will be treated like any other course. If people undertake an ESF-funded course which is part of our training scheme, such as training for work, the rules of that scheme will apply. If they receive a training allowance and not a jobseeker's allowance they will not have to be available for work. However, if they are undertaking the course while receiving JSA, the rules of JSA will apply. That is common sense.

I get the impression that the Opposition are struggling tonight. Their kneejerk opposition to the legislation was based on the false assumption that it would mean a reduction in assistance. That has been disproved and Labour Members feel that they must justify their ridiculous stand in some other way. There is no reduction in assistance. The Government have made a clear commitment to funding part-time study and that commitment will continue. I think that the Opposition should withdraw their new clause 4 and perhaps, in so doing, Labour Members might also apologise for misinterpreting the legislation.

Mr. McCartney: If there are any apologies to be made tonight about the unemployed, they should come from Conservative Members. There have been two recessions in the past decade and there are 3.5 million people unemployed. Yet Government Members have the cheek to come to the Chamber and ask Opposition Members to apologise for the effects of mass unemployment.

The Minister of State has failed once again to answer the pertinent questions about why the Government discriminate against people on European social fund courses. The truth is that the Minister is disinvesting in training. The Secretary of State goes around the country saying that he is disinvesting in training and education; he prides himself on that fact. The training for work scheme has been cut by 66,000 places and the learning for work scheme has been cut by 30,000 places.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon is absolutely right: the Government have cut grants to local education authorities to such an extent that virtually no money is available for training or for creating further employment opportunities through further education. I urge my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby in voting for the new clause in order to assist the unemployed of this country.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 277.

Division No. 108] **[6.04 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, I[illegible]
Davies, Bryan [illegible]*ham C'tral)*
Dav[illegible] Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*

Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Tessa Jowell and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John

MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian

Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 5

LOANS FOR BACK TO WORK EXPENSES

'.—(1) Regulations shall make provision for the payment in prescribed circumstances and for prescribed items, of sums in the form of repayable loans to or in respect of persons, who are or have been entitled to a jobseeker's allowance or to income support.

(2) A sum payable under the regulations shall be known as a "jobstart loan".

(3) The question whether a jobstart loan is to be awarded and how much it is to be shall be determined by an adjudication officer.

(4) In determining whether a jobstart loan shall be paid under this section, and the amount of any such loan, regard shall be had, so far as regulations so provide, to the income or capital of the claimant.

(5) Regulations made under this section may, in particular, provide for—

(a) a jobstart loan to be payable only on the occurrence of a prescribed event;

(b) a jobstart loan not to be payable unless a claim is made before the end of a prescribed period;

(c) the amount of a jobstart loan not to exceed a prescribed amount;

(d) the amount of any jobstart loan otherwise payable to be reduced where the claimant has income or capital of a prescribed description which exceeds a prescribed amount;

(e) a jobstart loan to be repayable after a prescribed period, upon such terms and conditions as may be prescribed.'.—*[Ms Lynne.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Lynne: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I shall not detain the House for long on new clause 5. It is a modest measure which recognises the financial barriers that can hinder unemployed people who are keen to work from taking work once they are offered it. I should prefer grants to be made more available to get people back into work or to help them when they have got back into work. If the jobfinder's grant were payable after six months of unemployment instead of after two years, that would be a step in the right direction—but I do not imagine that the Government will move on that.

My small proposal for a modest, interest-free loan for people starting work could be implemented at little cost. In that way, when people have stopped receiving benefit and are waiting for their first pay cheque, they would not be left without money in their first week or month of employment. I envisage a loan in the region of £500, to assist with living expenses, travel to work and other employment-related costs.

A citizens advice bureau in western England reported the case of one client who had found a new job after five months' unemployment. His wife had been in work but had been off sick the previous three months and was about to have her income reduced from half pay to statutory sick pay. The client had borrowed as much as he could from the bank and was worried about supporting himself and his wife while awaiting his first pay cheque a month later as his employer was unwilling to pay his salary after two weeks. In eastern England, a citizens advice bureau reported the case of a client who came off unemployment benefit to start a job. After two weeks, she had no money left and a fortnight to go before receiving her first pay cheque. She was unable to afford her bus fares and was worried that she might lose her job, which she was enjoying tremendously. Neither the DSS nor the jobcentre could assist her. In such circumstances, I do not suggest payment of a grant, but a repayable loan.

It is also difficult for people to repay their debts after leaving the benefit system and before receiving a salary. The Benefits Agency has established a good scheme for the direct payment of debts to gas and electricity companies, and to others to whom a claimant owes money, but when a person starts work that scheme comes to an end and the individual has to renegotiate his own debt repayments. Invariably, the gas company, for

[Ms Lynne]

example, will want to negotiate a higher repayment rate and often is not prepared to wait a month before payments begin.

A loan would also be useful to pay for work tools or for special clothing or footwear, without which the individual might be unable to take a job. The person might need driving lessons, or a driving course if he intended to set up as a minicab driver. A loan would also help to meet the cost of a medical examination if required.

The loan could be claimed before the individual started work or within 28 days of doing so. If the person had savings of more than £500, the loan could be reduced. Repayments would be interest free, commencing 13 weeks after the start of employment, as it would be unreasonable to expect the person to start repaying it before he was re-established, and there would be a maximum repayment term of three years.

I hope that the Government can see their way clear to accepting new clause 5, which would help people seeking work to begin new employment. Otherwise, many people may be debarred from saying yes to a new job because they do not have the right clothes or cannot meet the travelling expenses involved.

Mr. Bradley: Although most of the time in Committee was spent on the main thrust of the Bill—which is to cut benefits—there were frequent debates on measures to help people back to work. As the Government had called the measure the Jobseekers Bill, we hoped that they would take every opportunity to accept suggestions to help people back to work. I pay tribute to the citizens advice bureaux and to other organisations which, throughout the Committee stage and since, have provided invaluable information on the detail of the Bill and on cases such as those cited by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) which illustrate the difficulties that people experience when they want to take up work but do not have the means to do so.

The hon. Member for Rochdale could not serve on the Committee during those deliberations because she was serving on the Committee considering the Disability Discrimination Bill. In view of the contributions that the Liberal Democrats are making now, it is unfortunate that they were unable to produce another spokesperson in Committee on the Jobseekers Bill as I am sure that we would have welcomed that support.

One is always reluctant to support the introduction of more loans into the social security system. We have learnt from bitter experience that the replacement of grants by loans under the social fund—because of the inequitable way in which that system can be administered with cash-limited budgets—leads to disparities of treatment depending on when people come through the door.

I was always under the impression that one stood more chance of a social fund loan at the beginning of the year when the new budget was in place, and when offices were more likely to treat claimants sympathetically, but research shows that the reverse is true. Social fund officers are so worried about exhausting their funds too early in the year that they store up money and administer the fund only towards the end of the year. That is clearly unacceptable and inequitable, and leads to claimants in identical circumstances being treated differently in the course of the year.

Our experience of the social fund and of the Student Loans Company has shown that loans are expensive to administer and we would certainly not want to use the latter as a model for new clause 5. However, a loan is better than nothing and we approve new clause 5 in those terms because we must give whatever help we can to encourage people to take up new employment.

New clause 5 is modest in that, as with our earlier new clauses, it would allow the Government to prescribe the circumstances, amounts and operation of loans in regulations. At this stage, we are not asking the Government to accept a defined proposal which would create tremendous costs—the money would be paid back. We are not asking for an open-ended commitment to the loan: we are looking to the Government to take the modest view that such a scheme should be considered with a view to coming back with the detail at the regulation stage to debate the matter further.

The Labour party supports the new clause. We believe that it should be added to the package of measures that the Government have introduced, modest as they are. I do not believe that this additional modest measure should be denied by the Government. We leave it in their hands to come forward with the detail. I believe that this enabling new clause would be to the great benefit of unemployed people and I hope that in that spirit the Minister will accept the new clause.

Mr. Roger Evans: I thought that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) was rather torn in his speech. He began by saying that he was reluctant to see the extension of loans in the social security sphere and gently chided the social fund for a number of faults which he and his colleagues have put to Ministers in the past. He referred to loans being expensive to administer and even referred to the Student Loans Company, but at the end of the day he said that the new clause was good and that it simply empowered the Government to do things. I respectfully suggest, therefore, that there is perhaps some ambiguity in the hon. Gentleman's position.

6.30 pm

I must say straight away that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) raised a most important issue, and I do not disagree with her fundamental proposition that there are difficulties for people moving into work after a period of unemployment. The question is what is the best combination of ways in which we can assist. People in that position face a number of problems and it is a matter of putting a number of measures together to deal with them.

My approach to the problem has been this. It is important to recognise that in the Bill and in other Government actions we have introduced a number of proposals, the first of which—the jobfinder's grant—was mentioned by the hon. Lady. The 1994 Budget announced the nationwide expansion of that scheme from April 1995, with 25,000 grants available each year. The main national programme will have a fixed grant of £200 available to all people unemployed for two years who take a job paying less than £150 per week. The hon. Lady welcomed that, but sought to persuade me that we should reduce the qualifying period from two years to six months. The difficulty, of course, is cost. The grant targets help on those who most need it and the cost will be £5 million. Obviously, that sum would increase considerably, the more the period of qualification was reduced. We have determined that it is best to focus that help on the long-term unemployed.

The second two measures are in the Bill before us. The back-to-work bonus is a measure whereby for claimants who have taken small amounts of work while on benefit, a bonus will build up, to be paid when they go back into work. The gross costs in the first full year 1997-98 will be £50 million.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Minister explain why the Government intend to include the lump sum of £1,000 in capital for the calculation of other benefits?

Mr. Evans: It will be included in capital after 52 weeks. The point at stake is that that sum of money, which will have been built up by work and effort, will be available to be spent on all the problems that have been mentioned, for example, when the breadwinner of a family is moving back into work. That is a positive and real way of helping.

The third item in the Government's package is one that I mentioned earlier—the four-week run-on of housing benefit and council tax benefit to ensure that the family will be able to afford the rent in the first four weeks. The cost, again, is £50 million.

Those measures are already a substantial package and they are targeted at the unemployed who need most help—the long-term unemployed. The measures are a most important advance, but they involve significant extra expenditure. I must tell the hon. Lady, therefore, that in view of that package we do not propose now to introduce additional proposals for loans. As the hon. Member for Withington recognised, loans—even modest ones of £500—involve an administrative cost, so it would not be fair to say that the proposal would be cost-neutral.

Let us see how the measures that we have proposed work out. We recognise the problem that the hon. Lady identified and we shall, of course, continue to review whether any further measures—whether loans or other initiatives—are needed to address that continuing problem.

For the reasons that I have given, I invite my hon. Friends to reject the new clause.

Ms Lynne: I am disappointed that the Minister cannot see his way to accepting the new clause. It is a modest measure and would involve little cost for the Government. I believe that unemployed people will be hindered from taking work. Those who want to take work and are offered a job may not be able to meet some of the expenses and may have to turn the offer down.

When the Minister talks about the cost of administering the measure, he must balance that against the cost of people staying on benefits. I gave an example of a woman who could not get to work because she did not have enough money for the bus fare. She was going to have to give up her job because she could not afford to get to work. She had no money whatever. We are talking about people who would have to stay on benefit or return to benefit. It would be more cost-effective if the Government accepted the new clause.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) about the social fund. I am not asking for a grant to be replaced by a loan. I am not in favour of the social fund and would prefer to see a grant brought back in, but this is a new, small loan, and it is up to the Government to decide how much it should be. I said that it should be in the region of £500, because that seems a reasonable amount when the person has a month's travel costs and also the cost of new clothing and so on to be taken into account. The Government have taken that into account with the back-to-work bonus. A person who has been unemployed for some time may well need a new suit. He may need different clothes for the job. He needs to be able to pay debts that have built up.

Taking into account all that the Minister has said and the three measures that he has introduced, it is a very small and specific thing that I am asking for and I am disappointed that the Government feel unable to accept the new clause. I believe that in the long term it would be cost-effective. I therefore urge the House to join me in voting for the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 261.

Division No. 109] **[6.38 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas

Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
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Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy

Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 5

Duration of a contribution-based jobseeker's allowance

Miss Widdecombe: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 5, line 3, leave out 'him from' and insert 'his'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 7 to 10, 14 to 17, 20 to 22, 29, 30 and 36 to 38.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that the Opposition are content not to have an exposition amendment by amendment. Many of the amendments, of course, have been tabled in response to representations from Opposition Members in Committee, including the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn)—he is not here, sadly—who debated the gerund and possessive pronoun extensively. Other amendments make clear the policy intention, in some cases just changing "and" to "the," or "the" to "and". I therefore wish to move the amendment without further discussion.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to the Minister for the succinct explanation of the amendments. We do not want line-by-line clarification of them, but in Committee we opposed every aspect of the measures that are being tidied up. By not having a vote, I do not want it to be construed that we support the clauses to which those tidying-up amendments refer. With that explanation, we accept the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6

Availability for, and actively seeking, employment

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 6, line 11, leave out 'actually'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Clause 7

The jobseeker's agreement

Mr. McCartney: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 6, line 31, at end insert—

> '(6A) A jobseekers agreement may specify that a claimant need not be available for or seek, employment other than at a minimum prescribed amount of remuneration.'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in clause 16, page 14, line 32, at end insert—

> '(1A) Nothing in section 15, or in regulations under that section, shall be taken to prevent payment of a jobseekers allowance merely because the claimant refuses to seek or accept employment other than at the minimum amount of remuneration prescribed under section 7(6A) above.'.

Mr. McCartney: I exclude the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) from criticisms that I will make of his party in relation to the minimum wage and to in-work poverty. The hon. Gentleman has more than a fair record on those issues. It is pity that he was not a member of the Committee that considered the Bill. He would have assisted us greatly when Opposition Members moved the amendments to improve the Bill in relation to unemployed people.

The amendments have been tabled specifically to deal with minimum earnings. The reason we have done that, as I shall set out in detail, is the context of the debate. The Tory party is a party of fat-cat excess, exploitation and the dole—there can be no doubt about that. In 1993, directors in Britain's six top banks enjoyed salary increases of up to 181 per cent. Many of them made

[Mr. McCartney]

profits of more than £4.8 billion. That orgy of greed has resulted in the axing of 72,000 jobs since 1990, and the closure of 2,252 branches in the past five years.

The figures show how these godfathers of the bank boardrooms have been writing fat pay checks to themselves in the morning and redundancy notices to their employees in the afternoon. It is a scandal that pay has gone through the roof for top directors while thousands of their employees have faced a pay freeze or the sack. So what strategies do the Tories have for tackling the poverty trap? The answer is simply that they have none. They have turned Britain into a sweatshop. I want to set out the reasons why that is the case, and a diary of events on low pay.

The Committee sat for the first time on 24 January this year. Interestingly, that was the first occasion on which Mr. Cedric Brown of British Gas discussed with members of the Select Committee on Employment his views on fair remuneration at work. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). I am not someone who goes in for gongs or presentations, but my hon. Friend has been outstanding in her pursuit of greed in the boardroom at the expense of ordinary workers at the work place. Much of the exposure of the Conservative party's hypocrisy on these issues and its sham support for low-paid workers has been down to my hon. Friend.

On 1 February this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the shadow Secretary of State for Employment, released figures from the Government's own new earnings survey. They showed that Sir Iain Vallance earned more in a day than 80 per cent. of Britons earn in a month—more than 17.3 million people had to work a month to earn what Sir Iain Vallance earns in a day. On 9 February, when the Committee was sitting, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on income and wealth stated that

> "low pay is a problem on unprecedented scales. The lowest 10 per cent. of hourly paid workers are earning less now than in 1975 while the top 10 per cent. are earning 50 per cent. more."

On 14 February the Minister of State, Department of Employment, announced triumphantly to the Committee that considered the Bill that no lower income floor would exist to which an unemployed person could look for a safeguard against being offered a £1-an-hour job, or losing benefit. She trumpeted that as a triumph for the marketplace.

On 16 February, a Sweatshop of Europe report entitled, "What Future?" was published. It contained a detailed analysis of the jobs and pay rates offered by the careers and employment services, which are directly under the control of the Minister. The report highlighted the fact that young people had to work about eight weeks full time to earn what the head of British Telecom earned in one hour. The Minister's Department is offering people in Britain jobs where they have to work eight weeks to earn what the head of BT earns in one hour of one day. Despite that, she still trumpets with triumph her commitment to offering to the unemployed jobs that pay £1 an hour or less.

On 17 February, to their shame, Tory Ministers lined up to defend top pay awards and to attack the minimum wage proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham. On 21 February, the International Labour Organisation attacked deregulation and stated that that was not the pathway to greater job creation. It called on all Governments, and in particular this Government, to end poverty pay and to renew a commitment to full employment. The Government failed to respond to that by offering a debate in the House or even by offering the House a statement about their position on the ILO. The reason for that is that they do not want further to expose themselves publicly about their lack of commitment in relation to poverty pay. Their support for driving down wages further directly contravenes the ILO report.

On 1 March, the Secretary of State for Employment put clear blue water between himself and the Prime Minister when he defended mega pay rises and attacked a minimum wage, offering himself as a standard bearer of the politics of greed and privilege. I was unfortunate enough to be there listening to that diatribe of attacks on the low-paid in Britain.

On 7 March the banks were at it again, along with the privatised utilities. Jam, jam all the way for the rich and powerful, and dole, dole every day for more of the workers. There was a further scandalous announcement of mega pay rises and arrangements on pensions and share deals making them instant millionaires while workers were being made redundant, despite the fact that the profits were at the greatest level ever.

7 pm

On 15 March I issued a report highlighting the fact that privatised utility bosses have axed 126,000 jobs with another 82,000 to go in the next five years. So far, the jobs-to-dole strategy has cost the taxpayer £1 billion in benefit payments. That £1 billion of taxpayers' money has been used to strip out high-paid, high-quality jobs from the privatised utilities while the profits from those utilities go straight into the pockets of the few powerful people in charge of them. The Government responded by supporting that.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I will give way in a moment.

On 17 March my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham published a further report saying that the axing of wages councils has led to a cut in wages and reduced levels of employment. That is a direct attack on the concept that the Secretary of State for Employment always parrots; that if wages are reduced, employment increases. That is entirely bogus and my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham proved that to be so.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I said that I would give way in a moment. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has only just come into the Chamber. He was not around for the eight weeks during which we were discussing this issue in Committee. I will give way later.

On 20 March my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham published a further report highlighting the fact that over 3 million workers now earn less than the national insurance contribution of £57 per week. Of that number, a shameful 74 per cent. are women. It beggars belief that as we come to the next century so many people are earning less than

£57 a week. Yet, the Government and their proposals in this Bill will force people to accept wage levels that are even lower than that.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman said that in the privatised industries money had been diverted into the pockets of the managers. That is a gross simplification. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is only since the privatisation of the water companies that they have begun to deal with the huge logjam of crumbling Victorian sewers? That is costing hundreds of millions of pounds and was not being dealt with when the industry was in state hands.

Mr. McCartney: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should defend the Government's position on private utilities and that he went further to promote the water industry, which, since privatisation, has made thousands of people redundant. There have been record levels of cut-offs and record levels of profit at the expense of those who require water for the basic necessities of life. The hon. Gentleman should apologise to the House for his views on this matter. What about his constituents who have to suffer under the yoke of privatised utilities such as water which are increasing charges at the same time—

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It might be advisable if we returned to the subject of the minimum wage.

Mr. McCartney: I apologise for allowing myself to be led down the wrong path. I will not do it again.

On 21 March the Secretaries of State for Employment and for Social Security tabled a new clause, which will be debated tomorrow, to cut hardship payments to unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds. It will confirm the £400 million cut in benefits for the unemployed.

There it is. That is the catalogue of Government support for greed and privilege which occurred during the weeks in which the Bill was in Committee. At the end of that, the Government's only response is to attack unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds and reduce further their ability to live on or below the breadline. Many of those young people whom the Government intend to attack are kids who have come out of care and who may have been physically or sexually abused. Some of them are children with relationship problems or who have mental health or other health problems. The Government's only response is to defend the fat cats and the privileges in privatised industry. Those 16 and 17-year-olds will have no training place and no proper job to go to. It is no wonder that today Lord Whitelaw said of the Government:

> "This lot are a complete shower. . .one of the worst Governments I can remember."

Opposition Members could not agree more with those sentiments.

Where have the Government got us? We are now the sweatshop of Europe. We have the longest working hours, the least holidays, poorest pensions, lowest pay and highest levels of insecurity. The bottom tenth of the population are 17 per cent. worse off in absolute terms than when this lot came to power. The proportion of households living in poverty has trebled from 7 per cent. to 24 per cent. of the population since the late 1970s. A total of 328,000 people in Britain earn less than £1.50 an hour. Over 1 million people earn less than £2.50 an hour. Women have been badly hit by low pay—670,000 of them earn less than £2.50 an hour. In every part of Britain there is a serious low pay problem. Some of the worst affected areas are in regions such as Yorkshire, Humberside and the north. That coincides with high levels of structural unemployment. Those are the very areas that will be the worst affected by this Bill.

The Government do not just stop there. Between 1984 and 1994 there has been an increase of 1 million people holding down two and sometimes three jobs just to make ends meet, and a further 4.5 million people are earning so little that they live on or below the poverty line. The Government promote that as an excellent idea. They say that that is what people should do in a deregulated marketplace. They say that people should find themselves a second or third job in order to develop their skills and energies and that they should be thankful for it. Interestingly, in *The Guardian* today there is a little more insight into what the Government really mean about their friends having little extra earners in little jobs. Seamus Milne, the labour correspondent said:

> "The £300,000-a-year chief executive of the privatised electricity generator Powergen left MPs investigating top corporate salaries speechless last night when he mentioned in passing he had three 'little jobs' on the side paying £36,000 a year."

I must emphasise that they were "little jobs" on the side. Mr. Wallis took up share options of £876,194 last year and received a pension payment of £53,000. He stands to earn a £100,000 bonus. In defence of all that he said that the

> "extra jobs were all 'done in my own time'."

For one meeting a year he was paid £17,000 by the British Standards Institute. That is not a bad rate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the subject. He may be talking about that gentleman's minimum wage—I do not know—but he should return to the amendment under discussion.

Mr. McCartney: I was contrasting the Government's proposals in the Bill and their intention to drive down the position of the unemployed, who work for £1 an hour or less or run the risk of losing benefit, with their general policies in the labour market. The Bill supposedly provides opportunities for employment in the labour market.

My contention, as shown by the evidence I have put to the House, is that the Government have double standards—one standard for their friends and one for the unemployed. It is legitimate to say why we have tabled these amendments. We want to put the unemployed at least on a level playing field. It may be that the job that is being offered leaves them worse off than when they are on benefit. They may be driven further into poverty by having to accept an employment opportunity that none of the Conservative Members would accept for themselves or their family.

It is clear that Ministers would never accept those wage rates for the companies and individuals who support them, whether in the privatised industries, the private sector or the banking sector. It is legitimate to state precisely what the Government are doing with the Bill.

Ms Eagle: Did my hon. Friend notice that Mr. Giordarno and Mr. Cedric Brown of British Gas said in their evidence to the Select Committee that they would have no objection whatsoever to a minimum wage?

Mr. McCartney: It is interesting to note that a large and growing number of employers not only accept but promote the idea of minimum standards at work. Many companies which are involved in compulsory competitive tendering now recognise that one can maintain standards and opportunities in the marketplace for their goods and services only if they provide minimum standards of investment, training and education for the work force. Many companies now fear that, following the total deregulation of the labour market, competition will be on the basis of who can pay the least wages. Instead of investment in quality, there will simply be investment in the firms with the lowest wages. Companies will then be in an unfavourable position when trying to compete in the marketplace.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman may be able to make a speech during the debate. *[Interruption.]* I gave way to him earlier, and I was sorry I did because of the stupidity of his remarks.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman did not answer my question.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman has had an answer. If he does not like it, he can lump it.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman adopts the intellectual approach.

Mr. McCartney: It says a lot for the hon. Gentleman's intellect that he supports what is happening in the privatised utilities at the expense of those on low pay. If that is a sign of intellect, I am glad that I have my intellect and he has his.

The Government have got themselves into a position where on the one hand, their proposals will further undermine the right of the unemployed to seek a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, while on the other hand, they will allow employers—such as the bosses of the privatised utilities—to set wage levels for their own benefit. There will be huge wage levels and minimum levels of pay for the privatised bosses, while no minimum level is set at the lower end of the market, where it will be left to the market to drive wages down further. With that will go the rights of unemployed people to seek employment which will take them out of poverty, and not drive them further into it.

The Government's position is even more unsustainable when one looks at what the new JSA rules are doing to the incomes of people who are currently requiring benefits. Eighteen to 24-year-olds will lose £500 a year—a 20 per cent. cut—simply because they are under 25. They must still pay the same levels of national insurance contributions, tax, council tax and mortgage payments. But when it comes to their payments from the benefits system, the Government immediately make a cut in their income because of their age.

A person aged between 18 and 24 who has a partner working full time will have a 60 per cent. cut in benefit, and will lose £1,457 simply because of his age. Again, that is despite the fact that he pays the same level of contributions as people over 24. A 25-year-old with a partner working full time will lose 50 per cent. of his income, or £1,205. Someone aged 25 or over with £8,000 of savings—which can include, of course, any redundancy payments—and a non-working partner will lose 70 per cent. of his benefit, or £2,694.

The House should look at those figures alongside the Government's support for Mr. Wallis and his one day a week job which gives him extra spending money of £17,000 a year. It is no wonder that we ask about double standards in public life, and about the hypocrisy, mean-mindedness and tight-fistedness of the Government. The Government are blatantly cutting the benefit of the unemployed and kicking them in the teeth. They are asking the unemployed to pay the price of the Government's failed economic policies.

Ms Lynne: Would the Labour party reverse those cuts? I asked that question before, but I did not get a satisfactory reply.

7.15 pm

Mr. McCartney: If the hon. Lady and her party had bothered to serve for eight weeks on Committee, she would have had an answer to that question, and a lot of other answers as well. The Labour party has consistently tabled amendments and new clauses to defend the status quo and to try to challenge and defeat the Government on the Bill. The next two days of discussion on the Bill will be about the clear proposals from the Labour party to defend the rights of the unemployed. We cannot make our position any clearer. We have not spent the last eight weeks of our lives in Committee—without the support of a single Liberal Democrat—defending the rights of the unemployed, to come here and have a silly smart Alec question about what we will do at the next election.

We are desperate for the Government to announce a general election so that we can put our new proposals on the minimum wage and other issues before the British public. With every day that goes by without a general election, more people are ending up in poverty and unemployment, and more people are being exploited in the work place because of low wages. If the Government are really serious about the Labour party's position on policy issues, they should give us a general election.

I understand that right hon. Members in the Cabinet set themselves up a little sub-committee to look after Government gaffes. Their first mistake was to put the chairman of the Conservative party in charge of the gaffe committee.

The Government would seem to have no intention—either before the passage of the Bill or slightly after—of allowing us to put the issues to the British public. But they cannot run away for ever, and we await the day when we can put some different proposals to the public, not only on the minimum wage but on recreating a welfare state which takes people out of poverty and into work and which gives people access to a range of issues which the Government currently deny them.

Mr. Heald: Getting back to the amendment, what would be the

"minimum prescribed amount of remuneration."?

Mr. McCartney: The Government have three choices, and each time we asked the Government about them they failed to respond. The Government can—by regulation—say that the minimum would be a person's current unemployment benefit level, his current income support level or his current jobseeker's allowance level. We have asked questions about that, as the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) knows. The hon. Gentleman served on the Committee, and that is why I was prepared to give way to him.

We asked the Minister of State, who was so eager that she answered before I could get the question out. She said that there would be no level in respect of the protection of an individual in relation to the minimum level of salary which can be given in an offer of employment. Therefore, the three options available to the Government could offer protection for the unemployed going back to the work place.

Mr. Heald: Which option would the hon. Gentleman choose?

Mr. McCartney: If I were the Minister, I would not be putting the unemployed in the position in which the Government are putting them. No Labour Minister would force people into employment at wages of less than £1 an hour or take away their right to benefit. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North's support of the Government's proposals in Committee has been shameful.

Ms Eagle: Does my hon. Friend recall that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, when asked about that very matter, said that the correct answer to question 18 of the jobsearch plan is the level of wages a person was earning in his last job?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right, and when we challenged the Government on that, no answer was given.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman knows that he cannot say that no answer was given when I was challenged. I gave the Committee a full explanation of what happened. The hon. Gentleman will recall, as will the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), what happened that night. There was a great deal of yah-boo stuff coming from the Opposition Benches. There was chaos. One could hear the chaos several miles off. My hon. Friend was not allowed to complete his sentence. Far from being confused, had he been allowed to finish he would have said that the amount was someone's last salary within the permitted period. The hon. Gentleman was given that explanation in Committee.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister is absolutely consistent in the excuses that she gives for the mistake either by herself or by the Under-Secretary, her hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). The fact is that the Government got themselves into a mess on that occasion. If I remember rightly, for her trial and tribulation in trying to trip around her hon. Friend's terrible error, we gave the Minister a Gotcha award on behalf of the rest of the Committee.

Ms Eagle: When my hon. Friend read the *Hansard* record of the response of the Under-Secretary of State for Employment did he notice the full stop at the end of the sentence?

Mr. McCartney: I do not want to discomfit the Minister any further. It is a difficult position when a Minister prays in aid a full stop or comma in respect of Government policy, but there we are. The Minister is right. She gave an explanation in Committee, but the problem was that all the members of the Committee laughed their heads off and we did not hear it all.

The Labour members of the Committee found the Government's position on this matter unacceptable. Through their labour market policies, the Government are trying to price the unemployed into low-paid work by denying them benefit. The unemployed have two choices, neither of which is acceptable. The choices are exploitation or the dole. The Government's proposals for JSA offer a simple choice.

Question 18 of the draft agreement on the jobsearch plan asks the claimant:

> "What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

There are even boxes in which to put the lowest hourly, weekly, monthly and annual wage rate. I do not think that Mr. Ed Wallis of PowerGen will be filling in the form, but it would be interesting if he did.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The box is not big enough for all the noughts.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right.

The Government's proposals for the jobseeker's agreement are different from what happened under unemployment benefit. JSA is not a daily benefit but a weekly benefit. In the jobseeker's agreement people have to sign up in advance for seven days a week at a minimum of 40 hours. If that is calculated in relation to the level of the jobseeker's allowance, it equates to about £1 an hour. The Government are giving a green light to poor employers in local markets to offer employment opportunities with pay at or around jobseeker's allowance rates. They will do so in the sure and certain knowledge that the Minister will offer up large numbers of unemployed people who will either have to take the job or lose their right to benefit.

Unemployed people will be criminalised. They can be fined and fined again. They have nil choice. It is either to have no income or to take the exploitative job. That is why the Government have made this proposal. It is a cowardly attempt further to manipulate local labour markets not by investing in quality training and job opportunities but simply by driving down pay to the lowest possible level.

Our position is in stark contrast to the response from the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Amber Valley. This is the hon. Gentleman who got the Minister into trouble in Committee. In a letter to the *Financial Times* on 23 December last, he stated that £2.70 was an extremely low level of pay. He can write that in the *Financial Times*, but as a Minister in the Department of Employment he backs the Government to the hilt when they are prepared to introduce the jobseeker's agreement and force people to work for not half but almost a third of that.

What is the Government's position? If £2.70 is extremely low, would the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North support it, given that that is the position of an Employment Minister? People could legitimately say that offers of less than that could leave them considerably worse off. The Government should respond to that. Is that Government policy? Did the hon. Member for Amber Valley declare the Government's position on the minimum level of wages in the economy?

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way a second time. He quoted earlier the view of *The Guardian* on the minimum wage. While I have not read that article, I have read reports by the OECD which say that the single common cause for high unemployment levels in France and the Club Med countries is a minimum working wage. So what is the hon. Gentleman's policy and what is his response to the OECD, if not to *The Guardian*?

Mr. McCartney: I say two things to the hon. Gentleman. This is not a complaint. The article that I quoted from *The Guardian* was not about the minimum wage. It was about Mr. Wallis's personal position in relation to his minimum wage. As for the OECD, the report did not say what the hon. Gentleman said it said. The Government interpret it in the same way as they do the ILO report. Those reports make it clear that the Government's position is unsustainable in terms of the market.

The ILO report, which is less than a month old, has made it clear that the position of this and other Governments who promote free market policies to the extent of poverty pay is driving their economies in the wrong direction. In the long run, that will damage the economy as a whole. Academic research has also shown that, in countries that have a minimum wage, there is no net loss of employment opportunities. The Government have not been able to prove their case.

Does the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire believe that the Under-Secretary was correct? Does he believe that £2.70 is the level that the Government should choose in respect of the jobseeker's allowance? Does he think that that is a fair level? Does he think that that should be the floor?

Mr. Fabricant: I am concerned that people should have jobs. It is pointless to set a minimum working wage if it creates unemployment. Would the hon. Gentleman's party welcome the creation of unemployment?

Mr. McCartney: We are the only country in Europe that does not have statutory pay protection. Ours is the only country out of 100 ILO signatories that is opposed to providing minimum pay protection for its work force. The bulk of empirical evidence shows that the impact of minimum wages on unemployment is insignificant. That evidence comes from studies by the ILO on the minimum wage throughout the world. The Government do not have a case for opposing the minimum wage. They are opposed to people having fair standards, wages and conditions of work. The Government have set their face against that.

It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire did not support the Under-Secretary's view. I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister of State supports the Under-Secretary. The excuse that she gave in Committee—that the hon. Gentleman was shouted down by yah-boos—does not stand up. He wrote the letter in the closeted, quiet atmosphere of the Department of Employment and sent it off after due consideration. The Minister can give no excuse for what her hon. Friend believed about extremely low levels of pay.

The Government have every intention of taking wage levels in Britain to the lowest possible point, regardless of the social and economic consequences. They have no desire to see any wage protection for workers in Britain. It suits the Government to have high levels of unemployment because they create a market in which unscrupulous employers can call the tune. There is a trough for the wealthy fat cats to eat and gorge themselves in and for millions there is a trough of despair. That is what the Government's policies offer.

A national minimum wage would get people back to work, off benefits and out of the poverty trap. It beggars belief, but, as we approach a new millennium, earnings inequality in the United Kingdom economy is greater than at any time since 1866. For the bottom quarter of wage earners, earnings fell in comparison with average pay by 10 per cent. The earnings of the upper 25 per cent. rose by 11 per cent. The earnings of the top 10 per cent. of earners have risen by a staggering 50 per cent. Wages councils for 4.5 million people were abolished by the Government in 1993-94.

Mr. Heald: I am still trying to find out what the minimum prescribed amount of remuneration is. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that it will be equal to the statutory minimum wage that the Labour party would introduce as an incoming Government? If so, is he talking about £4.05 an hour for 40 hours a week—£160 a week—as the minimum amount that would entitle a claimant to refuse a job?

Mr. McCartney: During the eight weeks in Committee, I know that the hon. Gentleman found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that he was in the Committee to defend the Government's position and that we were debating a Government Bill.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): This is an Opposition amendment.

7.30 pm

Mr. McCartney: The Secretary of State must contain himself a moment longer. The position is this. The Government have four choices on this amendment and I will repeat them: employment benefit level, income support level, jobseeker's allowance level and the £2.70 suggested by the Under-Secretary in the *Financial Times*. I have given the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North four choices. Given that the Bill will be law before the next general election, if he wants a debate in the general election campaign about the minimum wage and any changes that an incoming Labour Government would make to social security, I shall be delighted to come to his constituency to help remove him. I have no problems with that.

As regards the Bill and what happens if it becomes law this summer, the Government must make choices and so far they have chosen to offer people £1 an hour or less. The amendment gives them four opportunities. I will make it easy for the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North. Which opportunity does he choose? Which one would he agree with? I see that he is smiling, but he will need to do better than that—he cannot buy food with a smile. What choice will he make? I will give him four opportunities—one out of four, two out of four, what is it to be? What is his choice?

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me another opportunity. The choice that he is offering is totally bogus because the potential law that we spent eight weeks debating does not make choices of that sort. It says that it is up to the claimant to show good cause, and he knows that. Will he finally answer the question and say that the minimum prescribed amount of remuneration would be the same as Labour's figure for a statutory minimum wage—that is, £4 an hour?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman has surpassed himself as he has given us a fifth choice, which is no floor. The position is clear—the Government are not prepared to defend people from having to accept £1 or £1.50 an hour, or less. Theirs is a total zero position.

Miss Widdecombe: This is an Opposition amendment and presumably its purpose is to make clear what they want in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman consistently refused to make it clear throughout the Committee and the beginnings of this debate. What does he want us to do and what is his choice of the five, six, seven or eight options? Will he specify that figure in that box?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady is being rather disingenuous with me. During the passage of the Bill, I gave her the options. From the moment that she got out of the trap and made it clear that there would be a zero rate for the unemployed and that the sky is the limit for the public utility bosses, she has had opportunities. In this debate, I have given her a fourth opportunity to agree with the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Amber Valley. I would call it a draw if I got anything out of this debate that improved the situation for the unemployed from zero. I give the hon. Lady another opportunity to come to the Dispatch Box to support her hon. Friend's assertion in the *Financial Times*. Does she agree that that should be the minimum floor?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend has not suggested a minimum floor as regards the Bill. All I want to hear from the hon. Gentleman is the figure—whether for an unemployed agricultural worker or an unemployed ex-boss of a public utility—that he wants in that box under the Bill. What is he asking for?

Mr. McCartney: I am going to have to give the hon. Lady a lesson about her own Bill. An unemployed ex-head of a public utility would not qualify because of his capital resources—he would probably retire with about £2 billion of taxpayers' money in the bank, so the question does not apply.

The Minister cannot use the excuse that the Under-Secretary has been misquoted. He took the opportunity, in his own time, to submit the letter to the *Financial Times*. She either agrees with him or she does not. I will repeat his remarks. On 23 December last, he stated that £2.70 is an extremely low level. That is the position of her junior Minister. That being the case, how can the Government accept a zero position in the Bill for the unemployed? It is clear that the hon. Lady—

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Opposition to table an amendment and for no guidance to be given in the speech for the Opposition about the essential point—what the prescribed minimum amount of remuneration should be? If I may give an example—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman need not bother to give an example because it is not a point of order and the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) is responsible for his speech.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North should know better than to challenge the Chair as it was obviously in order or we would not have been debating it. I should have thought that he would have learnt his lesson, as he got himself into hot water on more than one occasion in Committee with similar points. He is using yet another tactic, but he has failed to answer.

The Government are extremely embarrassed. They never expected that from the young boy Minister—he is the only Minister who went straight from a youth training scheme to be a Minister and he is the only person I know of who qualified and got a job out of the scheme. The "young Minister", as he was described in the last Employment questions, has put it on record—I assume that he is speaking for the Department as he is not speaking on his own—on behalf of the Government and of the Department, that he believes that £2.70 is an extremely low level. Opposition Members would all say, "Hear, hear."

What we find interesting is that, during the passage of the Bill, it has been obvious that the Minister of State believes that a zero rate or £1 an hour is not too low. There is a difference of about 66 per cent. between the hon. Lady and the Under-Secretary. I do not want to labour the point too much, but it is a further sign of Government confusion over minimum wages and standards at work. I see that the Philadelphia lawyer is coming to the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Roger Evans: The question that I want an answer to is this—the hon. Gentleman may not want to give a figure, but he used the phrase

"a minimum prescribed amount of remuneration"

in amendment No. 1. Is that the same figure as Labour's minimum wage? If it is, could he tell us, and if it is not, could he explain it?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman must do better than that. I know that he can convince juries at the Old Bailey with his arguments, but that was a bit threadbare. We state clearly that there should be designation in regulations—*[Interruption.]* I cannot make it any clearer. Through the amendment, we are trying to ensure that there is a floor, so that an unemployed person can be defended against exploitation.

This Bill will be law before the next general election, when the Labour party will put forward its position on the minimum wage and a range of other issues. The Bill is a stop-gap between this and an incoming Labour Government, which there will undoubtedly be—we will get rid of the whole damn shower of them. The position is clear.

Does the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North think that the Under-Secretary was right about £2.70 an hour? Does he think that he has put the Government's position? If so, we will call it a draw and we will accept that and

[Mr. McCartney]

designate it in the regulations. At least that would be better than what the Minister of State is saying—£1 an hour or nothing.

Mr. Evans: Do I take it from that evasion that, if there ever were a Labour Government, the figure that he is proposing for the minimum prescribed remuneration would be Labour's minimum wage?

Mr. McCartney: The Under-Secretary thinks that he is at the Old Bailey again. He seems to be rather troubled by the judge in this matter.

Mr. Heald: Answer yes or no.

Mr. McCartney: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman about yes or no. The Government must defend the Bill which, unamended, provides for a zero rate. Unemployed people can lose their right to benefit if they do not accept a job that pays £1 an hour or less. We have offered four options in that respect. I ask Tory Members again whether they would accept: a minimum level of unemployment benefit; income support; jobseeker's allowance; or the suggestion of the Under-Secretary of State for Employment of £2.70 an hour? For God's sake make up your mind and pick one of those four options before tens of thousands of unemployed people lose their right to benefit or are forced into skivvy jobs that leave them in in-work poverty at the end of the week.

In-work poverty affects millions of people. It is interesting to note that Tory Members have lost, within the confines of Government, the argument on the minimum wage. The Secretary of State for Employment is not here because he cannot take the embarrassment. The Minister of State and her hon. Friends wanted to get rid of the agricultural wages boards, which are the only statutory minimum pay boards left in Britain. They had to hold a public consultation on the matter and discovered that employers, employees and farming communities wanted to keep a minimum wage and minimum standards to protect their community from the onset of further poverty and to defend their local economies and local companies. The Secretary of State for Employment had to swallow that decision in Cabinet and his position was overturned.

So, the first time that public opinion was tested—it will probably be the only occasion between now and a general election—on the issue of a national minimum wage, the Government were defeated and had to climb down. I welcome the fact that a national minimum wage for agricultural workers is still protected. Tory Members have had to accept the principle and concept of a minimum wage, and the agricultural wages boards will continue to operate.

I wait to see whether the Minister will attempt tonight, by the back door or other means, to undermine the decision to continue the agricultural wages boards. May I put another question to her in respect of the jobseeker's agreement? In areas where agricultural wages board rates apply, what will be the position under the jobseeker's agreement of somebody who says, "I'm not prepared to accept a job below that rate."? The local labour market will have a floor agreed by the Government, as the agricultural wages board sets a statutory minimum floor in the local agricultural economy. What is the position of unemployed people in those areas? Will they be allowed, under the JSA, to insist that they will not accept wages below the level that the Government set under the agricultural wages board?

The Government were not in power when our right hon. Friend, Barbara Castle, put equal pay legislation on the statute book. The Tories screamed that millions of people would be made unemployed, industry would be laid to waste and destroyed, and the only casualty would be women. That has been proved to be a fallacy because women play an increasing part in the work force. The problem is that the equal pay legislation needs a little assistance because of the direct effect on low pay of the Government's market policies. Our proposals on a minimum wage will ensure that women have their rightful opportunity in the marketplace to take home a living wage.

The Labour party is proud to support a minimum wage policy and, during the run-up to the next general election, we shall increasingly promote and put forward that proposal effectively.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): On low pay, is my hon. Friend aware of the case in Coventry some months ago in which an individual was paid £1 an hour? When we took the matter up with the Secretary of State for Employment, the individual was told that he should claim benefits. The Government are thus protecting employers while abusing taxpayers by using taxpayers' money to subsidise bad employers.

Miss Widdecombe *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cunningham: The hon. Lady need not shake her head. If she wants a copy of the letter from the Secretary of State for Employment, I shall willingly send her one. That is the racket which the Government are perpetrating.

7.45 pm

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government are using in-work benefits not to lift people out of absolute poverty but to subsidise employers who are maintaining people in poverty. Not only do employers receive that incentive to pay poverty wages but, through the taxation system, they have huge tax rake-offs for their private income and capital at the expense of the low-paid. So it is a double whammy: if people work for a bad employer, the bad employer receives a subsidy to keep them on low pay, while his profits and personal income are hardly taxed at all. The vast majority of working people face a 7p in the pound tax rise, which is the highest tax hike in history. The Government have the worst record on tax of any Government ever, anywhere and at any time. They not only lie about taxation but pile it on as quickly as they can, especially on low-paid, middle-income and ordinary people.

Without a pay floor in the economy, low pay damages our economic prospects. It dampens consumer activity; leads to a high turnover of staff; weakens investment in training; and creates insufficient production by employers, who drive down wages to cut costs instead of improving investment in modern equipment and production methods. A statutory minimum wage would provide a floor to stop unfair exploitation. It would stop bad employers and corporate individuals having the subsidies that my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) described a few moments ago.

Only in the two-nation Britain created by today's Tories can a massive taxpayers' subsidy to low-wage firms be considered sensible economics. If the Minister does not want to listen to me and to my hon. Friends, perhaps she will listen to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, who clearly stated that there was general agreement within the Cabinet on the need for the agricultural wages boards and that a minimum wage in farming should be applied because it was fair. He said that it did not cost jobs and that both employers and employees wanted to keep it. If that is the hon. Gentleman's position, it is time that the hon. Lady gave up her bile and prejudice against low-paid workers and gave unemployed people a fair crack of the whip and an opportunity for a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I ask my hon. Friends to support the amendment.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I totally support the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney).

What has angered me most in Committee and in successive debates and Question Times in the House is how the Government and Tory Members preach about creating jobs and attack a minimum wage, when their party is full of people who have several jobs and think that the salary that they receive to serve in this place is insufficient. At the same time, they expect millions of people to live on poverty wages and accept any job, however low paid, that is offered to them. Tory Members are good at preaching about people who are workshy, but would they consider taking a job that paid £2.70 an hour or less?

The Government's employment policy and the Bill are all about creating a skivvy economy where hundreds of thousands of jobs are low paid and short term, while a few thousand people—like some retired Tory Ministers and the chairmen of the privatised public utilities—rake in up to £150,000 a year for just one day's work a week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield has already mentioned the evidence that was given yesterday to the Select Committee on Employment. Another fact that particularly angered me and should anger every hon. Member was the news that Michael Bett, the chairman of the Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body that recommended the paltry, insulting increase of 1 per cent. to the thousands of people who devote their lives to caring for the population, has been offered £57,000 a year for a three-day week. If the Government are willing to offer that kind of remuneration to the thousands of my constituents who are unemployed, I am sure that they would be more than happy to accept it. If the Government want to tackle unemployment, perhaps they should limit the number of jobs that any one person can do, because it seems that just a few hundred people grab every job that is going.

The Bill, if it is unamended, will force people to accept wages of £2.70 an hour or less; otherwise their benefits will be stopped. Just in case anyone thinks that the Opposition are exaggerating about jobs that pay less than £2.70 an hour, let me quote three examples from my part of the world.

First, there was the recent case in the Strathclyde area of a taxi office controller, working a 54-hour week for £1.48 an hour. If that person became unemployed, would he really be expected to be willing to work for even less? The second case is that of a qualified hairdresser in the Fife area, whose take-home pay is £68. She and her partner would be better off living on income support, because they would then receive the great sum of £71.70 a week. I came across the third example of low pay when I opened my local jobcentre in Dunfermline in July—a week before the Government confirmed the closure of Rosyth naval base, which has put thousands more out of work. A security guard's job was advertised, which required the man or woman to make their own transport available and offered between £1.80 and £2 an hour.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): The hon. Lady has cited examples of people on low wages, but is it not fair to say that they are entitled to family income supplement, which increases their income considerably?

Ms Squire: As far as I am aware, family income supplement disappeared some years ago and we now have family credit or income support. Because of the complexity and maze of rules concerning family credit and income support, many people on low wages are not entitled to either benefit.

The hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) leads me on to quote another example of a constituent who came to see me at my surgery at the weekend. He has worked for 29 years at Rosyth dockyard and is to be made compulsorily redundant. He has discovered that, first, because he is 55 years of age, he is not entitled, under current legislation, to unemployment benefit, even though he has paid all his life in the expectation that such benefit would be available to him. Secondly, he will not be eligible for income support because he will receive a pension of £79 a week. That is what he is expected to live on.

Some other Ministry of Defence Rosyth employees, who also face the prospect of redundancy, came to see me yesterday. They told me how shocked they were by the low level of income that people are required to live on.

In Scotland alone, 83,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour and 24,000 people already earn less than £1.50 an hour. That is the type of wage for which people are expected to work. They are expected to accept such low-paid jobs or face the risk of losing benefit.

The Opposition have made it clear that we want to promote decency and decent pay and conditions for those who are in work and then, unfortunately, find themselves out of work. That is why we believe that it is only just that we should amend the Bill, so that men or women can refuse to work for poverty pay without having their benefits stopped.

My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield has already mentioned that, under the Government, the gap between the highest and lowest-paid workers is greater than it has ever been since records began in 1886. The bottom 10 per cent. of full-time workers earn on average about one third of that earned by the top 10 per cent. In 1992, the richest 20 per cent. of the population had net income five times as great as the poorest 10 per cent. That disparity will have grown even larger in the intervening years. It seems that the Government are in favour of low pay, but we are not.

The Government claim that the unemployment rate is falling. I would argue that that is happening not because they have created decently paid jobs, but because they have encouraged low-paid and frequently part-time work. In the past 16 years, I have, time and again, seen jobs that

[Ms Squire]

once employed someone for between 30 and 40 hours a week split into three or four part-time jobs, which have left people with few if any employment rights and low pay. Since 1938—I mean 1978; it just feels like 1938 sometimes—the number of part-time jobs has risen by 32 per cent. while the number of full-time ones has dropped by about 13 per cent. In Scotland, the number of part-time jobs has gone up by 9,900, but the price we have paid is the loss of 7,600 full-time ones. One must question the reality of job creation.

In my part of Scotland, Fife region already has the highest unemployment rate of Scotland at 11.2 per cent., while one of my district council electoral wards is already approaching an unemployment rate of 20.7 per cent. The Bill will bring no hope to those unemployed people.

Low pay puts a burden on the taxpayer because the profits of low-paying employers are subsidised through family credit. I believe that the system of tackling wage poverty by top-up benefits is economically inefficient.

I shall now mention some of the arguments that have been made about a minimum wage. First, it has been argued that it will lead to job loss. There is little real evidence to demonstrate that. Before the previous general election, the independent organisation Industrial Relations Services carried out a survey of 527 firms, asking them what they would think of a minimum wage set at half average earnings. Nearly two thirds of those questioned said that it would not increase the organisation's pay bill, and a further 30 per cent. said that it would add less than 5 per cent. to the pay bill. Following the abolition of wages councils, we have not witnessed a growth in the very low-paid sector of employment, but jobs have been lost—notably, as many as 27,000 in the hotel and catering sector—and even lower wages have been paid.

8 pm

I remind Conservative Members that although minimum wages have little impact on employment, they affect the economy. Let me again take Scotland as an example, where 220,000 workers used to be covered by wages councils. Every 10p decrease in their wage levels since the abolition of wages councils will lose the Scottish economy £30 million. That policy damages the economy.

A second argument about the minimum wage is that it will lead to inflation and that the higher-paid will seek to maintain a differential. The Government should preach to those fat cats in the privatised utilities about seeking to maintain differentials, because they are the ones who constantly demand massive pay increases.

There is little evidence to show that maintaining differentials will affect the economy. Indeed, the Confederation of British Industry has estimated that a minimum wage set at half average earnings may add only 1.2 per cent. to the nation's wage bill.

The third argument that has been used against a minimum wage is that it will affect Britain's international competitiveness. Do the Government really suggest that we should adopt the employment practices of some countries in other parts of the world, where there continue to be children in full-time employment, where children work down mines and where workers are paid as little as 50p an hour?

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Lady now tell us when any member of the Government has suggested any of those things? *[Interruption.]*

Ms Squire: It seems that the jobseeker's agreement and the Jobseekers Bill suggest that there is no problem with people working for as little as 50p an hour. That sort of level of pay puts pressure on families to suggest that their children and young people should find any job, however poorly paid.

Miss Widdecombe: But the hon. Lady mentioned a number of horrors, including child labour. Where does that come into the Bill?

Ms Squire: I am saying to the hon. Lady that she has refused to set a level below which she thinks that it will be unreasonable for anyone of any age to work, and that that appears to me to be imitating the employment practices which, tragically and unjustly, continue to exist in other parts of the world where children continue to be engaged in horrific manual labour and wages are as little as 50p an hour.

Mr. McCartney: It is a fact—the Minister of State knows it, and she has been disingenuous not to admit it in the debate—that, under the young person's jobseeker's agreement, if the Minister carries a set of proposals that the Government will set out after the Bill is passed, young people coming out of care will lose the right to any form of income. Those are young people, newly out of care. The truth is that the Government are attacking, and will tomorrow attack, the very young people whom the Minister of State says that she will defend.

Ms Squire: I thank my hon. Friend for those excellent arguments.

When the Government are considering ways in which to create decently paid employment, they should consider the fact that good companies do not make investment decisions based solely on labour costs; they consider other aspects to be important, such as a highly skilled and motivated work force, an efficient transport and communications network and good research and development. Those can be far more effective than low pay in attracting inward investment and helping to create jobs.

If the Government are serious about reducing unemployment, they should also alter, as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield said, their education and training policies, especially as reflected in the contents of the Bill. The Government should eliminate the contradictions created by existing rules rather than set up other barriers.

In conclusion, I hope, albeit faintly, that the Government will support the amendments. It appears that their employment strategy is designed simply to move people from unwaged poverty into waged poverty. That merely exchanges one set of problems for another.

Pay is probably the clearest signal that we give of the value and worth that is placed on a person's work. Without a minimum prescribed amount of remuneration, contained in our amendments Nos. 1 and 2, the only message that the Government will give to unemployed people, whatever their circumstances, is that they are of little or no value and little or no worth.

When I was considering what to say today, and flicking through some of my notes, I came across a quotation that very much describes what the Government are about. It is by someone called Thomas Paine who, I know, will be familiar, at least to Opposition Members. He said, more than 200 years ago:

> "It is inhuman to talk of a million sterling a year, paid out of the public taxes of any country, for the support of any individual, while thousands who are forced to contribute thereto are pining with want and struggling with misery.
>
> "Government does not consist in a contrast between prisons and palaces, between poverty and pomp.
>
> It is not instituted to rob the needy of his mite, and increase the wretchedness of the wretched.
>
> There never did, there never will and there never can exist a parliament possessed of the right of commanding forever how the world shall be governed. I am"—

we are—

> "contending for the rights of the living."

That means that we support a minimum wage.

Mr. Heald: I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire). Starting with her quotation from Thomas Paine, I wonder whether she is prepared to accept that, 200 years ago, he was talking about a country with the workhouse and with the justices in charge of local government—a very different society, in which one could be hanged for stealing potatoes. Is the hon. Lady seriously saying that we live in such a society today?

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: I am happy to give way, although somewhat earlier than usual.

Ms Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; I could not contain myself.

Will the hon. Gentleman admit that, 200 years ago, when Thomas Paine was writing, so was Adam Smith? The Conservative party appears to be fixated on the writings of that economist.

Mr. Roger Evans: He was right.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and that sedentary intervention indicates that Adam Smith was right. However, I think that the hon. Lady should agree, although I am sure that she would not, that a sense of balance is needed in those things.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Reading!

Mr. Heald: I am not reading.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West gave us that sense of balance. She discussed the problems of unemployment in her constituency without mentioning that, in the past year, unemployment has decreased in her constituency by 10.4 per cent. The figures that she took would have suggested that the position throughout Scotland was becoming worse rather than better. In the past year, in Scotland, unemployment has decreased by 11.2 per cent. Twenty-eight thousand people net in Scotland this year are back in work. That is good news. The Scottish economy is improving—the hon. Lady knows that better than me.

The idea that we are discussing the subject against a background of worsening unemployment and no opportunities for young people is wrong. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) made a similar point, but unemployment in his constituency is down by more than 10 per cent. The level of unemployment in his constituency is 8.5 per cent., having gone down by almost 18 per cent. in the past year. Can he seriously argue that unemployment is getting worse, which is something that he said in one of his contributions?

Mr. McCartney: I want to correct the hon. Gentleman. It is not unemployment that is going down, but the claiming count. The hon. Gentleman should add to the claiming count the 2.4 million people who are economically inactive. The Government do not include them in the count; if they did, they would find that there are about 5 million people in Britain still looking for jobs and desperate for work. The Government are preventing them from working.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, which shows no sense of balance. As the hon. Gentleman would know if he had researched the matter—I think that he does know—the International Labour Organisation's figures, which have been described by the Trades Union Congress as utterly reliable, show almost exactly the same unemployment figures as the Government's own departmental figures.

What is more, is the hon. Gentleman really saying—I know that he cannot be—that the Labour party, in the unlikely event of its coming into government, would add those economically inactive people to the count? Of course a Labour Government would not. That would provide an inaccurate figure that would not reflect the true circumstances in this country. The ILO measure is different from the Government's measure in its formula, but the result is almost exactly the same: 2.4 million people are currently unemployed. The figure is too high, but it is falling fast.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West said that most of the jobs that have come on stream over the past year are part time. Not only is that inaccurate, but she should not forget that the people who are taking part-time work want part-time work. The Department of Employment survey of part-time workers showed that only 14 per cent. of them wanted full-time work.

Ms Rachel Squire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: I shall be happy to give way when I have finished my point.

If we consider full-time workers, as the survey did, we see that about one third of them would like to work part time. To suggest that people are being forced into part-time work is wholly inaccurate. Is it not about time that the Labour party started to address the serious issues on the basis of the facts?

Mr. Booth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heald: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, as I promised, and then to my hon. Friend.

Ms Squire: I certainly agree that there are people—the majority of them are women with family responsibilities—who look for part-time work. But they are looking for part-time work, not poverty wages, which is what they are frequently offered. I was also saying that full-time jobs are being replaced by low-paid, part-time work. If one talks to skilled engineering workers from dockyards and elsewhere, one finds that they are looking for full-time, not part-time, employment.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. What people who are looking for work want is a job. All the evidence shows that if we were to introduce a guaranteed minimum wage—something for which she has argued—we would lose rather than gain jobs. Who is she to tell people what sort of jobs they should accept?

Mr. Keith Hill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: I must finish my point, and I have also promised my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) that I will give way to him next.

Who are any of us to tell people what jobs they should take? Who are we to say that someone should not have taken that job, but another? That is nonsense. Each individual's circumstances are different. A particular worker may want to take a specific job for his or her own reasons.

Mr. Booth: Is my hon. Friend aware—from what he has said to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) I think that perhaps he is—that thousands and thousands of people, particularly women, treat part-time jobs as freedom from the drudgery of the workplace at home? Is not the part-time job an expression of freedom—something that the Opposition are always prating about?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend makes his point in his own way.

The huge increase in women in work since 1984 is something of which this country should be proud because those women who wanted to work now have the opportunity to do so, and do so in large numbers. It is true that one of the reasons for the increase in part-time work is that many women want part-time work. There is no reason why they should not want it. It may fit in with their responsibilities to their children. Some men may like part-time work so that they can give a hand in the home as well. We in this place should support women who want to go out to work and take pride in the fact that they have been given that opportunity. We should not always try to knock them down, undercut them and say that they should not have taken a particular job and were silly to do so.

8.15 pm

Ms Eagle: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support the recommendations of the Select Committee on Employment on mothers in employment, as he has just given a paean of praise to women in the work force. He asked, "Who are we to tell somebody what job to take?" Does he agree that that is what the Bill is all about? It is about telling people to take particular jobs on low wages or have their benefit denied. Who is he to make a point like that when it is the very point of the appalling legislation?

Mr. Heald: The hon. Lady makes my point for me. I am asking how we can say to someone who has taken a job that he or she should not have taken a particular job. I think that I made that point clearly. It is different if someone is paying a jobseeker's allowance, as the taxpayer is, or will be. The taxpayer is entitled to have his or her position protected, which is exactly what the Bill does.

It is not presumptuous to tell someone receiving the benefits of the taxpayer—we are the taxpayer's protectors—how we believe a proper, structured approach should be taken to job seeking. It is not presumptuous for us to say, "This is the advice that we are giving you and the agreement that we would like to make." If the person is not prepared to accept the terms on offer or suggested by the employment officer, the adjudication officer decides. If that is still not acceptable to the claimant, the matter can be sent to the social security appeal tribunal, which consists of the employer's representative, the employee's representative and a lawyer. There are further rights of appeal in the event that the appeal tribunal does not deal with the issue properly. The hon. Lady cannot say that the taxpayer's interests are being dealt with in anything other than a proper way.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is trying to be reasonable. He talks about protecting the taxpayer's interests. Does he have something to say about the interests of the taxpayer who is currently subsidising low-paying employers to the tune of £1 billion a year—twice as much of the taxpayer's money as the Bill attempts to save with its vicious cuts? Why is there not some protection for the taxpayer on that side of the equation as well as the other side?

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but time is short—it would be an extremely interesting argument to get into.

Miss Widdecombe: When my hon. Friend heard the intervention of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), did it not sound to him extraordinarily as though she were proposing the abolition of family credit?

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend as that is precisely one of the points that I wanted to make. That is not the first time in the debate that we have heard that line peddled. The hon. Member for Makerfield decried family credit in his speech and said that it was a disgrace. I thought that we were finally about to hear a commitment from the Labour party. Is it Labour party policy to abolish family credit? That would be a bold proposal by new Labour. I do not suppose for a minute that we will receive a clear answer tonight when we did not get one during the weeks of consideration in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman had the absolute temerity to stand at the Dispatch Box and pretend that the Labour party had something to say about tax, when week after week in Committee he ducked and weaved in an attempt to avoid making the commitments that were the only logical consequence of the amendments that he tabled. The Opposition's amendment talks about a "minimum prescribed amount". Have Opposition Members said what that amount will be? Will it be the same figure as

Labour's guaranteed minimum wage? That does not help us much because the Opposition are not prepared to tell us what that figure is either.

The Labour party is humbug from beginning to end. Labour Members make criticism after criticism week after week, but they are not prepared to say what they would spend or when they would spend it. We have seen examples of that approach again tonight.

Unemployment in Britain is falling for a number of reasons, one of which is that the Government have put in place a structure which assists the jobseeker. The Bill builds on that structure and I believe that hon. Members should support it. The Opposition's amendment gives no information about what the Labour party would do—it does not even give the Government the benefit of the Opposition's advice on the issue. How on earth could anyone support it?

Mr. Burden: I was pleased when the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) got to his feet and I was delighted when he began to speak. I hope that many people outside this place will read his remarks, because he has done the Labour party a great service.

The hon. Gentleman talked a great deal about "forcing" people out of jobs. A central issue in the debate is whether it is reasonable for the Government to force people into jobs that pay poverty wages. Government Members must answer that question because it is their legislation. Even after a Second Reading debate and eight weeks of consideration in Committee, we have yet to hear what the Government consider to be a minimum reasonable rate of pay to expect people to work for without risking a deduction in benefit.

Government Members may disagree on that point, so I intend to go to the top in respect of the legislation. The Minister of State made her position clear in Committee and it is important to put it on the record on Report. She said:

> "I have said until I am tired of saying it, that pay will not constitute a reason for refusing an offer of work. I know that that is not palatable to the Opposition. I have also said on record—it is already published in *Hansard*—that an unemployment adviser"—

I thought that they were employment advisers—

> "would take into account all prevailing circumstances".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 21 February 1995; c. 521.]

We examined the prevailing circumstances that the Minister had in mind. We were pleased to learn that she did not intend to cut the current list. Health considerations were a prevailing circumstance that could be taken into account generally—but not in respect of pay. Religious conviction, conscientious conviction and caring responsibilities could be taken into account—although the Minister did not mention the cost of caring. If travelling costs associated with a job were considered excessive, they could be taken into account, as could excessive travelling time. But there was no mention of pay. The Minister did not answer the key question: what level of wages is it reasonable to expect people to work for? Anything goes for the Minister and the Government.

Are we trying to imagine problems that do not exist? Is there no problem with low rates of pay? Perhaps the problem existed once but it has now disappeared. The facts are that the problem does exist and that it is growing. Mention has been made in the debate of a survey conducted by the Manchester Low Pay Unit which found that one third of jobs offered wages below the national insurance threshold.

The Low Pay Network undertook a study entitled "After the Safety Net", based on a survey of 5,918 job vacancies at 128 jobcentres across the country. Of the 4,493 vacancies that gave a rate of pay, 36.5 per cent. paid less than they would have done if wages councils had still existed.

We are not talking about highly paid jobs; we are talking about jobs in catering, hotels, shops, hairdressing salons and clothes manufacturing. We are talking about rates of pay that the wages councils said were unlawful. Under the wages councils, it was unlawful to pay people less than about £2.50 per hour. When the Government were busy abolishing the wages councils, we posed the question, "Do you condone the fact that many employers are paying less than wages council rates?" Government Members replied, "Of course we do not condone the law being broken." So the Government abolished the law and legalised pay rates that had been unlawful under the wages councils.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he mention the 15 per cent. fall in unemployment in his constituency in the past year? Does he intend to examine subsections (7) and (8) of clause 7, which make it perfectly clear that the terms of a jobseeker's agreement are subject to the test of reasonableness, with a right of appeal not only to the adjudication officer but to the social security appeals tribunals? In those circumstances, how can he make those points?

Mr. Burden: The hon. Gentleman referred to my constituency. I know precisely what the unemployment situation is in Birmingham. It does not give me any joy that one in five people in Birmingham are unemployed. About half that number have been unemployed for more than a year—that is higher than the national average—and about 30 per cent. of them have been unemployed for more than two years. One quarter of young people in Birmingham are unemployed. I think that that is a problem and I would not use that tragedy to try to score political points.

The Government should be more concerned about doing something to address the unemployment problem and to create jobs. Government Members seek to blame the unemployed for their predicament. The unemployed are unemployed because there are no jobs, not because they are workshy. The community understands that and it is about time Government Members understood it as well.

Of course, it is not just a question of overall rates of pay. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North mentioned the expansion of part-time work and job insecurity in Britain. That is part of the backcloth to the debate. He referred to the number of jobs that have allegedly been created. The fact is that an average of 270 full-time jobs have been lost every day since 1992. That is a net figure; it takes into account the number of jobs created as well as those that have been lost.

It is true that there has been an expansion in part-time work. If people are unlucky enough to lose their job, there is a one-in-three chance that their next job will be part

[Mr. Burden]

time. If people move into part-time work, they are twice as likely to lose their job within a year. The average pay for a part-time job is—

Ms Eagle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for civil servants to brief Back-Bench Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is completely out of order.

Mr. Heald: I apologise; the civil servants made that point to me.

Mr. Burden: The average pay of part-time workers is 70 per cent. less than that of full-time workers and, on average, a part-time job is 50 per cent. shorter than a full-time job, so when Conservative Members talk about the expansion of part-time working as if it were a one-way street or something for which people were crying out, perhaps they should look at the reality of part-time work for so many of our citizens.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who always gives way. Will he be as fair as he is wont to be? If he is to go through the parade of figures over the past few years, is it not right that he should point out that we have created 600,000 jobs in Britain in the past 18 months, when 2 million jobs have been lost in the rest of the European Union?

8.30 pm

Mr. Burden: If the hon. Gentleman does not understand how many jobs have been lost every day since 1992, I shall give him the figure in a few more ways. Let us go back to 1990 rather than 1992: since 1990 the number of jobs lost per day has been 579, which equates to the loss of about 24 full-time jobs every hour for the past five years.

Miss Widdecombe: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If, instead of comparing peaks and troughs, he looks at the matter over a complete economic cycle, will he admit that we have created 1.5 million jobs in Britain, a figure substantially higher than most of the rest of the industrialised world?

Mr. Burden: If the hon. Lady wants to look at a complete cycle, perhaps she should examine the level of unemployment in my constituency and others since the Conservative party came to power. She will see that the Government have destroyed many jobs.

I am pleased that the Minister intervened as I was talking about job insecurity. The philosophy of job insecurity has been encouraged not just by the Government but by her Department.

I received a letter from the hon. Lady today dated 19 March taking exception to the fact that, a week or two ago, I publicised the fact that an internal circular in her own Department—Employment Service personnel notice 5/95—was deliberately encouraging managers in the Employment Service to deprive temporary staff of their employment rights.

I shall quote from that letter as the hon. Lady was obviously quite put out by what I said. She wrote:

> "I can assure you that the aim of the document is not to deny temporary workers their employment rights. On the contrary the notice aims to reinforce the principles underlying the Civil Service Order in Council."

Obviously that circular, which instructs managers to make sure that temporary members of staff are not employed for longer than 51 weeks, had nothing to do with depriving temporary workers of their employment rights. Perhaps it was totally misrepresenting the intentions of the Employment Service. Was it? I shall quote from that particular circular.

Personnel notice 5/95 also encouraged managers to carry out employment checks on potential recruits to see whether they had worked for the Employment Service before. Why do managers have to carry out an employment check? There are various possible reasons. It could be for reference purposes. If somebody who had worked for the Employment Service before was a good member of staff, perhaps the service would want them back, but that is not why the circular urges managers to carry out employment checks. The reason is:

> "If it is not checked, we might later find that the individual has already worked for up to two years and might now be in the position of having enough service to qualify for a wide range of employment rights."

There we have it in a nutshell: job insecurity, getting rid of employment rights and denying temporary workers employment rights is official Government policy. It is all linked together. Low pay, job insecurity and increasing casualisation of employment are all part of the Government's ideology. It is something to which we may object, and indeed we do. The Government may think that they can get away with that, but they might have some problems with this Bill under European law.

It is by no means certain that the Bill, if enacted, will be lawful under European law. As far as I know, the Government and Britain are still bound, or consider that they should be bound, by the European convention on human rights.

Article 4 of the European convention on human rights states:

> "No-one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour."

The article also sets out some exceptions to that rule which allow work to be done by prisoners and the military in times of emergency and include

> "any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligation".

The Commission has decided in a number of cases that, in order to give rise to a violation of that article, the work must be involuntary, done in order to avoid the menace of a penalty, be unjust or oppressive and cause the victim unavoidable hardship. So there we have it: a violation occurs if a job is taken under the menace of a penalty. That is precisely what the Jobseekers Bill seeks to impose. It seeks to force people into jobs under the menace of the penalty of having their benefit deducted. Benefit sanctions are absolutely at the core and the heart of the Bill.

Tomorrow we shall debate new clause 6, which attempts to deal with another example of that compulsion or threat of penalty. Tomorrow we shall debate the Government's ambition to force young people to remain on training schemes even if the quality of the schemes is lousy and the Government are doing nothing for the young people. They are to be forced to stay on those schemes under the threat of removal of benefit.

The Bill is not only fatally flawed logically and blames the unemployed for their predicament but fails to create one single extra job to put people back into work. I am pleased to see the President of the Board of Trade—or the new leader of the Conservative party—coming into the Chamber.

The Bill also perpetuates the state's and the taxpayer's subsidising of low pay. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) talk about how family credit can come into play to alleviate low pay. He is absolutely right; it does. It would be far better if employers who paid poverty wages were not subsidised by the taxpayer. There should be an obligation on employers to pay reasonable wages. It is not up to the taxpayer to subsidise poor employment practices, whether by private employers or by the Employment Service itself. In-work benefits cost the taxpayer many millions of pounds, as my hon. Friends have already said.

The Bill is not only flawed logically; it could be flawed legally. The United Kingdom has been before the European Court of Human Rights 47 times and has suffered 23 losses in 16 years. The Government could be heading for another defeat in relation to the Bill. At best, the Bill shows ignorance of the plight of the unemployed. At worst, it shows the Government's determination to cover up their own failures, to blame the unemployed for that and, in an unlawful manner, to impose on the unemployed penalties for problems which they have not caused and for which they should not expect to stand the price.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I am conscious of the time and the wide range of the debate so far, but certain points need to be made about the minimum wage. The absence of a minimum wage certainly contributes to economic inefficiency. The history of the textile trade—which is close to the hearts of the people of west Yorkshire—in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was of an industry that tried to compete on wage levels with the far east, with the consequence that hundreds of companies went out of existence and 57,000 jobs were lost in west Yorkshire. The textile companies that survived, prospered and remain today invested in technology, machinery, equipment and human capital—in training people and enhancing their skills—to increase their companies' capacity.

Low wages encourage the black economy. Anyone with experience of contract cleaning or contract packing companies knows that the names on the payrolls come from Disneyland. The vast majority of people working in those industries are colluding in a black economy, in which the employer does not pay national insurance contributions and employees often have alternative occupations.

Low wages also set the poverty trap, because people in receipt of family credit and living in rented accommodation are liable to a 94 per cent. clawback of any increase in their income. A person earning £120 per week and receiving family credit must increase his wages to more than £200 before enjoying any benefit. The Government are considering extending family credit to childless couples, which will broaden the net of the poverty trap.

During the passage of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who was the present Under-Secretary's predecessor, took part in almost a Dutch auction in a debate on the abolition of wages councils, when it was said that a wage of £2.75 per hour, or £2 or £1.50, was acceptable. It was only when the figure reached 70p per hour that the right hon. Member for Stirling wavered. He did not say that was bad, but if the figure had dropped to 60p, he would probably have been on our side.

Compare that with Home Office policy. Anyone in Britain with a spouse living abroad whom he seeks to bring into this country must have an income of £160 a week, and an additional £40 per week for each child involved. The Home Office requires a couple with two children to have an income of £240 per week. The right hon. Member for Stirling thought that an income of £28 a week for someone working 40 hours was acceptable. It is disgraceful that such policies operate. The Home Office supports the minimum wage, but the Department of Employment supports the opposite. A minimum wage brings dignity, economic prosperity and security to the employed, saves taxpayers' money and is economically efficient.

Mr. Chisholm: Unfortunately, time is again short. The new clause attacks the heart of the Bill, which is why there is no possibility of the Government accepting it. The Bill's apparent purpose is to reduce public expenditure by attacking benefits for the unemployed, but its underlying reason is to drive people into low-paid employment and, by increasing the pool of people in such employment, to drive low wages even lower.

Conservative Members get excited because figures are not quoted, but the principal question is whether there is to be a floor to wages. The Government have refused to put in a floor. The absence of one is bad for workers, bad for public finances, bad for demand in the economy, bad for economic efficiency and bad for jobs. We will take on the Conservatives over all the nonsense they talk about jobs being lost through a minimum wage. Many statistics prove how bad it is for workers not to have a wages floor, and I recommend that people read the new Labour party document published last week, which shows that 328,000 people earn less than £1.50 per hour for their work. Women are particularly badly affected. Three quarters of the 3 million people who earn below the national insurance threshold are women.

8.45 pm

The absence of a minimum wage is also bad for public finances. Conservatives make a fuss about our attitude to family credit. Of course it will not be abolished, but more of the strain should be taken by employers. The Conservatives are supposed to favour privatisation, so why do they not privatise family credit? That way, more would be paid by employers and less by the Government. That should appeal to the Government, because it would reduce public expenditure.

If more people earned more at the bottom of the income scale, that would increase demand in the economy, which would, in turn, create more jobs. Low wages also cause high staff turnover, which serves as a disincentive to train. Why should employers train staff who will not stay with them long? Low pay is a substitute for training and for developing new processes and products. That was the point of Winston Churchill's famous quotation in support of a wages floor 90 years ago.

We will continue until the general election to challenge the assertion that a wages floor is bad for jobs. It is bad for jobs not to have one. At the last general election, the Government peddled their lies, and no doubt the same lies are all ready for the next general election. When that time comes, we will dissect and demolish those arguments. I do not have time tonight, but I can offer a foretaste.

The Government assume that a minimum wage will bring changes at all income levels, but many studies have shown that segmentation of the labour market will not necessarily have knock-on effects for other wage levels. The methodology of some theoretical studies that say there will be job losses can be challenged. They merely add the amount of money necessary for a minimum wage as an increase in the average wages level and feed it into the computer, to produce job losses. If that were true, when equal pay legislation was enacted in the 1970s, there would have been declining employment; instead, there was a slight increase. Women's wages increased a little and more women were working.

The same is true of the agricultural wages board. Even the Government accept that, and studies by the London School of Economics show that a minimum wage level had no effect on jobs. That applies equally to wages councils. The Library background paper refers to studies by the LSE and others that show that the existence of those councils did not hold back employment. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) told us what happened after the wages councils were abolished. There is evidence that there were fewer jobs—18,000 in retailing and catering in the period immediately following the abolition of wages councils. At the same time, wages fell—which was, of course, the purpose of the legislation.

Europe was also mentioned, as was the Under-Secretary's letter following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). Again, the Under-Secretary seemed to think that he disproved the point, because the figure for employment growth in the UK between 1980 and 1990 was 6.4 per cent.

It is interesting to look at the employment growth from 1980 through to 1993, which was what the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham was about. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, there is a slightly negative figure for the UK. Every other country about which my hon. Friend asked had a positive figure. In other words, all the countries that had some form of minimum wage legislation had a better employment growth record in that period.

I note that the same letter also makes the point about the low level of the minimum wage in the US. At least the US has accepted the principle, which is all we are asking the Government to do. A figure of $4.25 is quoted. If hon. Members refer to the study paper from the Library, they will find reference to another paper. Quite a lot of research on this has been done in America. When New Jersey, I believe, increased its minimum rate from $4.25 to something over $5, and the neighbouring state—I believe it is Pennsylvania—did not, there was a job increase in the state that increased its minimum wage. So why does the Conservative party not look at evidence from throughout the world, and, indeed, from this country, with agricultural wages boards and the wages councils, and see what has happened in practice, instead of inventing all the figures and feeding them through its computers?

There are, perhaps, reasons why that has happened in America, where minimum wages have increased, because in certain circumstances it is rational for employers not to hire new workers. Sometimes, it is rational for employers to keep output below the optimum, because sometimes they also have an interest in keeping wages low, and therefore having a pool of unemployed people in the labour market.

We in the Labour party are saying that there must be a floor for wages. There will be a market failure in our economic system if we do not have that floor. It will not cost jobs, and we shall go on saying that until the general election. We know that the Government do not have many cards to play in the next general election, so they will be scaring the electorate about the minimum wage as well as about Scotland, where I come from. We know all the scares that we will hear, but the Labour party started its campaign last week to tell the British people the truth about the minimum wage. That is the message that we shall get across so that the Government will not be able to scare people into voting for them again.

Miss Widdecombe: The standard of debate has deteriorated through the evening. We started off with an entirely sensible debate about disability provisions. We then had a debate which was total confusion and chaos because Opposition Members did not understand what was being proposed. Now, in our final debate, we have heard a rant of unreconstructed 1970s socialism from just about every Opposition Member who has contributed.

The first point to get across in this debate—although one might have been forgiven for wondering whether that is what it is—is about a proposed amendment which would write in that there must be specified levels of remuneration. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) asked whether we would imitate countries that had child labour, low wages and so on. In fact, what we are going to imitate is our own existing system. In question 18 in relation to the jobseeker's allowance, the claimant is asked:

"What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

The Opposition talk as if we were introducing something scandalous in the Bill. By the end of the evening, we even heard about it being "unlawful" to introduce that under the Bill. Yet under the "Helping you back to work" plan that the Employment Service currently operates, question 27—I appreciate that the Opposition may have had difficulty getting as far as that—asks:

"What is the lowest amount before stoppages, etc. that you are willing to accept?"

There is absolutely no change.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way presently as I sympathise with the hon. Lady's obvious affliction, but I need to leave the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) time to respond, so there is some pressure. I will take the hon. Lady's intervention presently, but first I want to finish this statement because it is crucial that people should understand—I believe that they have been badly misled by the Labour party, both in the House and outside—that this does not represent a change.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Minister for her generosity in giving way. I shall be quick. What would be an acceptable answer to question 18, which asks:

"What is the lowest wage you are willing to work for?"

What would be an acceptable answer to avoid an individual applying for the jobseeker's allowance being denied benefit for making an unreasonable claim on wage levels? Will the Minister answer that simple question?

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Lady to clauses 7 and 8, which are about reasonableness. I shall come to that presently. What is being suggested by the Opposition today is that we could even get down as far as having no pay. The hon. Member for Makerfield actually said that. Given that this is a straight carrying over of the present system, how many people are currently offered nothing and then lose their benefit? The only incidence that I know of somebody being offered nothing was when a jobcentre displayed a vacancy on behalf of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, when he was advertising for an assistant. I do not suppose for one moment that it would have been regarded as unreasonable if somebody had turned down that job on the basis that no pay was being offered. That is the whole point.

The Opposition are the scaremongers in this. They want people to believe, first, that there is a change and, secondly, that the policy would be unreasonably operated.

Mr. Burden *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: This will be the last intervention that I shall allow, so is the hon. Gentleman sure that he wants to intervene at this point?

Mr. Burden: I am very sure indeed. Is the Minister now saying, unlike what she said on 21 February, that pay could constitute a reason for refusing an offer of work?

Miss Widdecombe: What I was saying then—I understand that the hon. Gentleman may not have clicked on as quickly—was that no pay would constitute a clear reason. The hon. Member for Makerfield said specifically several times in his opening rant that nothing would count for these purposes.

One other thing that I have to correct concerns the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden), but he has just had his intervention, so that is bad luck. What he did not read out when quoting from my letter was the postscript, in which I said that it was a pity that he had not bothered to ask the Employment Department for an explanation before going public with his horror story.

There is no question whatever of the purpose of that circular being to deny people their employment rights. The policy of the civil service since 1870—there have been a few Labour Governments since then—has been that recruitment to permanent posts in the civil service is to be done through fair and open competition. To that end, the guidance for the civil service is that for temporary workers, after one year of employment, their employment must cease and the job must become open to fair and reasonable competition from outside—in which they, of course, can compete. The hon. Gentleman can show me no part of employment law in which 51 weeks is significant. It has nothing to do with employment law, but everything to do with civil service fair and open competition.

The hon. Gentleman then came to the other quote about managers ensuring that people have not accumulated two years. He read it as though it were something sinister. It cannot have escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that people who had accumulated two years would have the full rights of permanent employees, which would cut off opening their jobs up to fair and open competition. The hon. Gentleman has endeavoured to raise a storm in a teacup, but it is cruel, misleading and a sign of how desperate the Opposition must be if they cannot come up with anything better than that.

Let me explain what will actually happen under our proposals, as opposed to the dreadful stories put about by the Opposition. As I have said, I do not think it reasonable for pay normally to constitute a ground for refusing an offer of work—but I emphasise the word "normally". Clause 16 continues the concept of the "permitted period" that the Government introduced in 1989: a claimant with a usual occupation has up to 13 weeks to refuse work outside that usual occupation and the rate of pay that he or she used to receive. The claimant will not be subject to a sanction in such circumstances.

9 pm

That system works in a sensible way. After the permitted period, claimants should start to widen their job search. I explained clearly in Committee that we were not interested in introducing a "cliff edge"; we do not suggest that, after 13 weeks and one day, someone who used to be a senior manager, for instance, should immediately seek work as a gardener, or take some other job that is wholly removed from his previous occupation. Of course unemployed people should be given a reasonable time in which to review their prospects. If the senior manager whom I have cited is still unemployed at the end of his permitted period, he might then be expected to start looking for a junior management or senior clerical position; but that is not to say that he must immediately take any job at any level.

Obviously, the Employment Service will be offering jobs and operating sanctions. Hon. Members' objections can be interpreted to mean only that they do not trust the ordinary individuals in the Employment Service who will implement the rules. I assure the House, as I have done before, that the Employment Service will not set out to offer people inappropriate jobs.

Having discussed the amendment, perhaps I can now examine the amazing claims that we have heard from the Opposition. First, they have consistently refused to tell us what the minimum wage will be. The Trades Union Congress wants to know what it will be; Conservative Members want to know what it will be; the country wants to know what it will be; businesses want to know what it will be; but still the Opposition will not tell us. Why is that? It is because they know that as soon as they do, the proper calculations on job losses will be done, and we shall then be able to estimate the size of what the deputy Leader of the Opposition has described as a shake-out. What will be shaken is people, and what they will be out of is jobs.

The Opposition have ignored the Government's creation of 1.5 million jobs over a complete employment cycle. They have ignored the fact that we have 40 per cent. of all inward investment into the European Union from the United States and Japan—and why is that? It is because we have a flexible labour market. The Opposition have ignored the OECD report, which said that the reason for the investment was our flexible labour market. They have ignored the report by the International Monetary Fund, which said that Europe should be considerably more flexible. They have ignored the fact that the take-home pay of the bottom 10 per cent. of full-time wage earners is 23 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979. Indeed, the figure fell between 1975 and 1979.

Will the Opposition apologise for their record? Will they look happy, for once, about the 36 per cent. rise in average disposable income that has taken place since we came to power? Will they welcome the fact that, following the abolition of the main wages councils, the pay of employees covered by those councils increased by 3.7 per cent.? Will they look at the facts? Will they welcome what we have achieved? Will they tell us what their minimum wage will be, and what the number of job losses will be? If they are not prepared to do that, will they at least stop spreading horror stories, start telling the electorate the truth and start preparing for the same fate at the hands of the electorate as they have suffered since 1979?

Mr. McCartney: As is her wont when she is in trouble, the Minister ranted and raved. The fact is, however, that the Government's record on low pay is the worst in Europe. Ours is the only Government in Europe who make excuses for the ability of employees in privatised industries to earn £1 million overnight while others are forced to work for £1 an hour or less in other parts of the economy.

The Minister failed to give any answers about the Government's intentions in regard to the Bill. Before dealing with her speech, however, I should thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) for her eloquent testimony to the Government's abandonment of the defence communities in Dunfermline and other parts of Scotland. Her speech was a brilliant exposé of the Government's attack on workers who have contributed thousands of pounds in national insurance, and who then lose their right to benefit when they are made unemployed. In the Bill, the Government are taking the first steps towards abolition of the contributory benefits system.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) served on the Standing Committee and he served his Government well during those eight weeks. He had only one problem today: like many barristers, he tried to make a good job of a bad brief—a Conservative central office brief. He failed to accept that, according to the Government's own figures, between March and December last year 78 per cent.—eight out of 10—jobs created in the British economy were part-time jobs. In the past decade, the Government have destroyed 3 million full-time jobs. They are the only Government in the western world to have seen no net employment gain during that period: indeed, there has been a net loss.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) presented a compelling argument in relation to the Government's proposals on low pay, and the way in which they are trying to use the unemployed to regulate the market by forcing down wages and allowing employers to engage in illegal practices and offer poverty pay. The Government's only purpose in abolishing the wages councils was to allow employers to pay wages which had previously been illegal. Under the present Government, poverty pay is legal: an employer can now pay £1.50 an hour without facing sanctions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) made a well-researched speech about investment in training-related research and development. He also made a good point about family benefits and benefit clawbacks. Rather than taking people out of absolute poverty in work, the Government have left people in poverty while subsidising bad employers. That is the difference between the Labour party and the Government. We shall use family credit and in-work benefits to lift people out of absolute poverty. The Government use that to maintain them there and to provide subsidies for cowboy employers. We shall put an end to that situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) argued eloquently for the principle of a wages floor in the economy. He was an articulate and enthusiastic supporter of a minimum wage, arguing that low pay was unfair and inefficient, and that a minimum wage was fair and efficient. The Minister, in her usual way, continued to dodge the issue. She has had several opportunities to respond and I ask her yet again: will she fix a wages floor?

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Mr. McCartney: I am glad that the hon. Lady said that. She fell for the trap, which was set in Committee. The refusal to set a wages floor will mean—and she has admitted it—that under the jobseeker's agreement people will lose their benefit if they turn down a job that pays £1 an hour. No wages floor has been set at jobseeker's allowance level, at income support level, or at unemployment benefit level—not even £2.70 per hour, which was the level set by the Under-Secretary of State for Employment in his letter to the *Financial Times*.

The Minister has made it clear that the Government intend to ensure that people will be driven from the unemployment register into the hands of employers paying £1 an hour or less. I call on my hon. Friends to reject the Government's position on poverty pay and unemployment, to vote for the amendment and to support the unemployed and people on low pay.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 279.

Division No. 110] **[9.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John

Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric

Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Willetts and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 6, line 35, after ‘referred ’, insert ‘forthwith’.

No. 9, in page 6, line 44, leave out first ‘by’ and insert ‘at the instigation of’.

No. 10, in page 6, line 44, leave out second ‘by’—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Clause 12

EFFECT ON OTHER CLAIMANTS

Mr. Roger Evans: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 10, line 22, at end insert—

> ‘(aa) where the claimant and A are a married or unmarried couple, any portion of the applicable amount which is included in respect of them shall be reduced to one half for the period for which this subsection applies to the claimant.’.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendments Nos. 12, 13, 39 and 40.

Mr. Evans: I understand that the Opposition are content for me to make only a short speech on amendment No. 11. The amendments are drafting and technical, but I should perhaps refer the House to amendment No. 12, where the first line includes the word "is", which is clearly a typographical error, and should be deleted. The amendment should read

> "Where a reduction under subsection (2)(aa) would not produce a sum which is a multiple of 5p".

Mr. Bradley: I confirm that the Opposition are content with the amendments, but I add the caveat that we are not content with the clauses to which the amendments relate. We opposed them in Committee, and we continue to oppose them. I do not want the fact that we are not pressing the amendment to a vote tonight to be misconstrued.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 10, line 40, at end insert—

> ‘( ) Where a reduction under subsection (2)(aa) would not produce a sum which is a multiple of 5p, the reduction shall be to the nearest lower sum which is such a multiple.’.

No. 13, in page 10, line 48, at end insert—

> '(5) Subsections (6) to (8) apply where an order made under section 150 of the Administration Act (annual up-rating of benefits) has the effect of increasing the sum prescribed in regulations made under section 4(5) as the personal allowance for a single person aged not less than 25 ("the personal allowance").
>
> (6) For the sum prescribed in regulations made under subsection (2)(c) there shall be substituted, from the time when the order comes into force, a sum arrived at by increasing the prescribed sum by the percentage by which the personal allowance has been increased by the order.
>
> (7) If the sum arrived at under subsection (6) is not a multiple of 50p—
>
> (a) any remainder of 25p or less shall be disregarded;
>
> (b) any remainder of more than 25p shall be rounded up to the nearest 50p.
>
> (8) The order shall state the sum substituted for the sum prescribed in regulations made under subsection (2)(c).
>
> (9) Nothing in subsection (6) prevents the making of further regulations under subsection (2)(c) varying the prescribed sum.'.—[*Mr. Roger Evans.*]

Clause 13

SEVERE HARDSHIP

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 11, line 35, leave out 'has' and insert 'and "other assistance" have'.—[*Mr. Roger Evans.*]

Clause 15

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH A JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE IS NOT PAYABLE

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 13, line 34, leave out 'the' and insert 'an'.

No. 16, in page 14, line 19, leave out 'more' and insert 'both'.

No. 17, in page 14, leave out line 22.—[*Mr. Roger Evans.*]

Clause 22

THE BACK TO WORK BONUS

Amendments made: No. 18, in page 18, line 3, leave out 'subsection (5)(b) and to'.

No. 19, in page 18, line 38, leave out from 'person' to end of line 44 and insert—

> '(1) the whole or a prescribed part of a back to work bonus to be payable, in such circumstances as may be prescribed, to such person, other than the person who is or had been entitled to a jobseeker's allowance or to income support, as may be determined in accordance with the regulations.'.—[*Miss Widdecombe.*]

Clause 23

EMPLOYMENT OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED: DEDUCTIONS BY EMPLOYERS

Ms Lynne: I beg to move amendment No. 41, in page 18, line 48, after 'allowance', insert

> ', invalid care allowance or a benefit paid by virtue of his incapacity for work'.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 3, in page 18, line 48, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.

No. 4, in page 19, line 5, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.

No. 5, in page 19, line 10, after 'deductions', insert

> 'which may exceed the payments which he is required to make by way of secondary Class I contributions in respect of that person.'.

Ms Lynne: The Bill does a great injustice to disabled people and their carers. The national insurance holiday to employers who take on someone who has been unemployed is welcome, but it does not go far enough. Obviously, I should like a full benefit transfer scheme, but that is a debate for another day. The Bill would exclude those who care for someone, those who claim invalidity care allowance, those who claim benefits that are paid on the grounds that they are incapable for work and those who suffer an illness or disability that qualifies them to claim incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance.

The Minister may feel that he covered the amendment in Committee with the reply that he gave, but it was not adequate. He said:

> "The basic principle is that it is a work incentive proposal and there is no obvious case for extending it to those who are incapable of work. . . . There are other helps for disabled people to get back into work in the form of disability working allowance at a more generous rate than family credit. Housing benefit and council tax benefit contain extra premiums for disability, which again increases the amount of benefit that disabled people receive."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 28 February 1995; c. 640-41.]

I do not think that that is good enough, although there are provisions within the social security system to help disabled people back to work. The disability working allowance is one such thing, but it is unlikely to have any impact as a work incentive and the take-up rate is only 17 per cent. It would take another 25 years for the Government to achieve their target of 50,000 claimants.

The Minister missed the point in his reply in Committee. We are not talking about an incentive for those out of work. We are talking about an incentive for an employer to take people on. Employers can save about £6 a week. I do not see why that should not apply if they take on a qualified disabled person. I hope that the Minister will reconsider this. The amendment has particular value for carers who want to return to work. I know that the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People talked about considering the position of carers who received income support but were exempt from the requirement to sign on at the unemployment exchange.

I hope that the Minister will clarify the position on carers and whether they could be included in the national insurance holiday. Could disabled people be included if they had been in receipt of incapacity benefit? If employers take on someone who is disabled could they be treated in the same way as if they had taken on someone who had been unemployed for two years? I hope that the Government will consider accepting the amendment. It would go a long way to helping disabled people and their carers.

9.30 pm

Mr. Bradley: I add the Labour party's voice to this group of amendments and announce that I will try to divide the House on amendment No. 3.

Amendments Nos. 3 and 4 reduce from two years to one year the qualifying period under which a new employer would get the national insurance contribution holiday. Amendment No. 5 deals with the amount of the

[Mr. Bradley]

contribution rebate that clause 23 leaves to be prescribed in regulations and provides for the rebate to be more than the employer's contribution for the person in question.

It is unfortunate that we have so little time to debate this important group of amendments, which deal with support for taking people off the long-term register and getting them back to work—one could describe it as pathways back to work.

When she moved amendment No. 41, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) referred to our debate in Committee. It is important that I point out that we moved an amendment at that stage to provide that income support, incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance or invalid care allowance should be included as part of the two-year qualifying period.

As the Minister will know, I have corresponded with the Department during and since the Committee to try to clarify exactly how ex-carers and others who have been in receipt of incapacity benefits will be treated by the Bill and whether they will have the right to be included in any scheme that takes people off the long-term register.

Carers who have been undertaking the caring role and have not been available for work should not be discriminated against in any way when that caring responsibility ends and should not be excluded for two years—those are the Government's terms—from any help for returning to work. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us further details on that matter, because there is a general wish on both sides of the House to support people in those circumstances.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) in the Chamber. I tried to catch him before the debate started, as I did not want to do any further damage to his career by quoting him without giving him notice. His succinct and pertinent comments on Second Reading are worth quoting again, as they are relevant to amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 5. He was critical of the Government for failing to provide worthwhile incentives to employers to take on the long-term unemployed and his criticisms have a sound base. He said:

> "The problem is that, although the Government have accepted the principle, their measures are wholly inadequate. The national insurance holiday for employers who take on those who have been unemployed for two years or more will offer employers just £6 a week. Employers have already made it clear that this is simply not enough and that it does not offer an incentive.
>
> What is more, the national insurance holiday will not be introduced until April 1996. Why should the two-year unemployed have to wait to become unemployed for three and a half years before they get this measly incentive?"—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 61.]

We could not express the purpose behind our amendments more clearly than that.

There is a strong economic case for offering incentives to private sector employers to recruit the long-term unemployed. In the long run, that will allow the economy to grow faster while assisting the improvement of local economic activity in areas of social deprivation. The insecurity that people feel about their futures and the absence of the so-called "feel-good factor" are due to the chronic insecurity that people feel in their jobs.

The figures show for themselves why there is such debilitating uncertainty in the current climate and the current economy. Between 1993 and 1994, for example, 20 per cent. of all employees had left the job that they were in at the start of 1993. Similarly, people have a one in two chance of being out of their present job within two years. There are 1.5 million fewer jobs in the economy than in 1989, which means that 1.5 million jobs have disappeared during the recession and have not been replaced. In 1995, there are 3 million fewer full-time jobs than there were in 1979.

For two months running, the number of vacancies at jobcentres fell. Having fallen by 3,400 in January, they fell by more than 2,000 in February. If people are unlucky enough to lose their job, they have a one in three chance that their next job will be part time. Once they have shifted into part-time work, they are twice as likely to lose their job within a year as an employee in a similar full-time position. The impact of that insecure world of work which the Government have created is disastrous for families trying to plan for themselves and their children. Furthermore, nearly 11 million people—40 per cent. of the work force—have been out of work at some point in the past five years. Men are hit worst; 44 per cent. or 6.8 million men have been affected. The unemployment figure is still almost 1 million higher than it was under the post-war Labour Government.

All those figures and many more show that the current workings and deregulation of the labour market do not work. Long-term unemployment is grossly inefficient and unjust. There is a strong argument to support measures targeted at getting the long-term unemployed back to work. People who have lost their job in the past year have only a 23 per cent. chance of finding work within a month. If they are out of the labour market for a year, their chance of finding work falls to just 12 per cent.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Is the hon. Gentleman trying to argue that employers should keep people in work to stay inefficient and that people should be kept in employment to increase prices and to have inefficient industry? Is that the policy that the Labour party is putting forward? Is he saying that industry should not return to efficient organisation? Is that what the Labour party wants? If so, we want to know.

Mr. Bradley: That intervention was quite amazing. The purpose of the amendments is to build on the Government's measures. They have recognised that they must create incentives to get the long-term unemployed off the dole queue. The right hon. Gentleman implied that he did not even support those modest measures and wants no help to be given to the long-term unemployed. He clearly does not understand the Bill before us, the clause that we are dealing with and the fact that the amendments that we are discussing would help people to return to work. He should concentrate his mind on those matters and even read the statements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in introducing the proposals.

In his Budget speech, the Chancellor recognised that the Government must introduce those measures, and they have been included in the Jobseekers Bill, the back-to-work schemes and the back-to-work bonus. The amendments seek to reinforce, improve and extend those measures to help people who, because they have been out of work for one or two years, stand little chance of getting back into work. I should have thought that the right hon.

Gentleman would have felt some responsibility, given how long his party has been in government, for trying to help the long-term unemployed back into work. That is the sole intention of the amendments.

At the same time as the Chancellor announced his measures to help the long-term unemployed, we put forward the Labour party's eight pathways back into work. Given the intervention from the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), it is worth re-emphasising that clear Labour party policy to help the long-term unemployed. We strongly believe in the release of capital receipts to enable local authorities to build and launch small business expansion schemes, so that those businesses can expand and take on new workers. We shall introduce a benefit transfer programme for non-profit employers to help them to take on the unemployed in their areas. We shall propose an environmental task force, open to all young people. We shall look at tax rebates for employers who take on those who have been unemployed for two years or more. We shall look at modernising the benefits system so that we can ensure that people have pathways out of poverty through a combination of properly paid work and benefits.

We have just had an excellent debate on the minimum wage, which revealed that the Labour party is seeking proper wages for employment, topped up by benefits, rather than that people are ground down into poverty through the benefit system. We shall work to set up national child care systems to ensure that there are full opportunities for everyone to get back into employment.

We shall introduce many other measures when we are in government. At this stage, we want to ensure that the Bill provides the maximum opportunities to ensure that those who have been long-term unemployed and registered as such have the opportunity to benefit from the modest schemes that the Government have introduced. Amendments Nos. 3 and 5 are therefore designed to ensure that the Government include people who have been unemployed for between one and two years in the proposed new system. In particular, amendment No. 41 would guarantee that those people who have not been on the unemployment register but who have been unemployed through no fault of their own, because they have willingly undertaken the essential task of caring, also benefit from the Government's proposals.

As the hon. Member for Rochdale reminded us, in Committee the Government were not minded to look more sympathetically at the needs of the long-term unemployed or to consider lowering the unemployment threshold from two years to one. Since then, I hope that the Government have reflected on their position. I hope that they now appreciate that it is important that the plight of carers who, having undertaken caring responsibilities, face great difficulties when they try to get back into work, should be recognised.

More should be done to encourage the long-term unemployed back into work. I hope that the Minister will give us some encouragement by demonstrating that he has recognised the problem and by looking sympathetically at the amendments. I hope that he will accept them; otherwise we shall divide the House on amendments Nos. 41 and 3.

Mr. Roger Evans: I begin with amendment No. 41, which is otiose because clause 23(6)(a) gives a power to prescribe circumstances in respect of people who do not satisfy the terms of clause 23(1). They can be treated as such. The necessary empowerment to make the regulations is already included in the Bill. Therefore it is unnecessary to pass the amendment in order to achieve the object that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and, indeed, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), sought to persuade me to achieve.

I regret that I am not in a position to offer any satisfaction on the two policy matters that were mentioned. First, in respect of the disabled, the hon. Member for Rochdale fairly quoted me from Standing Committee, and the Government remain of the view that disabled people receive help to return to work in other ways. Disability working allowance is available at a more generous rate than family credit. Housing benefit and council tax benefit contain premiums for disability which also increase the amount of benefits that disabled people receive. Disabled people will qualify for the extra £10 premium in family credit or disability working allowance if returning to work for 30 hours or more a week.

9.45 pm

Ms Lynne: The Minister has not understood, as I said in my speech. We are talking about giving the employer an incentive to employ disabled people, not the other way round—not giving the disabled person the incentive to get into work.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Lady makes a fair point of analysis, but at the end of the day there is a question of money, whichever way round one tackles it. The Government's opinion is that the package announced in the uprating statement is an important, and indeed expensive, work incentive measure. The measures will cost an extra £300 million in benefit expenditure and will cut costs to business by a further £300 million when the national insurance reduction is taken into account. The Government's opinion at this stage is that we have gone a very long way. There is power in the Bill to go as far as the hon. Member for Rochdale wishes, but we do not propose to do so at the moment.

The second category, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Withington as well as the hon. Member for Rochdale, was that of ex-carers. My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has expressed sympathy. Indeed, he has written to the hon. Member for Withington, explaining that that category would not be entitled to the national insurance holiday, but expressing sympathy for the opinion that those who had received income support should be able to qualify and offering to consider the matter. I am not in a position to take the matter any further this evening, but that is the position as it stands.

The three amendments that the Labour party has tabled are extremely interesting and important. The purpose of amendments Nos. 3 and 4 is to make labour more attractive for hiring. The idea is that national insurance contributions are expensive; the employer has to meet them; if one gives a holiday from them, that is a direct incentive to the employer. The pair of amendments seek to extend that concession to employers from two years to one. The inexorable logic of the argument is that, by making labour cheaper, employers will have an incentive to take on more employees. Conservative Members strongly concur with that viewpoint.

[Mr. Evans]

It is deeply ironic that the inexorable sanity and logic of that position has been denied for the rest of the evening, because the minimum wage that Labour Members have contended for would have the effect of making labour more expensive. Somehow the Opposition wish to have more people in employment by making labour cheaper by those amendments, but refuse to accept the corollary that, if one increases the cost of labour by introducing a minimum wage, it will have the opposite effect. That is cloud cuckoo land of a most extraordinary nature, and shows the fundamental failing to understand a free market economy that is endemic on the Opposition Benches.

The difficulty with amendments Nos. 3 and 4, which are well intended, well meant and no doubt efficacious in the sense that they provide a positive incentive to increase the amount of people employed by reducing the cost of labour, is that, unhappily, they cost the taxpayer a considerable sum of money. The effect of amendment No. 3 would be to increase the category of employees who would potentially benefit from about 120,000 to 500,000 to 600,000. The precise effects are not necessarily easy to predict, but it is obvious that an estimated cost to the taxpayer of about £45 million would increase to about £170 million to £200 million in the terms of those two amendments. I regret to say that the Government believe that a considerable amount of money has been spent on the issue and it is not appropriate now to increase the burden on the taxpayer. In Committee, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) proposed amendments to like effect and suggested that they did not represent a spending commitment.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that, because the cost would be met out of the consolidated fund—general taxation—it was a mere book-keeping exercise. Increasing the burden on general taxation would, as a consequence, increase the amount needed to be raised from taxpayers to cover the additional cost. In no sense was it a book-keeping exercise. The hon. Gentleman's logic in Committee was incapable of being followed. The reality is that, yet again, the Labour party is arguing for a substantial public expenditure commitment.

Amendment No. 5 is in a different category. I can happily say that it is otiose in the sense that the Bill contains the power to do the same thing in any event.

Mr. McCartney: What does otiose mean?

Mr. Evans: Otiose, for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, means unnecessary and repetitious. The power already exists—*[Interruption.]* I can say to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) that I shall be brief.

The Government expect to provide, in regulations, for the deduction to equate to the amount of the employer's national insurance contributions. But the Bill contains the power to make that amount more or less. It is likely that we shall make provision in regulations for employers who operate occupational pension schemes to claim an amount equal to their gross national insurance liability—the actual amount of contracted-out national insurance contributions paid, plus an amount equal to the employers' 3 per cent. contracted-out rebate. That puts all employers on an equal footing and encourages them to include employees who qualify for the national insurance contribution holiday within the pension scheme, which will be beneficial to them. If amounts in excess of the employers' contribution liability were generally to be available, that would increase the amount of money involved and increase the burden to the general taxpayer.

The national insurance contribution holiday scheme is intended to be easy for employers to understand and operate, and for the Department to administer, within a given cost. We are concerned to keep it on a broad basis and limit exceptions that would otherwise complicate a straightforward scheme. I invite the House to reject amendment No. 41 on the basis that, even if it is necessary and desirable to carry out the policy intentions urged on me, which I reject, the Bill already contains the power to take such action were the Government to be persuaded to change their mind.

Amendments Nos. 3 and 4 are extremely expensive. The Government understand the logic of the desirability of making labour cheaper to encourage more people to be taken on. I remain baffled by the fact that that logic was missing in the earlier argument this evening.

I urge the House to reject amendment No. 5 on the basis that the Bill already contains the power. I have explained the way in which we intend to pursue the regulations.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, but I am not grateful for the fact that he has not accepted amendment No. 41, especially when the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People said that he would consider it. I was hoping that we would receive a commitment tonight from the Under-Secretary of State further to the statement from the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. I am also worried that disabled people, along with carers, will not be encouraged to get work. If we had a national insurance holiday for carers as well, it would help them to get back into work.

The Minister also said that the scheme would cost a great deal of money. He seems to forget that it is cost-effective to get people back to work. It might cost money for the national insurance holiday to be extended to disabled people and carers, but we should think of the savings in benefit. If the people who are now receiving benefit got back into work, that would represent a great saving for the Treasury rather than a cost. It is a great shame that the Minister is not prepared to accept amendment No. 41 and I shall certainly wish to put it to the vote.

Mr. Bradley: I was glad to hear the Minister's views on the amendments, although I am clearly disappointed by what he said. It is correct that I have been in correspondence with the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, as I thought I mentioned in my opening remarks on the amendment. I will continue with that correspondence in an effort to assist carers as much as possible within the benefit system and to try to ensure that they benefit from the Government's schemes.

The Minister was disingenuous in describing our proposals. We recognise—the shadow Chancellor stated it quite clearly at the time of the Budget—that extra expenditure will be required in the short term in order to extend the pathways back to work proposals. That will prove economically efficient in the long term.

Mr. Roger Evans: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I understand the force of his argument, but it may assist the House in forming a view about it if he were to estimate the short-term cost of the back-to-work package that he has described.

Mr. Bradley: I urge the Minister to read the statements made by the shadow Chancellor at the time of the Budget when he presented the whole package. The Minister is welcome to come back to me if he thinks that the package will not prove economically efficient and at least cost neutral in the long term. It must be a better use of human resources to remove people from the unemployment register so that they stop claiming benefit and start paying taxes.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: It is rather unfortunate that the hon. Lady has just wandered into the Chamber.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I have been here on and off.

Mr. Bradley: That is certainly not true. I have been in the Chamber for six and a half hours and it is the first time that I have seen the hon. Lady here. She must have wandered in and out in a dream, because she has certainly not had anything to do with the debate.

I will quote from the Chancellor's last Budget speech in support of my views. He said:

> "We must combine greater prosperity for the majority with measures to prevent the emergence of a deprived underclass, excluded from the opportunity to work and dependent on welfare".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1079.]

Through our amendments, we are saying that the measures that the Chancellor has taken and those in the Jobseekers Bill do not go far enough. They scratch only the surface in tackling the problems of the long-term unemployed in this country.

If the legislation's intention was to create jobs, its thrust would be primarily towards measures to help people back to work. However, the Government's key measures cut the benefits that are available to unemployed people and undermine the basic contributory principles. They reduce from 12 months to six months the amount of benefit that people will receive from their payments through the national insurance scheme. The Bill's whole emphasis is wrong; we believe that the Government should look at further enhanced measures to help the unemployed back into the work force. That is why, after reflection in Committee, the amendments were tabled to allow the Minister to reconsider the opportunity to extend the proposals in the way that the amendments are framed. It is to be regretted that he has not taken that opportunity and in that light we shall divide the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 278.

Division No. 111] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Den[illegible]
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun

Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Ms Liz Lynne.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Jobseekers Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

As amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Amendment proposed: No. 3, in page 18, line 48, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.—*[Mr. Bradley.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 280.

Division No. 112] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie

Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Alan Ingram.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*

Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Willetts and
Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 26

TERMINATION OF AWARDS

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 21, line 34, after 'or', insert

'where he is a member of a married or unmarried couple'.

No. 21, in page 21, line 39, after 'or', insert

'where he is a member of a married or unmarried couple.'.

No. 22, in page 21, line 42, leave out from '"partner"' to end of line and insert

'means the other member of the couple concerned.'. —*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Clause 27

INSPECTORS

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 22, line 10, leave out 'he considers' and insert 'may be'.

No. 24, in page 22, line 19, at end insert

'but do not include a private dwelling-house unless the inspector has reasonable grounds for supposing that the dwelling-house is being used for the purposes of a trade or business.'. —*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Clause 28

OFFENCES

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 23, line 37, leave out 'this Act' and insert 'that section'.

No. 26, in page 23, line 38, leave out 'this Act' and insert 'section 23'.

No. 27, in page 23, line 44, leave out 'this Act' and insert 'section 23'.

No. 28, in page 24, line 7, leave out 'this Act' and insert 'section 23'.—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Clause 29

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 29, in page 24, line 33, at end insert

'"employed earner" has the meaning prescribed for the purposes of this Act;'.

No. 30, in page 25, line 12, leave out

'such meaning as may be prescribed'

and insert

'the meaning prescribed for the purposes of this Act'.—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Clause 31

PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 26, line 41, at end insert 'or'.

No. 32, in page 26, line 43, leave out from '29(1)' to end of line 44.

No. 33, in page 27, line 2, leave out from 'under' to end of line 6 and insert

'section 24 or paragraph (b) of the definition of "pension payments" in section 29(1).'—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Schedule 1

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 31, leave out lines 41 to 45.

No. 35, in page 32, leave out lines 15 to 21.—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Schedule 2

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 33, line 26, at end insert—

'The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (c. 49)

. In section 78(2A) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (relief from payment of contributions in respect of children subject to supervision requirements etc.), after "income support" insert ", an income-based jobseeker's allowance (payable under the Jobseekers Act 1995)".'.

No. 37, in page 34, line 5, at end insert—

'The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (c. 44)

. In section 53(3) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (school meals), after "income support" insert "or of an income-based jobseeker's allowance (payable under the Jobseekers Act 1995)" and for "it" substitute "that benefit".'.

No. 38, in page 34, line 14, at end insert—

'The Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 (c.47)

The Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 is amended as follows.

In section 8(b) (availability of advice and assistance), after "income support" insert ", an income-based jobseeker's allowance (payable under the Jobseekers Act 1995)".

In section 11(2)(b) (contributions in respect of advice and assistance), after "income support" insert ", an income-based jobseeker's allowance (payable under the Jobseekers Act 1995)".'

No. 39, in page 35, line 21, after 'to', insert 'half'.

No. 40, in page 35, line 22, leave out 'the claimant' and insert 'them'.—*[Mr. Roger Evans.]*

Further consideration adjourned.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

PETITION

South West Water

10.29 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I wish to present a petition which has been collected by the *Sunday Independent* newspaper on behalf of the South West Water consumers in my area who are deeply concerned that their water bills have doubled since the privatisation of water, and who know that their bills are to rise further and that they have to pay more than any other region in the country.

To the Honourable the commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset sheweth that water consumers in the south west of England have seen their bills double since 1989 and are burdened with the highest water bills in the whole country.

Wherefore your Humble Petitioners pray that your honourable House will take urgent action to prevent further water price rises for domestic users in the south west and will ensure that South West Water considers the plight of domestic users as well as the interests of its shareholders and businesses in the region.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition has been signed by 42,511 people.

To lie upon the Table.

Penalties for Crime

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.31 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I must point out to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) that the case of PC King is sub judice, and I trust that the hon. Gentleman will not include any reference to it in his speech.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I am indebted to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We have heard a lot recently about the rights and welfare of offenders, but, as Members of Parliament, we have a much higher priority, which is a responsibility to the law-abiding public and to the victims of crime. We have a responsibility to protect them from the offender and from those who would threaten violence.

There is too much excusing of bad behaviour and not enough unequivocal condemnation of it. The public are sick to the back teeth of thugs laughing at justice as they walk free, while the Crown Prosecution Service—in its politically correct way—pursues those who seek to defend the public. The public have a clear view of crime and punishment, and their perceptions are worthy. First, they want the CPS to exhibit more common sense in its prosecution policy and to pursue the real villains who go out to cause mischief and mayhem, and not good people. Secondly, the public believe that when the courts find people guilty of a serious crime, they should give tough sentences. They also believe that Parliament should provide a more effective range of sentences for the courts to use. Thirdly, people think that when villains are sent to prison, they should endure a tough and stark regime which will deter, as well as rehabilitate. There can be no place in prison cells for television sets, home comforts and drugs.

We are making good progress on fighting crime, not least because of the sound guiding hand of men such as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, who is to reply to the debate. My hon. Friend is greatly admired by his Dorset constituents. I know that because I represented those people on the police authority in Dorset, and also as a police cells lay visitor.

Crime figures are now significantly down—particularly property crime—and my hon. Friend may be able to give us the statistics. That welcome fall in crime is due to a number of factors which are worth examining. The work of the police in targeting persistent offenders has been important, and courts have done their duty by increasingly putting habitual thieves into prison. My constituents know that prison works, not least because the villain cannot prey on the vulnerable while he is locked up.

We heard on "Kilroy" last Thursday that the one thing which really deters young villains is the shock of a custodial sentence. Ex-villains made that point graphically in the evidence which they gave on "Kilroy". They said that they laughed at probation officers and community orders, but that they did not laugh at prison. Some of them thought that they had been robbed of years of their lives because they were not given proper punishment early enough. The mother of one of the young offenders made a plea from the heart for her son to be dealt with more harshly, so that he could learn the real lessons of life. I shall return to that point later.

I must stress the importance of parental responsibility. Society must do more to reinforce that responsibility both by empowering courts to enforce it more effectively and by helping more vulnerable parents to cope.

Crime prevention has an important role. Castle Point's local crime prevention officer, Gordon Sinclair, is worth his weight in gold. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) agrees with me on that. Mr. Sinclair is the local catalyst in partners against crime. He has launched successful industrial estate watch schemes and even developed an innovative neighbourhood cluster security scheme which has rightly received Home Office commendation.

Recent Home Office achievements include tougher standards for community sentences, new guidelines to limit repeat cautioning, new parish councils, less paperwork for the police so that they can get out on the streets and additional powers for the Attorney-General to refer unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal. Of course, we now give better treatment to victims.

In the Government's legislative programme key issues have been firmly tackled. For instance, a move has been made to give custodial sentences to persistent 12 to 14-year-old offenders. There has been a crackdown on bail bandits. The Government have reformed the right to silence rule, which benefited the professional crooks. A new DNA database has been established to help detect serious crime. Those are all sound measures. It is a great pity that Opposition Members are so churlish about them.

For less serious crime, we need non-custodial sentences, but they must be more rigorous and effective and better focused on the needs of the law-abiding community as well as dealing with the offenders with understanding, compassion and thoughtfulness, of course. So I welcome the Green Paper "Strengthening punishment in the community". It foreshadows the replacement of the soft, easy option of current community punishments and empowers the courts to be more innovative and focused in sentencing. In the words of Gilbert and Sullivan, it lets the punishment fit the crime, and about time too.

Let me give an example of how the proposed single integrated community sentence might operate. I take the case of a drunken fool who goes out late at night to damage people's property by spraying graffiti. The court could specify all or any of the following. It could require reparation to the community by ordering 50 hours' clean-up work, including graffiti removal. It could restrict the offender from returning to the homes or the area that he damaged. It could impose a curfew order on the offender of, say, 9 o'clock so that he was back at home and not out in the dark doing his mischief. It could also order his attendance at an alcohol abuse clinic, giving an element of rehabilitation and hope to the offender. All this is common sense and therefore it has my backing.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Is my hon. Friend aware that in Orange county in California graffiti vandals have six strokes of a rattan cane and in St. Louis they are considering putting this on television? I proposed at the weekend that we should consider seriously the use of a rattan cane for our very violent criminals. Perhaps the Minister might take that on board.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend is never knowingly oversold when it comes to defending vulnerable people in our society against those who would go about with villainy in their mind. I congratulate her on her efforts on behalf of vulnerable people and her constituents.

We need to go further and provide a greater range of alternatives to gaol—non-custodial sentences. So I welcome the trial of the so-called boot camp philosophy, which also comes from the American experience. We should focus on the best of that experience to give a tough and rigorous reforming regime for our wayward youngsters. It must inject discipline into vulnerable young lives which have had little structure and which social systems have betrayed by withholding timely and effective punishment and strict frameworks of behaviour.

I should also like to look again at the short, sharp shock of incarceration, but not the old 46-day model, which failed. It was too long. It gave the youngsters time to settle down, to achieve a pecking order and to learn from each other. We need a new, five to seven-day model—much shorter and infinitely sharper.

We must let youngsters know with absolute certainty and at the earliest possible stage in their careers in crime what the future would hold for them. To treat young offenders with inappropriate kindness and understanding is often to deceive them into a life on the slippery slope of crime and to betray them in the way that we betrayed our youngsters in education, with a politically correct and totally counter-productive, progressive social and education system.

I welcome the Government's move to resist solutions such as that of Essex social services, under a now disgraced Labour and Liberal pact, where young thieves and thugs were sent on foreign holidays and were thereby positively encouraged and reinforced in their wayward ways by misguided social workers.

Some hon. Members advocate bringing back flogging, as we just heard—

Mrs. Peacock: Caning.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend advocates caning. If we do it, we should do it properly and it should be a real deterrent on the Singapore model. Any hon. Member who thinks that it would not work and would not deter thugs and vandals should go to Singapore, where they will see women walking in the streets safely at night. They will not see any cars being vandalised on the streets and the only joyriders are young children playing on the carousel in safety.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) has done the House a great service by raising that important issue, and I congratulate her. She found a most novel and effective way to bring the matter to public attention.

For most serious crimes, I want the most serious punishment. I want hanging for certain types of murder and I do not say that lightly.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the restoration of capital punishment for pre-determined murder would act as an effective deterrent? Does he also agree that, if it saved one life, it

[Mr. David Amess]

would be worth while? Finally, does he agree that, by failing to vote for its restoration, the House has let the British people down and has damaged our sense of fairness and of making the punishment fit the crime?

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes his point most eloquently and persuasively. He is absolutely right, as always. He will have noted a week or so ago that a murderer, who had murdered his girlfriend, done his sentence and been let out, then murdered his next girlfriend. No doubt he will be back in prison and I wonder whether we will let him out a second and a third time. That is a very good point.

On armed robbery, villains are going equipped with firearms to commit an ever-widening and ever more petty range of crimes. They even go armed with guns to rob sweet shops. They take guns only after careful planning and deliberation. The one who carries the gun should add this to his deliberations—if convicted, he will go down for a statutory minimum of 10 years, and probably longer. There will be no remission for good behaviour, but only longer for bad behaviour. There will be no mitigating circumstances and no argument of, "It was his first offence, M'lud." That would have a salutary deterrent impact on the villain's decision to tool up. It would make society a safer place, make life safer for police and it would help Parliament to withstand pressure to arm the police, which would be wrong.

On the killing of Tony Martin, my 17-year-old constituent, the judge said of the guilty man, 31-year-old Andrew Osborne,

"you opened that knife and plunged it into a 17-year-old boy's body."

He received six years' imprisonment and may serve only four, which is not enough to serve as a sound deterrent and to protect society.

The thug was convicted of manslaughter—a verdict that many of my constituents think was a travesty. I will not comment on it.

I have the first instalment of a massive local petition, which I shall present to the House once it is complete. It calls for the sentence to be referred to the Court of Appeal. We cannot bring back young Tony Martin, as much as our hearts and sympathies go out to his loving and caring family, but we can help them in their grief by giving them hope that other young people will be safer in the future. We can do that by making it a much more serious offence for knives to be taken to places of entertainment where young people congregate.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fundamental reason for the ridiculous circumstances that we find ourselves in is that we have had a succession of weak-kneed Home Secretaries since the war—one after another? Are not civil servants in the Home Office to blame for that state of affairs? When will the present Home Secretary show his true colours and get hanging and corporal punishment restored and castration introduced? If someone rapes, castrate him! When will we start to have Conservative principles, not the wishy-washy politics of the lot that sit opposite?

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend makes his point with characteristic firmness, and I agree with much of what he said. I cannot agree with his criticism of the Home Secretary, however, as his decisions must reflect public opinion. I want, with my hon. Friend, to influence public opinion to ensure that the public force us to take the action that they want us to take, which is to get tough on villains. That is the message that we receive.

I refer to recent cases of police officers who have been charged with assault having dealt with hooligans and serious thugs. I have such a constituency case, but the attorney informed me this afternoon that an appeal has been lodged. The matter is therefore sub judice and I shall respect that. I hope that, if necessary, I can bid again for a suitable occasion to raise that specific constituency matter. Tonight, however, I shall speak generally.

It is said that the law is an ass; I say that people who interpret the law badly and in defiance of justice are the asses. Society expects the police and all good citizens to step in to save a child, an elderly person or a youth from the violent threat of a thug. We certainly do not want a constable to stand back and wait for that threat to become a reality, and an elderly person to be cast to the floor, or a baby to be thrown from a train. If a police constable reacts to a situation not of his making and without malice, exerting reasonable force in response to a violent threat to the public, he should not risk losing his job. That would be unjust and disproportionate.

If a constable were to lose his job in such circumstances, the message to every police officer would be crystal clear. It would be, "Don't get stuck in to protect a threatened, vulnerable member of the public. Stand back. Wait for the thug to do his worst and convert his violent threat into violent action. Then politely ask the thug if he would care to accompany you to the station. Show him your warrant card and hope that he will be impressed by that"—I doubt it in this day and age—"and if you do step in, remember: you may lose your job."

Society must avoid sending out that message. We all accept that the police rely on community, co-operation and confidence to do their job effectively. Serving police officers, politicians and communities across this nation have watched those cases develop with great concern. They have written in their thousands in support of accused policemen, particularly in recent weeks, but they need have no fear—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is doing his best, but he seems to be describing a particular case, even though he has not mentioned it. Will he get away from that case?

Dr. Spink: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall try to steer my speech in more general terms.

Police commissioners, if not all courts, are sound and sensible. They know that the PC Guscott precedent must weigh heavily. Commissioners of police are experienced, good men, with a clear sense of justice.

A court might assume that a policeman, observing a violent threat, should walk away or try to reason with the thug and that that thug, left to his own devices, would not carry out his original threat, nor subsequently harass or pick a fight with another person. The policeman would not have the time or hindsight enjoyed by a court that subsequently decided on the matter. That policeman must decide, on the spur of the moment, what to do and he may decide that safe is better than sorry and remove the threat by using reasonable and proportionate force. That is what I and other hon. Members would want him to do.

The courts should take into account not just the probability of outcome, but the gravity of it. Let me explain that complex evaluation of a decision with an illustration. A 100 per cent. probability of a £1 outcome has less worth than a 1 per cent. probability of a £1 million outcome. We all understand that, so let me take that illustration further. Where the thug threatens the most grievous harm and the policeman takes minor physical action to remove that threat, those facts must weigh heavily when judging the reasonableness of the policeman's decision. The slaughter of a child would be a grievous threat, as would a threat to attack an old person.

If doubt remains in the minds of hon. Members, let me add a second and rather chilling thought. What if a citizen or an off-duty policeman had been in the pub when 17-year-old Tony Martin was knifed on Canvey island? If he heard the escalating threat and moved in to stop the developing fracas, he might have hit a thug and made an arrest, if he thought that that was reasonable. The CPS may have prosecuted that bobby for common assault, particularly if an independent witness stood against him. We should, of course, ask searching questions about any so-called independent witness's experience of the police.

After the event, the CPS and others in the court might argue that, in any case, no one ever believed that real harm had been intended. Perish the thought. People had merely made boastful threats and no one in the pub would have done anyone else any harm. Of course not. But Tony Martin died that night. If an off-duty policeman had been in that pub, Martin might have lived. Perhaps that is why we should not judge the police too sanctimoniously when they act genuinely to meet the threat of violence, and they, rather than the thug, end up in court. If, on the spur of the moment, the police make an error of judgment—I am not saying that they do—they should not lose their jobs.

I welcome the Government's sound crime and punishment policy. I encourage them to be even tougher in the future. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your patience.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on losing no time in securing an early opportunity to debate penalties on crime following the publication, last week, of the Government's Green Paper on community punishments.

My hon. Friend's concern for law and order is well known and well respected and is as one would expect from a former county councillor for God's own county of Dorset. It was remarkable to me, but not surprising, that he was supported in the excellent debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). They added their support for punishment for graffiti vandals and capital punishment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield offered us the three Cs—capital, corporal and castration. The only source of disagreement with my hon. Friend is that he referred to "the lot sitting opposite"; but Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will have noticed, as I have done, despite my not-perfect sight, that no Opposition Members are present for this debate on law and order. Law and order are of the greatest concern to my hon. Friends and I deeply regret that no Opposition Members are here to join that debate. Naturally, I was pleased to note my hon. Friend's strong support for the general thrust of Government policy on law and order, and I shall do my best, in the moments that remain, to respond to as many of those arguments as possible.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point knows, the Government's approach to tackling crime has sought to ensure, first, that a proper emphasis is given to the prevention of crime; secondly, that the police have adequate powers to apprehend the guilty; thirdly, that justice is fairly as well as efficiently done; and, fourthly, that the courts have the necessary powers to deal effectively with those who are convicted. We are also committed, as my hon. Friend noted in his speech, to providing better treatment for the victims of crime.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for outlining some of the Government's significant achievements. As he says, it is a pity that not everyone in the House—one looks at the empty Opposition Benches—has the interest to be with us tonight or has supported the measures that we have introduced. Indeed, most of our difficult but necessary measures have been introduced in the House in the teeth of fierce opposition by our Opposition opponents.

At the outset of his speech, my hon. Friend mentioned three specific public anxieties about law and order. The first of those concerned the prosecution policy adopted by the Crown Prosecution Service. I know that anxieties are sometimes expressed by members of the public about cases that have been dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service, as well as about some cases that have been taken to court.

It is not for me, as a Minister, to comment on the way in which the independent CPS makes its decisions, but the general policy of the CPS appears to be pretty sensible—to prosecute all offences where the evidence provides a realistic prospect of conviction and where it is in the public interest to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point also mentioned that the public believe that those found guilty of serious crimes should be given tough sentences. The Government entirely agree that those who commit serious crimes should be properly dealt with by the courts. Indeed, so that long sentences can be imposed, we have ensured that tough penalties are available for the most serious crimes. Life imprisonment is mandatory for murder and the maximum for other grave crimes such as manslaughter, rape, wounding with intent and robbery. We are committed to keeping penalties under review to ensure that they remain appropriate. Where changes are needed, we do not hesitate to make them.

Sentencing in individual cases must be a matter for the court that has heard all the evidence in a case. The sentencing framework in which the courts operate does, however, explicitly link the type of penalty that will be appropriate with the seriousness of the offence committed. The length of a prison sentence, where one is imposed, will similarly be affected by the seriousness of the offence.

The Government are aware that unduly lenient sentencing in serious cases undermines public confidence in the criminal justice system. That is why we introduced

[Mr. Nicholas Baker]

the power that the Attorney-General now has to refer serious cases to the Court of Appeal if it appears that the sentence is unduly lenient. As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point rightly notes, we have recently extended that power to include a wider range of offences.

Towards the start of his speech, my hon. Friend mentioned the crime figures and asked whether I could provide the most recent figures. For the 12 months to June 1994, 5.4 million crimes were recorded by the police in England and Wales—a 5.5 per cent. decrease on the previous 12 months. The figure for property crime, to which my hon. Friend especially referred, decreased by 6 per cent., for burglary and theft by 8 per cent. and for vehicle crime by 9 per cent. As he knows, we have been very encouraged by recent decreases in recorded crime. We know, however, that there is no room for complacency. It remains of great concern to the Government that crime is a reality for far too many people. The tough stance against crime and the criminal must continue.

I was pleased to note my hon. Friend's support for the use of community sentences for less serious crime. As he rightly said, we have recently introduced tougher national standards for existing community sentences. I was equally pleased to note his support for the proposals outlined in the Green Paper that we published last week.

My hon. Friend also suggested that a further look should be taken at the short, sharp shock of incarceration. He rightly acknowledged that the experiment with such regimes during the 1980s was not a success. He suggested a different approach that would simply give young offenders a taste of what prison was like to discourage them, at an early stage, from pursuing a life of crime.

My hon. Friend mentioned a recent case in his constituency involving the death of a young man. I recognise the strong feelings so understandably felt by Mr. Martin's family and friends, and by other people in the area. I appreciate that it can sometimes be difficult for people to understand why there has been a manslaughter verdict in such cases. The position in law is that where, on a charge of murder, there is evidence on which a jury can find that the person charged was provoked—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday, 30 March.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday, 30 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

1. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received over the past 12 months about the export of live animals; and if he will make a statement. [13874]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): Over the past 12 months we have received approximately 90,000 items of correspondence on the transport of live animals.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware of reports that English farmers have been using the Scottish port of Cairnryan as a back door for the export of veal calves to the continent via the Irish Republic? The animals are apparently transported by road from the south of England to Cairnryan, shipped over to Northern Ireland, smuggled across the border into the Irish Republic, then shipped to the continent so that, by the time they reach their eventual destination, some of them have travelled more than 2,500 miles. Will the Minister consult the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister for Agriculture to try to put a stop to that barbaric practice?

Mrs. Browning: I certainly will, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will provide me with evidence to help me look into the matter.

Sir Roger Moate: Is my hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) voted in 1975, when the last Labour Government reintroduced the export of live animals? Is it not important to understand that we are discussing not exports as such, but the importance, pursued by the Government, of ensuring the maximum welfare of animals in all forms of transit?

Mrs. Browning: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right. The welfare of animals is our prime concern, which is why we take seriously claims that the rules are being violated. However, my hon. Friend is right: it is a legal trade and, under good welfare conditions, we believe that it should continue. That is why we are working actively to ensure that not only do we have good standards but that standards in the rest of Europe are improved to our level.

Mr. Morley: The Minister will be aware that one of the problems of the live animal trade is the definition of animals in the treaty of Rome as "agricultural products". At the forthcoming intergovernmental conference in 1996, will she argue for redefining animals as "sentient beings" as a matter of principle at this stage?

Mrs. Browning: At this stage, we are prepared to look at reasoned arguments about the definition of live animals, but I am not in a position to give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance on that today.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while the welfare of animals is important, the livelihoods of farmers should come first? Would not it be a good thing if the House showed the same concern for farmers and farm workers, many of whom in my constituency are now losing their jobs as a result of demonstrations, as was shown recently in the case of fishermen?

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the House and my hon. Friend agree that the majority of farmers are the very people who care about animal welfare. They not only look after them well on farms but they, too, are concerned when welfare standards are violated in transporting animals. I agree with my hon. Friend that we all deplore violence and I hope that those who wish to make their views known—I know that some of them hold them passionately—will do so in a law-abiding and peaceful way.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and others should not make allegations in the House which they cannot substantiate? Will she take it from me that the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department faxes to me the records of live cattle that move from Scotland to my constituency and the port of Larne? This is the first time that I have ever heard of the falsehood which I nail in the House today.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the need for proof, which is why I invited the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who mentioned the matter this afternoon, to supply me with evidence. We take very seriously falsification of documentation or other matters that are not legal in connection with animal transport. However, I hope that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West can substantiate what he has said today, because my officials are kept very busy with that matter, and I do not want their time to be wasted on a wild goose chase.

CAP Fraud

2. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of fraud in the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement. [13875]

9. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the proportion of expenditure under the common agricultural policy in Europe which is lost in fraud. [13883]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): The Government are vigorously pressing for action to combat fraud. There is no very reliable estimate of what is lost in fraud, for obvious reasons, but action to counter it is becoming much more effective.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that satellite technology is vital in combatting fraud, as has been evidenced recently by the use of imagery to detect potential overpayments on durum wheat to Italy? Is he aware that the national remote sensing centre this morning met representatives of the Department of Trade and the British national space centre to consider the further potential of using satellites for detecting fraud and in agricultural management? Will he undertake to meet representatives of the DTI and to study the NRSC report so that we can continue to exploit this potential, which is valuable British expertise?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right, and gives an example of a real case—the attempted durum wheat fraud in Italy. The interesting thing is that the satellite information was able to prevent the fraud, which is better than pursuing it afterwards. All the member states, apart from Luxembourg, which perhaps is small enough not to need satellites to look at its territory, were either using remote sensing as a control tool by 1994 or, as in the United Kingdom, doing trials on it. My officials and the officials of the intervention board are indeed in close touch with the British national space centre, so progress is being made on the matter; it is a very good technique.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my right hon. Friend make every effort to ensure that other member states in the European Community attach the same importance as we do to tackling fraud in the CAP? Will he further ensure that, when large-scale fraud is uncovered, member states are subjected to heavy fines, and that they are made to pay those fines in full?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. In the most recent year for which the accounts are completely closed, there was £1.2 billion of disallowance against member states, which is a large sum of money. I am proud to say that only £2 million of that related to the United Kingdom. There are beginning to be serious penalties and we welcome that, but there is more to do.

Mr. Tyler: May I put a little more pressure on the Minister regarding milk quota in other member states? He will have noticed, in the debate on Tuesday, that Members on both sides of the House expressed anxiety about both fraud and inadequate control mechanisms, especially in relation to milk quota. I know that that may involve long discussions, but I hope that he will be able to give us a progress report and also say what initiatives he intends to take here to deal with the current milk quota crisis that is affecting us so badly.

Mr. Waldegrave: Several different issues are involved in what the hon. Gentleman says. First, there is the issue of the proper enforcement of milk quotas in other countries. Very large disallowances against Greece, Spain and Italy have been enforced, and the Commissioner has to report to the Council of Ministers by 31 March on the position in those countries before we approve any payments to them for the future.

In this country, we would like quotas to be tradeable across boundaries, which would help us. I am arguing for that in the Community.

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister agree with the chief agricultural official at the European Court of Auditors who said that fraud was inherent in the CAP? Is it not clear that, as long as we are taking surplus farm production into state intervention, and as long as the movement of agricultural commodities across the European frontier can attract large export rebate subsidies, we shall always have a major fraud problem?

Is fraud not another reason why we should end state intervention buying and export subsidies, and replace those arrangements with other means for supporting our agricultural industry?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that many of the range of quantitative controls introduced after MacSharry are vulnerable to fraud. That is one reason among many for getting back to a much freer market. We had fraud in the old days under the deficiency payment system. Whenever one is involved in the business of paying people to produce goods, one is vulnerable to fraud, which is why it is ultimately better to leave the business to the market.

Marketing Grant Schemes

3. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to improve the processing and marketing grant schemes. [13876]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): Outstanding interest has been shown in the new scheme since its launch last October, and waiting times for grant applications have been halved.

Mrs. Lait: Is my hon. Friend aware that the fruit industry is important in Hastings and Rye? Is he further aware that, however much we have helped that sector with the new grants, it is still being undercut by imports from abroad? What action is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that there is a fair market? What further steps is he taking to provide variety in the agri-food industry?

Mr. Jack: Ten of the projects that made successful applications were from the fruit and vegetable sector. The thrust of the processing and marketing grant scheme is to try to improve the efficiency of the fruit and vegetable industry. The scheme provides an opportunity to provide the primary producer with great rewards and to improve the marketing and competitiveness of British-produced fruit and vegetables, thus achieving the effect that my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Simpson: What success has the Minister had in encouraging United Kingdom meat processing to replace the export of livestock? How would he set about offsetting the UK's poor performance in promoting its own produce in comparison with New Zealand and Denmark?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman asks an interesting question. So far, out of the 22 projects that have qualified for £4.7 million under the scheme, seven are from the meat processing industry. The improved meat quality, improved hygiene and improved butchery standards are some of the criteria that have enabled those seven projects to gain that form of help. That backs up some of the excellent work that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is currently doing to encourage the marketing of home-produced veal.

Set-aside Land

4. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he is making in the EC to allow land set aside under farm woodland and agri-environmental schemes to be counted against farmers' set-aside obligations. [13877]

8. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking in the EU to enable farm woodland to be counted against farmers' set-aside obligations. [13882]

Mr. Waldegrave: Following the United Kingdom's campaign, the Commission has produced proposals to allow that. They are under discussion at a technical level and we are pressing for their early adoption.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the woodland planted under the farm woodland premium scheme so far has been disappointing? Would it not be more justifiable if farmers could use set-aside money for schemes that benefit the environment and the countryside?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the purpose of the change for which we have been arguing—that is true of both legs of his argument. We believe that many farmers have not come forward for the woodland scheme because they do not want to undertake that as well as the set-aside scheme. If joining the woodland scheme counted as set-aside, that would boost the woodland scheme. We do not like set-aside and would much rather not have it, but that move would give us the opportunity to do something useful with set-aside, and improve the environment.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the step that he has just announced is important and would no doubt assist the uptake of forestry and other agri-environmental schemes? Can he reassure me that the administration of the farm woodland premium scheme will continue to be as efficient as possible, bearing in mind the problems of two of my constituents to which I recently drew the Ministry's attention?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have seen one of the schemes involving Mr. Day and I shall look at the other. We make every effort to be as efficient as possible. I endorse the first part of my hon. Friend's contribution.

Mr. Tipping: While the movement within the European Union is extremely helpful and will help community forests such as the Greenwood in Nottinghamshire, will the Minister take another look at the grant available to land owners because that lack of financial incentive is holding up community forests?

Mr. Waldegrave: That matter was reviewed relatively recently. We believe that the grants are adequate, but we shall keep them under review. The scheme to which the hon. Gentleman referred is interesting and imaginative.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: On the question of the agricultural environment, the Minister keeps saying that support for agriculture needs to move away from production to environmental and rural considerations. Why is his Department's budget for the agri-environment just £21 million this financial year, when support for the common agricultural policy is £2,800 million? Less than 1 per cent. of the Department's budget is allocated to the environment. Is that not a rather feeble commitment to the environment?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman should recall that we are also financing schemes within the European Community part of our budget which go to the environment. I am sure that the House is well aware of our dilemma. As net contributors, it is very difficult for us to argue for a domestic increase in a budget when we are spending so much through the CAP as well. There must be some constraints on spending. If we were able to reduce our contribution to the European Community—which I think we will achieve over time—there would be more room for funding localised schemes.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend realise that the people of Scotland are astonished that land has been set aside when it should be used to grow desperately needed malt and barley for the whisky industry? It is difficult to explain that to people, but it would be easier to explain if we were able to grow woodland on that land.

Mr. Waldegrave: If the land is suitable and is eligible for the farm woodland grant scheme I hope that they will be able to do exactly that. I remind my hon. Friend—I am sure that the House is aware of it—that set-aside is not compulsory. Farmers in different parts of the country have chosen not to fill in their integrated administration and control systems forms, take the subsidy or set aside. One obviously must have good land if one is to do that. Set-aside land is an exchange for the subsidies that are offered.

Fish Stocks

5. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the current health of the United Kingdom's fish stocks. [13878]

Mr. Jack: The state of the fish stocks around the United Kingdom is monitored continually by fisheries scientists, whose advice underpins the annual European Union decision on what can be safely fished. The state of many stocks continues to give cause for concern.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister aware that the common fisheries policy is universally loathed in the industry? Is it not about time that the Government stood up for a change in that policy which would allow all member states to control unilaterally a rigorous conservation policy? Should he not do something about that in Brussels before there are no fish and no industry left?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman should look to his own Front Bench who, as far as I am aware, are still on side as far as the common fisheries policy is concerned. At least on this side of the House we have had the courage to face the issues. At my right hon. Friend's insistence, a small group has been formed of experts from the industry who will examine ways of reforming the common fisheries policy and addressing some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised. In advocating a world without the common fisheries policy, perhaps the hon. Gentleman dreams of returning to the halcyon days of the three-mile limit when fishermen could do whatever they wanted and there was no defence for our fishermen.

Mr. Harris: Does my hon. Friend appreciate the anger of fishermen—particularly following the unfortunate incident in Plymouth on Saturday when I think that he behaved very well indeed? What will Her Majesty's Government do to ensure that the Spanish begin at least to try to abide by the laws which are designed to protect fish stocks, because at the moment they are flouting them completely?

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words of sympathy. I am still dusting the flour off my shoulders after last week. Following my first encounter with certain fishermen in Plymouth, I had a very sensible and constructive meeting with representatives from the west country industry—some of whom came from my hon. Friend's part of the world. We discussed the central issue of enforcement.

I have made it absolutely clear to the new Fisheries Commissioner, Mrs. Bonino, that if we do not have proper enforcement and policing measures within the common fisheries policy I will understand why our fishermen have no confidence in it. In the context of the disagreements between Canada and Spain, I have taken the opportunity to reiterate at the highest level in the Commission the need for proper attention to be paid to that matter.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Given that fish stocks are under pressure and that there are likely to be fewer employment opportunities in the industry, will the Minister give his full support to the early retirement scheme for fishermen at the Fisheries Council meeting on 5 April? Does he agree that, if the scheme is to work properly, it must be mandatory throughout the European Union, it must be applied uniformly and more cash must be put on the table? It is a worthwhile start. Will the Minister come off the fence and give the scheme his absolute support now?

Mr. Jack: We shall have to wait and see the proposals when they are tabled at the Fisheries Council. We have, however, increased our resources to the fishing industry to enable it to restructure by having a budget of some £53 million for the decommissioning scheme. As for other matters, we are presently advancing the PESCA scheme which aids those parts of the fishing community affected by the decline of work at sea. We are spending additional sums of money on enforcement and research and development. There are, ultimately, limits on what we can spend on an industry that is valued at £500 million.

Framework Programme (Research)

6. **Mr. Lester:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what opportunities the new FP IV European research programme for the agriculture, fisheries and food sectors will provide for United Kingdom researchers. [13880]

Mr. Waldegrave: The new agriculture and fisheries programme, part of the fourth framework programme is well directed to United Kingdom priorities, including animal health and welfare, non-food agriculture, fish stock management and aquaculture and food technology and nutrition. Some 660 million ecu, or just over £500 million are available for the programme. There are wide opportunities for United Kingdom researchers to participate.

Mr. Lester: Does my right hon. Friend agree that research and development is vital to the future of British agriculture? Is not it a good thing that, despite contributing 15 per cent. to the European programme, we won back 18 per cent. from the last programme?

Mr. Waldegrave: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In last year's expenditure round, I protected the domestic research and development budget of my Department for that reason. My hon. Friend is entirely right about the European Community's research and development programme. Various things have to be done on European scale if we are to compete with the Americans and the far east. It is encouraging that British scientists are the preferred partners of those in France and Germany, which is why we get back more than we put in.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Can my right hon. Friend advise me if a research grant would be available to Northern Foods, which today announced substantial staff reductions, not only in its milk sector, but in its meat and groceries division?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have no doubt that the company might be able to form a joint venture and make an application for research funds. I very much hope that that would enable it to confirm that a large part of the redundancies it has sadly had to announce have nothing whatsoever to do with its milk business.

Gooseberry Industry

7. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he is doing to encourage the development of the British gooseberry industry. [13881]

Mr. Jack: We encourage the development of all horticultural produce in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that the gooseberry is a grossly underrated fruit and that gooseberry crumble and gooseberry fool make excellent puddings? What is he doing to promote the gooseberry, particularly the giant gooseberry and the desert gooseberry?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend's giant question deserves a giant answer. He may be interested to know that at one time the big gooseberry season was put to the time of year that Members of Parliament thought was a dull time for journalists. On a serious note, I can tell him that with help from the Ministry, the East Malling research station has developed a new large red desert gooseberry which my hon. Friend will find to his taste with when it comes on to the market later this year.

Mr. Tony Banks: Would not this be a safer place in which to work if hon. Members spent more time eating gooseberries rather than goosing.

Mr. Jack: There is a growing demand—*[Interruption.]* I was almost tempted to say that perhaps that question came from a gooseberry fool, but I shall return to the thrust of my argument. The supermarkets have shown great interest in having more supplies of gooseberries. Once that is achieved, all will benefit from it.

Trade Deficiency

10. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to reduce the trade deficiency in agricultural produce. [13885]

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department has a wide range of initiatives specifically designed to tackle the trade gap.

Mr. Griffiths: Can the Minister tell us, then, why we continue to have a huge trade deficit in food and why in France 90 per cent. of desert apples are home grown, while in Britain the figure is only 25 per cent? Should we blame our consumers or our farmers, or is it down to lack of support from the Government?

Mr. Waldegrave: The obvious reason why we have a large deficit is that we can grow only temporary foodstuffs. Even in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, banana production would not do very well. However, many imports could and should be produced here. My Department, through Food From Britain, a range of marketing grants and, above all, the huge support structure for British agriculture, is doing a great deal to grow more in Britain. In the past few years, the history of apple production—the efforts of my hon. Friend the Minister of State have led in this—has been encouraging.

Mr. Lord: Is my right hon. Friend aware that pig farmers in Suffolk are extremely afraid of unfair competition from Europe as they phase out their sow stalls and tethers while others may not? It would be quite a contribution to the trade balance if more of our own pigmeat could be consumed in Britain. Supermarkets are showing increasing interest in our home grown, extensively produced pigmeat and I urge my right hon. Friend to do all that he possibly can to encourage that trend.

Mr. Waldegrave: I certainly can and will; the Meat and Livestock Commission is doing that. Both sides of the House will want to join my hon. Friend in saying that it would be perfectly legitimate to have a campaign for high welfare pigmeat. British pigmeat is reared in humane conditions, which is not necessarily true of imported pig products.

Dr. Strang: Is not it clear that in the dairy sector Government deregulation has forced up prices for consumers and destroyed jobs? Does the Minister agree with the management of Northern Foods plc that deregulation is one of the reasons for the devastating job losses that have been announced today? Will the Minister admit that as long as we have EU milk quotas we cannot have a proper free market in the milk sector and that deregulation gives us the worst of all worlds, as the Labour party and others warned at the time?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have very great sympathy with those people in Northern Foods who have lost their jobs. I have rather limited sympathy for the management, because I happen to know, as many farmers will confirm, that Northern Foods was going round the farms up and down the country saying that whatever anybody else would pay for milk it would pay 1½p more. If that was not bidding up the market, I do not know what was. If Northern Foods then found that, having bought the market share, it could not afford it, that is bad management. The overall situation in that market has been one historically where we have imported high value added products and exported low value added products. That is crazy. It is now changing, but in the long term we will have a much stronger and more secure market.

Milk (Dioxins)

12. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent tests have been taken in the Bolsover area regarding levels of dioxins in milk; and if he will make a statement. [13887]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry sampled milk from the Bolsover area in July 1994 and I announced the results of dioxins testing on 20 October 1994. We will take further samples this year.

Mr. Skinner: Will the new team of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food take a fresh look at the matter? In the past several years, high levels of dioxins have occurred not only in milk but in the River Doe Lea—about 1,000 times above the safety level—and in the atmosphere, and we now have the alarming news that dioxin has been found in the blood of some workers at Coalite. In view of those facts, will the Ministry now hold the public inquiry that was refused years ago? I am sure that if such conditions applied anywhere near Buckingham palace there would have been a public inquiry years ago.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman has rightly brought the matter to the attention of the House on many occasions. I cannot this afternoon give him an assurance of a public inquiry. The health of the workers at Coalite is subject to an independent Government committee on toxicity and its findings will be passed to the Health and Safety Executive, which will then consider whether further action is needed. I am keen to hear the hon. Gentleman's further views on the matter and, if he would find it helpful, I would be pleased to see him at the Ministry to discuss it in more detail.

Fisheries Policy

13. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss fisheries policy. [13888]

Mr. Jack: I last encountered representatives of the fishing industry on 17 March in Plymouth, principally to discuss the implementation of the future arrangements to apply in western waters from 1 January, but also to boost the sales of British flour.

Mr. McAvoy: I am sure that the Minister enjoyed his encounter at Plymouth, but I assure him that if he ever meets fishermen from Scotland and Northern Ireland it will be an even more robust encounter. Did fishermen in Plymouth take the opportunity to tell the Minister that they just do not believe that he and his Government fully represent their interests in the European Union? In that context, will the Minister consider contacting the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans to borrow some backbone?

Mr. Jack: I had a useful discussion with members of the industry. Although we may not have agreed on everything, it is fair to say, as some of the comments of the industry's representatives on the treatment that I received at Plymouth showed, that they understood that they had been listened to and that their views would be represented fully in Brussels.

The Canadian Prime Minister said in Parliament in Ottawa yesterday that he hoped that the discussions would be helpful. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, behind the scenes, we have been doing a great deal of work with the help of Sir Leon Brittan and Sir John Kerr to ensure that the negotiations are kept on track. Ultimately, they will come to a successful conclusion.

Mr. David Porter: When my hon. Friend meets representatives of the fishing industry, he surely cannot find many who are any longer in favour of our membership of the common fisheries policy. Does he accept that it is the policy itself that is destroying fish stocks, and that instead of tinkering with it he should agree to come out of it and start afresh?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend knows that I shall soon have meetings with representatives of the industry in Lowestoft, and I shall certainly listen carefully to their comments on the common fisheries policy. To say simply that all problems will be solved by coming out is to offer too simplistic a solution. Without a common policy, we would have to invent some system of common management for fish stocks to the benefit of all fishermen concerned. I would certainly welcome constructive comment from my hon. Friend on the way forward in reforming the common policy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Why does the Minister not accept that he cannot have it both ways? He cannot spend his time in this country defending a common fisheries policy that the industry wants to get rid of, and his time in Europe failing to get the British industry a better deal under that common fisheries policy. He has to do one thing or the other—either pull us out or get a better deal for the nation, which contributes 75 per cent. of the fish.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman does not speak for the entire United Kingdom fishing industry. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has taken a view on Britain's fish, but he will know that its view is not supported by fishermen in Northern Ireland or in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman asks for a better deal. Under their terms of accession to the Community, Spain and Portugal could have expected a free-for-all in western waters, but we kept them out of the Irish sea and out of the Bristol channel. Instead of having 220 Spanish fishing boats in the remainder of the Irish box, we restricted the number to 40. That is not a bad deal by any standards.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The Minister will shortly visit the three fishing ports in Northern Ireland. I very much regret that I shall not be there personally to meet him, but I can assure him that he will be received with the respect that he deserves by fishermen in Northern Ireland. One of the main issues that they will raise with him is the unfairness of the operation of the Hague preference for the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. I ask him this now, as a matter of urgency: a rumour and concern exists in Portavogie that, in the next decommissioning scheme, boats fishing for nephrops will be excluded from the advantages of that scheme. Can he give an answer to that today?

Mr. Jack: On the Hague preference, the hon. Gentleman puts his finger on a complex and difficult issue. In recent times, the United Kingdom has gained overall as a result of the operation of the Hague preference, but because of the increase in the haddock stock in the past quota round we have a net deficit. I am looking carefully at the implications of that and will welcome contributions to that discussion from the Northern Ireland fishing industry. I have also heard the same rumour about nephrops and decommissioning. I will certainly examine the matter most carefully and will have an answer for Northern Ireland's fishermen when I visit.

Mr. Ian Bruce: May I welcome my hon. Friend back from what appeared to be a Head and Shoulders shampoo advertisement? My fishermen think that he is head and shoulders above other agriculture and fisheries Ministers when he goes to the European Commission.

Are we reducing the amount of fish that we are landing, or is the amount increasing? Is the value down or up? What would happen if we had no European common fisheries policy to police the illegal activities of the Spanish?

Mr. Jack: If my hon. Friend examines the latest fisheries statistics, he will find that the value of landings has increased.

My hon. Friend made a pertinent point about the common fisheries policy. If we returned to the days when there was no such policy, we should have only a three-mile limit, and anyone would be able to establish their own free-for-all. If we pulled out of the policy unilaterally, as some have suggested, the other countries remaining in it would say, "We will play by our rules"—which would be to the detriment of our fishermen.

Meat Exports

15. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to encourage on-the-hook meat exports. [13890]

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall address a Meat and Livestock Commission conference on 3 April on developing outlets for dairy breed beef, including exports. I shall encourage good applications for meat export initiatives to come forward under MAFF's marketing schemes.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. Can he confirm that United Kingdom meat exports have nearly doubled since 1991? Does that not underline the expertise and export success of British companies such as Anglo Dutch Meats in my constituency?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can more than confirm what my hon. Friend asks. In 1994 United Kingdom meat exports were worth £950 million; in 1984 they were worth £400 million. There has been a huge expansion in exports, which is a tribute to businesses such as those to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Will not the establishment of a meat hygiene agency, as proposed by the Government, double abattoir inspection charges, and will that not further discourage on-the-hook exports?

Mr. Waldegrave: No. There has already been an increase as a result of the European Community directive that applies to veterinary inspection of abattoirs, but that is separate from the activities of the meat hygiene service. The service has assured me that it will cut the overall cost: the amount of resources going into inspection will be smaller than it was under the local authority regime.

Sugar Regime

16. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to defend British interests in the forthcoming discussions on the reform of the EU sugar regime. [13891]

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend is pressing strongly for a conclusion that meets the interests of consumers and the United Kingdom sugar beet and cane sectors.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should look to world market prices to balance supply and demand for sugar, rather than to artificial quotas and price rises that threaten British jobs in my constituency and elsewhere?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend does the House a singular service in drawing our attention to the need for deep price cuts as the best way of solving Europe's over-supply problem, certainly in relation to beet sugar. We are pressing for a price reduction of some 12 per cent. in the negotiations. We do not believe that our sugar beet quota should be reduced, as our production is not contributing to the surplus.

Mr. Stevenson: If that is so, would the Minister care to explain why the British Government have just agreed to European Commission proposals on the sugar regime that effectively mean no change whatever in the next five years? How does he square that with his apparent enthusiasm for change in the sugar quota regime?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman—who, I know, follows these matters reasonably closely—is somewhat ill informed. No agreement has been reached on the future of the sugar regime. My right hon. Friend will examine the matter when he goes to the Agriculture Council next week.

Intergovernmental Conference

18. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the priorities for the Government in relation to agriculture at the intergovernmental conference in 1996. [13893]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government are currently considering their priorities for the inter-governmental conference. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman heard the Minister's response.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government are currently considering their priorities for the inter-governmental conference.

Mr. Timms: What further consideration has the right hon. Gentleman given to the sugar regime, given the impact on jobs at Tate and Lyle in east London?

Mr. Waldegrave: That was a good, off-the-cuff question from the hon. Gentleman, who obviously thought that he had been called to speak on the last question. The sugar regime is unlikely to be a matter of treaty amendment at the IGC.

Veal Market

19. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to promote the British rose veal market. [13895]

Mrs. Browning: I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome the initiatives we are taking to promote British rose veal. We had a successful veal seminar at the Department and we are setting up a demonstration unit to encourage United Kingdom producers to raise welfare-friendly veal.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ease the problems of the veal trade, should not we encourage every family in Britain to serve roast veal to their families this Sunday? Will my hon. Friend encourage supermarket initiatives to promote high-welfare veal so that we can achieve the widest distribution possible?

Mrs. Browning: I am very happy to encourage welfare-friendly veal to be served for Sunday lunch, but I must tell my hon. Friend that I think that the answer is in the sauce. There will be much opportunity not just for roast veal, but for many other delicious recipes.

PRIME MINISTER

Border Controls

Q1. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the issue of the declaration attached to the Single Act on border controls. [139904]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I see no need to do so. I do not regard our frontier controls as something to bargain over. I will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to maintain them. I will, of course, look at what needs to be done if the circumstances make it necessary or desirable.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I congratulate the Prime Minister on his recent statement that he will take whatever steps are necessary to retain our border controls, in the face of what appears to me to be an obsession in Europe with getting rid of them. Will he consider the possibility of, at the 1996 IGC, seeking to resolve a legislative inadequacy created by a previous Administration by having the declaration changed into a treaty clause, which would stand firm in our courts and in the European Court?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend and I agree that any change to our frontier controls is unacceptable. Our European partners know that that is the position. If, at some stage, they were to come under risk, and if it became necessary to seek a treaty amendment, of course I would do so.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 March. [13905]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Mitchell: In the course of the right hon. Gentleman's day, will he take time to consider whether the economic recovery that Mr. George Soros and others forced on him is still proceeding to his satisfaction, or has it been so badly clobbered by unnecessary interest rate and tax increases that the best is already over?

The Prime Minister: No, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the case. I am grateful to him for drawing attention to the economic recovery, which is proceeding more effectively in this country than in any other European nation. He will rejoice with me at the 4 per cent. growth last year; the anticipated growth of more than 3 per cent. for this year and for next year; the fact that exports are running at record levels; the fact that employment is rising and unemployment is falling; and, above all, that we have now become one of the most competitive nations in industrial matters in the world.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will welcome all that and I am grateful to him for letting me draw attention to it.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the massive support in the United Kingdom for the reintroduction of corporal punishment for mindless violence—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This House must come to order right away.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend encourage our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to look very carefully at what people in the United Kingdom are now demanding as punishment?

The Prime Minister: I think that many measures could be taken to deal with crime, especially juvenile crime. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will have heard what my hon. Friend has said, and that my hon. Friend will give strong support to his measures.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister confirm that, according to the Government's own parliamentary answers, the costs of rail privatisation just for British Rail, the Department of Transport and the new regulatory bodies, leaving aside all the other costs, are estimated at more than £300 million?

The Prime Minister: I saw the right hon. Gentleman this morning and his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) publishing their report on rail privatisation.

Mr. Donohoe: It is excellent.

The Prime Minister: That is not quite how I would have described it. As the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) inquires, I would have described it as one of the shoddiest pieces of work that I have seen for a long time. The figures that are shown in that report are pure fantasy. They include a whole range of operational costs for the railways, not in preparation for privatisation but to provide a modern railway service across this country, which is what we seek to do.

Mr. Blair: I asked the Prime Minister a specific factual question. Is it true—*[Interruption.]* Let us just get the facts. Is it true, according to the parliamentary answers that have been given, that the costs just for those bodies, leaving aside other matters, is more than £300 million? Will he confirm that British Rail has estimated that it will spend an extra £100 million in the next two years directly as a result of privatisation—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that, or with dealing with one aspect of privatisation. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Members: Who was it?

Madam Speaker: George Foulkes. This is such a waste of time during 15 precious minutes.

The Prime Minister: The reality is that the true costs of privatisation are but one fraction of those claimed by the Labour party. They are a fraction of the costs of the industry, and a very small price to pay for a modern railway serving the nation in the way we wish to see it served.

Mr. Blair: People will notice that the Prime Minister has not disputed the figures that have been put. Will he confirm that when we add to those figures the metropolitan railway grant, recognised by the Department of Transport as costing £200 million this year and £200 million next year, and when we take even a fraction of the redundancy cost, the cost is more than £1 billion? Let us have a detailed refutation. Would not it be better if that £1,000 million were spent not on a privatisation that nobody wants but on delivering the modern railway network that the nation needs?

The Prime Minister: No, I have to repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that the figures that he quotes, which were used earlier this morning by his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West, are fantasy figures—they are not real figures. I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman some real figures. Investment will be sustained at around £1 billion, of which £250 million will come from the private sector. He cannot lecture us about private railways. He cannot begin to tell us what his own policy is or whether he would renationalise or not: he can tell us now if he wishes. The Labour party is more interested in appeasing the rail unions than in building for the 20th century an efficient railway that serves the needs of passengers and that does not serve the needs of Labour's friends in the rail unions.

Mr. Jessel: In view of the tremendous success of the Queen's visit to South Africa and of her impressive arrival in HMS Britannia, does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain should continue to have a royal yacht?

The Prime Minister: It certainly has been a remarkably successful visit thus far to South Africa and I have every expectation that it will continue to be a successful visit. The question of the royal yacht is under consideration.

Mr. Ashdown: In the context of European immigration, will the Prime Minister confirm that he is aware of the seriousness of the deteriorating situation in Algeria and the implications that it has for Europe as a whole? Given Britain's residual interests in Algeria and Europe's failures in Bosnia, is not it an issue that should be tackled on the basis of the closest co-ordination among the European countries in which Britain plays a full and constructive role?

The Prime Minister: I agree that this is an important matter. I think that it illustrates the kind of areas where the common foreign and security policy can exercise more influence than any country individually.

Mr. Molyneaux: As loyalist paramilitary bodies only yesterday undertook to dismantle their terrorist apparatus, is it still the Government's policy that the same must apply to the IRA before it can be admitted to any further talks or discussions on any other issues?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the same conditions apply to Sinn Fein in terms of exploratory talks with a Minister, which is the matter under consideration at the present time. It will need to make the same commitments before entering into exploratory talks with my hon. Friend the Minister of State as were made by the Progressive Unionist party and the Ulster Democratic party. That is the case.

On the secondary matter of entering the political talks, which is often confused—but not, I know, by the right hon. Gentleman—that is some way down the road after the discussions on modalities have been agreed and after there has been substantial progress on decommissioning itself. That is some way away.

Q3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 March. [13906]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Prime Minister will know that the rules of the House prevent me from raising aspects of the trading activities of Lord Archer, his friend, and I do not intend to do so. However, in the light of the fact that the prosecuting authorities have repeatedly failed successfully to prosecute people who have committed the offence of insider dealing—we know who we are talking about—is not it time that there was a full review of the law? Will the Prime Minister give an assurance to the country that that review will be undertaken?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to confirm that Lord Archer is my friend, has been my friend and will remain my friend in the future.

On the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, the questions of prosecution are for the prosecuting authorities. If my right hon. Friends the Law Officers feel that something is going amiss, they will approach me and the necessary action will be taken.

Q4. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 March. [13907]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is wholly wrong for Labour councils such as mine in Merton to use council writing paper to write to Labour governors urging them to carry out a misconceived and misleading campaign against education budgets? Is not it about time that education authorities stopped alarming parents with political propaganda and got on with the job of providing the best possible education for our children?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, and neither is this an isolated incident in Merton.

On the substantive question of education funding, I see no reason why every council should not be able, with good maintenance and good management, to look after the standards of the education service within the funds available. Before people accept many of the claims being made by the education authorities, I hope that they will look to see whether those education authorities have sought to make savings elsewhere before directing savings to teachers in the classroom.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Prime Minister aware that some observers of the sale of British Coal's non-operational property estimate that it will raise more than £100 million? Will he assure the House that that money will be used for two major purposes: first to help to clean up residual pollution in mining communities, such as mine water pollution, and, secondly, to widen the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme, which the Government introduced in 1974 to make available payments for men awarded disabled assessments for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, thereby ending the illogical discrimination between sufferers of two diseases which are caused by the same dust?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises two important points that are worthy of consideration. I do not agree with him that the proceeds of that sale should be necessarily allocated specifically to those purposes, but the two purposes to which he refers are well worth examining.

Q5. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 March. [13908]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which was widely welcomed by the police and which deals with joyriders, tearaways and bail bandits, was fought tooth and nail by the Opposition and the then shadow Home Secretary, who is now the Leader of the Opposition? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is by their deeds, not their words, that we shall judge them?

The Prime Minister: I share the view that we should judge right hon. and hon. Opposition Members by the way in which they vote and act, rather than by what they say. I share with them the wish to prevent more crime, yet they opposed all our changes on bail. They say that they want to ensure that the guilty are convicted, yet they opposed our changes to the right of silence. There are a range of areas where they have talked tough on crime, but when it has come to being in this House and being in the right Lobby to provide the right laws to bat against crime, we have found them in the wrong Lobby and not the right one.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 27 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Disability Discrimination Bill.

TUESDAY 28 MARCH—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Disability Discrimination Bill.

WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day (10th allotted day)

There will be debate entitled "The Impact of Education Cuts on Standards and Opportunity" on an Opposition Motion.

Ways and Means Resolution relating to the Atomic Energy Authority Bill.

Motion relating to the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Amendment Regulations.

THURSDAY 30 MARCH—Motion on the Contracting (Functions in Relation to the Registration of Companies) Order.

Motion on the local Government Finance Special Grant Report (No. 13).

Debate on tourism on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 31 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House may also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 29 March as follows: European Standing Committee A, European Community Document 6495/94, relating to Interoperability of High Speed Trains; European Standing Committee B, European Community Document 8076/94 relating to Protection of the Community's Financial Interests.

In the following week, on Monday 3 April and Tuesday 4 April, I anticipate progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill, bringing those to a conclusion on Tuesday 4 April. I cannot yet give details beyond that, but I harbour hopes of organising business in a way which would enable the House to rise for the recess at the close of business on Wednesday 5 April.

[Wednesday 29 March:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: 6495/94, relating to Interoperability of High Speed Trains. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 48-xxviii (1993-94) and HC 70-xi (1994-95).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 8076/94, relating to Protection of the Community's Financial Interests. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 48-xxviii (1993-94).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. Will he confirm that the morning sitting on Wednesday 5 April will take the format of the traditional motion for the spring Adjournment, so that hon. Members may raise any appropriate issue without giving notice to the Speaker, and that it will be followed by three half-hour Adjournment debates, for which hon. Members must apply in the usual way?

Can the Leader of the House tell us yet what he intends to do about the recommendations of the first special report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, which was first published on 7 March?

In view of the decisions taken today by the magistrates court in Croydon, and of what happened to Mr. Cantona this morning, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether we may be able to have a debate in the near future on consistency in sentencing in magistrates courts? It would not involve matters that are sub judice if we discussed consistency.

Can the Leader of the House tell us when we can expect a debate in Government time on the national health service? If we cannot have an immediate debate, will he guarantee that there will be a debate in advance of any further moves to allow certain private companies, some of which contribute to the Conservative party, to take over the running of NHS hospitals?

Finally, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is an urgent need for a debate and for answers from Ministers on what they intend to do about the electricity industry, and especially about the regulator's ability to protect the interests of consumers? That is necessary not least because of the regulator's proposal, following the windfall profits being made by the regional electricity companies, that consumers should receive some benefit from those profits—a suggestion that has been blocked by some of the fat cats in those companies.

Surely the Government have some responsibility in the matter, because they framed the legislation and they rigged the sale to ensure substantial profits. Will the Leader of the House therefore ensure that Parliament has the chance to be the voice of the consumer?

Mr. Newton: I shall take those questions in reverse order. On the electricity issue, I simply say that there is no doubt that consumers have benefited from the downward pressure on prices already created by privatisation, in that industry and in several others.

Of course I take note of the hon. Lady's request concerning the NHS, but I wish that she had acknowledged that the private finance initiative in the NHS and in other spheres was essentially designed to bring additional resources somewhere where we all want to see them generated, whenever and however that can be done.

As for the sentence on Mr. Cantona in Croydon, the hon. Lady will understand that I would not think it appropriate to comment on such a matter from the Dispatch Box, but I shall certainly bring her comments to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

I am still considering how best to proceed on Members' interests, and I hope to have further discussions through the usual channels. I hope that we shall be able to deal with the issue, if not before the Easter recess—I still would not entirely rule out that possibility—immediately afterwards.

The answer to the hon. Lady's question about the Wednesday morning debates on 5 April is strictly a matter for you, Madam Speaker, but I think that I probably have your tacit authorisation to say that what the hon. Lady

[Mr. Newton]

said was right. For the first three hours, the format will be essentially the same as for the traditional recess motion, and people can raise what they like without my having to try to answer it all at the end. That will be followed by three half-hour Adjournment debates under the normal ballot arrangements.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend will have heard the very reassuring remarks by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister with regard to our border controls. Was my right hon. Friend in effect saying that he would guarantee that the United Kingdom would retain its border controls? If not, could we clarify the issue by having a debate next week?

Mr. Newton: I thought that I sensed, as my hon. Friend did, that the Prime Minister's remarks were extremely clear. Certainly I do not think that I need to, or can, add to them.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is the Leader of the House aware that, in many parts of the House, there is growing concern about the method and timing of the way in which the House considers controversial regulations? I draw his attention in particular to the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, which are due to come into force in a few days' time.

Those regulations will introduce the Meat Hygiene Service, which represents an extremely controversial change from the present arrangements and is causing great concern throughout the country, to the agricultural industry, to the abattoirs themselves and, most noticeably, to those who think that the removal from local democratic control will produce a new and powerful quango.

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 845, and the amendment thereto, which refers to a controversial appointment to the new service?

[*That this House believes that the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, at present laid before the House, are primarily intended to empower the Meat Hygiene Service to take over from local authorities the responsibility for meat inspection and the supervision of hygiene in slaughterhouses; takes note that through the ability of the Meat Hygiene Service to set the level of fees, a risk-free business is proposed to be established with a turnover of £40 million extracted from the meat industry and wonders about the interests involved; questions also whether the regulations are seen as a convenient device for enforcing rationalisation in the industry which would not be to the long term benefit either of the consumer or of standards of hygiene in the industry; strongly objects to their being laid before the House, despite a lengthy period of gestation, with such short notice before the intended start of operations by the Meat Hygiene Service, which it regards as a contempt of the House; can see no service advantage in the proposed system over the service currently provided by the local authorities; and therefore demands that the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, be not enacted but that local authorities should retain their powers and responsibilities through the application of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.*]

Mr. Newton: I shall leave aside the question of the appointment for the moment. On the wider issues which the hon. Gentleman raised, there is, of course, a prayer down on this matter that will be given consideration through the usual channels.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is there any possibility in the near future of having a full-scale debate on the rights—and, even more importantly, the duties—of the citizen? Some of us are perplexed about the policies being advocated by the Leader of the Opposition, as the poor fellow can only utter sound bites in the newspapers.

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether "puzzled" is the right word, but I am increasingly struck by the fact that the rather windy words which have been used appear to be nothing more than a cloak for an old-fashioned increase in state intervention into everybody's lives, and that is what people do not want.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning the sneaky and underhand way in which the Ministry of Defence has announced the closure of RAF Finningley? Will he arrange as a matter of urgency for a debate to be held before the Easter recess on the RAF and the implications of that decision?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will realise that I cannot promise such a debate before the Easter recess, but at some stage we will have the annual debate on the RAF, which is one of the service days that has not yet taken place. As to the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, I would not for a moment accept his description of any action of any of my right hon. Friends, but nevertheless I shall draw his feelings to their attention.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Could we have a debate next week on truancy from schools? This morning, the Leader of the Opposition told the public that there were Conservative laws for dealing with truancy, but he did not tell the public why Labour councils have not used them effectively.

Mr. Newton: That was a good question, but it was not one for me.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a story by Anthony Bevins which appeared in last Sunday's *The Observer* and which was headlined "Three-day week for idle MPs"? I for one deeply resent that sort of comment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Could we have a debate on the work load of Members of Parliament, particularly in light of boundary changes which are adding about 30 per cent. to my work load, with no discussion about whether additional resources will be made available to Members to deal with the changes? We do not need lectures from journalists—we need to tell the truth in the House.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have gathered that, unlike some of the questions which he has asked, that one elicited a good deal of sympathy from Members in all parts of the House. It should be underlined that Members of Parliament are now able to give more time to their duties in many other ways, including those duties in their constituencies to which both they and their constituents attach importance.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): In his response to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), my right hon. Friend referred to the special report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests. He stated, as he did last week, that the matter should be dealt with by the usual channels, which seem to be extremely slow. Can he assure us that the matter will be brought before the House on a firm resolution which will lead to a solution, and which will allow a Select Committee of the House to continue its work, even after a delay of two months?

Mr. Newton: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. One of the things that we are concerned about is that we should, if possible, deal with the matters not simply on an ad hoc basis, but on a basis that gives a secure foundation for the future work of any Select Committee.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Is the Leader of the House aware of proposals to change the fostering regulations, which are currently being discussed in the Department of Health and will have serious consequences for local authorities and foster parents? Will he assure me that time will be made available for a debate on those changes, and that they will not go through without a debate?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give an assurance off the cuff, not least because, in a former ministerial incarnation, I was probably responsible for earlier arrangements on that matter. It is a subject in which I am personally interested, and I shall look carefully at the point that the hon. Lady raised.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the conference on the nuclear proliferation treaty will begin on 17 April. If we cannot have a debate on nuclear issues before the Easter recess, may we have one as soon as possible after the recess?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot give that assurance, but I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that I shall look at his request.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of the House look at early-day motion 757?

[*That this House notes that the first international religious conference on the problem of pornography, Protecting our Children's Future, was held in Manila between 17th and 20th January; acknowledges the declaration drawn up by delegates; agrees that pornography has become a major economic force that requires international solutions; believes that the important values of free speech and increased international communication are not compromised by ensuring that children, women and men are protected from sexual exploitation; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to bring United Kingdom law into line with Sweden, Germany, France, Norway, Australia and the USA so that British citizens who commit child sex offences abroad can be prosecuted under British law and to initiate an international law enforcement initiative to combat the global trade in computer pornography via the Internet.*]

Will the Leader of the House have a chat with the Home Secretary to see whether legislation can be introduced to protect young people abroad from marauders who go there from this country? If he cannot introduce legislation before Easter, may I press him to do so shortly after Easter to give hope to others?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that matter was recently raised in another place. He will also be aware that we have recently taken action in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to strengthen further our controls on pornography, but of course I shall draw his point to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the main railway line which currently carries all channel tunnel expresses runs through my constituency? Does he therefore understand my constituents' concern about the noise and vibrations affecting them and their properties? Will he find an early opportunity for a debate on that subject, and on questions of compensation?

Mr. Newton: Once again, I am afraid that I cannot promise an early debate of precisely the kind that my hon. Friend seeks, but he will be aware that progress is being made in the Private Bill Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, which will in due course lead to discussion on the Floor of the House. Although perhaps not in the near term, at some stage that will provide a further opportunity to discuss those matters.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on today's press reports that the Department of Social Security is to spend £200 million on a computerised identity database to be run by a private company and to include details of income and work history? That is despite a warning by the Data Protection Registrar last year that voluntary schemes could become compulsory by stealth. If the Home Secretary wants an identity card scheme, should he not come to the House to argue his case, rather than get the Department of Social Security to bring one in by the back door?

Mr. Newton: There are three points to make: first, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, as is well known, will produce a Green Paper on those matters; secondly, any action by the DSS is certainly not directed to producing an identity card "by the back door"; thirdly, any action by the DSS is directed towards something which everyone in the House should support, which is the prevention of fraud.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): May we have an urgent debate on the financial state of Lambeth council, given that it has domestic rates arrears of £13 million, community charge arrears of £85 million, and council tax arrears of £29 million? Would not such a debate enable the Opposition to apologise to the people of Lambeth for years of Labour misrule?

Mr. Newton: Yes, it would provide an opportunity for such an apology. I would therefore very much like to provide it, but am not sure that I can promise to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Leader of the House has already had about 10 requests for debates of some kind, most of which he has been unable to accept, yet a few moments ago he said that the House would rise a day early for the Easter holiday. Would it not make more sense to sit on that day, which should be used to discuss the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire,

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

North-East (Mr. Barnes), so that, instead of hon. Members going off on their holidays, we could help 6 million disabled people?

Mr. Newton: Whether or not the House sat on the Thursday, it would not be a private Members' day. I have said several times that I have no plans for changing the usual arrangements for dealing with private Members' Bills.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House be able to inform the House when the Environment Bill will come before it? Is he aware that many of us look forward to that Bill because of the way in which it affects national parks, and we seriously want that Bill to be enacted, so that there will also be more local representation on national parks?

Mr. Newton: First, I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an excellent Bill. Secondly, in direct answer to his question, I would expect to take the Second Reading of the Bill shortly after the Easter recess.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Was not the law made an ass of yesterday in Newport, East, the neighbouring constituency to mine, when the remarkable decision was taken to halt a trial on the sole grounds that the jurors did not understand the details of that financial case? Is that not an open invitation to fraudsters to commit crimes, as long as they are sufficiently complicated not to be understood by the juries? Do we not need an urgent debate to institute courts that have specialist jurors who will understand financial complexities of that type?

Mr. Newton: Madam Speaker, unless you are going to seek to prevent me from answering, I shall say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has asked the Director of Public Prosecutions for a full and urgent report on what the hon. Gentleman describes. I might add, however, that, although the jury has been discharged and two defendants have been acquitted, proceedings in relation to five other defendants have not been concluded.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): May I ask my right hon. Friend for an early debate on child care, so that we can discover how the Opposition reconcile their proposition that child benefit should be taxed at 40 per cent. with the fact that they are simultaneously encouraging the belief that there will be tax relief for nannies?

Mr. Newton: I receive an amazing number of requests to try to explain the contortions, the convolutions and the inexplicable nature of some policy pronouncements by the Labour party. I am afraid that that task is beyond me, but I hope that my hon. Friend's question elicits an answer from those who repeatedly think up those policies.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May we have an early debate on immigration and asylum policy in a United Kingdom and European Union context, which would give Ministers an opportunity to explain why Mr. Zia Rahman Farouki, who preaches hatred of Shi'ite Muslims, has been allowed to visit this country, when constituents are denied visits by relatives and friends on frequent occasions? It would also provide an opportunity for the Home Secretary to confirm or deny that he plans a new immigration Bill, which many of us fear will be used as a race card before the local elections and forthcoming general election.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to comment about the particular case that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate about facilities at the House at weekends? Is my right hon. Friend aware that last weekend, for example, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who speaks for the Labour party on energy, had to go to Twickenham to discuss energy policy with British Gas and that, of course, he therefore had to endure the sort of executive perks and privileges that Opposition Members have denounced, and that he also had to go as a guest of Mr. Cedric Brown, whom hon. Members have also denounced?

Will my right hon. Friend spare the hon. Member for Clackmannan and other Opposition Members similar ordeals in future, and make facilities available for them here?

Mr. Newton: I think that the appropriate answer in House of Commons terms is to say that I shall bring that request to the attention of the Administration Committee, or something of that type, but I strongly suspect that, however many facilities were available, the one most likely to use them would be the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who appears never to want to go anywhere else.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Last week, the Leader of the House said that he would reflect on issues arising out of my question to the Prime Minister in relation to Lockerbie. Before the recess, could there be any facility for the Crown Office, on which more and more responsibility is being placed by the Foreign Office and Downing street, at least to make some kind of a statement in a democratic forum?

Mr. Newton: I shall seek to come back to the hon. Gentleman about what I said last week, and I regret that I have not yet been able to do so. I certainly cannot give him the undertaking that he seeks now.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on the relative powers and responsibilities of central and local government? Does he agree that such a debate would enable us to expose the simple truth that the Labour party's proposals for regional assemblies would rob local authorities of their power? Such a debate would also enable me to express the abhorrence of the people of Worcestershire of the prospect of being ruled by Birmingham.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend expresses, more eloquently than I did, a point that I made from the Dispatch Box last week. I agree with my hon. Friend's remarks, and should it be possible to provide time for such a debate, I shall be glad to do so.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to reports in today's newspapers that the Government are considering relaxing the rules on the number of roadside information signs, in view of the fears expressed by the Automobile

Association, environmental groups and others about the safety of drivers who are confused by the number of signs? Could he ask the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement to the House at an early date?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to be here to answer questions on one of the days embraced by the business statement—Monday 3 April. That may provide an opportunity for my right hon. Friend to give a statement. It should be said, in fairness, that motorists sometimes encounter difficulties because of the absence of signs to help them to get where they want to go.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider an urgent debate on grant-maintained schools? Is he aware that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) yesterday addressed a conference of the grant-maintained heads of England and Wales, and threw them into total confusion? They have no idea what the Labour party stands for. More than that, he said that he would remove their independence, by using the expression "enhanced accountability." That can only mean a return to town hall tyranny and control.

Mr. Newton: I certainly have the clear impression that the hon. Member for Brightside further increased the number of bodies who are in a state of confusion about Labour party policy—that appears to include the Labour party itself.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): As the Disability Discrimination Bill comes back before us next Monday and Tuesday, would the Leader of the House look at what is happening to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, a competing Bill which is being held up by a series of filibusters in Standing Committee C so that it cannot make progress? Hon. Members should have a chance to decide between the principles contained in the two Bills. It is the duty of the Leader of the House to ensure that that happens. Could the Bill be dealt with in a Committee of the whole House if room cannot be found for it in Standing Committee C?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I have said on numerous occasions in the past few weeks about my plans for the handling of private Members' Bills. We should proceed normally. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's description of proceedings in the relevant Standing Committee, which is dealing with a number of other important private Members' Bills.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The Leader of the House will recall that two weeks ago I asked for an early debate on the Meat Hygiene Service, since when my right hon. Friend has acknowledged that the official Opposition have tabled a prayer against the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995. My right hon. Friend has also acknowledged the existence of early-day motion 845, which has been signed by more than 50 hon. Members.

[*That this House believes that the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, at present laid before the House, are primarily intended to empower the Meat Hygiene Service to take over from local authorities the responsibility for meat inspection and the supervision of hygiene in slaughterhouses; takes note that through the ability of the Meat Hygiene Service to set the level of fees, a risk-free business is proposed to be established with a turnover of £40 million extracted from the meat industry and wonders about the interests involved; questions also whether the regulations are seen as a convenient device for enforcing rationalisation in the industry which would not be to the long term benefit either of the consumer or of standards of hygiene in the industry; strongly objects to their being laid before the House, despite a lengthy period of gestation, with such short notice before the intended start of operations by the Meat Hygiene Service, which it regards as a contempt of the House; can see no service advantage in the proposed system over the service currently provided by the local authorities; and therefore demands that the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, be not enacted but that local authorities should retain their powers and responsibilities through the application of the Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.*]

Does not my right hon. Friend realise what serious problems are building up in the abattoir sector? Bishop's Castle abattoir in my constituency has been notified this week that the charge that it will have to pay for veterinary inspections is £60 per hour when most other abattoirs have been advised that their charge per hour will be £33.71. That is a serious problem, which the House should debate.

The Leader of the House is well aware of my view that the statutory instrument was brought to the House far too late—barely three weeks before coming into force—while the Government have, for three years, known what they want to do. That shows a contempt of the House, and it should be corrected at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Newton: I make two points. First, I cannot add to what I said earlier about the prayer that has been tabled concerning some of the regulations. Secondly, I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture is looking very carefully at such representations as my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange time for a debate next week, or as soon as possible thereafter, to discuss the new Cabinet Committee which has been formed to co-ordinate and present Government policy? I believe that it is probably more to do with co-ordinating and presenting Tory party policy in order to improve its standing at the next election, and there may be a conflict of interest in respect of the civil servants who have been appointed to serve that Committee.

In order to ensure that the integrity of the civil service is not compromised and that taxpayers' money is not used for political purposes, will the Leader of the House arrange to have a debate on the subject as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether it constitutes an interest, but, as it has been stated publicly that I am a member of the Committee, I mention it again now.

I make two other points. First, such a committee would not have been established if the Cabinet Secretary had thought that it was outside the rules in any way. Secondly, as we have Cabinet Committees to examine Government policies in a variety of areas, it seems entirely reasonable to have a Cabinet Committee which is concerned with Government policy as a whole.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I ask my right hon. Friend to allow time for a debate next week on empty rhetoric, so that I may be able to put a comparison before

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

the House. The Labour-controlled Ealing borough council has failed to evict noisy neighbours, but the Leader of the Opposition suggested yesterday that the Labour party favours the eviction of noisy neighbours. Should not the attention of the House be drawn to the Labour party's failure to practise what it preaches?

Mr. Newton: I am rapidly running out of things to say in response to my hon. Friend's frequent references to Ealing borough council, whose iniquities are rehearsed weekly on the Floor of the House. The only thing that I would say to him is that a committee concerned with empty rhetoric is not one of which I would care to be a member.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate early next week on the question of bonuses to national health service managers and nurses' pay? Is he aware that figures released today by the Institute of Health Services Management show that bonuses of up to £10,500 have been paid to NHS managers? The bonuses have been described as "illogical", at a time when nurses' pay is under discussion and is being frozen by the Government. Does the Leader of the House agree that next week would present an ideal opportunity to debate both issues in the House?

Mr. Newton: In my usual reasonable way, I will certainly consider that request for a debate, provided that the debate also embraces the huge increase in the amount of treatment being provided through the NHS, and the efficiency with which resources are being used in patient care as a result of improvements in management.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Will my right hon. Friend find time to debate a subject to which I know that he attaches great importance: the provision of school transport in Essex? Does he agree that the proposal by Liberal and Labour members of Essex county council to withdraw free school transport to grammar schools is mean-minded, petty and vindictive?

Mr. Newton: I am certainly well aware of the concern about that proposal, which, as my hon. Friend will understand, is shared by my constituents. Even so, I am not sure whether I can provide time for a debate on the issue. However, I hope that those in Essex will study my hon. Friend's words with care.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Can there be an early debate about banking, so that hon. Members have an opportunity to discuss the continued closure of small branches, such as Edwinstowe and Rainworth in Nottingham, while the National Westminster bank, for example, records profits of £1.4 billion?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the banks are private sector institutions which are responsible for decisions of that kind. I have no doubt that his remarks will be examined carefully by those concerned with the affairs of those institutions in his area.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House next week to make a statement about the Kingskerswell bypass? Is he aware that the future prosperity of my constituency depends on that work being undertaken at the earliest possible moment?

I have so far tabled no fewer than three parliamentary questions in an attempt to establish when work is due to commence, and I have been told for the past six months that work is imminent. However, no work has commenced, and the orders have not yet been made. Will my right hon. Friend request the Secretary of State to come to the House to explain when work can commence on the Kingskerswell bypass?

Mr. Newton: As it happens, I have already arranged for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to answer questions on Monday 3 April. I would judge from the question that he has just asked that my hon. Friend may seek to catch your eye, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Leader of the House give his attention to early-day motion 738, calling for the early ratification of the chemical weapons convention?

[That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the central part it played towards the negotiation of the Chemical Weapons Convention which bans the acquisition, development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons, and which Her Majesty's Government signed in January 1993; fully supports the United Kingdom's commitment, first made at the G7 Summit in 1991, to become an original State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention; notes that the Convention cannot enter into force until 180 days after 65 states have ratified and deposited their instruments of ratification with the Secretary-General of the UN; notes that as of the end of January 22 of the 159 signatory states had already deposited their instruments of ratification; views with concern that the United Kingdom has yet to ratify the Convention; notes further that Her Majesty's Government cannot ratify the Convention until enabling legislation has been brought forward by the Department of Trade and Industry and passed by Parliament; is concerned that the Department of Trade and Industry has no plans to do so in the current parliamentary session; understands that there is widespread support for the Convention amongst the main political parties at Westminster; welcomes the publication by the Department of Trade and Industry of a consultation document for the chemical industry regarding the implementation of the Convention in the United Kingdom; and urges the Department of Trade and Industry to bring forward the necessary legislation as a matter of urgency to demonstrate that chemical weapons arms control remains a high priority for the United Kingdom and to ensure that the United Kingdom does indeed become an original State Party to the Convention.]

Will he have a word with the President of the Board of Trade and insist that the Government bring forward that legislation in the near future, particularly in the light of the terrible events in Japan this week?

Mr. Newton: I am very conscious of the significance of the legislation, and it is something that I am certainly examining with care, wearing yet another of my hats as Chairman of the relevant Cabinet Committee on legislation.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend enable the Government to demonstrate their interest in the welfare of a premier British industry—civil air transport—by granting an early debate in Government time on the subject, in view of the European

Union's strong desire to arrogate to itself member nations' rights to negotiate civil air transport agreements and its failure to control subsidies to state carriers such as Iberia?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise an early debate on precisely those matters, but my hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport attaches importance to all the points that he has raised, and I shall bring his further comments to his attention.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Minister will be aware of the decision by the Secretary of State for Transport to refer the case of the Derbyshire to Lord Donaldson for investigation. Despite the fact that I asked the Minister numerous questions, he failed to answer my last question and preferred to plant a question on the Conservative Benches so that he could reply to it. That did not really affect me, as I am concerned not simply about the Derbyshire, but about safety at sea.

The Derbyshire certainly demonstrates the need for the House to debate safety at sea. There is no doubt in my mind that the matter requires urgent debate, bearing in mind the tragedies that have occurred over the past decade. Will the Leader of the House impress on the Secretary of State for Transport that, in addition to what he has done—which is most welcome—he should prepare for a debate in the House on this important issue?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly bring those remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who will answer questions in about 10 days' time. I should like to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work in these matters. I expect that we all share his welcome for the inquiry, which is now established and for which he pressed for so long.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): May I support the call from the shadow Leader of the House for a debate on the powers of sentencing given to magistrates? We could consider the Green Paper published last week by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the powers which magistrates have, many of which were imposed by the Opposition in government; but, above all, we could consider sentences handed out by magistrates courts for acts of violence inside football grounds. Does he agree that the general public will applaud the decision in Croydon today?

Madam Speaker: Order. The matter is sub judice, and an appeal is pending, so perhaps the hon. Member will not persist in the line he is taking. Will the Leader of the House answer the first part of the question?

Mr. Newton: Only briefly, in the light of what you have said, Madam Speaker. The matter was raised by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), and I cannot add to what I said to her.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): May I remind the Leader of the House that, at this time of year, funding, particularly in public sector budgets, is being squeezed? I have an internal memorandum from South Kent Hospitals NHS trust, which states:

> "Please note that the above practices"—

it refers to three GP fundholding practices—

> "do not wish patients to be given TCI"—

or "to come in"—

> "dates for their operations from Monday 13 March until 31 March. All urgent cases should still be admitted."

It continues:

> "As with many other practices, the above are attempting to curtail activities in order to remain within their financial limits. Please ensure that patients"—

Madam Speaker: Order. I really cannot allow Members to read out long extracts at business questions. Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Leader of the House what he is after, so that we might know whether we can have it next week?

Mr. Hughes: Clearly, those people are having their treatment delayed for purely financial reasons. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to come to the House and justify having people's treatment delayed on financial grounds?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly arrange for the hon. Gentleman's remarks to be drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Beyond that, if, as I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is quoting from what would conventionally be described as a leaked document, I shall certainly not comment on it off the cuff.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Is my right hon. Friend aware of what happened yesterday in European Standing Committee B on immigration and border controls? Attendance at that Committee was so strong that many Conservative Members could not obtain seats? Will he think carefully about, and possibly consider having a debate on, whether more matters that go to European Standing Committee B could be brought back to the Floor of the House, so that hon. Members could have a greater chance to express their views on serious subjects that need to be discussed at great depth? I urge my right hon. Friend to have a debate on that at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of what happened yesterday in European Standing Committee B, but the European Standing Committees were set up in precisely the way that they have been, which is different from many others, in order to provide an opportunity for the Minister to be questioned as well as to have a debate, and for all Members who wish to attend to attend, even though only those who were appointed to the Committee can vote. Those arrangements seemed to work rather well yesterday.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): As a diligent member of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, I reinforce the plea for an early debate on its first special report. In the meantime, I put it to the Lord President that many of us on that Committee are severely exasperated by the delay, but are even more exasperated by the leaks that seem to emanate from the Committee through the Tory Whips Office. May we have that debate as early as possible?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I certainly understand the desire to make progress on the matter, which has also been quite reasonably raised by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), and I have said that I shall be seeking to do that.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate as soon as possible, and preferably before Easter, on the standard of geriatric care in University hospital, Wales, where, a few days ago, a patient, a constituent of mine, Mr. George Ewart, was killed after receiving a massive overdose of morphine by an inexperienced nurse who was taking

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

instruction on the method of delivering the dose via a telephone call from an experienced nurse who was too busy to help? There has been a history of complaints about geriatric care at that hospital, and I would appreciate an early debate on the matter if the time could be found.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of that case, and I am sure that all of us would want to express our regret about it. It is, I understand, the subject of an internal investigation by South Glamorgan health authority, which is continuing, and it has also been reported to the coroner, who in turn has reported to the police. The Health and Safety Executive has also been informed. In the light of all that, the hon. Gentleman will understand that I do not think it appropriate to comment, and that at this moment it would not be appropriate to commit ourselves to a debate.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May we have an early debate on the privatisation by stealth of national health services? The article in *The Independent* today makes it clear that the Government's plans to extend the terms of the private finance initiative are not to bring in new finance but to compel NHS trusts to put health care services out to tender for strange combinations of builders and private health providers. Before the House is required to accept that the future of the NHS is to be put into the hands of the likes of McAlpine Health Care Ltd., should we not have the right to debate whether we wish to see an NHS in the future provided on the lump?

Mr. Newton: I understand that the report in *The Independent* is extremely selective in its quotations from the new guidance. It should be made clear that there is no requirement under the private finance initiative for any clinical services to be included in a facilities management package. Trusts should explore options of the private sector undertaking the design, building, finance and operation of the non-clinical services. In such schemes, the NHS would manage and provide all the health care services.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Is the Leader of the House aware of the Home Secretary's plans to discuss with the House his proposals for the probation service? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware whether any debate has been arranged, or whether there is any mechanism for us to give approval to the idea of drastically changing the training of probation officers, and perhaps replacing the present staff with recruits from the Army?

Mr. Newton: I have no plans at present for a debate, but that is not to rule it out, and, of course, I will look at what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Leader of the House reflect on the fact that some 13.5 million people live in the south-east of England, outside of Greater London, and that the House regularly has debates on Wales, Scotland and Greater London? Is there not a case for us to have an annual debate in which we can examine the stewardship of the interests of those 13.5 million people under the Conservative Government, in which I can criticise the Government on behalf of Labour voters, and the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames) can try to defend the appalling state of the south-east of England under the Government, with all the unemployment, the negative equity and the high cost of travelling to work in London?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman shares with me the honour of representing some of the larger number to which he referred in our different parts of Essex. I do not recognise the description he gives, and in all honesty I do not think that I will undertake annual regional debates of the kind that he appears to be suggesting.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will the Leader of the House do his best to ensure the publication of the Government report on the implications of the House of Lords ruling on the 1992 Pepper *v.* Hart case, in which, as he will no doubt recall, the Law Lords ruled that the courts could take into account ministerial statements when interpreting an Act of Parliament, rather than, as has always been the case in the past, just the words on the face of the Bill or the Act?

If the Government and their code of practice on open government are to be taken seriously, should not the working party report be open to all Members of the House to see? It is a change of enormous significance to the procedure of the House, our legislation and the way in which it is interpreted. It seems quite wrong that the Government should suppress a very important report and the debate that the House should have on it.

Mr. Newton: I am obviously aware of the Pepper *v.* Hart judgment, which was indeed, as the hon. Gentleman says, of some significance. The proper course is for me to undertake to reflect on the matter.

Point of Order

4.18 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Although I entirely fully understand why I came under your suspicion earlier, can I give you my absolute assurance that on this occasion I was not shouting in Prime Minister's Question Time, but I am grateful to you for drawing to the attention of the *Observer* that I was present for yet another Thursday?

Madam Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman, but I can distinguish a Welsh lilt from a Scottish accent. I think that both hon. Members might consider undertaking a vow of silence during Prime Minister's Question Time. I am always interested to hear their lovely accents, but not when another right hon. or hon. Member has the Floor of the House.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund Act 1995
South Africa Act 1995

Orders of the Day

Jobseekers Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

New clause 6

REDUCED PAYMENTS

'.—(1) Regulations may provide for the amount of an income-based jobseeker's allowance payable to any young person to whom this section applies to be reduced—

(a) in such circumstances,
(b) by such a percentage, and
(c) for such a period,

as may be prescribed.

(2) This section applies to any young person in respect of whom—

(a) a direction is in force under section 13; and
(b) either of the conditions mentioned in subsection (3) is satisfied.

(3) The conditions are that—

(a) the young person was previously entitled to an income-based jobseeker's allowance and that entitlement ceased by virtue of the revocation of a direction under section 13;
(b) he has failed to complete a course of training and no certificate has been issued to him under subsection (4) with respect to that failure.

(4) Where a young person who has failed to complete a course of training—

(a) claims that there was good cause for the failure, and
(b) applies to the Secretary of State for a certificate under this subsection,

the Secretary of State shall, if he is satisfied that there was good cause for the failure, issue a certificate to that effect and give a copy of it to the young person.

(5) In this section—

"training" has such meaning as may be prescribed; and
"young person" means a person who has reached the age of 16 but not the age of 18.'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.19 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Government guarantee a suitable youth training place for every young person who wants one. We shall spend £676 million on youth training this year in England alone. That is a significant investment in the future of our young people and the nation's economy. It means, moreover, that there is no reason why young people need to be unemployed. We do not wish to encourage dependency on benefit at such an early age, and 16 and 17-year-olds are therefore generally not entitled to claim benefits; but we have always recognised that there must be exceptions, and those are provided for in the system.

First, young people in certain specified vulnerable groups, such as disabled young people, are allowed to claim income support. They will continue to be able to claim it after the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. Secondly, young people in prescribed categories, such as those who have recently left local authority care, will be able to claim JSA for a period intended to allow them to overcome their temporary

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

difficulties. That, too, continues the existing arrangements. Thirdly, young people who are waiting for a suitable youth training place will be able to claim JSA if they would otherwise suffer severe hardship. Again, that continues the existing arrangements.

Most young people are keen to better themselves and take their obligations seriously, but a minority persistently abuse the system. I set out the Government's policy intentions in Committee on 21 February, and also explained in Committee how we intended to deal with such abuses.

Young people wishing to claim JSA on severe hardship grounds must register with the careers service. As a result most will quickly be offered, and accept, suitable training under the YT guarantee. We recognise, however, that young people may not always be entirely clear about their vocational needs and aspirations: that is why young people receiving severe hardship payments who are in the guarantee group for the first time are allowed without penalty to turn down one offer of training or leave one training place early, for any reason whatever. But if they turn down two suitable youth training places, or leave two such places early without good cause—or a combination of the two—they will incur the penalty of a 40 per cent. reduction in the personal rate of JSA for two weeks. If they subsequently rejoin the guarantee group, a reduction will be applied on each occasion when they turn down a suitable training place, or leave one such place early—again, without good cause.

I believe that that represents a clear and fair system for young people, but such a system clearly requires safeguards. First, it will be the careers service that decides whether a youth training place is suitable for a young person. The careers service is bound by arrangements made under the Employment and Training Act 1973, as amended by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, to provide young people with impartial guidance.

The careers service will not offer a young person a training place unless it meets his or her needs, circumstances and abilities. It will take into account anything that might limit the type of training that the young person could accept, including the young person's preference and aptitude, the level of approved qualifications for which he or she is aiming and the duration, proximity and availability of the training.

Secondly, we are introducing a new system of internal review that will take place before a direction is revoked on the ground that the young person has refused a suitable youth training place. The young person will be given the opportunity to request a re-examination of his case by the Employment Service before a direction is revoked. The Employment Service will consider all the circumstances of the case carefully; if it finds in the young person's favour, the direction will not be revoked, and the young person will continue to receive JSA.

If the young person is in a training place but is not happy with his training, he can take a number of courses of action—he can raise the matter with his training provider, with the training and enterprise council or with the careers service. Again, the facts of the case will be looked into carefully and, if appropriate, it may be decided that the training is not suitable and the trainee will then be found another place.

However, if the young person leaves a training place early and feels that he has good cause for doing so, he will be able to put his side of the case to the Employment Service. The circumstances of the case will be re-examined and, where good cause is established, a certificate will be issued by the Secretary of State and a copy given to the young person. If he reapplies for severe hardship under JSA, he will receive the full amount. However, if he does not have a certificate when he applies for a new direction, he will receive the reduced amount for the prescribed period of two weeks. If, subsequently, he gets a certificate, he can apply for a review under section 25 of the Administration Act to get back the amount of reduction that has been taken.

People receiving JSA are required to be available for and actively seeking employment. I want to explain how that will apply to 16 to 17-year-olds who are receiving severe hardship payments. They will be required to be available for and actively seeking work, but we believe that the priority for young people should be training or jobs with training. Jobs without training attached come a poor second. That is why 16 to 17-year-olds will not have to accept a job that does not have a suitable training content. If, however, they have abused the system by turning down or leaving youth training early without good cause and have suffered the reduction in the amount of JSA that I have described, they will at the same time lose their right to refuse offers of work on the ground that they do not contain training.

I believe that, taken together, the Government's youth training guarantee, backed by the clear sanctions, safeguards and protections that I have described, represents a fair and balanced package of measures for young people. The new clause is designed to put that into effect. I hope that, after debate, the House will support it.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Opposition, I oppose the new clause. I want to set it in the context of the debates that took place on two occasions in Committee, when we set out clear and specific evidence of the Government's failure in provision for young unemployed people.

Before doing that, I point out that during our debates on the Bill yesterday some 7,300 people were made redundant throughout the United Kingdom—from Northern Foods, Midland bank, Dewhurst and GCHQ, covering the retail, banking and manufacturing sectors. It is equivalent to 1,050 jobs an hour, 18 jobs a minute or one job for every three seconds while hon. Members were debating the Government's JSA proposals. Put in that context, we can see just how inadequate the Bill is not only in ensuring that people have a right to benefit, but, more importantly, in ensuring the necessary access and assets to get people back into the labour market.

The new clause is not about getting young people back into meaningful work; it is not about modernising and improving access to benefit and services for young people; it is not about tackling the causes of young people's poverty; it is not about tackling inequality and social and economic deprivation among young people; it is not about social investment in beleaguered working-class communities, from which many of the young unemployed come; and it is not about challenging the social alienation of youths who have been affected by unemployment—instead, the Bill is a vicious attack on young people. There is no other way to describe it.

Without any prior notice, the Government announced that they intended to change the rules for 16 to 17-year-olds—one of the most economically and socially deprived groups in the United Kingdom. This is the second occasion in under a decade when the Government have singled out young unemployed people for vicious and callous treatment. That process was commenced in 1988 by the Prime Minister when he was Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. Against all advice from people, organisations who represented young people, and the Government's own independent authorities, the Government took action to deny young people the right of access to benefit and to support services. As a consequence, young people in their thousands were left destitute. It was a national scandal of which the Government have testimony today. Hundreds, if not thousands, of vulnerable young people are still left without resources.

4.30 pm

It was against that background that Labour Members tabled a new clause on what should be in the jobseeker's agreement. It is interesting to note that, once again, the Minister has not taken the opportunity to publish the jobseeker's agreement for young people. The Government new clause does not deal with what should be in the agreement. It is simply about the way in which the Government will have a method of removing the right of vulnerable 16 to 17-year-olds to hardship payments.

In Committee, the Government made no effort to give the Opposition or even Conservative Back-Bench Members copies of the young person's agreement. On the last day that the Bill is in this place, we are still in the dark about what is contained in that agreement. The Minister either would not or could not clarify the differences between the adult Jobseekers Bill and the young person's version. Why is that the case? Why is she so unable or unwilling to provide basic information about the young jobseeker's agreement? Is it perhaps because of the fact that the Government had no intention at the outset of the Bill's passage to give any clear idea of their policy on 16 and 17-year-olds?

The new clause is a catch-all, and a nasty and malicious attempt to reduce the rights of 16 and 17-year-olds and to condemn them to even greater depths of destitution and exploitation. That boot camp philosophy towards the young unemployed is similar to that outlined by the Home Secretary on other issues. Suffice to say that the young persons jobseeker's agreement will be more punitive than the current arrangements for hardship payments, as the Minister admitted in her short introduction to the new clause. What will she do about the 1,000 vulnerable teenagers who have been turned away each month by the Government's covert campaign to cut support to them?

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) has asked parliamentary questions about the matter. Every month, 1,000 young people—vulnerable teenagers—are denied access to hardship payments. Those vulnerable young people are casualties not only of youth unemployment but of life—they have come out of care, are homeless or houseless, or have been physically or sexually abused. Each month, 1,000 of those people are still refused the right of access to hardship payments.

In the three summer months of last year, the latest period for which statistics are available, 6,190 teenagers who applied for hardship payments were turned away, an average of 476 refusals per week. Nine months earlier, before the rules were tightened, the refusal rate was only about 200 a week. Between 1989 and 1994, claims for severe hardship had risen from around 250 per week to 2,700 per week, a rise of more than 1,000 per cent. The reason for that increase was the Government's decision in 1988 to remove access to benefits and other help for young 16 to 17-year-olds. The Opposition and people who represent young people have said that that decision has led to a large increase in poverty and destitution among young people. The figures show that to be the case.

What did the Secretary of State for Employment, when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, do to deal with that growing problem? He was so alarmed about the increase in successful claims that he sent a specialist team to investigate the severe hardship payment unit in Glasgow. It was revealed in confidential documents that the view of the then Chief Secretary, who is now the Secretary of State for Employment responsible for the new clause, was that officers were being too generous to 16 and 17-year-olds, not that there was hardship or any vulnerable young people. He denied that there was hardship or that young people were vulnerable. His sole intention in the exercise was to reduce Government expenditure on vulnerable young people. As a consequence, when he moved from his Treasury job to his present post, he regarded it as a priority to tackle young people. The major reason that the new clause has been proposed is to reduce the overall sum spent on hardship payments for vulnerable teenagers. It is an extension of his role when he was a Treasury Minister.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): So that we can be clear about this, is the hon. Gentleman saying that the jobseeker's allowance should be available for all 16 to 17-year-olds or merely that all claims for hardship allowances should be allowed, whatever the circumstances?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until I get further into my speech. We are discussing a specific aspect of hardship relevant to the new clause. If the hon. Gentleman supports the new clause, he should at least read it. I know that he supports the Government absolutely in any circumstances and tends to crawl to the Minister at every opportunity, but he should not fail to read the new clause.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does my hon. Friend, like me, find it distasteful that Conservative Members seem to find this subject amusing and sit there laughing while he makes extremely important points about some of the most vulnerable teenagers?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is quite right, and it is merely a continuation of what happened in Committee, where Conservatives laughed through eight weeks of debate about the needs of young people. They laugh because they have no experience of the problems. It is not their children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews who will be affected by the changes; they are protected by privilege. They make sure that their children have access to training or education—they purchase it. This change in Government policy does not affect the children whom they come across, so they not only regard this as a joke and a jolly good wheeze, but are wholly uninterested in the needs of young people. If they were anything other

[Mr. McCartney]

than disinterested, they would not have made such a proposal. The new clause would never have got out of the locker from which it came.

It is interesting to note that in Committee not one Conservative Member was prepared to stand up and defend the interests of 16 to 17-year-olds. As I told the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) yesterday with reference to one of his interventions, he should be ashamed of himself.

If the Government training programme is so successful, why has there been such a dramatic increase in the number of claims for severe hardship payments? The truth is that training for 16 to 17-year-olds has failed dramatically because teenagers are still experiencing severe problems in relation to their access to, and the quality of, training and their access to employment opportunities following training.

Only 31 per cent. of young people were in work six months after leaving training, and 30 per cent. leave training without a qualification or a credit towards a qualification. The percentage of young people leaving training who get a qualification or a credit has hardly increased since 1990 and, even now, barely half of all leavers come out of the scheme with some form of qualification.

The Government are not dealing with the crisis in training, with the crisis in the quality of training or with the lack of full-time employment opportunities at the end of training. Instead of tackling those problems by introducing new measures in the Bill, they blame the victim. The language in which the Minister of State proposed the new clause was revealing—it was the language of blame. She used negative language about young people and how they view the Government's proposals and talked of the need for coercive tactics in dealing with young people. Those coercive tactics bear no relation to the plight of young people and their attitudes to work and training, which I shall come to in a moment.

The figures that I quoted say nothing about the quality of training provided. The trends are set against the decline of more traditional forms of structured training for young people. For example, the number of trainees and apprenticeships in manufacturing has declined by 60 per cent. since 1979 and 150,000 apprenticeships in engineering have been lost since the Government began deregulating the market. What other Government, in changing their labour force, in trying to develop new skills and new techniques, in promoting engineering as part of a drive for exports and in trying to improve the country's economic competitiveness, would allow 150,000 skilled training posts to be lost? No other Government would allow that. It is economic madness and, in response to the needs of young people to develop career opportunities, it is callous in the extreme.

Those appalling outcomes show that this Government's policy is clearly not working. The Government must tackle the twin problems of youth unemployment and lack of skills among young people. The Minister's solution is simply to force young people on to schemes and deny them benefit if they refuse to go on them because the schemes are poor, unsuitable or exploitative.

The hon. Lady has created a serious problem with what she has said to me in Committee and confirmed today. We are to have two classes of schemes and attitudes towards young people. Those who are lucky enough to have access to quality training and work opportunities will be given a guarantee that during that work experience, training and minimum standards will be maintained. But for those who, for various reasons, are unable to secure that quality training or access to employment opportunities, such standards will not be maintained.

The Government will force young people to take jobs that do not include any training or minimum standards whatever. What does that say to young people? What does that say about future investment in training for young people? If it is wrong to provide young people with jobs without training and minimum standards, it is wrong, full stop. The Government are therefore introducing a further measure of coercion with which to attack young people. They are not only reducing the right to hardship payments in 40 per cent. of cases, but they are attacking young people from a different angle. If young people have access to job opportunities, they cannot rely on the Department of Employment to protect them, in either quality of training or minimum standards.

That is perverse logic in anyone's language. It can serve only to encourage bad employers to operate outside the system and feel no obligation to provide training for our young people. Why should young people be given manual jobs with no skill element? Bad employers will simply need to sit and wait for the first opportunity that the Government take to throw young people out of the system. The first young people who are removed from the system will be automatically offered jobs by bad employers, who will not have to spend a penny on training or minimum standards and who will be outside the policing arrangements for dealing with and providing work for young people.

A similar argument arose yesterday about minimum pay. The Government are giving a green light once again for bad employers to exploit young workers through levels of pay, training and standards. What a set of options to offer young people.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman heard me say very clearly in the House yesterday that the Employment Service is not in the habit of and will not in the future be in the habit of offering people inappropriate vacancies. That applied to young people as well.

4.45 pm

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady has been somewhat disingenuous, to say the least. In Committee, we spent hours giving her evidence of case after case of such practices. She could not refute such cases because they were either pending appeal, had already been heard or had been provided by citizens advice bureaux, the Coalition for Young People, the Unemployment Unit, youth organisations and churches. We could go on for hours today, but the point was well made in Committee. Young people feel abused by the system. The system does not meet their needs when they inevitably complain and the trainer or the organisation that placed them in that vulnerable position is not dealt with. The young person is guilty until proved innocent. Only when young people prove themselves innocent are they entitled to some form of benefit. Little or no action is taken against the employer who was exploitative in the first place.

Ms Eagle: Does my hon. Friend recall some of the comments made by Conservative Members in Committee to the effect that, if training for young people were to consist of scrubbing floors, it would be acceptable because it would teach them discipline?

Mr. McCartney: A number of inane and disgraceful comments have been made as the Bill has progressed. It is interesting to note that the hon. Members who made them are not here. Perhaps the Government have made them take a vow of silence and stay away so that they do not embarrass the Government with their views on young people. The point was well made by my hon. Friend.

We have a dossier of Conservative Members' views on young people. On Second Reading, comments made by well-heeled, millionaire-type Tory Members of Parliament on young people who were seeking employment and could not get it were revealing. A range of views was expressed, and between now and the next election we intend to use them to the full. *[Interruption.]* Would the Whip, the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), like me to embarrass his hon. Friends? Perhaps he would, but I will not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] No. I have not gone soft, but I have not notified the hon. Members concerned that I intend to mention them in the Chamber. If the Minister would like to go and get them—I am sure that they are in the House—I would be more than happy to discuss their views on young people.

The point that I am trying to make—

Mr. Heald *rose*—

Mr. McCartney: I shall give way in just a second.

The Government should be looking to the new options and training opportunities that they can provide to improve the system. The direct result of the Government new clause will be to halve the choice of training and opportunities for young people to look round and find a suitable scheme. The Minister confirmed that in her explanation of the new clause. The Government are reducing by 50 per cent. the chance of young people to come out of a scheme or a training opportunity when they find, having been placed in it for a range of reasons, that it is unsuitable.

Will any hardship payment or benefit be provided for young people who are waiting for a decision on an appeal? The Minister made some concession during her short introduction to the new clause when, for the first time, she referred to an internal review. I assume that that was introduced—it was not mentioned in Committee—to take account of what my hon. Friends and I said about the need to protect young people in the process of turning down an opportunity or coming out of a scheme in which they had already been placed. The hon. Lady did not say whether young people who are disallowed payments after that internal review will be given a formal opportunity for an appeal process. If they are given that opportunity, will they be allowed to claim some form of benefit until a decision is made?

How long will a claimant be given to consider a training offer? That is important, because it would be totally unacceptable if young people were told that, if they did not immediately accept a training position, action would be taken against them by the Department. A young person needs a period to reflect on the proposals put to him. How long will that period be? Will it be a day, two days, a week or a fortnight? Will the second offer of training be a different placement, as a matter of course? What I mean by that—

Miss Widdecombe *indicated assent.*

Mr. McCartney: Then I shall not proceed with that question. It is important that people are not offered the same placement as they originally turned down.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall answer the question so as to get the facts on the record. The answer is that if someone has turned down a placement, the same placement will not be offered a second time.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the Minister; that is another improvement since the Committee stage.

Where training is unsuitable or of poor quality, it becomes a euphemism for exploitation, and a cheap job with poverty pay. Training is a pretence for young people in such positions. In many areas assessment has become a sham, because in truth there is none. Few or no resources go into checking what happens during the training process.

In Committee we gave the Minister ample evidence of that state of affairs, and it is now incumbent on the Government to say clearly what investment and what procedures will be attached to the regulations under the new clause to ensure that young people are protected in their placements, and that a regular check is made on the quality of provision. Young people could then have confidence that they had an independent person to turn to if difficulties arose. Without such independence, they will continue to be left in dangerous circumstances.

We must also ensure that schemes are tailored to meet individual needs and requirements. The Minister suggested earlier that the Government might be moving in that direction. She said that there would be checks on trainers, and that the review procedures would be examined. Will that include ensuring that part and parcel of a young person's jobseeker's agreement will be total control by the young person over the final decision? I shall explain what I mean by that in a minute.

It is important that as the Government introduce the new arrangements they ensure that young people feel that they are part of the process and not simply a cog in the Government's wheel. The agreement should be made between two equal partners. When the Committee was to discuss the jobseeker's agreement per se, we tabled many amendments, which the Government rejected, to ensure that the balance of power between the Department's officers and the claimant would be equal, and that both parties would find the eventual agreement positive in terms of the individual's needs.

For the outcome to be successful for young people, they must feel from the outset that the agreement is as important to them and for their development as it is to the Department as a tool and a weapon for refusing them access to the benefits system. It is therefore vital that the Minister sets out clear and specific arrangements whereby young people can with some confidence enter discussions and negotiations on their agreement. I do not see why she cannot do that today. If it cannot be done at all, the agreement will not be worth the paper that it is written on, but will be seen as just another coercive document to be used against the young person.

Those of us who have teenage children, or whose children have already been through that difficult period in their lives, will know that teenagers react more positively if they are dealt with on the basis of an equal partnership. Growing up is difficult enough in the teenage years, but

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it is even more difficult if people are out of work and feel alienated, and the person sitting opposite them seems totally unsympathetic to their position. Even worse, that person has the power to determine major aspects of the young people's lives, including eligibility for housing and access to income, training and employment. That is an uncomfortable position for anyone, let alone a vulnerable 16 or 17-year-old.

Department of Employment services must be seen not simply as a policing arrangement for young people, but as a positive aid to help to meet their needs. Rather than moving the goalposts towards assisting young people, the Government, both in Committee and now, by tabling the new clause, have done the opposite. They have moved the goalposts towards an indifferent approach that will alienate young people further and will, in a coercive way, undermine their abilities and their rights of access to the Department's services and to income, where they would have been eligible for income.

The new clause does not deal with the causes of distress and financial hardship for young people; it merely attempts to deal with the symptoms. The Government have chosen to ignore the real issues facing youngsters in the 1990s, who are the victims of the Government's economic failures.

There are three things to say about the new clause. First, it allows for a continuation of the exploitation of young people. Secondly, it does not protect minimum standards or guarantee quality training and education. Thirdly, it reduces choice for young people at a time when they should have more choice and more opportunities.

Why have the Government not used the opportunity to deal with the high failure rate, and with the number of people who do not complete the course and thus do not have appropriate qualifications? That is the real issue, and that is the damning indictment of the Government. For many young people, the current training programme has not worked. Yet rather than deal with those problems, the Government have decided to attack young people instead.

The Government have a poor record in dealing with young people, most of whom are desperate for work, training or a mixture of the two. If they sign the young jobseeker's agreement in good faith and then find that it is detrimental to their well-being, what will the Government do to ensure that sanctions are not taken against them, and that the Department acts on behalf of young people rather than on behalf of the people exploiting or attempting to exploit them?

The agreement will remove current safeguards against low-paid employment and benefit disqualification, and reduce young people's rights. Current Employment Service guidance states clearly that although advisers should ask claimants to sign, people should not be pressed to do so against their will. But now we know that the new agreement will do precisely that. Without a signature in advance on the agreement, young people's access to training and to a range of Department of Employment services will be reduced or ended.

The young person's JSA is to be used to increase pressure on young people who are especially vulnerable to take up low-paid work, with or without relevant training. The Minister confirmed that again today, because she said that the Government will pressurise young people to take up opportunities where there is no training element. That is totally unacceptable.

Miss Widdecombe: At present there is no safeguard at all for a young person who wants to turn down a job on the ground that it does not contain training. We have now announced that in the future, unless someone has already turned down two training offers, he or she will be able to turn down a job on that ground. Only after someone has abused the system and either turned down or walked out of two training opportunities shall we revert to the present system, so we have improved the position for young people. Will the hon. Gentleman welcome that?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady has not improved the position; she has created a further two-tier system, as she has again admitted. She uses the word "abuse", describing the young person as abusing the system, whereas we are talking about young people being abused and seeking assistance from the Department to have the exploitation stopped. At that point, when young people approach the Department, under the Minister's new proposals they will run the risk of losing their right to benefit.

The Minister's explanation went even further, because she said that if a young person wanted to get back into the system, any right to protection would have been forfeited. The hon. Lady is quite prepared to place young people in vulnerable positions, either because of the exploitative level of pay involved or because of the fact that there is no training element. She is offering skivvy jobs, with low pay and low levels of attainment. The Government's economic policies are undermining the rights of young people.

Young people have suffered particularly under the Government's policies. More than one in three 16 to 17-year-olds are paid less than £1.50 an hour. Almost half are paid less than the national insurance threshold of £57 per week, and the Government's proposals will force even more young people into skivvy pay and exploitation. Eight out of 10 jobs for 16-year-olds and almost seven out of 10 for 17-year-olds pay less than £2 per hour.

5 pm

Since 1990, hourly pay rates have fallen in real terms by 15 per cent. for 16-year-olds and 11 per cent. for 17-year-olds. The reason is that the Government withdrew the legal rights of protection for young people under 21 from exploitation by employers. The Government were the first in a century to remove the legal right of young people not to be paid exploitative rates of pay. Within a few years of that legal right being removed, young people's pay has fallen further. That is the Government's policy.

The Minister stated in Committee how the labour market conditions for young people who are entitled to severe hardship payments will be assessed. I want her to tell me what labour market conditions will have to be satisfied by 16 to 17-year-olds in order for them to qualify for hardship payments. Can she define what the market conditions will be? Will the conditions be more about satisfying her Department than about satisfying the needs of young people? There seems to be a dilemma for a young person who does not want to fall foul of the new clause. If a young person does not agree with the

Department of Employment's view about labour market conditions, a range of sanctions will be introduced against the young person, irrespective of his needs.

If we are serious about dealing with the needs of 16 and 17-year-olds, we must ensure that the conditions will assist them in relation to the labour market and will not assist the Government in their ideological drive to lower wages and reduce working conditions in the marketplace.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government want higher wages.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister knows that that is not the case, despite what she says from a sedentary position.

The Minister is the same hon. Lady who, yesterday, gleefully denied people on benefit the right to a minimum level of pay if they come off benefit to go into work. She is prepared to allow people to work for £1 an hour, or thereabouts. If they do not take such jobs, they could—under the jobseeker's agreement—lose their right to benefit after 13 weeks. What the Minister hates is that the public are beginning to realise what the consequences of the legislation will be for them, their families and their young children.

The Minister fails to accept evidence that has been provided to the Department with regard to 16 to 17-year-olds. Almost half those claiming severe hardship payments had no money when they claimed and were totally destitute. That situation has arisen since 1988, and was precisely predicted at that time. If the Government remove from young and vulnerable people their access to income, they will be left destitute.

One third of those young people had been thrown out of the family home, or had been living with relatives and friends who could no longer support them. One in 10 had been in care. Some 22 per cent. had been physically or sexually abused. Severe hardship claims have risen 20-fold between 1988 and 1994 because of the Government's callous proposals. Some 45 per cent. of all claimants have slept rough.

What an image for Great Britain in 1995. What an image of what we are doing to a generation of young people. Who would have believed that we would approach the turn of the century with a Government whose policies after 16 years deny young people who have been physically or sexually abused access to income? One in 10 young people who have been in care are being denied access to income, and 45 per cent. of 16 to 17-year-olds who need severe hardship payments are homeless and sleeping rough. What a crisis for our young people. What is the Government's response? It is a clause that denies young people further access to income and responsibility in terms of employment.

The Government have ignored not just that survey. The Coalition for Young People carried out a survey, which was presented to the Minister, of how young people view the activities of her Department. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of young people said that the Department of Employment had been unhelpful to them in its advice and assistance. A majority of young people felt that the Department was not on their side, and that the Department's staff were acting as police officers rather than as advocates on their behalf. A large proportion of young people did not, in the end, claim severe hardship payments because of the complexities that were put before them by the Employment Service and by benefit officers.

That is a damning indictment of how the Government view their relationship with young people. Given that background, it is no wonder that so many people are afraid of the new clause, which is one of a family of measures that are attacking young people. In a survey about young people's attitudes to the Benefits Agency, young people said that they felt intimidated, and that even when benefit was granted, they were made to feel that they had been done a favour. They complained that they were not listened to, and were often flatly refused permission to apply or seek advice.

That illustrates the need for young people to have an independent advocacy service, and the Minister has again failed to address that matter in relation to the jobseeker's agreement. At 16 or 17 years of age, many young people are not articulate and cannot speak up for themselves.

The Minister knows that the vast majority of the 16 to 17-year-olds with whom the Department will have to deal are young people who have been abused in one form or another. They will have come out of care, and may be suffering social stress because of the physical or sexual abuse that they had to endure. Many of them will be young people with perceived needs, but they may be unable to articulate those needs. It is those young people—the very young people whose interests we are supposed to be here to protect, enhance and promote—who will be undermined and who will lose out in the system that the Minister is proposing.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): The hon. Gentleman will agree that the vast majority of young people are keen to get work, and to take on appropriate training. Therefore, new clause 6 will apply to very few young people. Does he agree that there is a small minority of young people who are workshy, who do not want to go on training courses and who would prefer to sit at home and receive taxpayers' money? If the hon. Gentleman does not like new clause 6, how would the Labour party ensure that that small minority of young people who are idle were given incentives to do something with their lives?

Mr. McCartney: If the hon. Gentleman had been here for the beginning of the debate, he would have heard me praising young people for their attempts to get work and to promote themselves.

It is completely untrue that lots of young people want to live off taxpayers' money. Tory Members such as the hon. Gentleman, who have a great deal of bile and negative attitudes towards unemployed young people, try to promote that fallacy, but it is not the case.

Mr. Streeter: What would Labour do?

Mr. McCartney: I shall come to that, if the hon. Gentleman will let me answer. The clause deals with young people who go to the Department or to their training provider and ask to be released from their training because of exploitation, or because the scheme is inappropriate to their needs due to disability or other factors. They may ask to be removed because they feel that the scheme proposed for them will not fulfil their needs.

The hon. Gentleman was present when I gave eloquent testimony to the number of cases in which young people had legitimately sought an alternative scheme. When the Minister introduced the jobseeker's scheme, she said that

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she had been disappointed about the low outcomes. She has that problem because the schemes do not work for the vast majority of young people but, instead of dealing with the problem of poor schemes, the Government have decided to tackle the young people. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is so.

Miss Widdecombe: If the schemes are so appalling, how come 78 per cent. of those who complete them have a positive outcome, and how come the recent youth cohort survey shows that 78 per cent. of trainees rated their training as either excellent or good and only 5 per cent. rated it as poor? Ask the young people themselves, and they say that those schemes are good.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister severely doctors the figures. Like many other figures that the Department provides, the cohort of young people is not taken as a whole. The figures represent a percentage of those who completed training and do not reflect the total number who started or sought training. They are therefore highly selective. The real figure that the Minister should have quoted is that, on average, 50 per cent. of young people do not find success through the training schemes.

When the Minister introduced the young jobseeker's agreement in Committee, she expressed disappointment about the outcomes. That is on the record.

Miss Widdecombe: I expressed disappointment not about the outcomes, which are extremely good for those who complete their courses, but about the number who fail to complete. Before the hon. Gentleman tosses around figures of 50 per cent. failing to complete, will he acknowledge that one third of those people fail to complete only because they go into a job or a different sort of training scheme?

Mr. McCartney: Again, the Minister wriggles. She brought forward the proposal in Committee because the Government were unhappy about the outcomes. At that time, we challenged her for attacking the symptom rather than the cause. The cause is the fact that substantial numbers of young people are exploited through those schemes. The outcomes for them are far from perfect, because of either a lack of qualifications or a lack of job opportunity at the end of the course.

The Minister should have introduced proposals under the new clause to tackle those problems instead of introducing further draconian measures that undermine the needs of a specific group of young people with special needs and aspirations and, as the Government did in 1988, attacking 16 to 17-year-olds. This Government are good at attacking the vulnerable, and the proposal will affect another group of young people.

In Committee, the Government gave no sign of what the jobseeker's agreement for young people will include. My hon. Friends and I therefore tabled a new clause to try to get the Government to elucidate on the agreement. Is it not a scandal that the Bill is about to leave the House before the Government have published their proposals? They talk about parliamentary accountability, yet before publishing their proposals they pass a clause that undermines young people if they do not sign an agreement that the Government are not even prepared to bring to the House for scrutiny.

The Minister should clarify her intentions on a range of issues. For example, will the jobseeker's agreement deal with provisional help for housing needs? What is the outcome of the Government's survey on the needs of young people in terms of training and employment opportunities? The overwhelming majority of 16 to 17-year-olds are tied up with their housing needs. Those who are houseless or living in poor housing conditions invariably cannot or do not finish training schemes. Their housing needs are so overwhelming that they affect their capability of accepting training places or entering full-time employment.

5.15 pm

Miss Widdecombe: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that young people who are on benefit because, for example, they do not live at home and have good cause not to live at home, will get assistance through housing benefit and council tax benefit, in some cases up to 100 per cent? Will he acknowledge that that is a comprehensive package? To take advantage of it, a young person must simply abide by the rules that we set.

Mr. McCartney: Once again, the Minister's comments have a sting in the tail. She described all those safety nets and then spoiled it all by saying that a young person must have the right key to open the door. She admitted that all those safety nets will be withdrawn from young people if they fall out with her Department in respect of this agreement. Moreover, she has not said why her Department is still refusing 1,000 young people a month, who are currently homeless, houseless or coming out of care, access to hardship payments.

Miss Widdecombe: I answered the hon. Gentleman's specific point about young people coming out of care in my speech, which I should have thought was short enough for him to have taken it all in. I said, that for eight weeks, their position on JSA is protected and that, after that, they can establish severe hardship and remain on JSA. That was made extremely clear. Who are those young people who come out of care and somehow do not get a single penny?

Mr. McCartney: Again, the Minister attempts to paint a rosy picture. Those 1,000 young people a month exist. It is a Government figure—the Department's refusal rate. The issue is their inability to be accepted for hardship payments. They must be accepted before they can have access to those passported benefits. The Government are leaving thousands of young people in potential destitution, which the clause will exacerbate.

There is one question which I thought the Minister would answer this afternoon and which I raised in Committee. We pressed her on ensuring that young people had access to transport costs for training courses, and she said that it should be simply a matter for the training and enterprise councils, as trainers. That is not an acceptable answer. If she accepts that it is a reasonable proposition that young people should have that assistance, she should at least be prepared to ensure equality of access to the provision. Why should a young person in my area, for example, have access to it while a young person on exactly the same scheme in a borough down the road does not? It is either right to give access to transport costs or it is not. Given that the Minister has accepted the principle that it is right, she should ensure equality of access for young people, irrespective of where they live or where the scheme is held.

Through this proposal, the Government have sunk to a new low. During the Bill's passage over the past eight weeks, they have made numerous proposals that undermine the rights of the unemployed, including the loss of benefit after six instead of 12 months and cuts in people's benefit. The proposal before us, however, beats them all. By denying many young people, including those who have been sexually and physically abused, access to rights, the proposal will lead them to destitution. That is unacceptable under any circumstances.

Absolutely no one could defend the proposal. It shows how out of touch the Government have become with reality—with what is happening outside the House. They are out of touch with the public's perceptions and feelings about the way in which we want to invest in young people, not damage them as a result of the failure of Government policies. It is a mean and nasty proposal, which my colleagues and I will vigorously oppose in the Lobby tonight.

Ms Lynne: I shall be fairly brief. I want to tackle the detail of new clause 6 and obtain clarification about some of its wording.

Subsection (1)(a) appears to give wider powers to vary circumstances when benefit could be reduced than are provided for in subsection (3), which is confusing to someone who has just begun to consider the clause in detail. I wish to know what other circumstances the Government have in mind in which benefit could be reduced.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): It is gratifying to hear some comments from the Liberal Benches. It would be of great interest to us to know why, in view of the hon. Lady's interest and her comments, no attempt was made by the Liberals to participate in the Committee proceedings.

Ms Lynne: If the hon. Gentleman had been in the House yesterday—it appears that he was not, at least for the majority of the debate—he would have heard my remarks on that subject. I was on the Committee that considered the Disability Discrimination Bill, which was just along the Corridor, and I was unable to attend both Committees. I would not have been allowed to serve on both Committees. However, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would realise that those of us who were not in Committee do have a right to question things. That is why we have Report stage. If he would not mind, I should like to make progress with some detailed questions about new clause 6.

Subsection (2)(b) allows either of two conditions to trigger the section, not both. Read with subsection (3)(a), that appears pointless because, if the direction is made under clause 13, and that has been revoked already, surely a young person will not be in receipt of anything anyway, and how is it possible to reduce nothing? I think that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) will find that that is so, but I should be grateful if the Minister would give me some guidance on that.

Miss Widdecombe: If a direction is revoked, the individual concerned, as now—it follows the same rules, although there is slightly different terminology—may make an immediate application for a new direction. That direction will be granted, provided that severe hardship is established. The question under consideration of revocation, therefore, refers to the former direction.

I am sure that the hon. Lady understands that, at present, someone who turns down a second offer theoretically leaves the guarantee group but can in fact be re-admitted immediately. Those provisions continue that.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister saying that, if someone refuses the second offer, they are not entitld to benefit and they will be denied it?

Miss Widdecombe: If someone refuses a second offer, or leaves a scheme without good cause, the direction will be revoked. I suppose that the person could choose to wander away, but it is most unlikely. They would apply for a new direction. They would obtain that new direction, but for the first two weeks of it they would suffer the sanction. If subsequently it was decided that they had good cause and they obtained a Secretary of State's certificate, the amount of the reduction would be reinstated.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful to the Minister.

Perhaps I may now discuss certificates. Under subsection (3)(b), what will be the procedure for the issue of certificates? Subsection (4) mentions "good cause", and the Minister said that the Employment Service would decide. Would that be in consultation with the careers service?

Miss Widdecombe: As I said in my short introductory speech, the careers service will decide whether a course is suitable. It is important to understand that a person does not have to walk off a scheme and then ask, "Please may I have that scheme ruled unsuitable?" A person who is already on a scheme can apply to the careers service, saying that the scheme is not suitable. If it is then found not to be suitable, it will be as though that young person had not received the offer.

Ms Lynne: That is as a result of the Employment Service and the careers service consulting together. I am grateful for that.

Will a young person apply for a certificate before leaving the training service or can they apply retrospectively? Perhaps the Minister would prefer to answer when she replies to the debate, because otherwise she will be bobbing up and down.

Miss Widdecombe: I am bobbing up and down because the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) has a habit of taking up an awful lot of time. Therefore, I am trying to take every possible opportunity to answer the questions. The individual concerned—

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady chose to speak for a short time instead of half an hour.

Miss Widdecombe: If I had done that, no one else would have had a go.

The individual concerned will have a choice. He or she can either apply while on the scheme—in which case, if it was agreed, they would not suffer any sanction—or, having left the scheme, can claim good cause at that stage.

Ms Lynne: I am sorry to go through the new clause in such detail, but we need clarification of specific issues.

I wish to know what constitutes "good cause" in subsection (4). Will it be prescribed in regulations, as it is currently for over 18-year-olds, or will it be included in good cause provisions prescribed under clause 15 of the Bill? Perhaps the Minister would answer that later.

[Ms Lynne]

What should constitute good cause? Might something that damages the health of a young person be good cause? I believe that it should be. Might poor treatment by the employer or trainer, such as the wrong type of directions, the wrong way of issuing directions, a rude method of approaching that young person—*[Interruption.]* I assume that that would be debatable for a good cause, from what the Minister is saying from a sedentary position.

The Minister has discussed the inadequate training element—when a course does not increase skills. I assume that that would constitute a good cause if it could be proved that the training course had no skill incentive and that it provided no improvement when the young person emerged at the end.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) spoke about homeless people. I am concerned about the effect on the completion of training of homeless young people being unable to obtain accommodation. More support and understanding should be given to a young homeless person in the completion of a training course, because if one is homeless it is extremely difficult to turn up on time or to do many things within a training course. Some young people need to visit a probation officer or to attend youth service appointments. I hope that those will be included in the good cause element. I assume that they will be, but I need clarification as we are debating a new clause.

I wish to mention various other matters, especially about homeless people, who have very special needs. I fear that, as a result of the implementation of the new clause, more young people would become homeless and more 16 to 17-year-olds would suffer severe hardship. Invariably, they obtain severe hardship grant because they cannot afford to pay for food and other essentials. If they are cut off from that benefit, they will be in a very difficult position.

I know that the Minister has explained all the reasons, but a small number of people will be cut off. I am extremely worried about them—worried about where they will go, where they will end up and whether they will end up turning to crime.

Miss Widdecombe: Under the clause which deals with training, they would not be cut off from benefit unless they decided not to apply and to re-enter the system. They would suffer a reduction in the personal rate of their benefit. That would not affect any other income-related benefit, such as housing benefit, that they might be receiving.

Ms Lynne: I understand that, and I am grateful.

I wish that the Government would take on board the idea of restoring benefit to all 16 to 17-year-olds, with proper training. Some of the training packages today are very good; some are extremely good, but some are poor. Instead of pushing youngsters into poor training that is often inadequate, with no job at the end of it, I wish that the Government would reconsider restoring benefit for all 16 and 17-year-olds. The new clause seems to want to make it more difficult for young people instead of trying to get them back into the job market. I shall therefore vote against new clause 6.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I shall comment on one or two of the points made by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) in his 50 minutes of understated analysis. I asked a question in an intervention after the first 10 minutes of his speech. In the light of his observations about 16 to 18-year-olds and their financial circumstances and his assertion that not all claims for hardship were granted, I asked whether he was saying that the jobseeker's allowance should be available for all 16 to 18-year-olds or that all claims for hardship should be automatically allowed. The hon. Gentleman promised me that he would come to that, but 40 minutes later I have no more information than at the beginning of his speech. He has failed to answer the question.

5.30 pm

When I made that intervention the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said that it was monstrous for me to laugh when the hon. Member for Makerfield said that he would give his reasons later. I laughed because that was so characteristic of the hon. Gentleman. When an intervention is made and a question asked of him, we receive another 40 minutes of his speech, but the question is never fully answered.

It is right to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). At least she is prepared to say that she would extend the jobseeker's allowance to 16 to 18-year-olds. Of course, it is then incumbent on her to say how she would pay for that in the unlikely event of the Liberal party coming to power. It is a great pity that we did not have the benefit of her observations in Committee. I do not think that she is the only Liberal Member; there must be others who could have served on the Committee.

Ms Lynne: We will be giving a fully costed programme before the general election, as we did before the last general election, when we had a menu with prices, and we will have the same again. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) will be able to read it to see how we shall pay for the restoration of benefit to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Heald: It is reassuring to know that that ammunition will be available to us when the general election campaign begins.

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: I shall continue, if I may.

On the subject of completing courses, all members of the Committee agreed that it was important that young people should obtain something worth while from their training. The point being made by my hon. Friends in Committee was not that young people should spend their training time scrubbing floors, but that they should be encouraged to complete their training courses. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; those who complete training courses, obtain successful outcomes. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, 78 per cent. of those who complete their courses achieve a successful outcome. The battle is not to provide excuses for young people, but to ensure that more young people complete their training courses.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: No, I shall continue for a minute or two.

The difference between Conservative and Opposition members of the Committee was that we were able to field some members of the Committee with practical experience as employers—people who had employed hundreds and, in one case, thousands of employees. They said that most young people—the vast majority—are hard workers who want to learn, but a small number are not prepared to work or train. My hon. Friends' advice was that a firmer and more structured approach should be adopted towards such young people, who should be encouraged to complete their courses.

Mr. Streeter: Does my hon. Friend agree that the only conclusion that we can draw from the speeches of Opposition Members is that they would impose no sanctions on young people who do not wish to train and do not choose to spend their time productively? The Opposition would allow them to sit at home, idle, at the taxpayer's expense.

Mr. Heald: Only yesterday we heard from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) that we should be looking for a responsible society. How is it responsible to tell young people that if they do not meet their obligations to the taxpayer they will still receive the money? How is it responsible to tell young people that if they make a hardship claim, but are not prepared to train, it makes no difference and they will still receive the money? What sort of message is the Labour party giving to young people? They are saying that it is a something-for-nothing society where one does not need to train or work, but can get something for nothing. What sort of society is that?

I know that the hon. Member for Makerfield would not deliberately seek to mislead us, but why did he say that young people receiving benefits for hardship would have housing difficulties, when housing benefit is passported from the allowance? Their council tax is paid. It is not as though young people who are living in hardship are not being catered for. The purpose of clause 13 is to deal with people who are under 18 and suffering from severe hardship.

The purpose of new clause 6 is not to deprive young people of the allowance completely, even when they have failed to complete training courses time and again. The Government make provision for young people in many ways, not just through the jobseeker's allowance. They do so through the general national vocational qualification initiatives and the modern apprenticeship scheme. The Government introduced those initiatives for the sole purpose of helping young people.

In his diatribe about unemployment, which is a serious problem, the hon. Member for Makerfield did not mention the fact that in the past year unemployment has fallen by 400,000 and there are 263,000 more full-time jobs. When he spoke of apprenticeships he did not mention the aspect of the 1960s that I remember. My recollection of the 1960s is that the trade unions were the first to want to scrap apprenticeships so that they could push up wages. In the 1960s the trade unions wanted a higher platform for the differentials. We have all learnt a lesson and, after all the years of Conservative government, the Trades Union Congress has learnt a bit of sense and strongly supports the modern apprenticeship scheme. I welcome that, as must all hon. Members.

Mr. Burden: Will the hon. Gentleman give the House any evidence for his statement about the attitude of trade unions to apprenticeships in the 1960s?

Mr. Heald: If the hon. Gentleman wants, he can discuss the subject with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), who was an apprentice in the 1960s and can tell the hon. Gentleman about it. I cannot expand on that subject for too long because this is a short debate—*[Interruption.]* I have one or two further points that I hope to make—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There are too many conversations taking place and too many interruptions.

Mr. Heald: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Makerfield mentioned independent advocacy as though the Department of Employment should be treated as an enemy or an authority that did not have the interests of young people at heart. He spoke of the Department as though it were not prepared to listen to young people, take on board their concerns and be advocates for them.

I have been to numerous modern jobcentres as a member of the Select Committee on Employment. I very much regret the fact that the hon. Member for Wallasey joined the Committee a little too late to make some of those visits. Those centres had open plan offices with staff trained to take seriously the concerns of young people. It was not as the hon. Member for Makerfield described it. The staff are keen to offer advice and guidance. Mistakes may be made and the hon. Gentleman may be able to pick out occasional cases, but the staff as a whole should not be pilloried by the hon. Gentleman. The staff make a serious effort to help young people and to be sensitive and understanding.

The jobseeker's allowance is not currently extended to 16 to 18-year-olds. I hope that the hon. Member for Makerfield will, for once, be prepared to tell us the Labour party's policy on that. Is he saying that it should be extended to 16 to 18-year-olds? I notice that he does not intervene. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that each and every claim for hardship allowance should be allowed, regardless of the circumstances? That is the logic of his argument; but perhaps he would like to intervene to confirm it.

Mr. McCartney: It is not a public school debate and the hon. Gentleman should take it seriously. No young person should be left vulnerable and destitute; under the Government's policies, 1,000 young people per month are left in that position. New clause 6 will make the situation worse. It is the Government's proposal and the hon. Gentleman should either defend or oppose it. The Government are trying to undermine the rights of 16 and 17-year-olds and we will continue to defend them. If he would like to give us a general election, we will test our policies for young people against those of the Government.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Member for Makerfield flatters me: that decision is not up to me. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for at least attempting to reply to my questions, although once again there were no real answers.

[Mr. Heald]

I am happy to support new clause 6 because it will help those who have not helped themselves. In that spirit, I believe that all hon. Members will recognise that there is a place for a reduced payment, even among those who have not been prepared to assume the responsibilities involved with accepting taxpayers' money.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman talks about the responsibilities of those who take the taxpayers' money. Does he think that there are similar responsibilities on employers who deliberately pay low wages in the knowledge that they will be topped up with taxpayers' money? Do employers have responsibilities in that regard?

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for confirming that she believes that the Government should abolish family credit. I smiled at her remarks; perhaps she might like to smile occasionally. I said yesterday that I do not believe that the new Labour party will present that policy at the next general election. I would be jolly pleased if it did.

New clause 6 will assist young people. It is incumbent on a responsible Opposition to propose their own policies and it is sad that Labour Members have not been prepared to engage in constructive debate.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): The latest figures from the Department of Employment's own labour force survey show that in the summer of last year the unemployment rate for 16 and 17-year-olds in mainland Britain stood at 23.8 per cent. That general figure disguises considerable regional variations. In London, part of which I have the honour to represent in Parliament, the rate was the highest in the country—an enormous 38 per cent.We know from other sources that at a more local level unemployment among that age group is higher still: in some wards in my Streatham constituency it is as high as 60 per cent. and it is worrying to note that those are the wards with the highest concentrations of so-called ethnic minorities.

The labour force survey figures show the reality of unemployment among young people and expose the total inadequacy of the Government's reliance on the claimant count as an indicator of unemployment. In summer 1994 the Government's official figure for youth unemployment was 17,000 whereas the total figure was 180,000—10.5 times greater than the official count. Some 90 per cent. of young people aged 16 and 17 years had no form of income in the summer of last year—the highest figure recorded since 1988, when the Conservative Government abolished the general entitlement to benefit for that age group.

The tiny figure of 17,000 claimants receiving severe hardship or bridging allowance illustrates the extreme difficulties that young people face in securing any form of benefit. Many thousands of young people fall outside the youth training guarantee, making nonsense of the Government's official claim that no 16 or 17-year-olds are unemployed and that a benefit safety net is therefore unnecessary. The truth is that life is already very tough indeed for large numbers of young people and the provisions in new clause 6 are likely to make it even tougher.

Opposition Members have repeatedly expressed our concerns about the considerable new powers for arbitrary judgment that the Bill will confer on Employment Service officials. The most obvious of those is the discretion that the Bill allows for judgment about the behaviour and appearance of claimants.

5.45 pm

The provision for benefit sanctions if a young person leaves a training programme "without good cause" raises further anxieties. What constitutes "good cause" and who makes that decision? What assistance will young people receive in plotting their way through the rules minefield described by the Minister in her opening speech? How long will young people be made scapegoats because of the obvious inadequacy of training provision?

Accounts of weaknesses in the youth training provision are legion. I will relate just three cases supplied by the Coalition on Young People and Social Security. A youth housing association and hostel provider in Gloucester stated:

> "In the last 12 months none of our residents has secured a job at the end"—

of a training scheme placement—

> "and probably 95 per cent. are on placements that were not indicated as a choice".

A National Children's Home project in Scotland reported:

> "Three young people on YT at present on occasion have been sent home at 9.30 after arriving at 9.00 and being told there is nothing for them to do. No incentive is given to attend and little commitment to training is shown by the trainers. The young person is not in a position to leave as Income Support would not automatically be paid".

The youth housing association and hostel provider in Gloucester continued:

> "One resident has not found a placement and just goes in to the office for training. He is often sent home after a morning, and feels it is a waste of time".

It is not surprising, therefore, that the outturn in terms of job placements is both limited and highly variable. Even for those who have completed their job training, on average only one in three finds employment and the figure can be as low as one in five. The latter figure applies to the East London training and enterprise council. Of course, they are lucky to have a TEC in east London; we have lost our TEC in south London and the Government have made no effort to replace that essential service in an area of massive deprivation.

It is also not surprising that there is a great deal of scepticism about the programmes and that many young people simply abandon them in disgust. Are we to conclude that the Government wish to coerce young people into attendance at often worthless courses by means of the threat of benefit sanctions as set out in the new clause? The Government have created mass unemployment among young people and they have responded to that crisis with a totally inadequate training provision.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. How would he compare the situation in the UK with that in France or Spain, where youth unemployment is far higher although those Governments have pursued the policies that he advocates?

Mr. Hill: We have heard that argument many times before. The reality is that we would be comparing different situations with different historical bases.

Mr. Burden: On Tuesday 7 February the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) made exactly the same point in Committee. I asked him how he knew those unemployment rates as the Government officially do not count the figures for people between 16 and 18. He replied that he would be happy to provide me with further information when he had researched the matter further. I wonder whether he has done so.

Mr. Hill: While we are talking about figures that we do know, I must confess that during the two months of our deliberations on the matter I was waiting for the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) to intervene on me, as he has intervened on other Opposition Members, to talk about the Government's remarkable success in reducing unemployment in my constituency. As he has not done that, I will put it on record that unemployment in Streatham is 16.7 per cent.—twice the national average—and male unemployment is 22.5 per cent. In the three years since the last general election, the unemployment rate in Streatham has risen by 10 per cent. and since 1990 it has risen by 100 per cent. So there can be no rejoicing about a reduction of unemployment in Streatham. On the contrary, I make a rock solid prediction that new Labour will bury old Tory at the next general election with an electoral avalanche because of old Tory's appalling performance on unemployment in Streatham and in south London generally.

In conclusion, the young want meaningful training at work. They are the victims of the Government's failure and they will be further victimised as a result of new clause 6. That is why we oppose it.

Mr. Burden: Yesterday I questioned the legality of the Bill under article 4 of the European convention on human rights because, under menace of penalty, the Bill seeks to force people into jobs, irrespective of the level of remuneration being totally unreasonable.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman goes too far, I remind him that we are dealing with one new clause and his remarks must relate to it.

Mr. Burden: I was about to say that new clause 6 falls foul of precisely the same problem. Again, under menace of penalty, it is trying to force young people into something that they do not wish to do and which would be unreasonable.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have acknowledged that new clause 6 affects only a limited number of young people. The main reason for that, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, is that the Government have ruled out the vast majority of young people from access to benefits.

When Conservative Members glibly talk about the alleged levels of youth unemployment in Britain compared with other countries they should get their facts right or at least be consistent with their own Ministers. I repeat what I said in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) asked the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security what the cost would be of restoring income support for 16 and 17-year-olds. The Minister's reply was that he did not know. He said:

> "The information is not available."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1995; Vol. 253, c. *878*.]

The Government do not know how much it would cost to reinstate income support. The only conclusion we can draw from that is that they do not know how many unemployed young people there are between the ages of 16 and 18. Estimates of youth unemployment in Britain have been given which have yet to be disproved by Conservative Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) gave the figure according to the International Labour Organisation: about 180,000.

A large number of young people are excluded from benefit, but a small number of young people could possibly receive benefit in particular circumstances—lone parents, people with disabilities, and those who qualify for severe hardship payments.We should be clear about the severe hardship payments that Conservative Members want to remove. We are talking about the princely sum of £27.50 for those who live at home and £36.15 for those who live away from home. I have yet to find anyone with no income who is not in severe hardship, but according to Conservative Members the young person apparently has to prove severe hardship. That is matter of great concern to young people.

A recent report by the Coalition on Young People and Social Security draws attention to the real problems of access to the severe hardship allowance. A selection of reasons was given by young people for failure to complete claims. I will read out a few examples:

> "He did not complete his claim because the jargon used was too difficult, and he felt they were talking over his head . . . Claimants often get confused. They are intimidated by the procedures . . . One young man became annoyed at the lack of direct, clear, concise information and despaired at the procedures . . . One of our clients was appalled by the 'hassles' involved in making a claim. Enquiries were made into his relationship with his male flatmate who was working. If the DSS could prove they were a couple, no benefit would be payable. They weren't a couple, but he was very angry."

I wonder why that has occurred. Conservative Members accuse us of blaming the staff of the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency, but we have never said any such thing; it seems that the procedures and the cultures of the organisation, imposed from the highest level, are at fault.

When the Minister replies to the debate, will she clarify one point? It has been drawn to my attention—I hope that it is wrong—that the guidance procedures and, indeed, the blueprint issued to Employment Service officers implementing the jobseeker's allowance severe hardship provisions actually states that it has to be the young person who requests and applies for a severe hardship payment, and that it is not the role of a member of staff interviewing young unemployed people and finding out about their circumstances to suggest that they may qualify for severe hardship payment. I hope that the Minister will clarify that. It has certainly been put to me there are procedures which suggest that it has to be the young person who asks and it cannot be a member of staff who offers advice. If that is true, it is a real problem. Those are the people who are threatened by the new clause, along with lone parents and people with disabilities.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) said that we were on the wrong track when we discussed the number of young people who did not achieve qualifications. I shall say something about that in a moment. First, I want to take up his point that 70 per cent. of young people complete their training courses.

Mr. Heald: I said that 70 per cent. achieve qualifications.

Mr. Burden: The hon. Gentleman said that 70 per cent. emerge with qualifications. I am grateful for that

[Mr. Burden]

intervention as without it my point would have had no force whatever. There is another way of looking at that statistic: it means that 30 per cent. of young people who complete training courses do not emerge with qualifications. That is a high and worrying statistic and it might have been more constructive if Conservative Members had tried to do something about that statistic, instead of penalising young people who fall foul of the system.

Some 30 per cent. of people who complete training courses do not get a qualification. In total, about 50 per cent. do not end up with a qualification either because they drop out or because they fail to achieve a qualification. Conservative Members say that that is a problem for the young people themselves, but Labour Members disagree with that analysis and we are not alone in doing so.

Studies have suggested that the United Kingdom's performance in vocational training is much worse than that in Germany, producing 50 per cent. fewer people with qualifications, particularly at the lower technical levels. That information was from the Centre for Economic Performance. Literacy and numeracy is cited as a problem for United Kingdom employers and is particularly acute among young people, according to the British Chamber of Commerce. The introduction of non-vocational qualifications has not been smooth and the system is still facing teething troubles, being considered "inappropriate" for unemployed school leavers. That comes from the National Institute Economic Review 1994. In 1993, Professor Smithers from Manchester university, an expert in the field, described the introduction of national vocational qualifications as

"a disaster of epic proportions".

There are major problems with the quality of training provided in Britain. Rather than do something about that, however, the Government prefer to attack young people. The Government's response is to say, "Hang in there—don't worry about the quality of the training because if you give it up you risk losing benefit."

6 pm

I was pleased to hear the Minister of State say today that there would be a review. If a young person said that training was inappropriate or unsuitable, procedures would be instituted for a review. I was also pleased that, in answer to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), the Minister gave examples of what might be good cause for dropping out from a course, including conditions at the workplace, such as health considerations, and so on.

I want to test whether Conservative Members are as free thinking as they claim. Because of the problems of training provision, particularly with regard to conditions in training situations for many young people, many trade unions take their responsibilities to trainees very seriously. They make a major effort to represent trainees in the workplace and to improve their conditions, and they do a good job.When the Minister replies, will she say whether the refusal of an employer to recognise a trade union at a workplace in which a trainee was operating, even if the request for trade union representation was supported by a majority of employees and wished for by the trainee who was a member of it, would or could be good cause for dropping out of a training course?

The Government seem to recognise that some things would constitute good cause for giving up a particular training course that was not of good quality. What worries me about that is that if the Government are prepared to institute such procedures and if they are as reliable as the Government say that they are, why, when Opposition Members sought to introduce an amendment in Committee to ensure that training is of a minimum acceptable quality, did every Conservative Member who was present on that day vote against it? It was rejected by 10 votes to nine.

That was the one time in Committee that we could have inserted into the Bill a provision specifying that there should at least be a bottom line with minimum quality conditions for training. The amendment was not prescriptive. It did not set out conditions which had to be met. It simply said that minimum conditions should be prescribed for training. That could be dealt with by way of regulations. Conservative Members love regulations. The Bill is littered with powers for Ministers to specify this or that by way of regulation. Yet when it came to an amendment saying that there should be an obligation on the Government to lay down minimum conditions for quality of training, the Government refused to accept it and they were backed up in that refusal by every Conservative Member who was present that day.

I hope that what the Minister is saying is right. I hope that the reviews do work. Given the Government's performance in Committee and the sort of arguments that Conservative Members have put forward today, however, I am sceptical about that and young people will be fairly sceptical about it, too. They know that that same Government wiped them out from the unemployment statistics, removed a large majority of them from any access to benefit at all and, when they had the chance to lay down proper training provisions, did not do so. And the same Government have turned a blind eye to all the evidence that they have received from bodies such as the Coalition on Young People and Social Security, Youth Aid and the citizens advice bureaux on the operation of the severe hardship provisions and the lack of quality training in Britain.

All those groups have provided ample evidence of the real problems facing young people today. Despite all that evidence, however, the Government have failed on Report to insert any provision in the Bill to improve the quality of training. All that they have chosen to insert is a measure which will penalise young people. Faced with that, I am pretty sceptical about the Government's motives and I am convinced that young people outside will be as well.

Mr. Streeter: This is also the Government who have enabled more young people than ever before in the history of this nation to take part in higher and further education and to further their own lives. This is the Government who have done more in the past two years than any Government in history to bring unemployment down and to create jobs for young people.

It is no wonder that members of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill do not understand the labour market. They do not understand that young people want meaningful jobs. Not one of them has had any experience of the private sector or of job creation. Before they came into the House, all of them languished in the public sector.

I support new clause 6. I understand that the Labour party opposes it, but Labour Members should tell us what sanctions the Labour party would incorporate in its proposals for the small minority of young people who prefer to sit at home, who do not want to get a job or to go on to higher or further education, who want to leave school but are not prepared to go on reasonable training courses, in order to ensure that they have the incentive to take training for their own benefit.

I visit many schools in my constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, as do you. Most young people are super. They are highly motivated. They know that they want to train for their own benefit and they are committed to their careers. But we have to accept that a small minority of young people drift through life between the ages of 16 and 18. I was concerned recently to learn about some of the messages of despair and hopelessness sent out by some modern day pop groups. We have heard recently of the suicide of Kurt Cobain and one or two other music leaders of this generation.

What kind of example is it to say to young people, as the Labour party appears to be saying in its opposition to new clause 6, that it is all right to stay at home, to remain idle and to take taxpayers' money while doing nothing with their lives—

Ms Eagle: Before the hon. Gentleman gets too much into the hit parade and grunge, will he explain why the Bill treats all those who are unemployed as if they are part of the minority who are work shy about whom he is talking? Is that a fair attitude to take to the entire pool of the unemployed?

Mr. Streeter: I am delighted to reply to that intervention. Young people who are motivated to train, to obtain jobs or to stay on in higher and further education can survive blissfully under these provisions. These provisions are intended for the small minority who do not wish to better their own lives. Anyone who is keen to motivate himself and take up reasonable training need not worry in the slightest about the proposals. That is the one thing that Labour Members do not understand. They cannot tell us how they would deal with the minority of people who prefer to remain idle at home wasting their lives at taxpayers' expense.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is an important principle? The Opposition say that this is a vicious attack on young people. They claim to be the defender of young people. Establishing that is an absolute principle in their opposition to the Bill. Is it not immoral that the Labour party gives absolutely no indication of what it would do in the circumstances to put the matter right?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and makes a valuable point. I would go further: the Labour party will not even tell us today—in the unlikely event of it getting into Government—whether it would repeal the measures in the proposed legislation with which it strongly disagrees. Much rhetoric has floated across the Chamber, but Labour Members do not have the guts to tell us tonight whether they would repeal the measures set out in the Bill.

It is important that we encourage our young people to make the best of their lives. They are our seed corn. We should invest in their lives for the sake of the nation and for their own sake. The Labour party has offered nothing tonight to help young people in this country but has continued to undermine them.

I strongly support the new clause and this measure.

Mr. McCartney: On behalf of the Opposition, I shall take a few moments of the House's time before the Minister replies for the Government.

I thank all my hon. Friends for the excellent contributions that they made following the devastating attacks by the Government in Committee. As in Committee, the Government have shown no concern for the position of young people. They have shown extreme callousness in dealing with these matters and an inability even to understand the extent of the problems faced by many vulnerable young people as a consequence of unemployment and displacement in their lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) made a professional and clinical exposure of Government failures in housing and employment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) highlighted the shambolic nature of the Government's knowledge of unemployed young people.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) has come to be known by Opposition Members as an absolute jobseeker—for a position on the Government Front Bench. One cannot think of any occasion when the hon. Gentleman has not been a supporter of the Government. Even when they fly in the face of overwhelming evidence, he is there. He is one of the faithful going down with the ship. In his contribution, he tried to equate the needs of young people in the 1990s with some spurious attack on trade unions in the 1960s. I speak as someone who was lucky enough in the 1960s to be able to have training in the private sector. I lived and worked in the private sector. It is interesting for children of the 1960s to remember that, when we left school on the Friday, we could start work on the Monday. In fact, over Saturday and Sunday I remember that I had two choices of apprenticeships: I could have been either an apprentice seamen or an electrician in the colliery.

I decided to be an apprentice at sea. In the intervening period after leaving school, I trained as a seaman at the National Sea Training college at Gravesend. I had another job during that summer period—at a proper rate of pay, because it was a trade union-organised place. That was in 1967—a wonderful year as I remember, with flower power and all the rest of it.

Today's young people are the first generation not to be guaranteed a training or job opportunity when they leave school. They are the first generation of people who are unable to be certain that they will advance in social and economic terms, unlike their parents or grandparents. That is the Government's responsibility. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North said that the measure was necessary to stop abuse, yet he gave no evidence, not a single case. How many cases have there been? What is the cost of the abuse? Ministers, with all the panoply of the civil service and two of the largest Government Departments—the Department of Employment and the Department of Social Security—could not give us a single instance of abuse with regard to 16 and 17-year-olds. Not a single penny has been misused, yet they propose to undermine the rights of 16 and 17-year-olds.

[Mr. McCartney]

As for the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), not only was he patronising and full of cliches, but he continued where he left off in the Bill. He reminded me of something that Mae West once said: "His mother should have thrown him away and kept the stork." Until tonight, I did not realise who she was speaking about. It is obviously the hon. Gentleman. He is the man who said that young people were living blissfully on £27.50. The hon. Gentleman, each and every lunchtime or evening, will spend more on a meal than we expect young people to live on for a week. That is the reality. He said that they should be looking for meaningful jobs.

The Government have destroyed 3 million full-time jobs in the past 16 years. There have been two recessions in the lifetime of the Government. Some 40 per cent. of manufacturing industry has closed; 150,000 apprenticeships have been lost; and sackings in privatised industry have so far cost the taxpayer £1 billion in unemployment benefit—and the hon. Gentleman talks about meaningful jobs. After 16 years of Tory Government, he talked about the drug culture undermining young people. Thatcherite policies have led us to the crime and drug culture, denying opportunities to thousands of our young people.

6.15 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) has been directly responsible for encouraging the Government to cut 10,000 jobs from the Rosyth area by constantly calling for defence cuts to be made in Scotland and not in his part of England? That shows me that he is not, in fact, in favour of a United Kingdom but just wants everything centred on Plymouth.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman shows callous disregard to anyone seeking employment.

The Minister herself has revealed again today not only callous indifference to the situation but the Government's sanctimonious view of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. For every year in which the Conservative Government have continued, there have been more and more "undeserving" poor. It is all an excuse to exclude people from the system. So far this year, benefit disqualifications have doubled to 113,000 because of inadequate job searches. It is interesting to note that the Economic and Social Research Council said that the problem is one not of a lack of commitment or keenness by young people but of insufficient jobs in training places being provided by the Government. That is the truth. The problem is simply that the Government do not care after 16 years about the future of our young people. For that reason, the Government will go down at the next election, and deservedly so, and we will have a Labour Government, who will invest in and have a commitment to all our young people.

Miss Widdecombe: The worth of the new clause is proved by the utter feebleness of the debate from Opposition Front Benchers. First, they started by talking about 7,900 jobs that have been lost. Will they tell us, please, about the 1.9 million jobs into which people were placed last year? Will they tell us how many jobs have been created per new day? No, they want to talk only about lost jobs. They want only to depress people, to trade on people's misery, for political advantage. We can always tell how well things are going by how glum and dismal the Opposition look.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) said that youth unemployment was about 20 per cent. Let us look at the very labour force survey that he used. Let us look at the International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment. It includes, as he will know if he studies the survey more closely, many people who are in full-time education. If he looks at the latest figures for autumn 1994 in the same survey, he will see that only 8 per cent.—I repeat, 8 per cent.—of 16 and 17-year-olds were not in education, in jobs or in training. Furthermore, he tried to depress his constituents by saying that the Government, after the South Thames TEC had gone into liquidation, were making no effort to replace it or to cover the provision that it had made. He knows that that is not accurate. Indeed, were I not constrained by parliamentary tradition I might use a word other than "not accurate".

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) asked whether it was true that guidance had been issued saying that officers of the Benefits Agency or the Department of Employment may not raise the issue of whether a young person should apply for benefit. I am pleased to confirm that no such guidance has been issued, nor will it be. At present, some severe hardship payments are dealt with by the Benefits Agency. The agency has specialised staff to help young people to make their claims, and the careers service is under a contractual obligation to endeavour to identify potential benefit claimants and then refer them to the appropriate agency. The reverse of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is true; once again, an attempt to frighten the vulnerable simply will not work.

The hon. Member for Northfield also asked whether it would count as "good cause" if a young person turned down a training place because the employer involved did not recognise a trade union. That is most unlikely to constitute good cause. If a trade dispute were in progress, we should probably take into account exactly the same considerations as we apply to adults in a different clause.

The hon. Member for Makerfield said that our youth cohort study was based on a selective sample. In fact, it was based on responses to postal questionnaires from between 15,000 and 20,000 16 and 17-year-olds. Moreover, it was conducted on behalf of the Department of Employment and the Department for Education by Social and Community Planning Research. Is the hon. Gentleman impugning that body? If he is, he will have to refute—

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way in a minute.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way in a minute.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way in a minute! Sit down.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows full well that if the Minister, or any other hon. Member, does not give way he must resume his seat.

Miss Widdecombe: I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for containing this disorderly behaviour.

I was merely saying to the hon. Member for Makerfield that if he wished to impugn the veracity of the research of the body to which I referred, he would be impugning a good deal that he often prays in aid. I shall now give way to him.

Mr. McCartney: Those whose veracity I am impugning are the hon. Lady and other Ministers. The fact is that, as Mr. Maples said, no one believes what they say any more.

Miss Widdecombe: If that is all that the hon. Gentleman can say, it is clear that what he has said about our cohort survey has been utterly defeated. Moreover, the fact that he was forced to struggle in that way says something about the hopeless quality of the Opposition—a hopeless quality that we have observed throughout the debate.

The hon. Gentleman told us that some young people could not make the seriousness of their position understood. He did not tell us that there were specially trained officers to assess all applications by 16 and 17-year-olds—officers attached to every branch of the Benefits Agency, who will be attached to jobcentres under the new rules. It is simply not true that, as the hon. Gentleman claimed, young people leaving care are denied benefit and left on the streets; it is not true that, as he told us, housing is not taken into account; it is not true that, as he told us so many times, we force people on to inadequate training schemes.

Let us be clear about this. I repeat what I said earlier: 78 per cent. of trainees who complete their training go on to jobs, further education or training. That cannot be poor quality. The YT programme provides quality training to NVQ2 level, and 71 per cent. of trainees who complete their planned training in England and Wales obtain qualifications. Those are the facts, together with the fact that I have just mentioned: the cohort study showed that 78 per cent. of respondents considered their training either excellent or good.

Young people themselves reject the Opposition's claim that training is inadequate. The Opposition's own ILO survey, to which the Trades Union Congress is so attached, rejects their claim that more young people are unemployed than we say. We have lower than average youth unemployment.

The fact is that, in two hours—of which the hon. Member for Makerfield took nearly an hour—the Opposition have established not a single fact that would cause any rational person to reject the new clause. I urge the House to support it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 230.

Division No. 113] **[6.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. David Willetts.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive

Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don

Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.37 pm

Miss Widdecombe: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I dearly wish that, during the proceedings on the Bill, both in Committee and in the House, the shadow Chancellor had been present because, in their opposition to the Bill, Labour Members fell back on their usual recourse—to promise, to oppose and to table amendments that would cost money. Let us consider what they asked us to do, and then ask them whether they would undertake to do it.

Labour Members wanted to change our rates of contribution, at a cost of £30 million. They wanted to reintroduce an age limit of 55, at a cost of £40 million. They wanted to carry back adult dependant increases, at a cost of £10 million. They wanted a disregard for earnings, at a cost of £15 million in jobseeker's allowance, £50 million in housing benefit and £10 million in council tax benefit—

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Rubbish.

Miss Widdecombe: It would have been rubbish if we had accepted the amendments.

Labour Members wanted to remove the waiting days for income-based JSA, at a cost of £40 million. They wanted to extend further education guided learning hours to 21 a week, at a cost of £40 million. They opposed savings of £180 million. That is the Labour party at its unreconstructed worst. Its answer to everything is, "Spend, spend, spend." When we ask whether the Labour party will do the spending, suddenly it has no policies. It opposes what we are doing, but has nothing to put in its place. At least the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) is honest. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will the House quieten down a bit? I remind the Minister that speeches must deal with the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the provisions that we have introduced are in the Bill. The Labour party opposes them. The proposals that it would like to include would cost all those millions of pounds.

I was congratulating the hon. Member for Rochdale on her honesty. She made a pledge that an incoming Liberal Government would restore the contribution from six months to 12 months. She made other pledges to restore benefit for 16 to 17-year-olds. The only trouble is that there will never be a Liberal Government. Oh, the joys of irresponsibility, of being able to promise everything, and of knowing that one will never be called on to deliver a thing.

The Bill provides for many winners, whom we never heard about. We did not hear the Opposition congratulate us on providing for 150,000 winners through the back-to-work bonus, for 120,000 winners through the national insurance contribution holiday, for 2,000 winners through the employment on trial scheme, for 50,000 winners through the £10 couples disregard, for 10,000 winners through national insurance credits for all work under 16 hours, and for even more winners through the 24-hour work rule. No, no, no—we heard nothing from Opposition Members about all those winners, but my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) welcomed them.

The Bill provides a proper system whereby an agreement exists between the taxpayer and the person who takes benefits that the taxpayer pays for.

Mr. Alan Howarth Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I had not realised that my hon. Friend was trying to intervene. There was so much racket coming from the Opposition.

Mr. Howarth: Of course I welcome the winners, as my hon. Friend describes them, and any advantages for unemployed people that emerge from the Bill. She catalogued a series of additional costs that might be incurred, which add up to some hundreds of millions of pounds. Will she confirm that, in consequence of the national insurance contributions increase that has been placed on employees, the Government will raise an extra £2.2 billion? Does she look forward to a world of benefit cuts and boot camps?

Miss Widdecombe: I have made no such proposals for such a dismal world. My hon. Friend refers to the amounts raised in national insurance contributions, but he knows that the fund must be kept in balance and that we spend today what we collect today. He knows that it is a "pay as you go" fund, and that any Government must keep the fund in balance. He should welcome the prudence of the Government, who actually keep it in balance.

I am looking forward not to a world, as my hon. Friend described it, of benefit cuts, but to a world of focused and targeted benefits for people in need. That is the sort of world we want to see, and that is proposed in the Bill. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for welcoming the winners, which is a jolly sight more than the Opposition have done. I urge the House to support this entirely prudent, just and caring measure.

6.42 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Time is short, so I shall not indulge in the illogical rantings and ravings of the Minister. From the start, and throughout the passage of the Bill, the Labour party set out to scrutinise the legislation line by line. I should like to commend my hon. Friends on the diligence with which they have undertaken that operation.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

I thank all the organisations throughout the country—citizens advice bureaux, disability groups, the Church Action on Poverty group, trade union groups, unemployment groups, and low-pay groups—that have expressed fear and concern about the measures. Without their help, we could not have scrutinised the Bill and represented people's needs as effectively as we did in Committee. It is sad, however, that, throughout our deliberations, the Government stubbornly refused to change any policy of substance, except to the detriment of the unemployed, especially the young unemployed. They will push the Bill through the House tonight.

At the beginning of Committee stage, I said that Opposition Members would show that the main purpose of the legislation was to cut public expenditure, through the Government's continuing reductions in the social security budget and through reducing the amount of money available to unemployed people. Our deliberations have cruelly exposed that purpose.

The Bill is part of an on-going process that the Government have undertaken, as we all know from the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994. We know that one cannot take £1.5 billion out of the social security budget without inflicting harm and misery on sick and disabled people. That will be the result of that Act.

The Bill, which contains provisions on what is ironically called the jobseeker's allowance, does not create a single job. Instead, it inflicts further hardship on people without a job. Let us remember that the jobseeker's allowance is about undermining the contributory benefit system by cutting benefits from 12 to six months, and about forcing people on to means-tested benefit after a mere six months.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) rightly said, that is being done at a time when national insurance contributions have increased from 9 to 10 per cent., resulting in a reported extra £2.2 billion for the Treasury. That is what we have—pay more and get less from the Government. That means more means-testing. It will especially affect people with savings, people who have lost their jobs and have redundancy payments, and people who have lost their jobs and have personal or industrial injury payments. They will be forced to use those benefits six months earlier and to have means-tested benefits. They will be forced into the poverty trap. Those are the consequences of the legislation.

In our deliberations on the Bill, we made much of the plight of the disabled—we make no apology for that. I predict that the chaos and hardship that will arise from incapacity benefit when it is introduced on 13 April, and the interface that that will have with the Bill when it is enacted in 1996, will result in a major scandal. It will be similar to the Child Support Agency, scandal, but it will cause extra misery and hardship for sick and disabled people.

Crucially, we have continually highlighted the fact that the Government expect people to take a job at whatever level of pay the Government believe is right. There is no lower level of pay. The Government are prepared to let people accept pay almost without an hourly rate. That is the real effect of the legislation. That is why we will continue to fight it in Parliament. That is why, after the next election, so many Conservative Members will be seeking jobs, and that is why we will vote against the Bill tonight.

6.37 pm

Ms Lynne: The Bill widens inequality in society. It will debar some people from receiving benefit, reduce benefit for others, and do nothing to alleviate the poverty trap. In the worst case scenario, it could cause more homelessness, more poverty and more despair. Why have the Government introduced it? It is to save the Treasury money. I am not against that, but it should not be done at the expense of some of the most vulnerable people in society.

The unemployed are vulnerable. They feel that they are already at the bottom of the heap. They feel degraded and have low self-esteem. What do the Government do about that? They introduce the Jobseekers Bill and, more important, the jobseeker's agreement, supposedly to help people back into work. That builds on the restart scheme and on the humiliation that some people suffer when they go for restart interviews, especially older people who are interviewed by a young interviewer who ends up lecturing them about what they should do.

Now we have the jobseeker's agreement. They can now lecture them about their appearance. I know that most of those interviewers will be good, but human nature dictates that some people will abuse that power. Whatever people have earned in the past, they will be forced to take a job after 13 weeks, no matter what pay is being offered. If they do not do so, they will end up with no money, which means more humiliation or even worse.

Surely the Government cannot want that, or perhaps they do not know what it is like to be unemployed. Perhaps no Conservative Member has ever been unemployed or realised the sense of failure that it causes. All people should be treated with dignity and respect, whatever their circumstances.

We need proper training for the staff who conduct the jobseekers' interviews. I asked on Second Reading and in a written question, how much money will be provided for training? We were told £71 million, but is that for overall training or just for disablement employment advisers? More money needs to be spent on training staff if the jobseeker's agreement is to work at all.

We have already debated the shortcomings of the new arrangements for the 16 to 18-year-olds, but what about the 18 to 25-year-olds? I have never seen any sense in 18 to 25-year-olds on income support getting less than anyone else. How can a married couple, both aged 24 and with children, be expected to live on less than someone aged 25?

Some people in those circumstances will have paid national insurance contributions for eight years, from the ages of 16 to 24. They are entitled to something in return, but the Government are reducing their benefit to £36.15. I do not think that any Conservative or Opposition Member could manage on that sum. Extra hardship will be caused to all those 18 to 25-year-olds, regardless of whether they paid national insurance contributions. If they did pay, they are entitled to something in return.

The Government estimate that 250,000 people will be worse off and 90,000 will not qualify for means-tested benefit under the Bill, but what about the unemployed with savings? Those who have savings of more than £8,000 will receive nothing after six months, and those who have savings of between £3,000 and £8,000 will have their benefit reduced after six months. If someone is unemployed and has a working partner, that person will receive no jobseeker's allowance after six months.

Women will be the hardest hit, because they are more likely to have a partner in work. The cut from 12 to six months' contributory benefit is an absolute disgrace, and should be reversed.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The hon. Lady should vote Labour.

Ms Lynne: No, because the Labour party has refused to say whether it would reverse the cut from 12 to six months.

We debated on Report how disabled people will be disadvantaged. When the 220,000 people have come off incapacity benefit, they will go to the employment exchange or to the Employment Service, which will find it extremely difficult to cope. The Minister did not give a satisfactory reply to my questions yesterday on that subject. Even after our debates, no one is convinced by the Government's arguments.

The Bill is a step in the wrong direction. We need proper back-to-work packages, proper training, proper incentives and, above all, proper jobs. We do not need this draconian measure, which is designed not to help the unemployed but to penalise them, even though the majority are unemployed through no fault of their own.

6.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The objectives of the Bill, which I commend to the House, are to improve the operations of the labour market, to create jobs, to promote enterprise, to introduce a modern, streamlined system for delivering benefits, and to target revenues better.

Mr. McCartney: And to save money.

Mr. Evans: Yes, and to save money. The Opposition have talked about nothing but savage cuts, but the Bill should be considered in context as part of the Government's wider programme of job promotion. *[Laughter.]* Yes, the savings under the Bill when it is up and running will be £270 million a year, but the Budget package of £700 million-worth of incentives is the other side of the coin.

I shall not weary the House at this hour with details of the gainers under this bundle of measures, which my hon. Friend the Minister of State has clearly—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must settle down.

Mr. McCartney: On a point of Order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Did the Minister say a "bundle" of measures or a "bungle" of measures?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well.

Mr. Evans: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the back-to-work bonus of 150,000 gainers, the housing benefit run-on which will help people back into work, and the introduction of the child care disregard in family credit, but I end with this point: the national insurance contributions holiday, which will benefit 120,000 people.

The national insurance contributions holiday was the one proposal that members of Labour's Front Bench welcomed. They not only accepted the principle but tabled amendments Nos. 3 and 4 to clause 23 to increase the number of beneficiaries from about 120,000 to about 500,000. They had no doubt that that would be the effect of their proposals. They had no need of empirical studies as to the effect of that course on the labour market, but were satisfied by their own theoretical analysis, which happens to be right.

If one lowers the cost to employers of employing labour, there is an incentive to employ more people but the converse of that principle, which inexorably follows in logic, is that, if one increases the cost to employers of employing labour, they can afford to employ fewer people.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is an extremely important distinction to be made between reducing the overhead costs of employing labour and cutting pay?

Mr. Evans: For the purposes of work incentives, there is no distinction whatsoever—it comes out of the bottom line. If one has the same amount to spend on one's work force and is made to give them more of it, one can afford to employ fewer people.

There is therefore a bizarre contradiction at the heart of Labour's objections to the Bill. The Labour party supports the national insurance contributions holiday but, at the same time, promotes the minimum wage. We heard that the minimum wage is, in effect, going to be the minimum prescribed sum for which anyone is allowed to work. We shall see the abolition of family credit, in effect, but Labour will not tell us what the minimum wage will be.

Labour's critique of this part of the Bill, rather like its critique of the whole Bill, has been nothing but empty rhetoric and deception, a morally and intellectually bankrupt analysis with no coherence. Let us be clear that the Labour party's approach will simply create more unemployment.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 239.

Division No. 114] **[6.58 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James

Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Bates and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George

Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Civil Service

[Relevant documents: The Fifth Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee of Session 1993-94, on the Role of the Civil Service (House of Commons Paper No. 27), and The Civil Service: Taking Forward Continuity and Change (Cm 2748), containing the Government's observations thereon.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

7.8 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt):

> "The British Civil Service is a great national asset. Since the 1870s, it has been the permanent and impartial instrument of all administrations. Governments have always seen it as their duty to preserve its efficiency and honesty for their successors."

Those are not only my views; those are the words of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service in November's report. That report demonstrated the strength of the consensus between the Government and the Select Committee. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and their colleagues on having produced such a valuable report.

The civil service plays a vital part in underpinning the constitution and in sustaining good government in this country. It always has, and it always will. The important challenge facing us all is to retain and strengthen the traditional principles that have made the Westminster model the envy of the world—independence, impartiality, integrity, objectivity, and permanence—while at the same time making the changes necessary to bring our system into the 21st century.

That will require a combination of continuity and change. That is why, eight months ago, my predecessor published the White Paper, "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", which was the first Government document since the Fulton report, more than 25 years ago, to address the role and future of the civil service as a whole. It built on ideas stretching back to the great Victorian reformers, Northcote and Trevelyan. The emphasis on accountable management and on developing the professional skills of civil servants can be found in Fulton, and has been carried forward strongly through the initiatives of the Government since 1979.

Those twin themes—continuity and change—reflect the need for continuity in the long-standing traditions of the civil service, and also the need for the service, like other large organisations, to change in order to improve performance. In the White Paper, the Government strongly reaffirmed their commitment to the established values of the service, which include—as well as integrity and political impartiality—recruitment through fair and open competition, selection and promotion on merit, and accountability through Ministers to Parliament.

The Treasury and Civil Service Committee said of those values:

> "They are as important today as in the last century; their importance should not diminish in the next . . . These values reflect rather than inhibit the jobs to be done. They are relevant to civil servants serving the public as well as to those serving Ministers directly. They can and should act as a unifying force for the whole Civil Service."

The Government's further Command Paper, published in January this year, "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", accepted most of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's conclusions and recommendations, in particular the Committee's proposals for a new civil service code and for a new independent avenue of appeal to the civil service commissioners.

With Her Majesty's approval, the appointment of Michael Bett as the new First Civil Service Commissioner was announced last week, following open competition. I had my first formal meeting with him earlier today, and he will oversee the enhanced responsibilities of the commissioners for interpreting the principles of fair and open competition for all civil service recruitment.

The commissioners will publish a recruitment code for Departments and agencies, and will audit their performance against it, and will approve all appointments from outside to the senior civil service. The First Civil Service Commissioner will attend the senior appointments selection committee, which is chaired by the head of the home civil service. He will be able to comment on senior selection processes in the commissioners' annual report.

The Government are now consulting civil servants and the civil service unions on the code. We shall also take into account any further comments from the Select Committee, and we will of course listen carefully to all contributions made in the debate.

Legislation is not necessary to introduce the code or the new functions of the civil service commissioners. Action under the prerogative can include implementation of the code once consultation is complete, and the new role of the commissioners can be created through a revised Order in Council. But any such action would be without prejudice to the possibility of legislation thereafter. I make it absolutely clear that the Government have an open mind about legislation. We set out our views in "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", but it may be worth amplifying them for the benefit of the House.

Legislation, as the Select Committee itself acknowledged, would need to be narrowly based. It would cover the powers of the civil service commissioners concerning selection for appointment to the home civil service and the diplomatic service, their powers to investigate complaints arising from the civil service code, and their power to report to Parliament on the number, nature, and outcome of complaints put to them.

Such legislation would also cover the powers of the Minister responsible for the civil service, in respect of terms and conditions in the home civil service—and, of course, the corresponding powers of the Foreign Secretary—and would introduce a new power for the Minister to issue the civil service code. If the code had already been issued the legislation would confirm it. Legislation would also include a power to make orders to amend it, which would be subject to affirmative resolution in both Houses of Parliament.

I am, however, very cautious about opening up the possibility of change in the constitutional position of the civil service. The Government would consider the introduction of a Bill only if we were satisfied that the proposed legislation would sustain the existing constitutional position, retain the flexibility of existing arrangements for regulating the terms and conditions of civil servants, and preserve the current position of civil servants under general employment law.

I would also want to be satisfied that such legislation would be supported in all parts of the House. As the hon. Member for Durham, North will know, I have already invited Opposition parties to take part in discussions, and I hope that in the debate we shall be able to explore some of the important issues that lie before us.

The values of the civil service are vital, not only in a constitutional sense but to ensure that all our citizens are treated equitably under the law. The integrity and objectivity of the service help to ensure that the right decisions are taken, and that those decisions are implemented honestly and without wasting taxpayers' money. Selection and promotion on merit are crucial principles in support of any effective organisation. The values of the civil service go hand in hand with effectiveness and efficiency.

It is the Government's duty to obtain the best possible value for every penny of public money handled through the civil service. That means sustaining the traditional values but also adopting new best-practice techniques to help to increase the quality of service to the citizen, and the efficiency of that service.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend at this early stage in his speech, but he has already said how important it would be to ensure that any legislation did not change the constitutional position of the civil service. He then described the characteristics and merits of our civil service, which are indeed terrific. May I ask him, for the benefit of the House, how he defines the constitutional position of the civil service? Even after taking part in the preparation of the Select Committee report, I am still slightly unclear about that. What is the Government's view?

Mr. Hunt: I had hoped that, for the benefit of my hon. Friend and others, I had set that out in the earlier part of my speech. The constitutional position of the civil service rests on the traditional principles of independence—that is fundamental—impartiality, integrity and honesty, selection and promotion on merit, and permanence. The constitutional position is reflected in those key principles. I said that I welcomed what the Select Committee had said, so clearly I share the view that it is vital that the traditional principles be preserved.

A possible change to the constitutional position comes whenever legislation is proposed in this House, because it is open to hon. Members on both sides of the House to propose amendments. One can envisage a situation in which some of those amendments might have a fundamental effect on the constitutional position that I have set out.

That is my concern, but some of those fears may be put to rest during our discussions with Opposition parties. Widespread consultation can provide one with a feel for the way in which the House, the civil servants and the unions wish to proceed. One can make a judgment about whether any legislation would affect the constitutional position.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Would not the values, traditions, independence and integrity of the civil service have been more effectively upheld if the appointment of the First Civil Service Commissioner had gone to somebody from the civil service who was steeped in the service's traditions and ethos, rather than to somebody from the private sector, whose qualifications seem to be a string of public and quango appointments in the gift of the Government, together with his long-standing support for the Conservative party?

Mr. Hunt: I reject the hon. Gentleman's description and analysis of the new First Civil Service Commissioner, and I have confidence that Michael Bett will uphold the traditional principles of the civil service. He has demonstrated that in the range of duties and responsibilities which he has carried out, and I am aware of the extensive public service work which forms part of his curriculum vitae. I sure that he will uphold the traditional values which I have just outlined to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman).

Paragraph 1 of the proposed new civil service code states:

> "The constitutional and practical role of the Civil Service is, with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity, to assist the duly constituted Government, of whatever political complexion, in formulating policies of the Government, carrying out decisions of the Government and administering services for which the Government is responsible".

That provides the remainder of the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington.

I hope that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) will reflect on the comments he has made, because it has been my experience that Mr. Bett is respected by Members on both sides of the House for his impartiality.

The Government want to see sustained improvement in the administration of the civil service, and intend to achieve that by building on the approaches pioneered in the next steps initiative which we launched in 1988, and the citizens charter and "Competing for Quality" White Papers, published three years later. That means systems appropriate to the end of the 20th century, better management information, resource accounting, delegation to the right level, clear objectives, annual targets, the management of performance, a focus on quality and service to the customer.

From April 1996, individual Departments will have responsibility for implementing their own systems of pay and grading for their staff, and those systems will be suited to their particular needs. Beginning this April, Departments will have responsibility for drawing up their own three-year efficiency plans, which will incorporate a wide range of efficiency measures.

The efficiency plans will build on the "competing for quality" programme, which has realised savings averaging 20 per cent.—over £400 million a year—with no reduction in the quality of service, and indeed with improved service in one third of cases. Competition and new opportunities for the private sector have provided a real spur to increased efficiency right across the civil service.

The focus on quality and service to the customer are at the heart of the citizens charter. The charter aims to raise standards of service and increase the responsiveness of Government. The recent changes in the structure of the civil service are tailor-made to meet those objectives. The creation of agencies under the "next steps" initiative has devolved responsibility for the executive service functions of Government, from remote offices in Whitehall to those who deal face to face with the general public on a daily basis.

That is where the public need high-quality service, and that is where the new structure of the civil service enables it to be provided. All agencies which directly serve the public already have, or are developing, charter standard

[Mr. Hunt]

statements, so that people know what service they have a right to expect from Government, and what they can do about it if that service is not delivered.

It may not sound revolutionary that one can now take one's driving test on a Saturday morning and pay for it by credit card, but ordinary people asked for the change and are benefiting from it. The introduction of a tax helpline may not seem very significant until it is used to solve a problem, and all for the cost of a local telephone call, no matter where one is in the country. The one-stop service being introduced by the Benefits Agency will not mean much to those who have never visited a benefits office, but the people who count—the customers and claimants—will see a real improvement.

There are now 102 agencies in the civil service, including the revenue departments, which run on next steps lines. Some 62 per cent. of civil servants—more than 350,000 staff—work in "next steps" organisations.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I hope that the Chancellor of the Duchy will at some stage take the opportunity to deal with the issue of impartiality in more detail. As a member of the Select Committee dealing with that issue, I am aware that we brought Sir Robin Butler back to give further evidence.

The House will be aware that Conservative members of the Committee asked Sir Robin about a number of matters: first, the way in which 80 to 100 amendments were given by civil servants to various Back-Bench Members to wreck a Bill; secondly, the way in which Sir Robin Butler was involved in various investigations—Members on both sides of the Select Committee questioned whether he should have been involved in those; and, thirdly, the involvement of civil servants in what appears on the face of it to be a Cabinet Committee with a political, rather than governmental, objective.

Mr. Hunt: I intended to come to that matter later in my speech. I am in some difficulty, because I understand that the Select Committee is still considering the matter, and at some stage it will produce a report. The Select Committee is at liberty to call for any evidence that it wishes to consider, and I am not too sure whether I should start evolving a response to some of the points which the hon. Gentleman has raised.

I can say that I regard the traditional principle of impartiality to be fundamental to the future of the civil service, and it is a part of the duty of all Governments to ensure that that traditional principle is upheld. I shall return to one or two of the specific points which the hon. Gentleman made a little later, but I hope that my answer will reassure him.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): May I follow the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) has made? Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that no civil servant will be employed in any form of political work associated with the new Cabinet Committee appointed to look for banana skins in the run-up to the next election?

Mr. Hunt: I was going to come to that in a moment, but of course I can assure the hon. Gentleman that civil servants are well aware of the need to retain their independence and political impartiality. However, civil servants have been dealing with the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy for as long as I can remember.

To return to the point raised by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) about the First Civil Service Commissioner and whether he should have been a civil servant, it is worth noting that the Select Committee favoured civil service commissioners who were not serving civil servants, and that the commissioners should be appointed from a wide range of backgrounds. I hope and believe that we have responded to the tenor of the Select Committee's recommendations.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) about the new Cabinet Committee, when I was appointed to my present position, the Prime Minister asked me to take special responsibility for the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy. I was also made chairman of seven Cabinet Committees, and I sit on nine other Cabinet Committees. I have been discussing with the Prime Minister what further steps might appropriately be taken to improve co-ordination and presentation, and I concluded that it would help to set up a new Cabinet Committee with a specific remit to undertake that work. The Prime Minister accepted my advice, and asked me to chair it.

The new Committee will provide a forum in which the relevant issues, right across government, can be addressed. It is a Committee of Ministers charged with co-ordinating and presenting the policies of the elected Government of the day and is serviced by civil servants. As part of the present Government's open government policy, the membership and terms of reference of ministerial Committees of the Cabinet are now published and updated regularly, so when a new Committee is established, unlike in previous Administrations, the Prime Minister now naturally informs Parliament, and that is what has happened in this case.

Mr. Mandelson: Will the Chancellor confirm that the membership of that Committee includes the chairman of the Conservative party? Is it a proper function of civil servants to spend their time cleaning up after him?

Mr. Hunt: Without being drawn into the nonsense in the hon. Gentleman's question, may I explain that the Cabinet Minister without portfolio sits on the Committee in his role as a Minister? He is a member of eight other Cabinet Committees.

This Committee consists of myself, in my capacity as Minister responsible for the co-ordination of Government's policy as a whole; the Lord President of the Council and the Lord Privy Seal, who are leaders of their respective Houses of Parliament with responsibilities for handling the Government's parliamentary business, which are highly relevant to the new Committee's work; and the Minister without portfolio, who has a specific role in which he works closely with me to help co-ordinate and formulate Government policy and its delivery. Nothing could be simpler.

Under this Government, for the first time ever, those facts are made public and, as soon as we have a Cabinet Committee, the public are informed of its membership and terms of reference. This is the most open Government in the history of this country, because, for the first time, a range of information that used to be behind the scenes, particularly under previous Labour Governments, is all now made public and open.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee pronounced a verdict on "next steps" which is worth quoting. It described "next steps" as

> "the single most successful Civil Service reform programme of recent decades",

and added:

> "We believe that Next Steps agencies represent a significant improvement in the organisation of Government and that any future Government will want to maintain them".

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I entirely agree that we said that—it has certainly been my position—but we also said that "next steps" should not be seen as a staging post to privatisation. Will the Minister confirm that he accepts our proposals on that?

Mr. Hunt: I have already made the Government's position clear in our published response to the Committee's report. The foundation of the Government's position is to ask, first, whether the job in question should be done by the Government at all. If not, privatisation is an option that clearly presents itself. What I am now talking about is when the Government decide that the job in question should be done by the Government but that it would be most appropriate and effective for it to be done by a "next steps" agency.

Just recently, in the first open competition for a Permanent Secretary post in a Department of state, the job of leading the Department of Employment went to an agency chief executive—moreover, one who had been appointed to that agency post from outside the civil service following an earlier open competition. In many ways, that symbolises the coming of age of the "next steps" initiative.

The setting-up of "next steps" agencies is, in itself, a valuable process. In progressing the initiative, there has been a thorough examination of every executive function in the Government. The "prior options" test, looking at the case for abolition, privatisation, strategic contracting out, and market testing, ensures that the Government undertake tasks that properly belong to them.

As I have just explained to the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), having determined the answer to that question, the next stage is to ensure that the Government perform those tasks to the best of their ability in organisations with the right structures, skills, and attitudes.

The Government must stick to their core tasks, deliver them to a high standard, and carry them out within tight running cost controls. The plans announced in last November's Budget mean that total cash spending in Departments will be held at the same level in 1997-98 as in 1993-94, which implies a 10 per cent. cut in real terms. That is clear and unambiguous proof of the Government's commitment to continuing improvements in efficiency.

These are, without question, challenging times for the civil service, but the civil service is responding. The changes that we have brought about are designed to make it responsive and flexible. That is the sort of civil service that we shall need for the next century.

I believe that civil servants retain the public service ethos that is their fundamental strength. The taxpayer pays their salary and civil servants want the taxpayer to get value for money. Civil servants want more responsibility. They want to provide the best possible service to the customer; to be efficient; and to be paid according to how well they perform, not how long they have been in a job.

The whole principle of continuity and change have produced a civil service reform that is an outstanding British success story, which will help equip the United Kingdom for the challenges of the 21st century. The Government have built on the enduring values and firm foundations of the civil service, creating more flexible and efficient structures in which staff can work to the best of their ability and provide a high-quality service to the people of the nation.

Stewardship of the civil service is a vital task. I submit to the House that, judged against any standard, the Government have carried out that task responsibly, effectively, and well.

7.37 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for the consultations with the Leader of the Opposition on the appointment of the First Civil Service Commissioner. I hope that the practice will continue and be extended to all senior appointments to the civil service and heads of significant agencies. After all, it will be standard practice for such appointments after 1 January 1996, as we approach the general election, on the basis of precedent.

Secondly, we support the establishment of the MBA course for civil servants—an important step forward—which is to be developed at the Imperial College school of management in London. Although that is a welcome step, the question of establishing the British equivalent of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration will continue and still has many arguments in its favour.

Thirdly, we welcome the tone of the letter that the Chancellor recently sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) about procedures to be followed on the code of practice for the civil service. Subject to the usual caveats, we shall do all that we can to help to achieve an agreed legislative framework for the proposed code for the civil service and ensure that it is in the legislative programme for the next Session. The Chancellor said in his letter to my hon. Friend:

> "I shall of course let you know in due course of the outcome of consultation within the Civil Service, and would fully understand if you did not want to give a final reaction to proposals for legislation until those consultations have been completed."

That would be precisely our position. It would not prevent us from chatting in the meantime.

There is still a need to grapple with two problems: the relationship of civil servants to Parliament and the House especially, and the problems of the public interest. I hope that those problems can be resolved. The Nolan inquiry and, more especially, the Scott inquiry will doubtless provide some helpful guidance on those matters, but they should not be allowed to prevent the introduction of the legislative framework.

I must add the congratulations of the Labour party to the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee, its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), and his colleagues, who, by the strength of their arguments, persuaded the Government of the value not only of a civil service code, but of a statutory one.

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

We now need to turn our attention to how best to secure the values that the Treasury and Civil Service Committee rightly identified as the unifying features of the British civil service—impartiality, integrity, objectivity, selection and promotion on merit and accountability.

In the past 15 years, the British civil service has undergone a period of radical change. Collectively, market testing, agency creation and privatisation have led to the fragmentation of the public service ethos. Although we are pleased with the Government's change of mind on the civil service code, we believe that they must now also recognise the way in which the civil service is being splintered and its essential values dissipated.

No one denies the integrity of civil servants, but what chance do our civil servants have to show their integrity when morale is so low? I do not see the picture of the civil service and its members as painted by the Chancellor today.

Despite the fact that the Government rejected the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee's request for a civil service staff attitude survey, the Treasury nevertheless conducted its own survey in 1994. Sixty-nine per cent. of Treasury staff said that morale was poor, and only 16 per cent. felt that the Department was well managed.

Such is the contempt of the Treasury for its employees that during the recent downsizing—what a charming euphemism for sacking—of the deputy secretary grade in the Treasury, an official was reported in the *Daily Mail* as saying patronisingly:

> "It is unlikely they are going to the best-paid jobs in the City—if they were that good we wouldn't have let them go"—

and the Government wonder why morale is so low in the Treasury, when it denigrates its own employees whose responsible jobs were to supervise the spending in other Departments.

That statement was made shortly after the reported massive overspend and confusion in the Ministry of Defence, in relation to its defence contracts and the handling of its properties. Now there is no one in the Treasury who will supervise the MOD in the handling of such affairs.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman should consider his facts more closely. I think that he will find, if he does, that the considerable manpower reductions that are proposed in the Treasury, following Sir Terry Burns' recent report, are almost all to be achieved on the basis of natural wastage, hence with the co-operation of the people concerned.

Mr. McNamara: That was not the impression that I received when speaking to some of the people involved and their representatives. It may be achieved voluntarily in the long run, but there are different ways of achieving voluntary redundancies, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows. I do not think that the civil service is any different from any other employer in achieving voluntary redundancies.

Morale is low not only in Whitehall, nor are all civil servants to be found there. Each day, for the thousands of civil servants who work outside Whitehall, the outlook has rarely been bleaker. Pity the poor civil servants who, in employment offices throughout the country, will have to change their whole mode of meeting and talking to the public as they seek to enforce the results of today's mass vote on the Jobseekers Bill.

The increase in casualisation, the decline of promotion and career prospects, the minimal pay increases that civil servants have been receiving and the fervour with which Ministers have introduced large-scale market testing and plans for privatisation—some of them without even undertaking market testing—have left the great majority of civil servants feeling very insecure and worried about their future.

The Chancellor's blanket decision in the most recent Budget to cut numbers in the civil service by 10 per cent. regardless of the role, size or responsibility of tasks, shows the cavalier attitude that the Government display to the civil service as a whole and to individuals in particular. That 10 per cent. cut is a 10 per cent. cut in jobs because that is the most expensive element in the civil service.

Such arrogance has also recently been displayed in the Department of Employment, where the Secretary of State enjoined his Department not to employ temporarily anyone for more than 51 weeks, lest they gain employment rights. By acts such as that, the Government have thrown a blanket of fear across the whole of the civil service, but they are also setting a shocking example to private employers.

The current Conservative period in office began with the Government abolishing the fair wages resolution of the House, continued by abolishing wages councils and ends with the current Secretary of State for Employment setting standards from his own Department for the worst employers—a great change from the Churchillian tradition that used to emanate at one time from the Department of Employment and the way in which the Government then regarded their servants.

In order to cope with that Government-instilled fear, civil servants are forced to sacrifice objectivity. The Government's White Paper, "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", outlines the introduction of individual contracts for senior civil servants at grade 5 and above. In such a job environment, where the proposed employer is the appropriate Secretary of State, how objective can employees be with their policy advice, especially if they know that every word that they say could be used against them in future contract renewal negotiations?

To avoid the risks of politicisation of the senior civil service, such contracts should at least be regulated by an independent or quasi-independent organisation. We are aware of the role that the Secretary of State envisages for the First Civil Service Commissioner. We await the outcome.

Further, there continues to be no explanation from the Government of the way in which they intend to resolve the constitutional dilemma of having a contract for civil servants with terms set out, including notice periods in the event of redundancy and dismissal, yet at the same time the Department retaining the royal prerogative whereby the Crown can dismiss at will.

Not only will senior civil servants have their own special pay arrangements, but, as the Chancellor said, so will all civil servants in every Department by 1 April 1995. Such pay delegation leads to more division of the civil service. National pay bargaining has served the civil service extremely well, underpinning the concept and practice of a national unified civil service. Each year, approximately 40 officials in the Treasury effectively manage the national pay bargaining process of 500,000 people.

Ministers now mistakenly believe that by pay delegation they can offer greater scope for savings on running costs by keeping salaries as small as possible. In reality, after all the gloss has gone, the Treasury will retain financial control of the civil service pay bill. Why the stupid delegation? That delegation will serve to provide little more than a thin veneer of superficial control of the parts of the civil service with pay delegation.

Last year, the pay deals in delegated parts of the civil service were remarkably similar to the national pay agreement of 2.2 per cent., yet the cost of those parallel deals is evidenced by the fact that more than 3,000 people have taken courses at Sunningdale to learn bargaining procedures in the new Departments and agencies, and as many as 200 pay bodies will be needed to administer the various departmental and agency pay systems—3,000 people, when 40 did it in the past. There were four main negotiated settlements, but now we shall have 200. The Government call that less bureaucratic and more efficient. It is rubbish; and that from a Government who extol the virtues of efficiency.

The Government's means of efficiency—market testing, contracting out and privatisation—have eroded the civil service values of selection and promotion based on merit. Successful agencies, such as the Chessington Computer Centre and the Insolvency Service Agency, which, respectively, administer the Government payroll and investigate the affairs of bankrupts, and meet their yearly targets and beat off all private sector competition, are to be rewarded with privatisation. Since its creation in 1993, Chessington has outperformed all its private sector competitors. A high-quality service such as Chessington should be valued by, and retained in, the public sector, not primed for privatisation in order to fund tax cuts before the next election. The irony is that Chessington will possibly be sold to one of the private companies that it has regularly beaten in competition.

We believe in rewarding the agencies' hard work not by privatising them, but by keeping them in the public sector, serving the public good and setting an example to the private sector of the smooth and efficient delivery of service to the public. But the pace of reform is causing the fifth essential feature of the civil service—accountability—to be left behind. If one allows agencies such as Chessington and the insolvency service to leave the Government via privatisation, the existing accountability arrangements no longer suffice. The Government do not seem to have taken that on board or to have introduced appropriate procedures for it yet.

In the case of the Prison Service, accountability for mistakes saw the buck pass from the Home Secretary to the head of the Prison Service to the prison officers and, then, to the IRA for daring to try to escape. That is a dangerous precedent, and it happens not only in the Prison Service. What a shambles the Child Support Agency was, but the Minister with responsibility again came up smelling like roses, just like the Home Secretary. They are escaping scot free from what should be their proper responsibility.

We are further worried about the Government's intention to implement a trial contracting out of the drafting of Treasury legislation to private sector lawyers, as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Significantly, he made the announcement to the European Forum rather than the civil service or the House. The European Forum has been touting on behalf of some private sector lawyers for the work for some years. Private industry will draft some of the most politically controversial and market and price-sensitive legislation. One can only conclude that the Chancellor came up with that idea when suffering from mental and physical exhaustion after his efforts to create a new steel industry in Consett and build new nappy factories.

There are serious conflicts of interest in lawyers' chambers and solicitors' firms to be resolved. Private law firms will almost certainly use the trial period as a loss leader. Civil service lawyers are highly qualified and highly intelligent, but are paid only between one third and one half of what lawyers in the City can expect. Any widespread contracting out of the drafting of legislation will lead to a significant exodus of senior civil service lawyers to more lucrative opportunities in the private sector. The expertise of the most experienced and able draftsmen will be lost, not only to this Government but, more significantly, to any incoming Administration. There is a growing fear that, despite the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's fine words, the Government's policies towards the civil service will make it increasingly difficult for an incoming Labour Government, elected on a popular mandate, to have the resources to legislate, implement and administer policy effectively.

The five unifying features of the civil service are threatened by the incessant drive for dogmatic change. I conclude by stressing a sixth feature: flexibility, which was also mentioned by the Chancellor. Flexibility is not a value, but a necessary quality of any organisation at the end of this millennium—especially in the increasingly vital sphere of information technology, its control and its use.

Information systems are, or should be, central to the operations of Government, Departments and agencies. Under market testing, those information systems are being sold to private sector companies. The information technology operations of the Inland Revenue and the Department of Transport have been sold to the same company, Electronic Data Systems. The Inland Revenue contract is worth £1 billion over 10 years. Electronic Data Systems offered the lowest tender, thereby winning a valuable prize—the Inland Revenue computer systems were admired throughout the Government and by many foreign Governments.

Now, the National Audit Office has identified 43 risk factors in the Inland Revenue contract. If EDS were to fail, it is estimated that to reconstitute the in-house organisation could take up to five years and cost the British taxpayer millions of pounds. EDS is excluded from liability for consequential loss arising from a breakdown in computer service. That means that the Inland Revenue cannot recover from EDS lost tax revenue or interest payments that it may be required to make on delayed tax refunds. What sort of contract is it when someone cannot receive damages when his partner fails to deliver the service that he said he would? That policy comes from a Government of business men.

The Inland Revenue runs the risk of losing control of its information systems. It will be virtually impossible for the small contract management team that remains to keep abreast of the constantly changing world of information technology or to have the knowledge to utilise it. The

[Mr. McNamara]

ability to change policy now depends on technological infrastructures. We have already seen that with the concern expressed by some members of the Inland Revenue about the structure of the EDS contract. The Government will rely on EDS to tell them what it is prepared to provide, and it will not necessarily answer to Government needs. The Inland Revenue's current plans to computerise tax returns depend upon EDS's design and supply of the relevant equipment by 1997. EDS is currently deciding whether it can meet that deadline successfully, under the terms of the contract. The Inland Revenue must wait, twiddling its thumbs, for the decision.

Now, on top of all that, the Government are considering whether to make another contract with EDS to control the computerised identity database that will cover the entire population and could be tied to a national identity card scheme. The question immediately arises whether the Government should place so much trust in one company that claims in its battle honours the botched Student Loans Company's computer systems contract. Control of that company will not be in this country or even in the European Union, but in the United States of America. The company will be subject to American legislation.

If there were to be a breakdown in the contract or a failure to renew, the Inland Revenue would be at the mercy of EDS and any other private companies that may have some of the knowledge. None of the control will be in this country. The Government have surrendered their responsibility abroad. What does that mean? Government by contract can lead to loss of flexibility and of the ability of the civil service to react to immediate events.

The Opposition would not argue that all Departments and agencies should be building their own information systems. But when we look to private sector expertise, we must recognise the difficulties in separating completely one from the other, policy formation, information technology, policy delivery and policy supervision. Government agencies must retain control of the strategic elements of their information technology and the technological know-how to be intelligent customers. The Government are running down that ability within the civil service until eventually it will be lost.

Privatisations such as those in the Inland Revenue and the Department of Transport are being carried out by the Government in the name of private sector practice. Yet few private sector companies would enter into contracts of that scale and lose their core abilities. Contracting out should be a management tool that enhances flexibility. But under market testing it has been used as an institutional dogma that engenders rigidity in what future Governments will be able to do. It is not the reforms themselves—"next steps", market testing and pay reform—that are endangering the essential qualities of the civil service, although one can raise all sorts of questions about them. It is the particular way in which they are being carried out.

Decentralisation is being implemented in a centralised manner at a pace that is leaving vital features behind and causing the Government to lose control. We must understand the effect that pay reform and job insecurity are having on civil service morale in order that impartiality, objectivity and integrity may be restored. We must select and promote on merit rather than on the principle that private is synonymous with good and public is synonymous with bad.

We need a revised framework of accountability for a reformed civil service that is not so dependent on the illusory distinction between policy and administration. The Cabinet Secretary tried to create that distinction and the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Social Security sought to take advantage of it. We must establish a creative balance between public and private provision, resisting the temptations of cut-price options with hidden long-term implications and recognising that government by contract can lead to increased risk and loss of flexibility. We do not want 20,000 civil servants in Westminster writing contracts that are dictated by the would-be service providers.

We must pull back from the brink of hollow government and restore the civil service as a national asset. The Chancellor's remarks about the civil service being a national asset were laughable when, by their policies, the Government are demonstrating that they are the biggest asset stripper in the land.

8.1 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): It is quite like old times for me to follow the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), although on this occasion I am not following him in wearing a tie colour coded in orange and green. As we have disagreed before, I am sure that he will not mind my doing so again on the subject of pay delegation.

As, among other things, Customs and Excise Minister, I would spend one day in six weeks in the field. I had the opportunity to talk with civil servants during the day and it was my experience that, south of Watford, they wished to discuss only pay but, north of Watford, they did not raise the subject at all.

I am taking part in the debate primarily to deliver a personal paean of praise and a vote of thanks. Although the late Nick Ridley of enchanting memory used to say that the most confidential place to say something was the Floor of the House of Commons, I am delighted to offer both paean and appreciation in so public a forum.

I served in five Government Departments over 15 years, if one includes the Whips Office, and I pay the utmost praise to the service that I received from civil servants in each and every one of those Departments. Those men and women were knowledgeable, diligent, agreeable, honourable and wholly devoted to the public weal. It was a pleasure to be a visiting player in their team. Many of them are employed in my constituency and, as a master of business administration, I welcome others to that state.

The most vivid index of their collective quality is the compliment paid by the last Secretary General of the European Commission, who was French. We are so often told, in Sterne's phrase, that they order these things better in France, so it is a delight to record the verdict of that long-serving French fonctionnaire: that, of all the civil service machines in the Union that interfaced with Brussels, the British was the best. It took a cross-Whitehall trawl on policy issues before a debate took place in Brussels in order to determine what was best for Her Majesty's Government as a whole. In many other capitals it was simply left to the lead Department to decide on a policy.

The proof of that pudding is the speed with which we implement EU directives and the infrequency with which we are taken to the European Court. In other capitals, the debate often begins only after the Council of Ministers has made up its mind.

Lest I should be thought purblind in a Panglossian manner, I remark in passing—as evidence that parts of the state of Denmark still require improvement—that, while I acknowledge that the instance occurred a decade ago, the worst spelling, punctuation and grammar of my experience occurred ironically in what was then the Department of Education and Science. The spirits of Chaucer and Rabbie Burns can rest easy in the knowledge that the most consistent good examples of those literary disciplines occurred in their old Department of Customs and Excise. In this case, I am perhaps being a little unfair to the Northern Ireland civil service; but my readings therein were diluted by the Northern Ireland Office. Perhaps Trollope can rest easy also.

My slender credentials for the debate include an unlikely one. The fact that my great granduncle served in this House with Stafford Northcote is less germane than the fact that my father shared rooms at Oxford with John Fulton of the Fulton report, at whose knee I therefore partly grew up. However, I served for four years in the late 1980s as Treasury Minister responsible for civil service pay and conditions and I was likewise responsible for some of the wider efficiency initiatives in the public service.

Without washing red tape in public, I admit that some of those initiatives were perhaps a little overdue. In one purchasing episode—where it had been assumed for years that costs rose with the inflationary tide—I salute the official who went to see for himself and inferred from the ubiquity of BMWs in the suppliers' car park that perhaps in that area of industrial activity the technology was moving in a deflationary direction.

The fact that the reforms have been spread over more than a decade has softened the process of change. Commercial bankers, like civil servants, had grown up in careers where it was assumed that there was a berth for life, with all the attendant industrial relations implications for pay and conditions. The implicit breaking of that contract, which occurred a decade earlier for bankers than for civil servants, came as a shock.

I can still recall the jejune embarrassment of the first essays in pay flexibility. But Departments learnt quickly, as they could soon be on the receiving end of another Department's unthinking ineptitude—I refer to the events of 10 years ago. With regard to civil service pay policy, I always found it easier to identify statistics for attraction and retention rather than for motivation.

Where change does not occur—as is recognised in paragraph 85 of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report and in paragraph 6 of the Government's response—is in the civil service's commitment to Governments of different hues. The late Dick Crossman used to inveigh against the capacity of civil servants to thwart his plans or to seek to do so. There have been echoes of him in the past 15 years and no doubt they will continue into the next century.

Like the perennial complaint by Governments of all colours that the BBC is biased against them, even-handed scepticism across all parties must be evidence that all is reasonably well in this area of our constitution. Leaving aside the ingrained British habit of always thinking of reasons for not doing something and leaving aside the great Sam Rayburn's memorable remark that the three wisest words in the English language are "wait a minute", it is the duty of civil servants to draw attention to all the disadvantages of a ministerial policy and to avoid those two terrible embarrassments for any Minister: changing policy in a hurry in mid-stream; and being caught at the Dispatch Box in the crossfire of arguments that he or she has clearly never addressed before. What Sir Humphrey describes as "Courageous, Minister, courageous", becomes reckless ignorance if no one said, "Wait a minute" first.

It is a compliment to the civil service that the Select Committee has done so thorough and even-tempered a job.

These are serious matters and it is right that they should be seriously addressed. As they are addressed in the Select Committee report, let me also praise civil servants for their self-restraint in not wondering aloud when Ministers would apply the same management techniques to themselves as they cheerfully endorsed for officials.

There was no question but that Lady Thatcher ran a tight ship, yet whether a guru would have recognised it as management by objectives at individual level is more doubtful. Perhaps it is the highest compliment of all that civil servants are the regulars, the custodians of the constitution, while Ministers are simply territorials who pass by with short service commissions.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the fact that the Government have turned down our recommendation that there should an efficiency study of Ministers?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman, with whom I have also crossed swords on occasions, knows that when one passes from an Administration, one acquires a certain independence of mind on these matters.

At the end of 15 years as such a territorial I was and am left with one nagging doubt. If I am right, the debate started in the last century by the Earl of Iddesleigh, as he eventually became, will carry on to the next.

When the efficiency unit was starting on its mid-1980s trawl on the future of the service, which was the harbinger of the next steps agencies, I asked the senior official who interviewed me to define the management responsibilities of the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary. I continued asking that question at intervals while I was a Minister. I suspect that Permanent Secretaries found the question a little naive, which reinforces my analogy of the regulars and the territorials.

Yet I went on wondering and came to a mild moment of truth in my final month as a Minister, when giving evidence to the Select Committee on National Heritage when its Chairman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), asked who was responsible for what he considered the shambles of the British Library—a narrative 16 years in gestation that was conceived by a Labour Government in the 1970s.

Clearly, no one person has been continuously responsible throughout that period, though the distinguished architect has been involved throughout. It has been a chapter of long-term errors, yet to say that, whatever its underlying truth, is to imply that accountability is dead, so in answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question I said, with full recognition of what I was saying, that I was responsible.

[Mr. Brooke]

When it is all over, and that great library is functioning to the satisfaction and admiration of all, it may be a good case history for a PhD to determine where precisely between Ministers and officials responsibility did and does lie. That is as good a coda to this paean as I can imagine. The fact that we can discuss these issues academically, and with the public weal as our lodestar, is the best possible tribute to the quality of the civil service.

8.12 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The final theme of the right hon. Member for Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) put what he said earlier into perspective. It was wholly proper for him to pay tribute to the support given by officials in a variety of offices, but to dwell on the nonsense and disasters of the British Library was to hark back to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) in a masterful speech which made the Chancellor of the Duchy sound like a used car salesman. When that expression was first used, it was more derogatory than it seems nowadays, when used car salesmen are the summit of creation.

I should declare an interest in the subject of the debate as I am parliamentary consultant to the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists. Lest that should be taken as accounting for the origins of my interest in the subject, I remind the House that I chaired the Estimates Committee inquiry which recommended setting up the Fulton committee. I also chaired a Treasury and Civil Service Committee inquiry into the effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service some 10 years ago.

The Select Committee reminded us of the dominant theme of the Fulton report, which was the cult of the amateur and the uncertain role of the professional and specialist civil servant and I shall speak mainly about that.

There is a general demoralisation in the civil service today, but nowhere more so than among professional and managerial staff. It is accounted for partly by the privatisation and contracting out and the unfair terms under which they are able to bid for work, and partly by the Government's lack of understanding of the areas for which the professionals have been responsible.

One example is the Transport Research Laboratory. Not long ago an edict excluding that office from examining road pricing came directly from the Secretary of State for Transport. The Building Research Establishment has been another victim at a time when the public and the building industry need much guidance in the development and use of new materials and the effects on the comfort of people in their homes of a muddle in Government standards, in the enforcement of building regulations and the improvement of standards, particularly in the public sector.

The enormously important role of the Meteorological Office in weather forecasting and the study of climate change calls for a back-up and integration of Government scientific activities generally into the environment, which has not been forthcoming.

The lack of perception by Government of the real role of the professional civil servant is the underlying problem, rather than the management questions. We have seen it in the attrition in the numbers and roles of Government chief scientists. The extreme case is the Department of Trade and Industry, where there is no longer any such creature in that sad wreck of a Department. More attention must be paid to the role of doctors, economists, statisticians and, as the right hon. Member for Westminster, South reminded us, the use of architects. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North reminded us about the role of information technology specialists. All those aspects have been severely mishandled by the Government in the past 15 years.

The Government should consider carefully the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North made about the role of Electronic Data Systems. I know that the Minister had some background in this area. I hope that he will look up the employment practices and the origins of EDS in the early days and compare them with the standards that he knows from his own experience are necessary in information technology and management consulting. EDS has always grossly exceeded in its promises and failed to fulfil them in many contracts in the United States, and hugely threatens to do so in Britain. Among the parts of administrative history that will have to be written is the story behind the emerging dominance of EDS, which is a sinister development under the present Government.

The role of the professional is important not just on the domestic front, but in shaping international debate and the framing of policy. Obviously, health is a key issue. At research level it is wholly possible for Britain to exercise influence in projects such as the Human Genome Organisation. All the ethical and moral debates underlying that will help to condition international attitudes in the emerging area of public policy, which will be of great importance to the future of our race.

Another subject which is less in the future, or at any rate more in the present of current parliamentary debate, is global climate change. Debate is hotting up with the shifting of the Antarctic ice sheet. The evidence will be coming in slowly over the next 10 years. There Britain developed a key role through the contribution of one man, Sir John Houghton, the former director general of the Meteorological Office, who became chairman of the research committee of the intergovernmental panel for climate change. That continues today through the role that Professor Julian Hunt, the present chief executive, is playing in the encouragement of meteorological development in other parts of the world.

The forecasting of the path of tropical storms was a Meteorological Office development, building on the idea of a Chinese meteorologist resident in Hong Kong. For Britain to be involved in forecasting the path of tropical storms which barely touch any remains of the British empire may seem a remote and unimportant development, but underlying it is a major shift in approach to the handling not only of meteorological forecasting but of the management and the forecasting of complex systems distributed through space generally.

The sort of issues that I am talking about can be handled only by Government and at a time of public debate when there is serious, restrained and competent discussion of what are quite difficult issues, not by a Government who think that they know all the answers before they start. Nowhere has that been more disastrous than in the sphere of economic policy, where we have suffered from a succession of Chancellors—excluding the present one—who thought that they knew all the answers in advance and who failed to maintain the apparatus, the thoroughness of analysis and keeping up with the state of the art in the framing of economic policy. The Government's handling of appointments in the economic service, and currently in the statistical service, shows a sad rundown in the intellectual leadership that the Government and the public sector once provided. That is important not just for Government but for the way in which these things are handled in society generally.

The Select Committee on Science and Technology was in California a fortnight ago looking at the emergence of the new high-tech biotechnology companies. One thing that is clear there is that the drive and initiative is largely due to the emergence of a new type of animal. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South reminded us that he was an MBA. I add to that the fact that that qualification was gained at Harvard. Shortly before he gained his MBA at Harvard I was at the graduate school of arts and sciences at the same university. In America today, the MBA that he was and the PhD that I was have become one person. There is the integration, the breadth of skills and competencies at a double post-graduate level, which are the necessary tools of business, administrative and public service development in the future.

Where does that have any chance of emerging in the British civil service as it is conducted today? I just do not see it. In which Department? Where would young men and women with the necessary competencies be motivated to go? An admirable scheme has been developed by the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Institution of Electrical Engineers, financed by David Sainsbury or one of his trusts, for the training of chartered engineers/MBAs. There are some 60 graduates of that double discipline. Will the Minister find out how many of them are working in the public sector? I doubt whether he will find more than three or four of the 60 there. That is not good enough if we are to get the necessary width of background in the public sector.

The themes 30 years ago at the time of the Fulton report were concerned with questioning amateurism and competence and comparing that with the professionalism and specialism that was needed. Today, the questions are much more those of strategic contracting out, market testing and worries about the politicisation of the civil service. Those themes may not be so far apart. The link between them is that they both reflect not so much the problems of the civil service as the problems of Parliament and our perception of the nature of the job of Government.

If we are to achieve a sensible balance in the development of a public service which is competent, which has breadth of vision and which is practical and realistic in the handling of social and political problems, the way forward has to be set in this place. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice)—I look forward to hearing what he has to say in summing up his admirable report—how far the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee really taps the frontiers of economic research. Unless the House is doing that, it cannot expect Government Departments to respond.

That process will receive a further shift onwards with the new generation of Members of Parliament who will come in after the next election. I am sure that we shall see a continuation in the raising of the technical background of Members of Parliament in many walks of life. I am not a pessimist in any way about current developments, but they are not always of the nature that public debate and debate in the House in particular make them out to be.

I hope that when the Minister replies he will deal with some of those points and, perhaps most important of all, that he will deal with some of the practical points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, which are of immediate public concern and also very much the concern of some of those civil servants in the union with which I am associated.

8.27 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I see that it is relatively easy to catch your eye in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am delighted to have done so; but it is a pity that there are so few people in the Chamber on a Thursday evening. I have counted 12 in all on both sides of the House. That is a pity, because the future of the civil service and its relationship to the House and the British constitution is an important subject. I want to say a few words about that in the time available.

Before doing so, I want to take up a point that arises from what the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said. It concerns the potential for British civil servants, as perhaps some of the best in the world, to contribute to the quality of government not only in Britain but increasingly, I hope and believe, in European Union institutions, such as the European Commission.

It has always struck me that the French, from a nation that I have long admired, seem to have the ability to second and post many of their best people, albeit for short periods, from the public service to other institutions, whether public or private, where French national interests can be served at the same time as the wider interest of those particular institutions. Invariably, that means that the French have mastered the art of writing the critical first draft in many Community initiatives over the years and have hogged some of the best positions, the key positions, in European institutions.

I have long pressed Ministers—I hope that they will make a note of this point tonight—to make an even greater effort to see that some of our best, brightest and most imaginative civil servants are seconded and posted to European institutions. That can be in Britain's interest and the wider European interest. I hope that we will give that greater prominence. That thought was prompted in my mind, albeit a bit tangentially, after listening to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South.

In talking about a flexible civil service for the late 20th and early 21st century, it is every bit as important that our civil service, with all its talent and opportunities, should engage, and should be encouraged to engage, in more secondments and swaps with the private sector. I know that there is an element of that now. Perhaps when he replies, my hon. Friend the Minister will give the House the latest figures on the extent of two-way movement of civil servants, in and out of the civil service, for temporary periods, to invigorate the private sector with their perspectives from the public sector, and to do the obverse—to invigorate the public sector with very necessary perspectives of the private sector. I fear that, all too often, those who leave the civil service on short-term secondment—or what was intended to be short-term secondment—for the private sector do not return, for

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

reasons of pay, conditions, morale, and so on. If the figures show that there is a net outflow, it should be a warning sign to Ministers to do something about the problems that might lie behind it.

On the more central subject of the debate—the issues raised in the Government's latest White Paper on the civil service—and prompted by the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, on which I have the honour to serve, I should like to say how much I have benefited, as always, from the free adult education that is available to those of us who sit on Select Committees. I have served on three Select Committees in my time: Foreign Affairs, Science and Technology, back in the bad old 1970s, and now the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I find them most interesting. Whatever impact we may or may not have on policy in those Committees—in this case, I think that we have had some impact on policy—they benefit the quality of debate and thought in Parliament by providing a free and top-class adult education for those who are lucky enough to serve on them.

I have played some part, therefore, in bringing about what we might describe as the all-party consensus which lay behind our report. I am delighted to pay personal tribute to my hon. Friend—I do describe him as such—the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), because he gave the Committee considerable wise leadership and went out of his way to build the consensus which helped to make the report that much more influential.

It is timely to pay tribute, like my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), in whose constituency I live—he is keeping an eye on me—to the British civil service, not only for its qualities, which were mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy in his opening remarks, but for its ability to manage and, indeed, survive extensive change within its own sphere. That was the subject of much of our investigation in Committee. It is notable and worth setting on record that, during the Conservative party's period in office so far, the overall size of the British civil service has been projected to fall from the 755,000 which we inherited in 1979 to 477,000 at the end of the current Parliament. That is a significant reduction.

Clearly, there have been some worries in certain quarters that such a reduction—indeed, it has been described as a fragmentation—could lead to a severe loss of morale, which could be permanent rather than temporary. I was therefore relieved to see this said succinctly in paragraph 36 of the White Paper:

> "The Government accepts that the process of change"—

change in the civil service—

> "is unsettling; but the Civil Service, like other areas of the economy, has to adapt if the country is to improve its competitiveness."

That is a slightly bleak statement of reality, but it would be naive to suppose that our excellent civil service could have stood aside from the process of seeking greater efficiency—and, indeed, achieving it—which the private sector had to go through, very often in even more difficult conditions.

It is fair to put one's hand up on the Conservative Benches and say, "Yes, it is true that we have privatised parts of the state." We have privatised not only the state industrial sector, which used to be called the nationalised industries, but the very heartland of the state itself. That was necessary and timely. It has happened in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries as well, to a greater or lesser extent. So we are not being eccentric. In my view, the state apparatus that remains—this is the important point—is more open and more efficient and is delivering public services to a higher standard than 15 or 16 years ago. I welcome that. It is one more reason to signal one's gratitude and admiration to the civil servants, at all levels—from the permanent secretaries right the way down to the humblest clerk in a social security office—who are delivering services in an exemplary way.

One important conclusion to be drawn from civil servants' achievement is that, in parallel with the dramatic reduction in the size of the civil service, indeed even in its thrust—with greater emphasis on policy advice in relatively small Departments at the centre and greater emphasis on the agency principle in terms of the delivery of public services—my hon. Friend the Minister should consider the need for fewer Departments and fewer Ministers. That is perhaps a revolutionary thought, but in the current Government there are about 90 Ministers, in round terms.

There are also all sorts of Ministers-in-waiting, like my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and others who sit on the Bench here. They are known as parliamentary private secretaries. Admittedly they do not take the Queen's shilling, but I suggest that the whole apparatus is becoming almost overladen, particularly when the civil service itself, the people whom Ministers are supposed to command, in military terminology, has slimmed down so admirably. My suggestion is that the great advantage of slimming down ministerial ranks might include the following points. Lines of accountability could be improved. I have been a junior Minister. I know a little bit about it. I have also been PPS to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so I have seen some of these things from the inside. There is no doubt that lines of accountability can get blurred, even in small Departments, let alone large Departments like Environment or Trade and Industry, by having a plethora of junior Ministers.

It is fair to say that, in Churchill's first post-war Government, it was standard practice to have only one junior Minister in a Department. Who is to say that the problems that Britain faced in those years were any smaller than the problems today? In many ways, they were greater, because we had our imperial responsibilities, and so on. Equally, PPSs scarcely existed. There were one or two to very senior members of the Cabinet and that was that. I know that the Government Whip is looking worried, but that heretic thought is worthy of consideration.

Mr. Brooke: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in that period of Government in the mid-1950s, it was perfectly possible that if the parliamentary secretary was not available, the PPS might be asked to take a decision himself?

Mr. Forman: That sounds admirable. I am sure that some wise decisions were taken in that way. I remember reading that in the Churchill Administration of the early 1950s, when Sir Winston was seriously ill, the government of the country was in the reliable hands of Mr. Christopher Soames.

Dr. Bray: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the role of junior Ministers. I was told by no less than "Otto"

Clarke—the formidable Sir Richard Clarke, the inventor of the modern system of public expenditure control—that junior Ministers functioned merely as parliamentary public relations officers for their Departments, and had no managerial policy role.

Mr. Forman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his copious memory.

I suggested that the first advantage lay in the improvement of lines of accountability. The second is the possibility of more coherent policy making: the existence of fewer, slightly larger Departments would necessitate better co-ordination across subject areas. Thirdly and importantly, Parliament would benefit from more wise contributions such as the one that we heard tonight from my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South, whose speech was eloquent and even elegiac.

Let me turn to my main point. I intervened on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in an attempt to establish what he saw as the constitutional role of the civil service—an issue that the Select Committee considered to be central. Either I did not put my question clearly or my right hon. Friend misunderstood: he did what I rather expected him to do, and rehearsed the list of admirable qualities possessed by the British civil service.

We are all agreed on those qualities. I believe that all tonight's speeches will be found to have referred to them, in all sincerity. In a more precise context, however, the role of the civil service raises issues relating to the nature of the British constitution—to the way in which the service, which is sometimes described as an important pillar of the overall architecture, fits into that architecture and to how well entrenched it is. We need to consider whether it is on shaky foundations, and on what its position depends.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy said that he had an open mind on the question of a proper statute to back up the civil service code that our report proposes. I am glad about that: perhaps by the end of the debate we shall have been able to close my right hon. Friend's mind in our favour—to persuade him of the wisdom of our report. He said that one of the conditions was that the legislation should be narrowly focused. In a letter to the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold)—a copy was probably sent to all members of the Committee—my right hon. Friend specifically stated that such legislation, if it went ahead, should not include attempts to extend its scope.

I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), bearing in mind his expressed wish to give a fair wind to the legislation. Perhaps he will give an assurance that he would not only give it a fair wind, but not seek to extend its scope.

Mr. McNamara: The Chancellor of the Duchy said that it would be possible at a later date to change the legislation by means of affirmative resolution in the House—by means of a statutory instrument. Given the necessary consensus, that could certainly be done. We welcome the principle, but we have yet to see the precise terms of the Bill. We shall want to hold discussions with the civil service unions before reaching a conclusion.

Mr. Forman: I am delighted to hear that. I think that it constitutes some extra progress.

My right hon. Friend said that the constitutional position of the civil service should not change. In a moment, I shall ask what that really means. He also said that there should be all-party support for the change. That is clearly vital in a constitution that involves no single codified document to govern the country's affairs: we must do everything by all-party consensus, if it is to last. As I have said, I am delighted by what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has said, and I hope that the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) will say something similarly supportive if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What, then, is the role and position of the civil service in the constitution? My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy drew my attention, in the second chapter of his reply to me—the first was not quite so forthcoming—to the first paragraph of the proposed new civil service code. It states that the duty of the civil service is

> "to assist the duly constituted Government, of whatever political complexion, in formulating policies of the Government, carrying out decisions of the Government and in administering public services for which the Government is responsible".

That is a fairly clear statement, but it has important implications.

The statement is, for example, very traditional. In the eyes of the current ministerial team—I do not know whether this would be true of the Opposition, if they ever returned to office—the civil service has no constitutional position independent of Ministers. That is important in the light of the debate about Clive Ponting, and numerous other events in recent years.

Mr. Radice: As the hon. Gentleman knows, one change is contained in the second paragraph of the document: all those duties and responsibilities are subject to the code.

Mr. Forman: That is a potential advantage. If we examine the constitutional lineage of the proposals, we see that the code clearly suggests that civil servants are servants of Ministers in the Government of the day while Ministers, in their turn, are servants of the Crown—hence the expression "Her Majesty's Government". My interpretation is that, strictly speaking, civil servants are not seen by Sir Robin Butler and his senior colleagues to owe any duty to the state over and above their duty to Ministers. That is an important constitutional point.

Mr. McNamara: In my speech, I said that the relationship between civil servants and Parliament—particularly the House of Commons—still needed exploration, as did the question of public interest and "whistle blowers". Both issues will be discussed in Lord Justice Scott's report, which I look forward to reading. My point was that they were thorny questions, but I do not think that that would prevent the Labour party from approving the legislation that we need for the code; the other parties can speak for themselves.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman was right to mention Scott in this context. Scott was always hanging over the Select Committee's deliberations. We wondered

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when he would report, and what the implications would be. Eventually we decided to press ahead, which was probably just as well: if we had waited for Scott, we might have waited for ever.

Ministers should, however, take full account of whatever Lord Justice Scott has to say, and also of what Lord Nolan says. Incidentally, I should be interested to know whether Lord Nolan has officially been invited to comment on the draft code and, if so, when his comments are expected and whether they will be published, along with others.

Because there is a chain of responsibility from civil servants to Ministers to Crown, it puts a particular responsibility on Ministers not to ask or require civil servants to do things that they properly should not do. It is all very well having a code of practice with statutory backing for civil servants—I welcome that—but we need to think carefully about something analogous to cover Ministers.

I am sorry to have to say that, but events over the past 30 to 40 years—I go back that far in my thinking—justify our considering it. It makes all the more important the idea of having a code with statutory backing. If a code is simply dependent on Ministers acting under existing powers, through an Order in Council or whatever, that would not have the same authority in these matters and would not enable arbitration to take place on the independent and authoritative basis that would apply if there were statutory backing.

In a system that does not have a codified constitution and where we are living under a regime of alleged parliamentary supremacy, it becomes all the more necessary to give a code statutory backing so that it is credible in the eyes of not only civil servants—all 477,000 of them, or whatever the figure is—but, just as important, in the eyes of the British public. There is no way at present to entrench such a code other than for Parliament, with all-party consensus, to give its support to legislation designed for that purpose.

If and when we have a more far-reaching form of constitutional change, the position might be different. In the interim, for as long as we have the status quo it is vital—and this is my main point—that there should be clear statutory backing for the code. It is the one area where there is an element of ambiguity in the Government's response to the Select Committee report. Other than that, we welcome the way in which Ministers have responded to what we said. Not only do I believe that there should be such an Act of Parliament but, as a little dicky bird tells me that there is not exactly a plethora of candidates for legislative slots in the coming Session—for various reasons which I shall not go into tonight—that strengthens the argument for an appropriate Bill finding an early and prominent place in the next Queen's Speech.

8.52 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I compliment the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on a thoughtful and thought-provoking speech. I share his dismay at finding the House so empty for a debate on an important part of the fabric of the Government and governance of this country. Indeed, I feel as though I have inadvertently wandered into a rather discreet and erudite debating club, comprised solely of the members of the Select Committee. I hope that they will excuse me for gate-crashing what is almost a private affair—

Mr. Radice: Please come in.

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the hon. Gentleman—it is one more to swell the numbers.

I offer my congratulations, which I am sure all hon. Members would wish to share, to the civil service staff for the way in which, over the past 15 years, they have stoically coped with the trauma and uncertainty of major changes in their working culture. I am sure that we all realise that that cannot have been easy and still is not easy. My party and I welcome the concept of introducing a civil service code; we should pursue the suggestion that that be backed by statutory obligations. Of course, it will depend on the detail. It is a vital part of establishing for civil service staff exactly where they stand. I take on board the point made about accountability and responsibility. I shall return to that later.

In his opening remarks, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster spoke of efficiency and cost cutting in the same breath as retaining the quality, integrity and honesty of the civil service. I shall deal with that in due course. I confess that before I was elected to Parliament I was a consulting civil engineer—so I have been on the other side of market testing, having been successful in securing work that came from that process. I worked closely with civil servants who were about to lose their functions, if not their jobs, so I knew what they were going through. Many of them were dedicated but despondent civil and public servants. Many were high-quality staff, but they had been trained and were operating in a different culture from the one in which we now try to operate our national institutions.

Privatisation can be a ruthless tool with which to gear up efficiency. The emphasis should be on the modern management techniques of establishing clear goals and objectives for staff. Staff are flexible and will change, so we should not always rely on the sledgehammer to crack the nut. There is a great danger of discarding dedicated and experienced staff when motivation is the prime ingredient that we need. I say that from my experience of being on the other side of the fence and seeing the effects that the changes had on the morale of staff. It was a great tragedy that that happened.

We have heard a great deal tonight, especially from Conservative Members, about cuts and efficiencies and how the Government's public sector policies have generated enormous savings. We need to look at that claim a little more closely. There is a feeling—indeed, there may be a case for saying—that the reality is that in some cases the Government are attempting to tackle waste where there is none. I cite as an example the staffing cuts at Customs and Excise, especially among VAT inspectors. I am sure that the House knows what good value VAT inspectors are. Each one costs about £25,000 a year in salary, pension and so on, but on average brings in about £360,000 in revenue. That is not a bad return by anyone's calculations.

The number of inspectors has been cut by about 600 when, instead, we should have targeted those resources on combating an increasing problem in our ports—the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco. That is especially true in my constituency as there are several cross-channel ports on the Hampshire coastline. Increasing rather than cutting the number of VAT inspectors could result in earning another £500 million a year in tax revenue.

The Government are not dealing adequately with an extraordinary amount of real waste that still riddles parts of Government bureaucracy. I want to deal with some of the key issues. I shall be as brief as possible because I realise that other hon. Members wish to speak.

I want to refer, first, to absenteeism in Government Departments and the lack of policy to deal with the problem. There seems to be an ever-increasing rise in the use of external consultants. There is almost a total lack of information on personnel matters from many Government Departments, which any efficient organisation must have. I should like to examine, and perhaps the Minister will reply to this later, some of the claims for efficiency improvement through job-shedding. The figures that I have seen seem to have gaps. I should like to test that if I can.

Another important issue is the damage to staff morale, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members. When I come to my final remarks, I should like to talk about the vacuum that has been created by the Government devolving their responsibilities to agencies, which the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington dealt with. It is an important issue for the civil service's future.

Many hon. Members may have noticed that, in recent months, I have asked Ministers a series of questions. Some of the results that have come through are interesting. In 1993, the Occupational Health Service estimated that the direct cost of sickness absence in the civil service, taking account of salaries, pensions and national insurance contributions, was about £459 million. No one is saying that those costs can be wiped out at the stroke of a pen. Of course there will always be absenteeism: that is a factor in any organisation, business or institution. But the figures show clearly that absenteeism rates are running far higher than the average, and that, therefore, a substantial cost saving could be made.

In 1993, the National Audit Office conducted a review of sickness absences in the Inland Revenue. Its review uncovered serious shortcomings in the way in which absenteeism was dealt with. The Comptroller and Auditor General wrote to me on the matter. As a result its work in 1993 with the Inland Revenue, the National Audit Office found that it was necessary to produce guidance on best practice for other departments and agencies to incorporate. The recommendations have stood from that time. I have to ask the question: what has happened since?

Despite the guidance, in 1994, there seem to be more departments and agencies with rising rates of sickness absence than departments and agencies with falling rates. Despite guidance, absenteeism is still rising. More than 60 per cent. of the departments and agencies that I questioned had an absenteeism rate above the figure that the Industrial Society identified as the national average.

I would not wish hon. Members to think that this is a witch-hunt of civil servants who are not performing properly. I am trying to emphasise the trauma, lack of morale and despondency that generate the illnesses that create extra absenteeism, which must be dealt with in this period of change. The position is simply not good enough. The Government must recognise that there is a real waste of resources on their doorstep. They must take steps to tackle it.

In answer to my written questions, a number of Government Departments claim to have introduced modern management techniques, such as return-to-work interviews and better defined policies on absence and absenteeism. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) has an MBA and will be familiar with those two techniques, which are important tools in management. Absenteeism is still rising and it is clearly linked to falling morale.

The Government seem to be conducting a love affair with external consultants—and not a cheap one either. They are spending more than £860 million a year on their services. But having paid the bill, all too often they seem to dump them, to use a current phrase. Time and again, they ignore the advice that external consultants provide, and, speaking as an ex-consultant, I know the frustrations that that can generate. In recent parliamentary replies, not a single Department has been able to identify any savings from expenditure on external consultants. Only two agencies managed to identify any savings at all, which totalled £382,000. That is a pathetic return on expenditure of £860 million. That has come about despite the recommendations of the Government's efficiency unit that Departments should be assessing moneys saved through consultancy work for the benefits expected, and to determine when those benefits are likely to appear. It has not happened.

The lack of information about personnel and staffing is a great cause of concern, especially in relation to absenteeism. What information is available from Government Departments? What responses have I had to questions? From the Foreign Office, I have had nothing; from the Department of Employment, nothing; from the Employment Service, nothing; from the Ministry of Defence nothing; and from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, nothing. Those five bodies employ about 145,000 people—more than a quarter of all civil service employees—yet not one of them was able to produce absenteeism figures in response to my questions.

Even more surprising, none of the MOD agencies, which were set up with the aim of improving efficiency, was able to provide any information on sickness and other forms of absenteeism, which are key factors in any study of manpower efficiency. Even when agencies were able to provide me with information on sickness absenteeism and its causes, they seemed to be incapable of getting it right. It appears that different hon. Members received different answers to the same questions.

When I challenged Departments about that, the excuses that I received included the use of incorrect figures for staff in post, the omission of categories of sickness absence, and the inclusion of

"certain absences not due to sickness".

The mystery deepens.

Similar unavailability and inaccuracies extended into the external consultancies. For example, the Department of Health produced figures for spending on external consultancies that directly contradicted those given for the efficiency report, while the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Employment, the Home Office and the Department of the Environment all declined to produce figures, despite the efficiency unit's recommendation that all Departments should be able to do so.

I deal now with the number of jobs that have been shed recently, especially in the past year. The Government claim to have made efficiency savings in the number of

[Mr. Chidgey]

civil servants employed. I believe that the figure currently cited for the number of jobs shed in the past year is about 40,000. I am sure that the Minister will confirm or correct that figure later, but I should like to know whether it includes the jobs that have been created or are being paid for through contracting out. Is 40,000 a net or gross figure? I think that we should benefit from clarification.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the developments in, the restructuring of and the changes to the culture of the civil service is staff morale. The constant and arbitrary use of the figure of 500,000 personnel as the target to which the civil service will be reduced, without it being related to specific savings or Departments, is having a devastating effect on morale. Indeed, the report recognises that morale is an important factor that will inevitably affect the quality of service. Of course, it also has a direct impact on absenteeism and the consequent lack of efficiency.

Morale has been badly damaged by the many changes that have so far occurred in the operation of the civil service and it will be damaged further by the Government's proposals for contracting out and for privatisation in the future. Of course, there is a need to increase efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and shed unnecessary jobs—we live in a changing world—but in making privatisation an inevitability the Government have created chronic job insecurity by subjecting staff to constant expenditure reviews and market testing. However, the Government still expect staff to be highly motivated and to perform to the highest standards. Frankly, that is unreasonable. In fact, there is a catastrophic decline in the morale of civil servants, which is manifesting itself in increasing absenteeism, and that must be dealt with. The increasing absenteeism rate is clearly a symptom of something more serious.

It is all very well for the Government to attempt to justify their continual cost reviews and market testing by claiming that

"the Civil Service . . . has to adapt if the country is to improve its competitiveness",

but, unless they deal with the trauma and despondency that they have created in the work force, their claims will continue to have a hollow ring.

I urge the Government to look again at the difficulties facing agencies in developing long-term plans and at the periodicity of the review—I know that it has been extended but has it been extended enough?—and, above all, to recognise the need to create a period of stability in the civil service. Agencies could then make proper and meaningful long-term plans and civil servants would be able to regain some sense of job security, job satisfaction, belonging and achievement. The result would be improved staff morale and real improvements in internal efficiency and service to the public.

Hon. Members have already mentioned accountability—another matter that needs clarification. The Select Committee found unconvincing the Government's attempts to draw a sharp distinction between accountability, which cannot be delegated by Ministers, and responsibility, which can. I have not found anything in the Government's response to the report or heard anything in the debate tonight that could remove that feeling of uncertainty. Indeed, I found nothing in fiascos such as the Parkhurst break-out, for which neither Derek Lewis nor the Home Secretary was prepared to take responsibility, that convinced me that they would not be repeated. It is a very important issue that affects public confidence. Such examples highlight problems that will persist unless some clarification is given and acted on.

Clearly, changes are still to be made in the civil service. Improvements must be made in the efficiency of the bureaucracy. There needs to be better management practice, better long-term planning and some understanding of staff needs and motivation. The reforms need to be addressed further. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said earlier—the hon. Member for Durham, North insisted that the right hon. Gentleman expanded on the point—that it would be ironic if the Government came to regard the most successful reforms for decades in the civil service as simply a transitional phase and a staging post to privatisation.

We need, as the Committee recommended, positive assertions of the value of those agencies remaining in the civil service. Modern management techniques and the stability for which I am calling are the means to address the problems facing civil servants. Frankly, reliance on ham-fisted, dogma-driven policies is not.

9.10 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I intend to make a brief speech. I join other hon. Members in expressing regret that there has not been greater attendance of this debate on an extremely important issue. After 15 years of a Conservative Government, government is still Britain's biggest business and the Government are Britain's biggest employer. It is therefore important not only to our economy but to our constitution that we get it right.

I join hon. Members in paying tribute to the hard work of many civil servants throughout the country in various Departments and agencies. It is a very difficult time for them, yet they work hard to serve the public and to ensure that services obtained from Government are provided in the best way that they know. It is important to pay such a tribute because civil servants have gone through a period of great change. For many of them, that change has caused much personal insecurity over their future and, often, caused alarm about the prospects for the areas in which they work. I recently spoke to people who were working in the Insolvency Service. They were desperately worried about the future, not only of the organisation for which they worked, but of the quality of the work if the Government's proposed changes were undertaken. They deserve all the tributes and all the respect that they can get from hon. Members.

I welcome most of the Government's response to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report. I was able to join that Committee towards the latter part of its preparation of that report. At times, it seemed as if the report would never end, but it did. Although it has obviously not set the House alight with enthusiasm, it was valuable and workmanlike. The great British institution of our civil service is important to the very foundation of our constitution.

I join in the praise that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), whose chairmanship of the Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee during the preparation of the report was an example to us all, displaying the skill needed to achieve a consensus report that all members of the Committee could support.

Today I shall talk primarily about one issue—the values of the civil service, especially impartiality. Many values are mentioned in the Select Committee's report and in the Government's response to it—such as the permanence of the civil service, its impartiality, its meritocratic nature, its honesty, accountability and integrity, its financial propriety, its commitment and its high standards. It is important that all those values be present in a civil service, and that we protect them, but the main and central concern of any Government must be to ensure that impartiality is protected.

At times during my speech I may appear to introduce a note of partisanship, but that is not my intention. If there is partisanship, it is partisanship not for party but for the constitutional role of a non-party political civil service.

There has been concern over many years—it was especially true in the 1980s and to some extent before that—about the way in which the impartiality of the senior civil service has been brought into question. The phrase "economical with the truth"—the words of a head of the home civil service, Sir Robin Butler—has gone into the dictionaries of quotations.

Mr. Radice: No, it was Sir Robert Armstrong who said that.

Mr. O'Brien: My apologies, it was Sir Robert Armstrong.

The quotation "economical with the truth" has done great damage to the reputation of the civil service, because people remember it.

There was also the television series in which Sir Humphrey Appleby was presented as the image of the civil servant. Okay, that was a joke, but at the same time it helped to give Sir Robin Butler, who took over from Sir Robert Armstrong, the responsibility of ensuring that he enhanced the public reputation of the civil service—and I am sure that that is what he set out to do.

Not only senior civil servants but the Government have the responsibility to protect that impartiality and integrity. The Government hold the integrity and impartiality of the civil service in trust for the nation, and I fear that there is concern that a Government who have been too long in office may begin to treat the senior civil service as a sort of particular party political fiefdom. That is the real danger to the impartiality of the civil service, because the civil service should not get too close to party politics. I fear that there is real concern that it may have done so in recent years.

Certain incidents immediately spring to mind. While the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was before the House last year, civil servants were asked to provide certain Government Back Benchers with amendments designed to wreck it. That Bill had wide support in this place—on both sides of the House, to some extent. Yet the Government ordered the amendments to be prepared. The civil servants cannot be blamed for preparing them; they were told to do so, and it was right for them to obey the order. No blame can attach to them.

However, I think that the Ministers who ordered the amendments to be prepared in such large numbers broke the spirit of trust in which they hold the responsibility of government. They should not put civil servants into the position where they are expected to wreck a private Member's Bill of that nature, especially when it is known that the Bill has great support in the House.

Sir Robin Butler suggested to me in evidence that he knew of previous Governments who had been involved in preparing amendments to private Members' Bills for Back Benchers. That has happened for many years under different Governments. It has not been wrong when the objective has been to assist Members in genuinely putting forward amendments to improve a Bill. However, questions must be asked when civil servants are obliged to provide amendments to wreck a Bill, and particularly a private Member's Bill.

Another issue that caused great concern to members of the Select Committee when Sir Robin Butler gave evidence was two investigations undertaken by Sir Robin. Again, I speak not from a partisan point of view, as hon. Members on both sides of that Committee raised their concerns. Sir Robin Butler, as the head of the home civil service and the Cabinet Secretary, was ordered to investigate the incidents by the Prime Minister.

The first incident involved the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's visit to a Paris hotel. I do not wish to go into the details of that visit, as I am not particularly interested in the background. I am interested in what happened between Sir Robin Butler and the Prime Minister. Questions were raised about who paid the hotel bill, and the issue became a matter of intense media and political in-fighting. The Government had recently lost a number of Ministers through resignations, and did not want to lose the recently appointed Chief Secretary.

Into that political and media dogfight, the Prime Minister appears to have plunged Sir Robin Butler by asking him to undertake an investigation. Sir Robin was, at best, ill qualified to undertake any such investigation, as he did not in any previous incarnation have experience of being a policeman, a private investigator or a barrister trained in interrogation. He had none of the qualifications for playing the detective, yet it appears that he was supposed to conduct an investigation and give a report to the Prime Minister on what happened.

Sir Robin asked questions, got answers and accepted them. He did not question all the main witnesses for the prosecution; for example, it appears that he did not question Mr. Al Fayed. Sir Robin then provided the Prime Minister with a report. The importance of the report was not just that it was used to give advice to a Minister or a Prime Minister, but that a report prepared by the head of the home civil service and the Cabinet Secretary was used to limit the political damage being sustained by the Government at a particular time. The suggestion being made was that anyone challenging the conclusion of the report was questioning the integrity of the head of the home civil service.

The Prime Minister had put the Cabinet Secretary—a supposedly non-political and impartial figure—in a position where he was being used to prevent questions from being asked by Opposition Members about party political concerns that were being aired legitimately in this place and in the media. That report effectively stopped the damage that was being sustained by the Government. Yet the investigation that was carried out was not thorough, and questions remained to be asked. But how could Opposition Members ask those questions without calling into question the integrity of the Cabinet Secretary, which we had no wish to do?

[Mr. O'Brien]

The Prime Minister should never have allowed the Cabinet Secretary to become involved in that sort of party political row. It was a dogfight. It was a row in which the Prime Minister got the Cabinet Secretary involved, and when Sir Robin Butler was asked to undertake that investigation, he should have said, "No, Prime Minister. It would not be appropriate in these circumstances to do that." It might have been appropriate for the Whips or the chairman of the Conservative party, or someone else, to undertake that inquiry.

Similar concerns have arisen about another investigation in which Sir Robin Butler was asked to become involved, when two hon. Members were the subject of accusations about money. Again, I do not propose to go into the details of the case. The question is: should a Cabinet Secretary ever get involved in investigating the circumstances of Back-Bench Members? No Prime Minister should involve a Cabinet Secretary in such matters as it may compromise the impartiality of the civil service. It may be that it does not; Sir Robin Butler may have acted entirely properly. But the perception of many people outside this place as well as, I regret to say, many inside it, is that that investigation should not have been carried out by that individual and that impartiality might have been compromised.

The Prime Minister is in a position of trust in this matter. Perhaps unintentionally, but perhaps also with some malice aforethought, he managed to use the Cabinet Secretary to limit the party political damage that his Government were sustaining.

A further issue has arisen in the past day or so. Serious questions are being asked about civil servants' involvement in a particular Cabinet Committee. That Committee's aim appears to be to provide the Government with a way to deal with policy problems and issues that will cause them difficulties in the run-up to the next election. It is about winning the next election, and the chairman of the Conservative party is on the Committee. He is a Minister without portfolio—he has no departmental responsibility—yet civil servants are being asked to advise and assist him in performing his task of winning the next election for the Conservative party.

Other questions have been raised over a period about the payment of a Chancellor of the Exchequer's legal expenses and other matters. All those issues have caused many people to question whether there has been what has been called a

"weakening of the moral compass"

in the Government and their relationship with the civil service. Lord Callaghan has expressed concern about politicisation. That concern is, to some extent, justified by what we have seen in recent years.

Let that be a warning to the Government and the civil service that the values of the civil service must be held in trust and protected, not only by civil servants but by the Government. The Olympian Sir Robin Butler should not allow himself to be dragged into the gutter of partisan politics, nor should any civil servant. Some members of the Select Committee fear that impartiality has been undermined, and that should never happen again.

9.29 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): We have had a good and thoughtful debate, in terms of quality more than quantity. We have heard interesting speeches from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who played a prominent role in drawing up our Select Committee report, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who made some perceptive remarks and put us on our mettle in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. We shall bear his remarks in mind.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) on mentioning some important matters. It would have been wrong if the debate had passed without mention of those issues, and I shall refer to them later. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on his excellent speech.

Perhaps I may say a word to the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, who is to reply to the debate. His appointment drew some rude remarks from some areas of the press about rats joining sinking ships, which was unkind as I do not believe that he is a rat at all, although he has perhaps changed his mind more frequently than most. I have known him well in several guises, and when we started out as rookie Labour Members of Parliament I certainly would not have supposed that he would end up as a Conservative Minister; nevertheless, I wish him well in his new post.

The report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has in some senses dominated the debate, and it is perhaps fair that it should. The background to our report was great managerial change, the next steps process—we have been told by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that that now greatly exceeds 60 per cent. and is likely to be 75 per cent. of the civil service in the future—and from 1992 onwards market testing, contracting out, privatisation, and so on. Many people have regarded those changes as increasing the danger of fragmenting the civil service. That argument was made to us by several of our witnesses, including former heads of the Civil Service.

There is no doubt that problems of morale result from all the great change that is going on. Although we were unable to carry out a survey ourselves—I shall discuss that in a moment—a number of other surveys of Government Departments have shown that there is a problem of morale in the civil service. Difficulties are also caused by bringing a great many private enterprise people into the public service. When the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, appeared before the Committee last February, he emphasised that some of the private sector managers being attracted into the public sector do not always understand that special care is needed when one is in charge of public money. That is obviously part of the background.

One political party has been in power for a long time, having been elected at four successive general elections. Although there is no evidence of general politicisation of the civil service, as Lord Callaghan told us, inevitably the younger civil servants pick up the scent, and I believe that that is true. As an Opposition Member of Parliament, I had indeed noted a difference between the attitude of the younger civil servants and that of those who have known another Administration. With the possibility of a change of Administration ahead, perhaps things will improve in that respect.

The Scott inquiry has revealed a great deal about the workings of Government, hovering like an angel above our deliberations—or perhaps like a black cloud over the Government and Whitehall, but it has certainly influenced both sides.

Two things emerged strongly early on in the Committee's hearings. The first was the importance of the civil service. I believe that all who have taken part in the debate have paid tribute to the civil service as a great national asset, and our report begins by saying just that. We go on to say:

> "Since the 1870s, it has been the permanent and impartial instrument of all administrations. Governments have always seen it as their duty to preserve its efficiency and honesty for their successors. The Civil Service's commitment to the highest standards of performance and conduct is a guarantee of constitutional and financial propriety and good government."

It is therefore very important in our constitution and in the running of our democracy.

There was general support from our witnesses for the values which underpin the civil service, including its non-partisan nature. No one argued, for example, that we should have a "spoils system". Everyone agreed that we should have an impartial civil service, with integrity, the ability to act objectively, selection for promotion on merit, and accountability. Above all, it was agreed that we should have an honest civil service. A number of our witnesses reminded us just how important it is to have an honest civil service. One only has to go to countries where civil servants are not honest to realise the economic cost of that and how it undermines the democratic process. We must therefore preserve those good qualities.

In the past, the shared values of the civil service were associated with shared ways of working, and shared systems of pay, grading and departmental organisation within the service. The intangible values to which I have been referring were linked to more tangible unifying factors. With reform and fragmentation, however, many of those tangible common elements have disappeared.

It seemed to us that in the new era of managerialism, the old methods of ensuring that the values of the civil service were maintained were no longer sufficient. That was the case for having a proper code, which has distinct advantages over the plethora of existing codes. It offers far greater clarity about civil service values, and about the duties and responsibilities of civil servants and Ministers in relation to civil servants. The code applies to all civil servants, not just to mandarins, and is both concise and comprehensive.

I stress the importance of the second paragraph of the code, which states that civil servants owe their loyalty to the Government

> "subject to the provisions of this Code".

That is the first time that any external authority has been brought into the relationship between Government and civil servants. I agree with the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that we need to enshrine that aspect. That is the case for having statutory backing in the way that he described.

The code contains a new duty on Ministers to familiarise themselves with its content and not to ask civil servants to act in breach of it. That is important. It asks Ministers to behave with propriety. It reminds civil servants of the importance of obeying the law, of dealing with the public honestly, fairly and without maladministration, and of ensuring the proper use of public money. It reminds them of their duty in relation to the separation of public and private interests and their confidentiality, and of their political impartiality. We say that it should be a condition of employment that all civil servants should read the code and conduct themselves accordingly.

We also say that if the code is to work effectively civil servants should have the assurance that if Ministers or heads of departments ask them to do things which are unconstitutional, illegal or improper, the civil servants should be able to appeal to an independent, outside body—hence the case for a civil service commission based on statute. The statute is important, and I endorse everything that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington said about that. A subsequent Government or Administration must not be able to remove it: it must be part of our permanent constitution.

I am delighted that the Government have broadly accepted the code. I am delighted that they have accepted that there should be an independent element in the appeal system and I am delighted that they are open minded about statutory backing. I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North and of the Labour party for the idea. I am also grateful for the support of the Liberal party, which is major progress.

All those factors add up to a big triumph for the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. Select Committees occasionally take a bit of stick—as happened for different reasons earlier this week. The study was long running. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien)—I, too, thought that we would never finish it. The inquiry was very comprehensive and I give thanks to my colleagues on both sides of the House for enabling the Committee to reach a consensus. It is interesting how the process of argument during the Committee hearings changed our minds and that of the Government. I do not pretend that the Government's change of heart was due only to the brilliance of our arguments or even to the power of Conservative Back Benchers who served on the Committee. The changing political situation—the fact that the Scott report was pending—also had an effect. The Government argued strongly against the Committee's proposals for 18 months, but then they changed their minds and I give them credit for making that excellent decision.

The time remaining is short and I should like to give the Minister the opportunity to answer some of the questions raised in the debate. I shall therefore not mention a number of issues to which I wanted to refer, such as the selection of top civil servants and the fact that the senior appointments committee has not been abolished as we had hoped in favour of the Civil Service Commission, although there has been some improvement.

We are sceptical about fast-streaming and I do not believe that the Government response has been adequate on that point. We proposed project teams and the idea of policy audits, but we have not had much joy in those areas either. With regard to managerial changes, we support the "next steps" process, but it should not serve as a stepping

[Mr. Giles Radice]

stone to privatisation. Market testing and contracting out must not be used in the doctrinaire way in which the Government have used them in the past.

My position is this: efficiency changes, yes; permanent revolution, no. I do not believe that reducing civil service numbers as an end in itself—irrespective of the effect on function and morale—is a sensible way to proceed. It is a pity that the Government did not accept our request to commission a survey of civil servants and we drew our own conclusions from that refusal: the Government were clearly worried about the final results.

We have not solved the problems in the area of accountability, and we were certainly not impressed by Sir Robin Butler's distinction between accountability and responsibility. The problem with his explanation is that no one would ever be responsible for their actions. We were also not impressed by those Ministers who appeared before the Committee and said that there were occasions when Ministers could lie to the House of Commons and get away with it.

Committee members appreciated the difficulties with agencies and the way in which responsibility could fall between Ministers and agencies, with the result that no one would take the rap in the event of a disaster. Several examples of that were cited in today's debate. One proposed solution is that chief executives could be responsible to select committees for framework documents. However, I do not pretend that we have answered all the questions and I think that we should examine the subject of accountability again.

In conclusion, I endorse what my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North said about impartiality. We all want an impartial civil service. I warn that we must be very careful in the run-up to elections because that is when Governments are most tempted to take short cuts, and they must not do that. I have written to Sir Robin Butler about the Cabinet Committee which is serviced by civil servants. I am sure that every hon. Member would seek the reassurance that civil servants will not be used for party political purposes.

I do not believe that the civil service has been politicised, although some worrying incidents have been reported by the First Division Association. I believe that civil servants would be able to serve another Administration and I hope that they will have the opportunity to do so quite soon. The existence of a code with an independent appeals system which is backed by statute will underpin this great British institution and help to maintain the impartiality, non-partisanship, honesty and efficiency of the British civil service.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. John Horam): We have had a very timely debate, because, as the House and all aficionados of the subject who are gathered here tonight know, we have had the first White Paper and the highly regarded report from the Select Committee. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) who, as one of my hon. Friends said, gave wise leadership to the sub-committee that prepared the report.

We have also had the Government's response in the shape of the second White Paper, which accepted the proposed code and went into discussions on the possibility of legislation. We hope to settle the code after further discussion before the summer recess and have it promulgated in the second half of the year. Included in the consultations will be further discussions with the Select Committee and the Opposition spokesman, obviously taking into account all views that have been expressed during the debate.

The debate was not only timely but has been conducted mainly in a relatively bipartisan spirit, for which, in the long run, both sides of the House will be grateful. Where it was not bipartisan or where political points were made, I accept that they were serious and not irrelevant.

We are all aware of the importance of the subject. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) regretted that so few were here to discuss it, and so do I. He characterised himself as a gatecrasher to a rather small coterie who were used to discussing the matter. That is a pity, and I am glad that he was not a party pooper and is still in his place, as he said that he might have to leave the Chamber.

The seriousness of the subject was reflected in all the contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made a number of points. I was disappointed by the relentlessly negative approach that he seemed to adopt, and I would contrast that markedly with the Select Committee report, which was positive about much of what the Government have done in the past 15 years. It is a pity that he did not take a more balanced view of the true picture.

I echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien). My right hon. Friend and I are certainly concerned that there should be good morale in the civil service. Any such group of Ministers is bound to have great regard for that fact, and any thought that there might be poor morale gives us genuine concern.

Mr. McNamara: Do something about it.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman should listen to what I have to say.

As the Select Committee said, morale is bound to suffer during periods of continuous change, but that is not a reason for not embarking on those changes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said, the public sector cannot be exempt from changes, nor can the private sector. We cannot ring fence the public sector and say that it must be exempt from changes that are happening elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North exaggerated the problem of morale. The Select Committee report used the expression "unease". The hon. Gentleman used very different words and mentioned a blanket of fear. Although we are concerned to maintain good morale and we were disappointed that it was bad, the hon. Gentleman has clearly exaggerated the feeling inside the civil service.

Mr. McNamara: I assure the Minister that if I felt morale in the civil service was high, I would say so and I would praise the Government of the day, but I know from my experience, and from those in the civil service whom I have met and know personally, that there is a blanket of fear, which results from their not knowing what will happen to them and from the ethos of the public service that they entered being undermined by the Government.

Mr. Horam: No, I must disagree totally with the hon. Gentleman. That really is not true. I am glad to see that he is winking. I think that he is making a point about which he is not wholly serious.

Mr. McNamara: It is true.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman also made an important point about pay delegation. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South, (Mr Brooke), who has great experience in personnel management. I think that he would agree that the delegation of pay in the civil service brings closer a matching between performance and reward, which will be wholly beneficial to an efficient civil service. That is what we intend. I think that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North will find that his fears about low pay and so on are in many respects groundless. In fact, pay may be higher for many civil servants as a result of that approach.

The hon. Gentleman referred to contracts. Contracts for senior civil servants do not change the existing terms of employment and they will not expose civil servants to political or other pressures. As now, decisions on performance will be a matter for departmental management, not Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South gave a marvellous evocation of the real qualities of the civil service—"elegaic" was one word that might be used. He relished it like an old wine that he loved well over many years; that was the feeling that came across. I liked his analogy of civil servants as regulars and Ministers as territorials. I was very glad of the speech that he made.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) made some interesting and serious points about information technology, the importance of which I fully accept. As he pointed out, I too have a particular interest in that area. I understand his point about EDS, but it is not my immediate responsibility; it is the immediate responsibility of the Treasury. None the less, I have taken careful note of what he said and I shall look into the matter. In a recent report the National Audit Office pointed out that over a 10-year period EDS would save the taxpayer £225 million. That is not an inconsiderable sum. I put that into the balance against the considerations that he legitimately raised.

The hon. Gentleman also made a fair point about the Sainsbury scheme. As he will know, my right hon. Friend and I are responsible not only for the public service, but for science policy, including technology and engineering. I am interested in that scheme and I shall certainly take account of what he said.

The hon. Gentleman regretted the disappearance of a serious, restrained, competent discussion—those were his words—on many issues. He cited disastrous economic policy. That was a rather unfortunate example. He may have seen the article by Wynne Godley in the *Financial Times* recently. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed the matter over many years and he knows well that Wynne Godley is certainly not a Conservative supporter. He is a distinguished economist and the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied of his mathematical and statistical qualities. After criticising Government economic policy since 1970, he has had to admit that during the past two years Government economic policy has been virtually perfect and that it would simply be vulgar to carry on criticising the Government. Government economic policy has been virtually perfect in the past two years. That is why now, for the first time in my life, we have an export-led economy with real prospects in the world. *[Interruption.]* That is absolutely true. I am glad to have support from quite independent economists on that subject. There is nothing like a good economist who is running his own business; I speak from considerable experience. I am glad that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South concluded that he was not a pessimist on these matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about secondments and two-way movement between the civil service and the private sector. I have some figures for him. Long-term secondments have increased threefold since 1979. In 1993, there were 400 outward secondments and 200 inward long-term secondments. In 1994, just over 1,700 civil servants undertook a secondment of some kind outside the civil service, so it is going pretty well.

My hon. Friend also advocated fewer Departments and fewer Ministers. There are, of course, no fewer than 89 Ministers at the moment, although people tend to say that there are far more than there were 15 years ago. There are not, of course. There were 86 Ministers in 1979, and there are 89 now. My hon. Friend may have been thinking of the time in Disraeli's period when there were only 24 Ministers—13 in the Cabinet and 11 outside. I have to tell him that the 11 outside included a Minister for the Horse, who was the Earl of Bradford. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend really wants to go back to that particular period, but I have some sympathy with him for his general position.

Mr. David Hunt: Only for three weeks.

Mr. Horam: Indeed. A Ministry with two Ministers is infinitely more efficient and productive than a Ministry with three, four or five Ministers. *[Interruption.]* I do not know how many the Department of Health has.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington also raised the constitutional role of the civil service. He pointed to the code and seemed to be saying that my right hon. Friend had not made a clear distinction between the various parts of the code, and was talking about the qualities of the civil service rather than the constitutional position. The fact is that the code, which is excellent, spells out the clear relationship between Ministers, the Crown and the civil service. It also says, as has been pointed out, that the civil service acts subject to the provisions of the code. That meets squarely the point that he was making.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about Lord Nolan, and I can confirm that my right hon. Friend has written to Lord Nolan, sending him a copy of the proposed code, and the Government will, of course, take account of any point that the Nolan committee may make about that.

[Mr. Horam]

I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Eastleigh on absenteeism. The Occupational Health Service, which is one of our agencies, is taking a look at that. There are differences between the Departments that we cannot wholly explain at the moment. None the less, the point that he made is relevant. I noted his other points, although absences are not necessarily always related to sickness.

The hon. Member for Warwickshire, North made a serious and good speech about the potential politicisation of the civil service. I recognise the threat that he outlined, but the Select Committee itself—the hon. Member for Durham, North reaffirmed this—did not think that the civil service had been politicised. I do not think that anyone seriously thinks that it has been, and that is precisely what the code, which now has all-party support, has been drawn up to deal with.

I thank the hon. Member for Durham, North for his kind words. Neither of us expected to find ourselves in this situation after 26 years in politics. We are where we are, however, and I pay tribute to the code that he produced. As he says, it is concise and comprehensive and applies, importantly, to all the civil service.

The work of the Select Committee shows the improved relationship that has occurred between Parliament and Government since Select Committees were established some 20 years ago. The iterative process that has occurred over the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report has been profoundly helpful both to Parliament and Government as a whole.

The Government's policy, as we know, is continuity in values and change in performance. We have, I think, shown that we are concerned—that the whole House is concerned—about the continuing good value of the civil service. We have, however, achieved a remarkable change in the performance of the civil service, and the public service as a whole, in the past 20 years.

I pay tribute to the civil servants who have taken part in that change, as well as the Ministers who have pushed it along. Ultimately it was the civil servants who bore the heat and the burden, and I feel that the main tribute should be paid to them for all the effort that they put into making the reforms work. I believe that we now have the best public administration in the world, and—these are not my words, but those of Simon Jenkins in *The Times* the other day—the most cost-effective and efficient.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Neuro-surgery Services (Thames Region)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Tonight's debate takes place against a background of chaos—the chaos of cuts, closures and confusion in the national health service in London and the Thames region—and in the wake of the tragic death of a patient for whom a bed could not be found in greater London.

On the radio today, the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) described the consultation about cuts and closures in his area as a sham. A fortnight ago, the Minister responsible for the citizens charter—who has just left the Chamber—said he was astonished that there was nowhere in London where one of his constituents could be treated. The Secretary of State for Health, however, seems to suggest that there is no problem in London and the south-east.

Let me remind hon. Members of the tragic events that led to my request for this debate. On Monday 6 March, at about 10.55 pm, Malcolm Murray was involved in a road accident. An ambulance was called at 10.57 pm, and arrived about 10 minutes later to take the patient to Queen Mary's hospital in Sidcup, arriving at about midnight. While doctors, nurses and ancillary staff fought to stabilise the patient and save his life, the senior house officer—the junior doctor—spent hours on the telephone trying to find a specialist neuro-surgery bed.

The nearest neuro-surgery unit—at Brook general hospital, with which the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is familiar—was closed that evening: it was not accepting referrals, because of an outbreak of gastric flu. I understand that the junior doctor contacted some nine units in the Thames region, and eventually a place was found; as we now know, the nearest that could be found was in Leeds. I am aware that an inquiry is currently taking place.

At about 5 am, an RAF Sea King helicopter travelled from Wattisham to Sidcup to airlift the patient to Leeds, where he arrived at about 8 am. He went into theatre at about 9 am, and was there for several hours. After surgery, his condition was critical and, tragically, he subsequently died.

In advance of the inquiry, I wish to pay tribute to the staff at Queen Mary's, Sidcup, who did all in their power to save the patient's life. I also pay tribute to the RAF for its rapid response, and to staff at Leeds general infirmary, who also did all in their power to save the patient.

During that week, in a damage limitation exercise, the Prime Minister said:

> "Mr. Murray required a highly specialised form of treatment with which Leeds was particularly able to help".—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 454.]

Leeds infirmary is indeed a specialist unit, which had the skill and expertise to treat the patient, but that skill and expertise is not unique to Leeds; it was available in the nine or 10 specialist neuro-surgery units in Greater London and the south-east, where no bed could be found for a patient from south-east London.

In a letter to me, the Under-Secretary of State for Health wrote that it was often

> "very difficult to strike a balance between wasteful over-provision of services and effective use of the resources available."

In a parliamentary question, I asked what was the capacity and occupancy of those units on the night concerned; that information, surely, would show whether there was wasteful over-provision and over-capacity. The Minister said:

> "Information on units' capacity and occupancy rates on the night of 6 March is not available centrally."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. *409.*]

If that information is not available to the Minister, I do not see how he could make the statement that he did in his letter to me.

The Minister also suggested in his letter that one in six existing beds is inappropriately used, and therefore not always available for the life-threatening emergencies for which they were primarily intended. Is he suggesting that, perhaps, some consultant surgeons in London were refusing to take admissions, waiting for a more interesting case? Again, I should like to know the substance of what he said.

What is beyond dispute is that the south-east quadrant has been poorly served in neuro-sciences because of uncertainty about the future. For example, the Brook hospital has had great difficulty in recruiting a neuro-anaesthetist.

I accept the argument that any specialist centre needs a high volume to gain expertise, not just for the surgeons but for the whole team. One health service planner in my region has suggested that a critical mass would be a unit with five or six intensive care beds. I understand that the Maudsley has two, and the Brook three. Both size and uncertainty may have contributed to recruitment problems.

The Government's favoured option appears to be to move the Brook further into central London and so further away from south-east London and Kent, the area that it is supposed to serve. Despite the Secretary of State's recent statement to the House—in which she said:

> "A generation ago, people travelled from the home counties to the London hospitals"—

now:

> "Patients and GPs rightly say that they would rather have treatment close to home than travel to London.—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 33.]

I do not dispute the need for centres of excellence, but why not one in south-east London? If the Brook is to close, why could not neurology and neuro-surgery facilities be located at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Woolwich or Queen Mary's hospital in Sidcup? They are extremely convenient for the M2, the M20 and the M25. Indeed, the Queen Elizabeth has its own helipad.

In a recent debate, the Secretary of State asked how we could deal with the issue of hon. Members having great affection for their local hospitals, which cannot provide the critical mass for sub-specialties and the costly equipment needed for state-of-the-art services. In Greenwich, the Queen Elizabeth or Queen Mary's could house the Brook units. North of the river, Oldchurch, with its accident and emergency and maternity and gynaecology intact, could also continue to provide neuro-surgery services. We do not need to move the units into central London to provide critical mass.

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

I have mentioned Oldchurch, which is across the river from my area. I understand that there has been consultation, but no commitment to the number of neuro beds or facilities. My information might be wrong and my fears unfounded, but I can tell the Minister that they are shared by people in that locality. Perhaps tonight he could go some way towards giving them some assurances.

My experience and that of my colleagues representing south-east London appears to be replicated by that of hon. Members representing north-east London. The hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) has been a consistent campaigner for Oldchurch hospital. In the past, he has been supported in his campaigns by other Conservative Members, including the hon. Members for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). Indeed, in a debate some years ago, the hon. Member for Hornchurch, in opposing the closure of Oldchurch, called on the Secretary of State to

"desist from this unnecessary, irrelevant and expensive exercise".—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1094.]

The reorganisation plans were also vigorously opposed by my former colleagues, Jo Richardson and Bryan Gould. Recently, my hon. Friends the Members for Dagenham (Ms Church) and for Barking (Ms Hodge) have told the House of their concerns about more recent plans for the Oldchurch hospital. As the hon. Member for Romford previously told the House about closure plans:

"the community health council, the London boroughs of Havering and of Barking and Dagenham, trades unions, doctors, patients, other organisations and members of the public have been loud in their disapproval."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1091.]

While the proposals for total closure may have been shelved, the rundown of the hospital has continued, despite vociferous local opposition. The Government appear to have ignored the views and wishes of the community in one of the largest health districts in London by agreeing to transfer accident and emergency services miles away to Harold Wood, with an insufficient number of additional beds to satisfy the in-patient demand that will be generated.

A series of inevitable consequences has been set in train, and the consultation exercise becomes a sham. Many of the regions where accident and emergency services are threatened score high on any social deprivation index. The Black report in 1980 showed conclusively that accidents are class-related and that,

"when people work in hazardous conditions, or children in unsafe housing experience higher accident rates, it is the speed and the quality of response of the health service that can make all the difference to whether injury is fatal, or whether it results in permanent or temporary disability."

Early response was crucial in the situation at Orpington hospital and at Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup.

Oldchurch hospital has a high neuro-surgical case load compared with other units in the Thames region. It could be expanded on site. The beds currently closed could be reopened with increased contract income. In those circumstances, the move of the unit either to Royal London hospital or Harold Wood hospital makes no sense, but that is the likely outcome.

Neuro-surgery services serving east London, north and south of the Thames, could end up moving further into central London. In the south-west of London, what is the future for the world-renowned centre of excellence at Atkinson Morley hospital, over which a threat has been hanging for many years?

Over a long period, together with Greenwich council and the community health council, I have expressed the view that the regional cardio-thoracic and neuro-science departments should continue to be located at Brook hospital. When it was clear that the Ministry of Defence intended to vacate the more modern facilities at Queen Elizabeth military hospital, local Members of Parliament of both parties supported a planned transfer of services from the Brook to Queen Elizabeth hospital.

The regional speciality services based at the Brook have established an enviable reputation, pioneered much innovative work, and been responsible for many medical advances. That has been achieved despite the fact that staff have been working in a less than adequate physical environment, in a hospital that has had the threat of closure hanging over it for some 15 to 20 years, and where staff have been demoralised by the progressive rundown of their departments. But as the community health council has said in its response to the consultation document:

"The letters we receive from neuro and cardiac patients from a wide area and the enthusiastic fund-raising and support work carried out locally both testify to the excellent service carried out by these departments".

I share the community health council's concern that the option of moving the regional specialties to the Queen Elizabeth was not even considered in the post-Tomlinson speciality review. The reason given was that the Queen Elizabeth was not a national health service hospital. It was not at the time, but discussions were well under way between the Department of Health and the MOD, and between the MOD and the local health authority. It will be an NHS hospital in the near future. That proposal should be considered seriously now.

The most recent consultation document says that other health authorities are already planning to send patients to the proposed central London centres, but, as the Queen Elizabeth option was not included as a possibility, other commissioners have not been in a position to consider all the options.

The Minister must be aware of the growing fears and concerns, and of the dissatisfaction expressed by consultants about the plans for the Maudsley-King's unit, both in the transitional period and in the long term. Services from the Brook will be shoehorned into King's, which is already unable to cope with demand, as evidenced by the deferral of the proposed closure of Dulwich hospital. Services are to be shoehorned into that unit, together with 44 Maudsley neurology beds, without easy access to medicine, surgery or intensive care. Doubts still remain about the ability to provide the capital investment needed for a long-term solution.

In response to the consultation document, the community health council states:

"In addition, it is claimed in justification for the proposed move of Neurosciences to Kings, that proximity to the psychiatric services at the Maudsley will be advantageous. The CHC has not heard any arguments supporting this theory. While cross referrals may take place, they are unlikely to be greater between Neurosciences and Psychiatry than between many other speciality areas.

It is also difficult to understand why the Tomlinson and post-Tomlinson reviews concluded by recommending that specialist services be moved into London (though the reviews differed in the preferred destination) when these recommendations go against the two main aims of the exercise: to move services out of London and to ensure that services followed patients.

Greenwich residents have a higher level of cardiac problems than most of their neighbours and accidents necessitating neuro-surgery occur more in this area near to major road systems. The proposal however is to move services into London and away from patients."

There appears to be complete confusion and little agreement about future plans. Why are some cardiac beds to be transferred to Guy's/St. Thomas' and some to King's? The Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham consultation document shed no light on this. Neurosciences will be split, as the King's development will not be ready to receive them for at least two years after the Brook closes. Patients will need to go to the Maudsley for neurology and to King's for surgery. I wonder whether that will that count as two patient episodes. In any event, it is neither cost-effective nor in the interests of patients or staff.

There are already problems for my constituents, with paediatric neurology services being split between Guy's/St. Thomas' and King's—so much so that paediatric consultants in Greenwich are recommending that future contracts for acute neurology and neurosurgery be placed at Great Ormond Street, where services can be provided under one roof.

I ask the Minister, even at this late stage, to recalculate the cost of the proposed move of the regional specialty services and contrast it with the cost of transferring those services from the Brook to the new Queen Elizabeth NHS hospital. While doing so, will he perhaps tell us why, in the transfer, it is proposed that 10 beds will disappear?

10.15 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) for the opportunity to inform the House about the important matter that he has chosen for this Adjournment debate. I begin by offering the family of Mr. Malcolm Murray my sincere condolences following his recent tragic death.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) in his place. Indeed, he ministered to the hon. Member for Woolwich, who, although he did not refer to the need for ear, nose and throat facilities in his constituency, seemed to require them this evening. I congratulate him on getting through his speech despite his evident difficulties.

I deal first with the Murray case. It leads to a number of concerns, and I should like to take this opportunity to deal with them. The transfer of Mr. Murray from Queen Mary's hospital in Sidcup to Leeds during his NHS treatment for serious head injuries on 7 March has rightly led not only—partially—to this Adjournment debate but to other expressions of serious concern about the availability of appropriate facilities for his treatment and care.

The House will by now be well aware that, on 8 March, South Thames regional health authority initiated an investigation into the case and the key issues arising from it. South Thames RHA has already given a commitment to publish its report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health as quickly as possible. I understand that the report will not be long delayed.

I am sure that the House and the hon. Member for Woolwich will appreciate that I cannot pre-empt the findings of the panel that has been appointed to report, but I should like to take this opportunity to make three points about the case and the circumstances that pertained on the night of 6/7 March.

The patient, Mr. Murray, required neurosurgery and intensive facilities. The intensive care facilities at or adjacent to the 10 hospitals in the Thames regions with neurosurgery facilities were certainly all very busy on the night in question. That does not, however, rule out the possibility that, with better bed management, a neurosurgical bed with intensive care support might have been made available.

On the general question of overall provision of neurosurgery facilities, which is of course important and sets the context of the debate, a review of regional records shows that, in 1994, all South Thames residents requiring neurosurgery were treated in hospitals in the Thames regions or in Southampton, which is more convenient for some residents in the south-west part of the South Thames region. More specifically, I understand that the consultant who received Mr. Murray in Leeds praised the way in which he had been treated before and during his journey. It is important to set that matter on the record.

As I have said, however, more detailed public consideration of this case will have to await the publication of the panel's report, but Ministers are being kept abreast of the key findings and issues raised, which will inform other decisions meanwhile. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that, on that particular matter, I am not in a position to go further this evening.

I turn now to the broader question raised by the hon. Gentleman about reviews of neuroscience. The House will be aware of the independent review of neuroscience in London, which was published in June 1993, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The work of that review group has been carried forward in South Thames since October 1994 by another neuroscience review group, with the full involvement of clinicians. The analysis undertaken by that review group was reported to chief executives of health authorities in South Thames on Wednesday 22 March.

That analysis is, of course, connected with the proposals for the future of acute services in north and south-east London, which are now with Ministers for a decision. I am confident that our forthcoming decision on acute services in north and south-east London will provide the context for the rapid resolution of the issue of how best to provide the balance of tertiary neuroscience services required in the Thames regions.

I take this opportunity totally to refute the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that consultation is a sham. It is far from that. It is a proper consultation process in the fullest sense. The findings of the consultation process will be seriously regarded by Ministers, and properly considered, and decisions will be brought forward in due course in a proper way.

I am, of course, very much aware of the specific concerns about the robustness of neuro-anaesthetic cover at the Brook hospital, pending the taking of those decisions. Indeed, not too long ago, I had the benefit of a meeting with the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham in my office to discuss this very matter, and I listened to the points that they made

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

extremely carefully. I made further inquiries, and I am pleased to be able to say to both of them tonight that those inquiries proved fruitful.

As the result of all that, steps have now been taken to strengthen cover, with two appropriately trained senior registrars who are now available for the Brook. That means that the Brook neuro-surgery unit will be able to remain operational until new, improved facilities in the long-term are available elsewhere.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that my colleagues and I listened to the important points that he made. I hope that he will welcome my response as suitable, and that it allays a number of his concerns.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I say how much agreement there is on this side of the House with what the hon. Member for Woolwich said about the Brook, and how great a welcome there will be in and around the Brook for the announcement that my hon. Friend the Minister has made. The work load carried by the consultant anaesthetist has been extremely heavy, and everyone owes her a debt of gratitude for what she has managed to achieve.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Woolwich for allowing that intervention—

Mr. Austin-Walker *rose—*

Mr. Malone:—and of course I shall be delighted to allow him a similar intervention.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I simply want to associate myself with what the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said, and to express my gratitude for the response.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; the matter was indeed important. I must tell him that there are occasions on which Ministers are actually keen to reach the right conclusion, and I hope that this has been one of them.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that Mr. Murray required intensive care in addition to neuro-surgical services. The availability of intensive care unit services was just as much an issue in that case was the availability of neuro-surgery beds.

In 1992, the Department commissioned a report from Professor Klim MacPherson of the health promotion sciences unit at the London school of hygiene and tropical medicine on the provision of intensive care services in England. That was published on 7 February.

On 21 March, the Secretary of State met the presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Anaesthetists, the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Nursing, as well as representatives of the Intensive Care Society and the British Association of Critical Care Nurses to discuss the findings of Professor MacPherson's report and the way forward. My right hon. Friend brought that meeting forward, because she too was concerned about the implications of the events that had unfolded.

As a result, it has been decided to establish a professional working group to seek professional consensus on the criteria for admission to and discharge from intensive care. In addition, the Department is funding the intensive care national audit and research centre, to set up an audit facility and to maintain a United Kingdom database of patients in intensive care. The outcome of all that work will provide better information about the way in which intensive care units should be used to help inform practice in that important area.

The hon. Member for Woolwich asked what had been discovered about the occupancy of intensive care beds, especially those connected with neuro-surgery units, on the night in question. He will understand that I cannot answer that question specifically tonight, but I can assure him that such matters will be part of the subject of the review that is under way. When the report is published, in what I hope will be a short time, the matter will be dealt with, and the hon. Gentleman will have the answer that he seeks.

The tragic events of 6 and 7 March serve to underline the urgency and importance of the work already in hand to define and facilitate the best future pattern of neuro-science and intensive care facilities in the Thames regions. I believe that everybody acknowledges that, although people may have their individual views about how that destination should eventually be reached. It is true that existing patterns of services have served the community well, but both disciplines are at a watershed in their development.

In the context of what I have said this evening, I hope that the hon. Member for Woolwich will concede that the professional views widely expressed across London agree that a reconfiguration of specialties is extremely important if the excellence of medical care that London deserves, which should be the norm in this city, is to be preserved.

That aim was what informed the debate that resulted in the Tomlinson report and the inquiry undertaken by the specialty neuro-surgical review in 1993. I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman the importance of taking those matters forward, and the fact that the consultation process that is under way, which I shall consider soon, is an important step in the process.

I hope that what I have said tonight will reassure the hon. Gentleman that, in the round, we are looking at such matters in the most serious way. As for the particular points that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham raised, of course we consider the specifics when they are raised before us. I hope that he thinks that my response this evening has been constructive.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 March 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Rail Services (Scotland)

9.34 am

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for this opportunity to raise a brief point of order, particularly as I raised a similar one only last week, and you were also indulgent on that occasion.

The written answers that I received from the Scottish Office and the Department of Transport last night further reveal that the possible outcomes of promised consultation on the future of threatened Scottish rail services—for which hon. Members on both sides of the House have been pressing—have not been costed by Ministers and Departments. Closing the services, mothballing the services or restarting them if the consultation process is successful all have cost implications.

In light of that, have you, Madam Speaker, been given any sign as to whether Ministers want to make a statement later today in the House? Obviously, those written answers completely give the lie to the assurances that we were given about consultation.

Madam Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman has frequently raised the issue in the House. I have not been informed by the Government that they are seeking to make a statement, but they have until 10 o'clock to inform me of their intentions.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

MEAT (HYGIENE AND INSPECTION)

That the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 539) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 540) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES: LICENSING

9.36 am

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 16, leave out '18' and insert '17'.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 18, at end insert—

"or

(c) facilities provided as part of the training of full-time or part-time military personnel."

Mr. Leigh: It will be apparent from what I said on Second Reading that, while I fully appreciate the necessity for some action to be taken because of the terrible tragedy at Lyme bay, I am worried about the Bill's regulatory nature. That worry lies behind my amendments, which should shed some interesting light on the Bill. My amendments simply suggest that the Bill should not cover facilities provided as part of the training of full-time or part-time military personnel.

I wish to insert the age of 17 rather than 18, because as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be aware, it is perfectly possible to join the Territorial Army or the Army and to die for one's country at the age of 17. I shall make some general comments to introduce my speech, then make some legal points, as I think that there is some slight ambiguity about the scope of the Bill. Lastly, I shall tell the House the nature of the detailed regulations covering Army training.

It would be absurd and ludicrous if the Health and Safety Executive were in any way involved in the training of soldiers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Education, will be able to tell me that he does not intend the measure to cover soldiers. I shall deal with that in a moment and demonstrate that my research shows that there may be doubt about that.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): My hon. Friend may be coming to this point later, in which case I apologise. He is probably aware that in many parts of the country, including my constituency, there is an active and popular air training corps. I understand that the future of the air cadets has recently been in question. Would the activities of such an organisation come within the scope of amendment No. 3?

Mr. Leigh: I hope that the words

"full-time or part-time military personnel"

include air cadets. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening, because he makes the point for me.

The purpose of this little debate is to show that, when a tragedy occurs, enormous pressure is put on the Government to act. That inevitably leads to the publication of a Bill, then to a measure such as the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill. Often when a Bill is rushed through, it

[Mr. Leigh]

includes many classes of persons because insufficient consideration was given to its drafting. That is my worry about any regulatory Bill.

I do not deny the appalling nature of the Lyme bay tragedy. Parents rightly want something done. Awful mistakes were made, and a price was paid. I do not know who drafted the Bill. As it is a private Member's Bill, I presume that it was drafted by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). I do not know whether or not he was assisted by the Government. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say. Does the hon. Gentleman have the legal expertise to ensure that the Bill is so tightly drafted that it will not have unforeseen consequences?

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), in an excellent contribution, said that the number of regulators already in place in an outdoor activity centre in his constituency totalled seven or eight. The hon. Member for Devonport intervened to suggest that they would be replaced by one regulator—the Health and Safety Commission. We know that that does not happen in the real world. Regulation will be piled on regulation, with the result that some activity centres, which provide an inexpensive service and are highly regarded, may be forced out of business.

My hon. Friend the Minister may say that he does not want military training included in the Bill's ambit and that there can be consultation, but that is not good enough. Why pass legislation in a rush and consult on it later? Why not include appropriate provisions now, by stipulating in clause 1(3)

"facilities provided as part of the training of full-time or part-time military personnel"?

The House will pay tribute to the close interest paid in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), who has shown himself to be an excellent parliamentarian. After we discussed my amendments together, I went to the Library, telephoned the Ministry of Defence and, with the Library's assistance, spoke to the Army.

Nobody could tell me whether the Bill embraces the Army, yet here we are on the last day for consideration of the Bill, without knowing whether the Bill encompasses our huge military training establishment, which costs hundreds of millions of pounds and has hundreds of years of experience. I will describe later—but briefly, of course—how carefully drafted are Army regulations.

Many Army cadets are under 18. Army regulations are submitted to the House every five years. Even where they cover safety aspects, doubt remains. A civilian who goes on a one-day Army course would not be employed by the Army or even be an Army cadet. Will he be covered by the Bill?

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): One of the most miserable weekends that I ever spent was on the Brecon Beacons in a massive blizzard in the dead of winter, under the auspices of the Combined Cadet Force. I was sent by my school. It is interesting to hear my hon. Friend talk about lack of consultation with the Army, but schools will have a major input. Is it not curious that this matter has been a blank area for so long?

Mr. Leigh: I will leave that point for the hon. Member for Devonport. He will probably reassure my hon. Friend that schools are in loco parentis and covered by existing Education Acts, and therefore not covered by the Bill. It worries me that that is not on the face of the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Several years ago, I went to Crickhowell, and the scars remain with me. It was an extremely long weekend, during which we took part in an assault course. The Army put us through that misery because it wanted to attract us to the Army's way of life. One cannot imagine anything less attractive than that weekend at Crickhowell. However, youngsters are encouraged to go on such assault courses to make men of them. Hon. Members can see what it has done for me. It should be made clear whether or not Army assault courses would be covered by the Bill.

9.45 am

Mr. Leigh: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I think that experience did him the world of good. He is a fine, upstanding fellow. Can he imagine some little chap from the Health and Safety Executive standing by while my hon. Friend was forced over a jump saying how horrible the sergeant-major was? I am sure no one wants an HSE inspector wandering around Army training courses. That might be dangerous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who has a long-standing interest in military matters, ensured Crown immunity from certain Acts of Parliament. Earlier legislation—such as the Atomic Weapons Establishment Act 1991 and the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974—took great care to ensure that the Crown was excluded. Schedule 7(1) to the 1991 Act states:

"The power of the Secretary of State under section 48(4) of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 (Crown exemptions) shall include power to provide for exemptions, in relation to designated premises or activities carried on by a contractor at such premises, from all or any of the relevant statutory provisions within the meaning of Part I of that Act."

I looked for such a schedule to the Bill—I hope that the House is convinced by my arguments that the Army should not be covered by it—but could not find one. Perhaps that is because the Bill was rushed through, and the Government have not been able to vote sufficient resources to it.

Section 48(1) of the 1974 Act specifically applies to the Crown:

"Subject to the provisions of this section, the provisions of this Part, except sections 21 to 25 and 33 to 42, and of regulations made under this Part shall bind the Crown."

That makes it clear that parts of that Act will bind the Crown, but subsection 2 states:

"Although they do not bind the Crown, sections 33 to 42 shall apply to persons in the public service of the Crown as they apply to other persons."

Given the detailed nature of that previous Act, is the Minister not convinced that there is a lacuna in this Bill? There is at least some ambiguity about whether people undertaking courses who are not employed by the Crown are covered by the Bill.

Section 48(3) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act says:

> "For the purposes of this Part and regulations made thereunder persons in the service of the Crown shall be treated as employees of the Crown".

That is specific and clear.

The parliamentary draftsmen who drew up previous legislation were clearly aware of the problem to which I have alluded, so I hope that the Minister will deal with that point. This is not a dry legal argument among lawyers which does not matter very much but which may be interesting in terms of jurisprudence: it is actually quite important.

I am sorry that she is not here today, but my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who so often on Friday mornings makes excellent speeches, served on the Standing Committee. I was not fortunate enough to serve on it, but I have researched its proceedings. She said in Committee:

> "I shudder when I think of the total confidence I had when I allowed my then 15-year-old son to take part in a Royal Navy exercise. He was taken on a frigate to the North sea in wild, tossing waters, lifted by a helicopter, swung on the end of a rope and dumped heartily into the sea. I am glad to say that my son was well equipped, wearing a life jacket and a dry suit—he was totally safe. When I think back, I am horrified because it never occurred to me to quiz the Royal Navy about its safety procedures and first aid procedures to be implemented should things go wrong.
>
> I was lucky. My son was in expert hands and came home".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 1 March 1995; c. 52.]

I am sure that the House is grateful to the Royal Navy for looking after my hon. Friend's son so well. Here we have an example of a mother who placed her son in the hands of the armed services. Nothing could be more dangerous than going up in a helicopter, being dumped into the sea—and all in the hands of total strangers.

What goes on in most activity centres is on a wholly different scale. I have taken the trouble to get in touch with the British Activity Holiday Association, the trade association involved. It is small, and lacks the resources to fight the Government, the hon. Member for Devonport or this House. The organisation told me that many people do not realise that many of its activities involve simply going around a swimming pool in canoes, and other indoor pursuits. Much of what goes on is not very dangerous. That is quite different from being taken up in a helicopter and dumped in the sea.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I would not want this moment to pass with the House thinking that the British Activity Holiday Association was opposed to my Bill. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Education Select Committee's report on activity centres, which I am sure he has read assiduously. Mr. Hudson, the chairman of the organisation, told the Committee:

> "We feel that there has got to be a structure to which activity centres have got to work, and let me say, from the start, that we welcome Mr. Jamieson's Bill and we support it."

Mr. Leigh: I have not denied that, but the organisation would like regulations to be applied with as light a touch as possible. I, and presumably other hon. Members, have received a letter from Mr. Hudson in which he says:

> "We feel that many people envisaging our industry from outside think in terms of activities on the sea or in wild country. Many centres do work in this sort of open environment, along with some private centres, but most BAHA centres operate in a closed environment providing introductions to activities in highly controlled conditions, eg within centre grounds or on a school campus."

Of course the organisation has to welcome the Bill—in a sense it has no choice—but I should have thought that it was concerned, rightly, about a whole new layer of regulation to be imposed on the industry.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: My hon. Friend might like to know that I too spoke to Mr. Hudson recently. Of course, the association supports the principles of the Bill, but it has a number of concerns, not least the possible cost implications of the new regulations. Operators have some anxiety, and my hon. Friend is right to draw it to the attention of the House.

Mr. Leigh: That is precisely what worries me about the Bill. Many of these organisations are very small indeed. I am disappointed that the Government, who are committed to the deregulation initiative, could not find some way of ensuring self-regulation of the industry. This is a sad debate: sad because of the original tragedy, and sad that we are now regulating a whole new industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to get back to the amendment.

Mr. Leigh: I am happy to do that.

I have obtained the Army cadet force regulations of 1973. A casual glance at them shows that there is no more comprehensive supervision of those undertaking training exercise than that carried out by the armed forces. They have a wealth of experience; often the training that they perform is very dangerous indeed. It is absurd to contemplate the idea of subjecting the armed forces to the strictures of outside bodies.

Section 0207 of the manual states:

> "training is carried out at a steady rate, compatible with the increasing abilities of a growing boy and to maintain his interest; the training syllabus should form a sound basis for planning unit training programmes . . . He must therefore be given progressive responsibility in training, instruction and administration."

Section 0218 states:

> "Courses of instruction for officers, other adults and cadets are arranged at Ministry of Defence Training Establishments or by districts/areas".

That suggests to me that people who are not necessarily employed by the Army may be involved in instruction.

Although my hon. Friend the Minister may be able to assure me that those directly employed by the Army may not be covered, I should have thought that Army regulations show that civilians may be involved and thus may be subject to the ambit of the Bill.

The manual further states that the aim of the annual camp is to give adults and cadets

> "training of a more interesting type by carrying out an exercise on a higher level."

Those of us who have been on these annual camps know that sometimes the courses can be extremely exhausting. Far more deaths and injuries have been recorded in Army training than in any civilian centres.

I fear that, following the passage of this Bill, nannying political pressure will build up. People will ask whether it is right to put our young men under such strain in these Army camps. There will be, perhaps, well-publicised cases of men on long route marches coming to grief.

[Mr. Leigh]

Then, as a result of this Bill, people may say that the law should be involved. The regulations, in section 0234, deal in some detail with unexploded missiles. That shows that the Army is well aware that this sort of training can be far more dangerous than anything envisaged in the sort of activities conducted under the auspices of the trade association to which I have referred.

I hope hon. Members will think, whatever the instant reply by the Government, that I have shown that, although it is right to be concerned about a particular tragedy, legislation, if not carefully drafted, may have unforeseen consequences. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give me some reassurances on this matter.

10 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I have discussed the amendment with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). He had the courtesy to discuss the tabling of his amendment with me, as I was a member of the Standing Committee and he was not. I knew from Second Reading that he had an interest in the Bill. Our views differ slightly on the need for the Bill and the extent to which it should run, but his concerns about the area covered by the amendment are valid.

Perhaps I should refer to my hon. Friend as my hon. and gallant Friend, bearing in mind that he served for a short while as a student in the Royal Navy. In fact, we were at university together. I well remember that he disappeared during holidays. When I entertained myself, my hon. Friend went to sea. He was at sea for a considerable period. Indeed, some say that he is still at sea.

My hon. Friend was training to be a member of the Royal Navy. He was under military regulations and was serving on a naval vessel. He was training and taking a considerable risk. It would be amazing if the Bill were to be extended to cover the armed forces, with the result that regulations in the Bill or a health and safety official instructed them not to take the risks that military training necessarily involves.

One of the most important parts of the Bill is the need for instructors and supervisors—those providing "leadership", to adopt the word used in the Bill—to have proper qualifications. That is something that we shall consider in more detail when we come to a later amendment.

The requirements that the Bill seeks to introduce are already catered for in other areas of life. I have much in mind the high quality of training that instructors in the armed services receive. The regulations and systems that they employ have been developed over many years to ensure as much safety as possible. The existing regulations and safeguards are sufficient for military personnel, and the Bill should not extend to the armed forces.

I am not certain to what extent the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and my hon. Friend the Minister have considered the possibility of the Bill being extended to have force in the armed services. They may be able to reassure us in a few moments that they have thought about military training and have specifically excluded it from this measure. I hope that they will be able to give us that assurance.

At the same time, I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle in pressing for such an exclusion to be included in the Bill, and not in the form of a reassurance, so that, at some future date, we do not find that, despite the original intention of the House, the Secretary of State extends regulations to include military personnel.

The Army, the Navy and the Air Force could conceivably use private organisations to provide facilities for the training of their personnel. The use of such facilities is referred to as "adventure activities" in the Bill, but training activity is entirely different. For children at school, "adventure activities" are a form of education and fun. For military personnel, training is an entirely different matter. Training is designed to equip military personnel to face the most difficult odds. They may have to face situations in which they are killed while fighting for the country. They have to face various forms of military activity.

We know that cadets and young soldiers are sent to the Brecon Beacons, where they have to go through extremely tough training. Unfortunately, there are injuries. It is sad that occasionally personnel undergoing training are killed. I know of many who have gone to the Brecon Beacons for training, either people who are full-time personnel in the armed services or, more often, people who serve in the TA. They all attest to the fact that the training is rigorous. They are expected to undergo things that I hope children at school would never be expected to experience. The training of military personnel is an entirely separate form of activity. It would be most unfortunate if the Bill were used to limit, define or regulate such training.

I do not believe that it was the intention of the hon. Member for Devonport, bearing in mind the development of the excellent clauses that are now set out in the Bill, for military training to be covered by the regulations that will ensue. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, I think that a specific exclusion is needed. My hon. Friend's amendment is therefore apposite.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle talked about combined cadet forces and schools. Traditionally, many quite young boys and some girls join their CCF while at school and undergo a form of military training. When young people join a CCF, it is always made clear to them—although the CCF existed at my school, I did not join it—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I was always regarded as something of a wimp. I think that my hon. Friends still take that view, judging by their sedentary comments. I preferred to serve in the school library.

Mr. Waterson: A trustie.

Mr. Merchant: Yes, I was regarded as a trustie. My service in the library gave me useful training for surmounting the obstacles posed by the House of Commons Library.

When children joined the CCF or its equivalent, it was always made clear to them that they were joining as young soldiers. They were told that, once they wore the uniform, they were expected to behave as soldiers. Equally, they were expected to undergo the training—perhaps in a milder form—that full-time soldiers underwent. It would be most unfortunate if the protection that the Bill will give to children undergoing education and adventure activities were to be extended to those who join the CCF. Different forms of activity are involved. The Bill could easily be extended to include CCF activities.

I sympathise with the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle that the Bill should not be extended to cover areas outside its original limits. He is right to draw attention to well-intentioned Bills that the House has passed that later became broadened to cover much wider areas than originally intended. It is right that we should scrutinise the Bill with that in mind. We should consider amendments to limit the Bill. We should not accept the rather uncertain future of ministerial regulation.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister would not seek to widen the Bill more than necessary. In future, however, a different Secretary of State—perhaps, Heaven forbid, from a different party—might have other motives and might use the Bill to extend regulations to cover the armed forces, possibly even as a deliberate attempt to weaken the sharp edge of the armed forces.

That Secretary of State might introduce well-intentioned regulations that would undermine the effectiveness of the armed forces. He might introduce some namby-pamby training system that led to health and safety officers jumping out of foxholes to issue warnings.

We are talking of men who are trained to face the rigours of war. The men who served in trenches during the first world war had to take unbelievable risks in defending their country. They had to be trained. There were no health and safety officers jumping out of trenches saying, "No, don't put your head over the top, you might get shot. It is rather dangerous. You might slip on that mud and break your leg."

Training in the armed forces is entirely different from education at school. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle said, however, that some of those who undergo army training are of school age. It is important that clear distinctions should be set out in the Bill to ensure that its provisions do not apply to the armed forces in any sense. Its original purpose—that of protecting children undergoing ordinary education—should remain.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is regrettable that the Bill has to be introduced as a result of the tragedy at Lyme bay.

I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might allow me, while speaking to the amendment, to congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on presenting the Bill.

Amendment No. 2 specifically refers to full-time and part-time military personnel. I too have had experience, similar to that of my hon. Friends, of some of the cadet force jolly jaunts to which they referred, and when I was a serving officer, I sat on the other side of the fence, as an instructor having to organise them.

The Army Cadet Force, the Air Training Corps and similar organisations that understudy the other services, are, of course, designed to bring out the latent potential for self-reliance, physical courage and so on of young people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said, there is some concern—quite rightly—that the Bill may impinge on Her Majesty's forces, and that, of course, particularly by default, would be entirely wrong.

I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, and the hon. Member for Devonport, will tackle that point, because I believe that it should be resolved, if possible, today. We have to be careful that we do not indulge in some knee-jerk reaction simply because of the tragedy at Lyme bay—or, indeed, any other tragedy.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle that, as the Bill currently stands, we may well be over-reacting. It is entirely appropriate that we take time today and in the future to consider the matters carefully. It would be entirely absurd if the Health and Safety Executive or the Health and Safety Commission were to have any say in the activities of adventurous training relating to soldiers and service men and service women, not just in the Army but the other services as well.

I venture to suggest that service instructors are in fact much better qualified than their civilian counterparts. I honestly believe—without meaning to make any disrespectful remarks whatever about civilian instructors who instruct in adventurous training but who have never served in Her Majesty's forces—that the best instructors in the voluntary sector are former members of the services.

I referred specifically to the ACF, of which I have most experience. I notice that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is in his place on the Opposition Front Bench. I have had the pleasure—although at times it was a rather dubious one—and privilege of instructing the children of many of his constituents, at camps in the Isle of Man, Scotland and southern England.

The whole purpose of the adventurous training activities with which the amendment is concerned is to provide a firm foundation, to bring out the latent potential, to which I referred, of physical courage, self-reliance and so on, through a variety of activities, which might include abseiling, canoeing, hill walking, orienteering, general physical training and fitness.

The purpose of those activities, in the military context to which the amendment refers, was to provide an environment that was challenging for those young people, to test their abilities to a particular limit, whatever their age and physical capabilities, and to push them to that limit so that they would be better able to understand their own capabilities and to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, and to do so in an environment that was as safe as it possibly could be.

My hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle and for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), referred to the ages of many of the cadets in the cadet forces. The majority are under 17 years of age. I am particularly concerned, in relation to the amendment, that we consider whether the HSE, for example, should have some role in the competence of civilian instructors who were instructing Army cadets or cadets from the other services, and to compare that role with the instructors who wear a service uniform and are subject to Queen's regulations. It would be a nightmare if there were to be one rule for one set of instructors and another rule for another.

10.15 am

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle mentioned the ACF training manual. I believe that he is entirely right to say that it is one of the most comprehensive documents that we could possibly have to deal with the training of our young people. He specifically referred to a number of sections in the regulations which

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

referred to training being organised at a steady rate—I think those were his words—compatible with the age group in question.

Bearing in mind the fact that those cadets are often trained by service personnel, who are, as I have already intimated, in my view better qualified than civilian instructors, it is important that we make it quite clear that the HSE should not have a major say in the way in which that training is carried out, because if it did, it would make a mockery of the way in which the Army and the other services carry out their adventurous training.

Mr. Leigh: Is my hon. Friend aware that, such is the detail of the regulations, which may, apparently, be covered by the Bill—there are more than 2,000 of them—that, for example, regulation 1135 says:

> "Soap is not to be issued from Army sources. The cost of purchase is to be charged to the consolidated grant"—

no doubt, the Treasury Bench. That is the detail that the Army has amassed over two centuries and which may perhaps be covered by the ambit of the Bill. It is absurd.

Mr. Banks: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, who makes his own point in his own way.

When the Army sets about training its young soldiers and the Army cadets it looks after from time to time at annual training camps and so on—and the cadet training teams throughout the country, who do such a splendid job during the week, either at school-combined cadet forces or ACFs; the same is true for the other services—it is very much dealing with a military scenario. The whole point of adventurous training—this is pertinent to my hon. Friend's amendment—is that the bottom line is that one needs to train young soldiers and Army cadets to know their own capabilities, to push them physically to a particular limit when they are young, and to "the" limit, whatever that may be, when they get older.

When one joins the services—my hon. Friend gave the Army as an example—one knows that one may well be put into an environment that is extremely hostile, in which one's life may be put on the line, and one knows that one will potentially be doing a very dangerous job. That is why it is important that, in the adventurous training activities to which I referred, particularly the physical activities—my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) referred to his experiences on the Brecon Beacons—unless there is an element of danger, unless young people are pushed to a particular limit, whatever it may be at a particular time—it will vary depending on age, and will be much greater and much more arduous when one joins the services full-time—unless one is pushed, one will not understand what it will be like to be pushed into a hostile environment.

Although there is physical danger in activities such as canoeing and abseiling, fortunately one is not usually being shot at while engaging in them. However, in that kind of controlled environment, it is important for young people to have the opportunity to understand what the real thing will be like. It is also important that, in that environment, the instructors of young cadets and young soldiers can see precisely what they are like, where their strengths and weaknesses are. It is a vital part of training.

My hon. Friends mentioned some of their experiences. I shall mention one. While listening to them, I was mindful of the fact that, every time I went abseiling as an instructor, whether in the Brecon Beacons or in a quarry with a small drop, I knew that we would break for lunch. When I dropped off the side in the afternoon after a good lunch, I was just as nervous as when I was undertaking the activity in the morning. Given the worries and difficulties that went through my mind as an instructor, I was perfectly able to understand what it was like for a young cadet.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend was here when I relived the nightmare of the weekend in Crickhowell. Deep scars remain. Does he agree that, when the armed services are giving youngsters who are perhaps not part of a cadet training force a weekend taster for the services, they pay due regard to the health and safety of the youngsters in their charge?

Does he further agree that we do not want to go to the ridiculous length of a sergeant saying to me or to a 12 or 14-year-old youngster, "I want you to climb this 12 ft wall and jump from it using just a rope," and giving the youngster the opportunity to say, "Well, sergeant, I would rather not—it's dangerous"?

Given my hon. Friend's obvious expertise in this matter, can he say what regard the armed services pay to the safety of youngsters, because—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a long intervention.

Mr. Banks: I think that I have the gist of my hon. Friend's important point. The amendment specifically mentions the armed forces, and I—and, I think, many of my hon. Friends—agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle that the armed forces should not be subject to the Bill's provisions. That is why he moved his amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) asked specifically about training. Bearing in mind my earlier remarks about pushing cadets and young soldiers to their limit, I can reassure my hon. Friend that, in my experience, cadets who were seen to be getting into physical difficulties were told to stop. The training was organised by serving soldiers and officers in a controlled environment, and they could say to people in difficulties, "Don't move. We will come and pick you up." That would be done if the cadets were close to a road in the Brecon Beacons or perhaps on an assault course.

Although it is necessary to push cadets to the limit, the limit will vary in individual cases, because of age and physical strength. If a cadet being trained by a serving soldier rather than a civilian instructor is seen to be getting into difficulties, it would be possible for the military instructor to call a halt. But it is a fine balance, and the training is designed to be tough.

I sometimes wonder how I managed to do some of the things that I did. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) was extremely lucky that there was not 6 in of snow on the ground when he engaged in whatever he was doing—he did not say who it was with—in the Brecon Beacons.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Banks: I was hoping to come back to the amendment, but I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thought I had made it clear that I was in the Brecon Beacons with the combined cadet force.

My hon. Friend spoke about assault courses. I can assure him from my own experience that, although sergeant-majors are not noted for their light touch in dealing with schoolboys who get stuck at the top of those unpleasant rope things which one has to climb, after five minutes of shouting and abuse, the penny dropped for me. They took control of the situation in the way that my hon. Friend has described, and got me down. I was relieved, and almost applied to become a librarian like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant).

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that he hoped to get back to the amendment. I also hope that he will do that.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for relating his further experiences.

It is important to recognise all this, and to take the time and trouble to look more closely at the Bill, so that the clause does not result in a knee-jerk reaction. It would be absurd if serving soldiers and members of the other services were subject to its provisions.

As I have said, the whole point of the training is to recognise the potential of each cadet. Perhaps, if my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East had been encouraged even more aggressively, he might have made it to the top of the rope and come back down again. That is the point of such activities, and the firm foundation of the military is to push cadets and young soldiers—I distinguish between the two—as far as they can go.

That makes young people begin to realise that they are able to undertake a particular activity and achieve an objective that they never thought they were physically able to achieve. That is the sort of training that the military tries to provide for its cadets, so that, when they join the services, they better understand how they tick, and will understand a hostile environment.

I have drawn a distinction between the qualifications of a serving soldier and civilian instructors. Training is usually carried out by non-commissioned and warrant officers, who are usually young. They form the cadet training teams which do such a tremendous job. Civilian instructors have a different set of qualifications, but I shall not trespass on your good will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we shall later come to amendments which deal with the qualifications of civilian instructors. No doubt I and some of my hon. Friends will wish to speak at that time.

Any suggestion that serving soldiers, service men and service women should be subject in such training to the general provisions of the Bill is absurd. I hope that the Minister will recognise my genuine concern and that of many of my hon. Friends.

10.30 am

Mr. Waterson: I want to be brief on the amendment, and I wish to associate myself with the congratulations given to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). It is important that the Bill passes what remains of its parliamentary assault course today, and I shall not detain the House any longer than is absolutely necessary.

It is important to bear in mind some crucial matters when tackling the kind of tragedy which spawned the Bill. As my constituency is on the south coast, I am conscious of the dangers faced by those going out to sea in whatever kind of craft, or without proper supervision or experience. But it is equally important to avoid legislating in haste on an important matter, and reference has been made to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in that regard. The Bill must be applied not only to the tragedy that we are discussing, but to future tragedies which may be different.

I referred in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) to the Air Training Corps, which has a popular and lively group in my constituency. With all due respect to my hon. Friend, we have not yet had a satisfactory answer as to whether air cadets, for example, will come outside the amendment. I shall only put down a marker on that point, as I hope that the promoter of the Bill or the Minister will be able to deal with those points in their speeches. I should say that there is also a thriving and long-established Territorial Army unit in my constituency.

Like several of my hon. Friends, I have served my time in the schools cadet force, where I learned such timeless skills as being able to take apart and put back together a Bren gun with a hood over my head. Unfortunately, the Bren gun became obsolete shortly after I mastered that skill, and it became as much use to me as my lessons in the quickstep and the foxtrot at roughly the same age.

I also had the benefit of annual summer camps with the cadets, although "summer" is an elastic word in that context, because the camps tended to take place in parts of the country where summer obviously meant something different from what it meant where I lived.

It is important to decide where we are drawing the line when we use the phrase "part-time military personnel". We have heard about those who are involved in full-time military training, and it is of course right that those people should not be concerned by the provisions of the Bill. That is common ground, and there has been no dissention from that view so far in the debate.

The real problem comes with the question of part-time personnel. Young people fall into two distinct categories with regard to the activities, and I am keen that these matters are dealt with in detail in the wind-up speeches on the amendments. There are those young people who have volunteered for the cadets or for the Air Training Corps. They are therefore regular members, who go once or twice a week to meetings, regular weekend events and annual camps.

There is a persuasive argument that those young people—or, perhaps more realistically, their parents—are aware of the different risks to which they might be exposed. There may also be a different structure of training and supervision, as was eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), who is very much an expert on the issue.

The second category of young people needs to be addressed, and I am not sure that it would be right if they were drawn into the amendment and were therefore excluded from the Bill's provisions. That category is made up of young people who occasionally—certainly not regularly—go to military-run facilities for a day or a weekend, possibly through an arrangement with their school. I am a lawyer myself, and I can see how difficult it would be to draw a line, but I should have thought that those young people should be subject to the full benefits and rigours of the legislation.

[Mr. Waterson]

Perhaps it is not beyond the wit of man—or the parliamentary draftsmen—to make that clear in the wording of the Bill. Some children and parents may be unable to see a realistic distinction between activities which the children perform both in school and out of school, such as canoeing or boating, and the kind of day or weekend trip about which we are talking.

We have heard a lot this morning about military matters. Someone once said that the trouble with the military was that generals were always preparing to fight the last war, not the next war. That could apply equally to this debate. We have discussed the Lyme bay tragedy, and it must be remembered that it is now two years and two days since that tragedy occurred.

There have been similar tragedies with different details. At Land's End in 1985, four children were swept into the sea and died, and four schoolboys were killed on a trip to Austria in 1988. It is not entirely clear whether such activities are covered by the Bill.

It is important that we do not tailor the Bill to one particular tragedy, desperately sad though it was. We must look forward to other possible incidents, and make a realistic assessment of where the provisions of the Bill should fall. That is why it was important for my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle to table the amendment, although I think that further work needs to be done on it.

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): The debate has been interesting and welcome, as it has enabled many of my hon. Friends who have not so far been able to participate in the detailed consideration of the Bill to show their interest and involvement in it. I very much welcome that, as, I am sure, does the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson).

The debate has illustrated the value of the scrutiny process which Bills undergo in the House of Commons and in another place, because an item which now—having listened to the debate—seems to be so obvious to us all had never been raised previously during debates on the Bill. It was not raised on Second Reading or in Committee, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who identified the matter and brought it to the attention of the House.

Before I get into the meat of the issue, I wish to outline some of the background to the Bill, as it is relevant to the consideration of the amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle said that he thought that there was a danger of the Bill being rushed through without proper consideration. I would contest that, because the Bill has received not only a lengthy Second Reading debate—which he will recall—but proper consideration in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) played a distinguished part in that Committee, and raised many questions. I hope that my hon. Friend was satisfied by the replies he received, not so much from me as from the promoter of the Bill, during those detailed discussions. It cannot be said that the Bill was at any stage rushed through, and the House should know that. I hope that that will reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle.

However, my hon. Friend referred to the key issue which we are talking about today. He said that the matter that he had raised in the amendment should be resolved in the Bill. That argument has run throughout the proceedings on the Bill.

It is important that the House and, in particular, my hon. Friend, should understand that, as I read the way in which the Bill has been drafted, it is a framework enabling Bill. It sets out the broad principles of what the hon. Member for Devonport wants to achieve, but—this is the crucial point—after the Bill has received Royal Assent and following a period of detailed consultation, regulations would be drawn up to give detailed effect to the main thrust of the Bill. Because of that, it would be wrong to put too much detail into the Bill now.

I am sure that my hon. Friends recognise that it has always been the case with legislation that, if we put too much detail into a Bill, that sets the Bill in legislative concrete and makes it extraordinarily difficult to adjust and improve it as circumstances demand.

We are in a new area of regulation—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle made most effectively and which I accept. I have always believed, ever since the hon. Member for Devonport introduced his Bill, that to put an excessive level of detail into the Bill would be wrong. Indeed, it would be wrong in principle, because it would set the Bill too rigidly and make it far too difficult for us to return to it subsequently were we to find that it needed improvements. It would also ignore the assumption that we have all made throughout—that there would be a period of consultation and then, on the basis of that, regulations would be introduced, subject to parliamentary approval, to give effect to the detailed requirements of the Bill.

That sets the scene, because it leads to the possibility that, were there to be the sort of errors or lacunae to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle referred, they would be picked up most effectively during the period of consultation.

Let us take the amendment as an example. In consulting everybody who might have an interest in the Bill, we expect many people to make observations on the relevance, for example, of extending the Bill's provisions to military facilities.

That brings me to the substance of the amendment. There is a danger of some confusion—if I dare say that to my hon. Friends. I noted carefully the comments of that distinguished war pensioner, my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), who said that service instructors are better qualified than civilian instructors. I made a careful note of his words—something that I always try to do during debates such as this.

Therefore, I equally recall that one or two of my hon. Friends pointed out that, tragically and regrettably, there are injuries and even deaths in the course of military training or activities in military camps. As far as I can tell, such injury and death have been avoided by most of my hon. Friends in the searing experiences which they recanted to us.

We cannot have it both ways, can we? Well, perhaps we can, but it is a little odd. One of my hon. Friends says that military installations are all right because the service instructors are better qualified, while others of my hon. Friends say that injuries and deaths can occur at such installations. I am a little reluctant to go all the way with those of my hon. Friends who say that we should exclude, as a matter of course, all military facilities from the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Merchant: Surely the point is that the nature and the pressure of the training given to military personnel is that much more intense than in the civilian sector. It is a different sort of activity, and the personnel are stretched to a much higher level. That is why, sadly, injuries and deaths sometimes occur. It has nothing to do with the quality of the instructors.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. I had intended to come to that point later in my speech, but I shall deal with it now. The Bill refers to

"facilities which are provided exclusively for persons who have attained the age of 18"

being excluded. In other words, any facility that might encompass an activity undertaken by someone under the age of 18 should, at least in principle, be a candidate for inclusion in the scope of the Bill. As we have all said, youngsters under the age of 18 regularly enjoy, in one form or another, the facilities provided by the military. Therefore, it appears that they would be candidates for inclusion in the Bill.

The Bill then refers to facilities to

"some element of instruction or leadership."

Again, that appears to encompass the sort of activities provided by military facilities. Therefore, despite the distinction that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) makes, in principle it appears that military facilities are candidates for inclusion in the scope of the Bill. We should at least accept that there is a debatable point; the matter is not entirely black or white.

10.45 am

Mr. Matthew Banks: My hon. Friend's cogent arguments are most persuasive. Can he satisfy my hon. Friends and me that his reference to opportunities in subsequent guidance if the Bill is passed would tackle some of the concerns that we have expressed?

Mr. Forth: Yes, I very much envisage that to be the case. I am trying to explain that I do not want to pre-empt the consultation and regulation-making process. However, I have no doubt that, during that process, these matters will be resolved. One reason why I cannot give the answers that my hon. Friends want is that we have yet to undergo the consultation process.

It is entirely possible that, at some stage, we may want to make a distinction between occasional part-time involvement in military activities and the involvement of full-time military personnel, albeit very young military personnel. I can envisage that possibility, although I do not want to pre-empt the consultative process or the making of regulations.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend's comments are causing me slight concern. I am not a parliamentary draftsman, although I am a lawyer. I thought that my hon. Friend would say that I need not be concerned because the military would be excluded from the scope of the Bill. He actually said the opposite—that it may be included, which I find rather worrying.

I think that my hon. Friend accepts that some of our points about the nature of Army training are valid. Therefore, I hope that, as he develops his speech, he will give an assurance, on behalf of the Government, that his aim is to use his power during the consultation exercise and the regulation-making process to ensure that the military is excluded from the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend pre-empts what I had intended to say. I can help him by referring to a note that I have been given by my experts, which may reassure him. He has forced my hand, but I will answer his question.

The Bill does not apply to the Crown, so if the Army provides facilities for adventure activities, the Bill probably would not apply. I emphasise the word "probably". That is the bad news. The good news is that regulations can always make it clear that, if the Army provides facilities for adventure activities, it does not need a licence. That is the nub of the matter—the licensing is the key, as I expect the hon. Member for Devonport will tell us.

I cannot be as unequivocal as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle would like, but it is clear that, in all likelihood, military installations would not be automatic candidates for the licensing regime specified in the Bill. I want to leave the door slightly ajar, for the reasons that I have given. We want to be satisfied, do we not, that there is no possibility of young people of school age being in any way vulnerable to anything that would expose them to an unacceptable level of danger?

If, as all my hon. Friends have suggested, during the consultation and regulation-making process, reassurances can be provided in relation to military facilities, I have no doubt that exclusion from the regulations would be entirely appropriate. I hope, however, that my hon. Friends will agree that we want that level of reassurance, despite everything that has been said about the expertise of the personnel, the instructors, and the relevance, or not, of the regulations, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle is such a master.

I hope that the sequence of events that I have described, and the flavour of my comments will reassure my hon. Friends. Equally, however, I hope that they will agree that we should not shut the matter out by putting an explicit exclusion on the face of the Bill at this stage, especially given some of my hon. Friends' doubts about the amendments.

The amendment's wording would be sufficient to cover all relevant military or militarily related facilities—there should be no doubt about that. However, it is unnecessary to include it. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle will accept the reassurances that I have tried to give today. Allowing a proper role for the consultation and regulation-making stage would be adequate. In the light of that, I hope that he will not feel it necessary to press his amendment this morning.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank Conservative Members for their kind words of support for my Bill. I am pleased to see that a number of hon. Members who were unable to speak in Committee and on Second Reading are in the Chamber to support the Bill, because undoubtedly its strength lies in the strong cross-party support that it has in the House, and in the enormous support that it has outside among many organisations that are involved with the safety of young people.

I am grateful to the Minister for his clarification of a number of points. I shall not attempt to repeat the arguments that he has so eloquently outlined. A number

[Mr. Jamieson]

of hon. Members said that we would not wish to act in haste after a tragedy. I think that it was the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) who said, rightly, that the Lyme bay tragedy occurred exactly two years ago this week. During that period, I have met the Department for Education and the Secretary of State for Education twice, once nearly two years ago, and much careful time and consideration has been given to legislation to assist the safety of children in activity centres.

I therefore reject the comment of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that the Government may have rushed into this matter. They have had an opportunity to give full and proper consideration to the legislation. As the Minister said, we have in front of us not detailed provisions, but enabling legislation.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle tabled the two amendments. Of course we all accept his experience in the military, just as we accept the experience of the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) as library monitor at Nottingham high school. He also made some useful comments about the amendments.

Amendment No. 2 would reduce the Bill's scope from the age of 18 to 17, so it would cover people aged 16 and under. I have listened to a number of arguments on that point. Just as I have had suggestions that the age may be lowered, I have had a considerable amount of correspondence from universities and higher education establishments suggesting that it should be raised. I have an almost equal balance of arguments from both sides. By putting the age at 17 and below, therefore, we may just have it about right.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle makes the point that people under the age of 18 are sometimes required to die for their country in the armed services, but I remind him that, equally, they cannot vote in elections, even for the hon. Gentleman, much as they may wish to do so; nor can they enter into a legal contract for a loan.

It is especially important that we identify people in an age group of immaturity and inexperience. We must protect them in particular. That is what the Bill seeks to do. A great difference exists between young people aged 17 and those aged 18. Those aged 17 are more likely to be in full-time education than those aged 18. Although I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman had excellent motives in tabling amendment No. 2, the Bill keeps the balance about right.

As the Minister said, we all have an ambition to anticipate what will come next in the legislation, the regulations and the legislation's next phase. Throughout Committee, hon. Members tabled amendments, and we had lengthy discussions about organisations that might be written in or out of the Bill. As the Minister said, a danger exists in putting too much detail in enabling legislation, lest we find later that we want to amend the primary legislation and that we have not got it right.

Comments have been made about the haste with which the Bill has been introduced. Two years of thought have been given to the Bill, but a further period of consultation will follow. Then there will be another period when the House can consider the detailed regulation that will come before it. Of course, that will have the full and proper scrutiny of the House, stage by stage.

At that time, hon. Members who have made valid points today about the armed services will have an opportunity to debate those regulations fully and properly, so the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle will have a further opportunity to return to the matter. What happens today will not close debate on it.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I would welcome clarification of what will happen at a later stage. I understand that the regulation comes back by way of a statutory instrument, which will be considered, presumably, by a Committee upstairs, and therefore not on the Floor of the House. The opportunity for the wide debate that the hon. Gentleman envisages may not arise.

Mr. Jamieson: Should the Bill receive Royal Assent, I am sure that the Department for Education will undertake wide consultation to ensure that all the bodies that have a proper and legitimate interest in the matter are consulted fully and properly on the regulations. Those regulations would then be brought, as other regulations regularly are, as the hon. Gentleman knows, to the House.

In Committee, I expressed the view that a Committee upstairs was the proper place for full scrutiny of the statutory instruments. If hon. Members are concerned about matters contained in those statutory instruments, they should take the opportunity, perhaps unusually, to discuss them with more thoroughness and diligence than is usually the case.

Mr. Waterson: I sit on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and on the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. We consider about 3,000 statutory instruments a year, and we are primarily concerned—sometimes I would it were other—with the form and the vires of the regulations. I cannot envisage the prospect of a discussion on this issue in the course of such scrutiny. Unless some way is found of debating the regulations on the Floor of the House, that discussion is a forlorn hope.

Mr. Jamieson: I do not have the hon. Gentleman's experience and I am grateful to him for bringing his experience to this debate. However, I have sat on Committees in which there has been a full and proper debate, and I should have thought it possible for that to occur in this case. As we are dealing with primary legislation, and considering the secondary legislation that will flow from it, I should have thought it eminently possible to have a full debate in the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments to explore and tease out of the Minister all the details that may be required.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Is my hon. Friend aware that, if the House so wishes, the statutory instrument can be taken on the Floor of the House anyway?

11 am

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. Should the House wish to have a fuller debate, it is possible for the statutory instrument to be taken on the Floor of the House. I hope that that reassures the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle that the next phase will be given proper consideration. I believe that that aspect of the legislation should be given close consideration, so that we get it right and rule out those bodies and organisations that we wish to rule out, while ruling in most firmly those that we wish to rule in.

We have this morning debated matters related to the military. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle said that he would not want members of the Health and Safety Executive wandering around assault courses, but I am sure that he will accept that he would not expect young people on assault courses to be put at unnecessary risk. We expect the very highest standards of safety measures from the military when young people are involved. It would not be in the interests of any commanders to put their soldiers, sailors or airmen at unnecessary risk, especially those who are young, immature and inexperienced.

I draw an analogy with what I understand to be the position in schools. The Bill would not apply if a school undertook adventure activities led by teachers skilled in those activities. It would already be covered by the line of responsibility that runs from the teacher through the head teacher to the governors and, in most cases, to the local education authority. There is a chain of command and, as I understand it, safeguards exist because schools act in loco parentis.

I believe that the training of military personnel employed by the Ministry of Defence would fall into a similar category. There is a duty of care on the employer to the employee, and the Bill would not cover people employed by the military on active service.

As the Minister said, the grey area is whether those working in a part-time capacity and perhaps offering amateur services to the Air Training Corps and other cadet forces which successfully involve hundreds and thousands of children are or are not covered by the Bill. The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) specifically mentioned the training of such personnel. Many civilian instructors are former military instructors and therefore of the very highest standard, so I should not necessarily draw a distinction between the two in terms of quality.

Mr. Matthew Banks: It is important to clarify what I said. I specifically said that some of the best—if not the best—civilian instructors were former service men and women.

Mr. Jamieson: I accept that, and I am glad that we agree on this point as well as on other matters.

I trust that, when we go through the consultation stage, we shall hear compelling arguments from the Army cadet forces and the Air Training Corps as to whether they should or should not come under the remit of the Bill. At that stage, many bodies will, quite properly, make a forceful case for why they should or should not do so.

To accept amendment No. 3 at this stage would be unnecessary, although I understand why the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle has, as the Minister said, raised a matter that has not been discussed previously. Now that he has raised it, I am sure that it will be given careful consideration in the consultation period, and when we reach the most important stage of setting out the fine detail of the regulations.

Mr. Leigh: In view of the assurances given by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and by my hon. Friend the Minister—in particular the Minister's assurance that this is simply an enabling Bill and that it is not the Government's intention to include military training in its ambit—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Merchant: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 20, leave out 'and'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 8, in page 2, line 22, after 'appeals', insert—

> '(m) the minimum qualifications required by staff employed by persons providing facilities for adventure activities.'.

Mr. Merchant: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for selecting the amendment because it gives the House the opportunity to hold a short debate on qualifications. The matter was raised in passing in Committee. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) will know that I sought at various points in Committee to strengthen the Bill, and I hope that he appreciates my motives in doing so.

Amendment No. 8 deals with an important issue of principle—the standard of qualifications that instructors and others who work in activity centres should hold. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give more detail about his plans. I accept that putting a specific requirement may not be the best way to proceed, but I hope at least to tease out of the Minister his intentions in this regard.

I also accept that I have probably not drafted the amendment as well as I should have, as I omitted to include a reference to establishments that had been licensed or, alternatively, to state that qualifications should be part of the licence requirement. It is my intention that the amendment should apply only to those centres that have been formally licensed under the Bill.

The issue of qualifications was widely discussed in relation to the safety of activity centres and in connection with the Lyme bay tragedy. Indeed, the issue played a central part in investigations after that unfortunate event just over two years ago and was discussed at great length in the investigations of the Select Committee on Education. It was also discussed in Committee. The regulations should cover staff qualifications. The amendment stresses that by including them in the specific list of requirements.

The qualifications of staff at activity centres are a matter of long-standing concern. Children who attend activity centres are effectively placed in the hands of staff who may be very highly qualified but who, regrettably, in some cases, are wholly unqualified or who have only part qualifications, some of them inadequate. Although there are other causes of disaster and problems even when children are in the hands of fully trained staff, a mishap is far less likely to occur if the staff supervising and leading the activities know precisely what the risks are.

Qualifications should include full training in all aspects of safety, full training on equipment, how to use it and how it operates, full training in all emergency procedures and full training in the skills involved in looking after young people—what might be called the skills of leadership. Training in dealing with people in difficult situations is of prime importance. It is important for instructors to keep their head and to ensure that those around them do likewise because panic is often the greatest contributory factor to disaster. It makes the problem far worse.

I am not being over-dramatic in saying that training is at the core of the Bill. Most accidents and disasters do not stem from criminal intent. There is an outside chance that

[Mr. Merchant]

a person who runs an activity centre deliberately runs it in a dangerous way. I would, however, be hard pressed to find a motive for that; it is extremely unlikely. The real problem is recklessness. Organisations may cut corners, believing that in so doing, they are not taking a serious risk.

Another problem is plain ignorance. When the Bill was in Committee, we were entertained by a long account of how the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) got into difficulties in a boat. The incident was described entertainingly, but there was a serious undertone. It is easy to take part in an activity with which one is not familiar and suddenly get into extreme difficulties. The problem stems from ignorance. If the instructors at a centre are not skilled, they may take their charges into areas of great risk simply because they do not realise what is going on. Trained people will not make that mistake. They know precisely what is at stake and they know how to handle it. Even if, under the Bill, regulations were introduced to provide for every potential problem, untrained staff might not know how to apply them properly. They might not even know that the regulations existed. Qualifications and training are important to uphold the regulations.

I accept that what I have described is a fringe problem. I accept that even today, without the Bill, in the vast majority of activity centres, staff are properly qualified. I am also aware of how strict activity centres have become in the past two years in ensuring that staff are properly qualified. We are, however, dealing with the fringe; so often, that is what legislation is about. It is important for qualifications and training to be stressed in the Bill.

Qualifications and training are in the interests of all. It is very much in the interests of the owners and operators to be able to show that there is full protection and that their centres have staff who are fully qualified. It is important that everyone can be reassured of that. Qualifications and training are also important for teachers, parents and local authorities. They are all involved and they need to have confidence and faith in the centres that they use and especially in the personnel and their qualifications.

After the Lyme bay tragedy, at the inquest and the subsequent trial, considerable reference was made to the fact that

> "the staff involved were wholly unqualified."

In a nutshell, that underlines the importance of having proper training and qualification standards.

According to the Select Committee on Education:

> "Some doubts have been expressed as to how far the Act"—

the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974—

> "extends to the competence of staff in relation to the safety of centres' clients."

The Act may well be deficient in ensuring that qualifications reach the highest standards.

The Select Committee, in referring to staff competence, said:

> "ACAC witnesses defined competence as including qualifications, experience and training. We expect that the criteria which are eventually set either in regulations, or by the licensing authority, will take account of all these attributes, rather than relying solely on technical qualifications."

The Select Committee widened the scope of training and stressed its importance. It also said that the licensing authority should give support to the providers of outdoor education in terms of qualification standards.

The Select Committee report put great stress on the importance of national vocational qualifications and on ensuring that they were available in all the necessary areas and activities. The Committee believed that NVQs played an important part in ensuring that standards were maintained.

The Select Committee especially stressed summer centres—part-time centres—because it was felt that they were less likely to have high standards for staff. The Committee said:

> "In assessing the competence of staff, the licensing authority should pay particular attention to centres where the seasonal pattern of employment is more likely to involve staff of a lower calibre than larger, full-time centres."

11.15 am

I draw attention to two important factors which strengthen my argument. My local authority, Bromley, which was keen that the Bill should be enacted, drew it to my attention and increased my interest in it. In a summary that the authority has sent me, it stresses:

> "Parents have the right to expect that when children go to centres they will be taught by qualified staff".

The adventure and activity centres themselves have shown how significant the Bill is and how much importance they attach to it. It is noticeable that in all their circulars to schools, they put great stress on the qualifications and standards of instruction required for their staff. I have a circular from Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays which lists the activities, sites and minimum instructor qualifications on their various adventure holidays. It goes into great detail. That stems partly from the criticisms after the Lyme bay tragedy and partly from the focusing of attention on qualifications. It is also a reaction to some of the previous malpractice.

Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays is honest in admitting that it previously had problems, although it has none now. I do not suggest that the company now employs anyone other than the highest-qualified staff. However, the company says that some years ago, it employed a chief instructor who was with it for some time—

Mr. Jamieson: Who sent the hon. Gentleman the letter from Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays?

Mr. Merchant: The letter was sent to me by a teacher. It is a circular letter which Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays sent to group leaders and teachers in many schools. It is clearly a circular letter. I would rather not tell the House the teacher's name, not because there is anything confidential about the letter, but simply because when I was given this material, I did not ask the teacher's specific permission to quote from it. I feel that I should not reveal the teacher's name.

Mr. Jamieson: Has the hon. Gentleman had any direct communication with Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays? If so, which member of that organisation has he had direct contact with? Is any member of that organisation mentioned on any of the correspondence? I do not want the hon. Gentleman to give away who the teacher was. Can he, however, name the person from Devon and Dorset Adventure Holidays who has written the letter?

Mr. Merchant: Yes, with pleasure. The name at the bottom of the letter is Chris Reynard and there is a signature. I am taking the letter at face value and I have every reason to believe that it is accurate. If the hon. Gentleman has any difficulties with the letter, I would obviously be delighted to hear them. It seems to be a perfectly valid letter on letterhead. In any event, the reference to the instructor is merely illustrative of a practice that has been known to have occurred at other centres and one of the purposes of the Bill is to prevent any such lax standards.

The letter, which I was going to quote, claims that a previous chief instructor provided forged instructor certificates and was later found to be fraudulently qualifying staff. So long as such activity is found to be necessary or is carried out, there is a problem from which those involved in activities—children, teachers and schools—must be protected. If there is a clear and proper requirement for minimum qualifications, if those qualifications are known to be above board and if they are the result of a recognised scheme with proper validation, all concerned—operators, clients, schools and children—would be fully protected.

As I said, such protection is at the core of the Bill and that is why I stress it in the amendment. I hope that either my amendment will be accepted or that the promoter of the Bill the hon. Member for Devonport and my hon. Friend the Minister will give an assurance that the whole question of qualifications will be properly and thoroughly dealt with and included as an essential part of the working mechanisms of the regulations which will stem from the Bill.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham raises an absolutely key element which should be covered by the Bill and he is quite right to stress the importance and the central role that can and must be played by qualifications of staff. I need not repeat—indeed, I do not want to repeat—the many examples that have been given of the problems relating to inadequate qualifications and the like. There can be no difference between myself and my hon. Friend on that matter.

I point out to my hon. Friend, however, that clause 1(4)(b) says that regulations may make provisions to

> "any requirements relating to safety (whether applying to facilities for adventure activities or to other facilities) which must be satisfied by an applicant for a licence".

That phrase "any requirements relating to safety" is very broad. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) will no doubt confirm that a deliberately broad statement of the requirements relating to safety is envisaged to address the problems of safety in activity centres. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Bill as drafted would enable us to cover whatever matters may arise relating to safety. So the power, as it were, is already in the Bill.

Our next consideration is whether qualifications should in some way be singled out as being of exclusive or even primary importance. That need not and—probably—should not be the case, because under the phrase "requirements relating to safety" there will inevitably be a wide range of requirements, all of which are interlocking and important. I would include in a list, which is not intended to be comprehensive but to give my hon. Friend a flavour of what I mean, training, competence, experience and management systems in addition to qualifications. If my hon. Friend thinks for a moment, he will realise that time and again we have heard examples of how a significant failure in any of those areas may lead to a shortfall in the delivery of effective safety measures.

Qualifications alone are not sufficient. They are necessary, but not sufficient. People may be qualified, yet their qualifications may be rather ancient, outdated and not strictly relevant. With the best will in the world, it is very difficult to identify simply through qualifications all necessary measures. Training is very closely related to qualifications, self-evidently, but may be required in addition to qualifications, competence is certainly relevant, experience, especially, is always relevant and the effectiveness of management systems and procedures—a factor which is often neglected—which have to be in place to supplement the straightforward qualifications that staff may have is vital. Again and again we have heard examples of how the failure of management systems or procedures have—probably—been the key element in giving rise to the sort of tragedies of which we are all too well aware.

Clause 1(4)(b) already contains ample provision to cover my hon. Friend's requirements and I hope that he will accept my contention that to single out qualifications may, in some senses, be almost counter-productive because it would imply somehow that the mere possession of qualifications by staff would be sufficient and that we could forget all other elements. Having given my hon. Friend assurances of what we shall have in mind as we enter the consultation process and shape up to making the regulations—qualifications are central, but the other factors are, too—I hope that he will be sufficiently satisfied and will not feel the need to press his amendment.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) for tabling amendments Nos. 7 and 8 and for making his points. I know that he has great concern for his constituents and that he has contact with his local education authority. He, like so many of us here, is also concerned as a parent. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a parent because I came across his two children recently in the Strangers' Cafeteria. Unfortunately, when they espied me, thinking I was an old socialist, they scurried under the table for cover. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] But once they were told that I was new Labour, they came out with smiles on their small countenances, they felt assured and they cooed. So, I know that the hon. Gentleman is very sympathetic to the Bill. Indeed, his carefully crafted amendments on report and in Committee have been extremely well received.

I remember the hon. Gentleman making a powerful and welcome speech on Second Reading. I noticed that at the beginning of his speech he said that he was

> "instinctively reticent about supporting extra regulation."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 630.]

I am sad to inform him that I am equally reticent about accepting his amendment. He can tell from my tone that, just as in Committee, he is heading for disappointment if he thinks that he has won us over on this matter.

As the Minister rightly pointed out, clause 1(4)(b) and, possibly, clause 1(4)(a) cover training and qualifications, about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned. In clause

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1(4)(a), it is conceivable that a centre would be signing up for a licence to a code of practice. That code of practice would contain, if it were worthy, details relating to qualifications required by staff. As the Minister says, the qualifications in themselves are not a guarantee that children will be safe. A far more important issue is the management and culture of safety within the centre.

The Lyme bay tragedy occurred in relation to the St. Alban's centre, which had instructors who were qualified in canoeing. Sadly, they were not involved in that activity on that day, but were round the corner dinghy sailing. That was a management problem, not a problem of not having the staff to undertake the task. The amendment would be tautologous as the matters are already covered in the Bill.

11.30 am

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Beckenham used in support of his arguments information from Devon and Dorset Holidays. The hon. Member for Beckenham clearly did not hear the Radio 4 programme, "Face the Facts", about three weeks ago. I can happily provide him with a tape of that programme so that he can listen to it.

I raised the subject on Second Reading. Mr. Chris Reynard was interviewed by the BBC in relation to the claims that he made in his brochure about his centre, particularly about the staff qualifications and the endorsements that he said he had received from various organisations. He states in his brochure that his was "voted the best centre". When asked by the BBC who had voted, the man lapsed into a period of Trappist silence and could not or would not answer the question. When pressed by the interviewer several times, Mr. Reynard was silent—he could not give the names of those who had voted his the best centre in Britain.

Mr. Reynard covers his literature with endorsements that he says that he has received from various organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. He quotes as supporting him people like Alan Cottle, the outdoor education adviser for Surrey. I believe that Mr. Dane Oliver is also quoted as supporting him. I believe that all those people have written sharp and pointed letters to Mr. Reynard saying that in no way were they supporting his organisation, particularly the poor, ill-thought-out scheme for giving people qualifications. That scheme was not recognised by anybody.

On the same programme, when Mr. Reynard was asked about who recognised the qualifications that he had given out, he again fell into silence. The broadcast is most interesting and anybody interested in any part of outdoor activities should listen to the tape. I strongly commend it as it is revealing. It illustrates why we need the Bill. There are people like Chris Reynard around, albeit in the minority. People exist who are prepared to use bogus safety claims and comments from other people out of context and without their permission to try to sell their product on the market. We need the Bill to provide protection from those people.

I ask the House to reject the amendment as the issue is adequately covered in the Bill.

Mr. Merchant: I am grateful for the various comments of the hon. Member for Devonport, not least his comments about my children. As a father, I am concerned in a personal way, as well as being concerned for my constituents and their children. I want to ensure that anything in which my children participate, now or later in life, should be properly controlled and supervised.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I support his Bill. My reference on Second Reading to my natural instinct against regulation can be seen as a compliment to him and his Bill in that I nevertheless find it attractive and support it. I can also reassure the hon. Gentleman that, while it is true that my children hid under the table when they saw him because they thought he was an old-style socialist, they came out not because I told them that he was new Labour, but because I told them that he was the Bill's promoter. They were delighted to hear that.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring at length to Devon and Dorset Holidays and Mr. Chris Reynard. He is obviously better informed than I am on that subject. I initially thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to say that the letter that I had received was not genuine and there was some forgery involved, in which case I intended to say that I had quoted from it in good faith, the teachers had given it to me in good faith, and we all believed that it was an accurate letter. I now realise that the hon. Gentleman is saying that there are even more problems attached to that organisation. Perhaps the qualifying remark that I made at the beginning of the quotation—that the holiday centre was now operating to the highest standards—was inaccurate. Obviously, it is not operating to such standards and the problems are worse than I suggested. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear and I fully share his concern.

I am reassured by what the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Minister said about qualifications. I have achieved my objective by drawing attention to that subject and receiving the reassurances that I sought. I fully accept the comments of both my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman that the qualifications themselves are not sufficient. I was not intending to suggest that they were, but was simply trying to stress one aspect. I accept, and always have done, that qualifications are merely a starting point—there must be good practice, good management and continued experience. I would not want to be party to anything that appeared to suggest that only qualifications were important.

I have succeeded in my main objective of drawing attention to the importance of qualifications and given the House the opportunity to discuss that subject. I have put the matter on record, which is important for the implementation of the legislation and the drawing up of regulations. I am satisfied that my main purpose has been achieved. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

OFFENCES

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 2, line 44, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.

It may seem churlish at this advanced stage to start tabling new amendments, but the fact that the Bill is widely welcomed—I very much congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his initiative—does not mean that it should not be properly and thoroughly scrutinised. We have already had an interesting debate on the armed forces, which threw up a number of new ideas that need to be advanced.

I should declare an interest. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), I am the father of young children. They are currently much too young to participate in activities likely to be covered by the Bill, although the climbing frame at the back of our house fills me with dread every time I see it used. Only this morning, I handed over £1.50 to my eldest daughter's school as she has just won a certificate for swimming 25 m—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The process is beginning. I spoke earlier about the formative experience that I had on the Brecon Beacons during an exercise known as arduous training—arduous it certainly was. We all have our own memories and experiences of such activities.

Amendment No. 9 deals with penalties. It aims to give the hon. Member for Devonport the opportunity to disclose the precise rationale behind his thinking on penalties as it appears in the Bill. In the light of the appalling tragedy at Lyme bay and the other distressing occurrences that we have heard about today, there will inevitably be a temptation to say that the penalties should be as high as possible and that no penalty can he high enough.

It is important to remember that the penalties proposed in the Bill have no direct relationship with penalties awarded in courts in circumstances such as the Lyme bay disaster, where gross negligence and manslaughter were involved. Such cases, and the terrible incident raised in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) involving Hayley Hadfield, are dealt with under the existing legal system.

The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 also has a bearing on the Bill. Although there is a strong temptation to whack on heavy penalties, we are considering a regime that presupposes no loss of life or personal injury but relates solely to failure to comply with regulations.

Mr. Waterson: Has my hon. Friend reflected on the prospects of double jeopardy? In a tragedy such as Lyme bay, it is feasible that a person could be pursued under the regulations and be convicted of manslaughter, yet also face claims for civil damages. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill's provisions should bear some relationship to the likely penalty under a criminal action?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is a distinguished lawyer and I am not, so I defer to his knowledge. He makes a good point, to which I shall return later.

Amendment No. 9 relates to anything for which a licence is required being otherwise than in accordance with that licence. The penalties envisaged by the Bill are a prison sentence of up to two years, an unquantified fine or both. It makes no reference to the defence that an operator had taken all reasonable steps to comply with the conditions of a licence.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and my hon. Friend the Minister said that detailed implementation would be best left to the framing of the legislation. The existence of such a defence would be an important safeguard against the effect of the regulations being unduly harsh.

It is perfectly conceivable—notwithstanding the remarks of the hon. Member for Devonport about rogue operators, who undoubtedly exist—that an owner or operator could be inadvertently let down by a member of his or her staff acting deliberately or incompetently, despite the owner or operator having made every effort to comply with the licence. I should welcome clarification of how my hon. Friend the Minister sees the legislation working in those circumstances. It seems that the Bill does not allow for mitigating circumstances and that the offence will be absolute. I doubt whether that was the promoter's intention, and I should welcome his thoughts.

Amendment No. 9 proposes a maximum prison sentence of one year instead of two years. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury suggested a maximum prison sentence of 10 years. The promoter said that my hon. Friend would have made a good hanging judge in days gone by and that 10 years was excessive. I share that view. We are dealing with a breach of regulations, not with an offence that might be indictable under criminal law. Does the hon. Member for Devonport feel that a maximum prison sentence of one year would be an insufficient deterrent against non-compliance?

One finds in any walk of life a minority of rogue operators who attempt to breach regulations and to run cowboy enterprises, but the majority of activity centre operators are responsible and conscientious people. The prospect of a prison sentence of almost any duration would be a sufficient deterrent to encourage such people to comply with regulations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) may recall that the managing director of Active Learning and Leisure—the company involved in the Lyme bay tragedy—was convicted of manslaughter and given a three-year custodial sentence. Four young people lost their lives in that accident. In the light of that sentence, we must consider the penalties envisaged by the Bill for a technical breach of regulations. In relative terms, a maximum sentence of two years for a breach alone may seem a little harsh.

11.45 am

Mr. Nigel Evans: On Second Reading, it was said that 300 activity centres—about 10 per cent. of the total—may try to flout regulations even though ways of satisfying them are evident. In those circumstances, and given the risk of injury or death for young people, should not it be left to the courts to decide a maximum sentence of up to two years? Should not a judge decide the appropriate sentence?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point. The question is whether a rogue operator would be deterred by a one-year sentence as much as by a two-year sentence. The individual concerned in the Lyme bay disaster, having been convicted of gross negligence and

[Mr. Ainsworth]

manslaughter, was sent down for three years. That has a bearing on the relative weight that we should give to a technical breach of regulations.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) and I have known each other a number of years, but I do not agree with the purpose of his amendment. I hope that I may persuade him to reconsider.

The Bill's promoter rightly emphasised the fact that it has support in all parts of the House, and we should make it clear that we mean business. In the context of sentences, it is for Parliament to fix maximums within which the courts can operate. It is not for us to speculate on appropriate sentences in particular cases. It is our duty to set a maximum and for the courts to set a tariff. The Court of Appeal often issues guidelines on the tariff for certain types of offence.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Does the hon. Gentleman disagree with the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) that a new view should be taken of deterrence and that halving a potential sentence acts as a more effective deterrent? Would the hon. Gentleman propagate that view with the Home Secretary?

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman tempts me down another route; if I were to follow it, I am sure that the Chair would have something to say to me. Perhaps I can go this far: there is a more general problem with our criminal justice system. I refer to the system of tariffs. If, as they are, the penalties at the top of the range are limited, that fact tends to exert downward pressure on tariffs for other crimes such as burglary, and then on down to offences of the sort that we are considering today. As long as a life sentence can mean an average 12 years in prison, and as long as we do not have the death penalty at the top of the range, I can foresee problems with sentences for some of the more questionable types of manslaughter—they will tend to come low down the scale. I secured an Adjournment debate on that very subject a while ago. A constituent of mine was attacked without provocation and died as a result. His attacker got away with a very light prison sentence for manslaughter.

Presumably for this, as for other offences, a sort of tariff system will emerge, with the imprimatur of the Court of Appeal, to guide the courts on sentencing policy within the range between one year and two years, depending on the circumstances. We should also remember that the amendment relates only to offences taken on indictment. Under the framework of this Bill, I would expect the vast majority of cases to come before magistrates, where they can be dealt with summarily—presumably by a fine, which would be the end of the matter.

We should also bear it in mind that we are talking about what could be a wide range of offences. We are discussing a regulatory offence, but that can range from a trivial infringement of the regulations, warranting a modest fine in a magistrates court, right the way through to enormous breaches of the regulations that might result in death or serious injury. We must therefore allow the courts a wide range of penalties.

In the case of a gross breach or flouting of the regulations, the offence would almost certainly be taken on indictment, so the full rigour of a two-year sentence should be available. In the ordinary way the court will have to consider not only the circumstances of offences but the track record—possibly the criminal record—under these or other regulations of the accused.

Let us consider the example of a person with a long history of running an activity centre badly, recklessly, negligently or sloppily. If he is brought up for an infringement that did not in itself cause serious injury or death but which was one of a series of offences against the same regulations, that is another good reason for keeping a more serious penalty.

There should be a wide range of penalties, from fines to imprisonment. I can see the problem of what lawyers call double jeopardy—in the case of the Lyme bay disaster, triple jeopardy. It was clear that there was a lack of knowledge of local weather conditions, the equipment was wrong, there was inadequate liaison with the coastguard service and the rescue operation was mounted late and was based on information much of which proved to be inaccurate. Almost everything that could go wrong in that tragic incident went wrong. Rightly, the manager of the St. Albans activity centre and the managing director of Active Learning and Leisure were charged with manslaughter. In December 1994 the latter was convicted of manslaughter through gross negligence and given a custodial sentence of three years.

What followed represented an interesting legal development. The company was found guilty of corporate manslaughter and fined £60,000. The charges against the manager of the centre were, I believe, dismissed. It is important to remember that the company was the first in English legal history to be convicted of homicide; and, according to the Library briefing, its managing director was the first director to be given an immediate custodial sentence for a manslaughter conviction arising from the operation of a business. When I was a student—and, indeed, until the issue arose in cases such as the Marchioness—it was always assumed that a company could never commit manslaughter because, unlike a person, it was not capable of the mens rea—the intent—necessary to commit that sort of offence.

There are three possible results of a tragic incident such as this one. First, there is a claim for civil damages. In this case, I am not aware of whether the families concerned have entered claims against the individuals or company involved. Secondly, there is the prospect of a criminal action for manslaughter being brought against those who are to blame—persons or corporate persons. Thirdly, the regulations we are discussing in this debate may come into play.

I strongly believe that we should leave it to the courts to express the community's outrage—or in lesser cases, its concern—at certain incidents. The courts should be able to deal not just with cases involving a death but with cases of serious injury or of children being placed in danger, even though they may mercifully have escaped injury or death. There are also other remedies; the courts should take account of what else is happening at the same time. They cannot deal with the regulations in a vacuum if a criminal action for manslaughter is also being brought. Ultimately, however, it is for the courts to take into account all the factors that I have mentioned, which also explain why I cannot support my hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I listened carefully to the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I managed to follow most of them, but like many of my hon. Friends I am not a lawyer. Much of the time I consider that an advantage; but I think that I speak for most people when I say that, in the context of regulations involving children, we need the toughest deterrents to turn people away from courses of action likely to put young people in danger. That is why I cannot agree with the amendment, or with the arguments in its favour advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth). I agree with him on most occasions, but not this time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne mentioned that this company was the first to be found guilty of corporate manslaughter—that is significant. Had the right legislation not been put in place some years ago, that important step forward would not have been possible.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: In view of my hon. Friend's chilling remarks about my modest amendment I should be grateful if he told us why he believes that two years is the right length of prison sentence.

Mr. Banks: It is a question of balance. In this instance I think that the hon. Member for Devonport has got it about right. Progress has been made, and it should not be tampered with by the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East referred to an individual being sentenced to three years for manslaughter. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that the courts must be the arbiters of these matters. They must decide on the merits of the case. If such a case comes to court, the jury will no doubt decide whether a company or individuals are guilty of the offence. The judge will have a number of options at his disposal. The amendment is unnecessary and two years is about right. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) went slightly over the top in suggesting a penalty of 10 years. As I have said, I think that two years is about right. Those outside this place would not expect us to reduce the penalty from two years to one year.

12 noon

The amendment reminds me of the debates that took place on bail bandits. The House will be pleased to know that I shall not be going down that avenue this afternoon. All too often some of my hon. Friends sought to tinker too much with a measure that was making excellent progress. We do not want the amendment before us to be agreed to. We want to be able to make progress. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that two years represents the right balance.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) has had a bit of a battering from my hon. Friends: next, we shall be hearing from Opposition Members about a Tory split on penalties.

Mr. Jamieson: I missed that.

Mr. Forth: I am sure that that will not stop the hon. Gentleman making the assertion.

Clause 2(3)(a) provides that regulations under subsection (1)

"may provide defences to be available in proceedings for an offence".

The provision was inserted in Committee for exactly the reasons that have been advanced. I hope that that covers the point.

We are back in familiar territory. It is right for the House to seek to determine the appropriate penalty for a particular offence. As our expert colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), has said—he was muttering about sending me a bill, and I hope that on this occasion he might waive his fee for the advice that he has made available to the House—we are dealing with terms-not-exceeding provisions to give the courts discretion.

It is a well-known phenomenon that the term set out in the proposed legislation will be seen by the courts as a guideline. Sentences will tend to be set in response to the level at which the guideline is set. Some of us may regret that penalties all too rarely meet the maximum—I for one would like to see the maximum penalty exercised more often by the courts—but signs are given to the courts that reflect the penalties that we believe should be imposed.

In setting penalties levels, I suspect that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) decided to pitch them at about the same levels as are set for other health and safety offences. To take a more prosaic governmental view, we think it important that there should be consistency in setting penalties for broadly similar offences. It is important that the Bill is broadly consistent with the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

All in all, we have penalties that are much related to those that are provided for in the 1974 Act. When set against the offences with which the Bill seeks to deal, they are about right. It is my instinct to leave the wording, the levels and the penalties much as they are, and certainly not to reduce them. As some of my colleagues wanted dramatically to increase the penalties when they were considered in Committee, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) thinks that they are a little excessive, I suspect that probably they are about right. I hope that on reflection my hon. Friend will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Jamieson: One of the curious consequences of the Bill is the number of alliances that it has created across the Chamber and the number of differences that it has highlighted. I was far too cautious, of course, to mention a split in the Tory ranks; the Minister has kindly highlighted it for me. I heard the scurry as journalists left the Gallery to change their headlines for tomorrow. It may be that this moment will be looked upon in future as the turning point for the Government. It may be seen as the critical moment—the split too far that caused the Government's demise.

The hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) seeks to reduce the penalty from two years to one year. There was an interesting debate on the matter in Committee, the report of which I am sure the hon. Gentleman read carefully before tabling his amendment. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)—I call him the hanging judge—wanted the penalty to be

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increased to 10 years, which I found rather excessive. Such a penalty is comparable to that which faces someone who has caused the death of another person.

When I hear that some hon. Members think that the penalty should be increased and then hear that others think that it should be reduced, I suspect that two years is about right. It is worth reflecting on the sort of offence that would attract a sentence of two years' imprisonment. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said, bringing his expert legal knowledge to the Chamber, it would be for the courts to decide the length of the sentence. The offence would be, as is set out in clause 2(1)(b)(i),

> "to make a statement to the licensing authority . . . knowing it to be false"

and in (ii), to

> "recklessly . . . make a statement to the licensing authority . . . which is false in a material particular."

If a centre, in the process of being licensed, recklessly made statements that it knew to be false, I would say that such conduct should attract a sentence of possibly up to two years, depending on the severity of the offence. There are some who might think that such an offence should attract an even more severe sentence. My original view was that such conduct should attract a slightly longer prison sentence. We are seeking to deal with someone who undertakes recklessly to try to mislead the licensing authority about matters that relate directly to children's safety.

In Committee, however, we meshed more closely the Bill with the 1974 Act. That was an important function of consideration in Committee and it now represents the strength of the Bill. The Bill is now aligned with other legislation on health and safety. As the Minister has said, the 1974 Act makes provisions in similar circumstances for a two-year sentence. I justify the provision on those grounds although my natural instinct is for more severe punishment for someone who tries to mislead the licensing authority.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: It is a wonderful thing to unite the House but I did not intend to unite it so solidly against me. I tabled a probing amendment, and the issues raised by it have been well and truly probed extremely thoroughly. I am unrepentant for moving it. It is important to consider whether the proposed penalties are appropriate. We have had the opportunity to do so, and I thank the hon. Member for Devonport and my hon. Friend the Minister for their responses. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS

Mr. Nigel Evans: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 3, line 36, leave out from 'instrument;' to 'and' in line 37.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 11, in page 3, line 40, after

> 'Commission', insert ', organisations representative of the owners of activity centres'.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate today—brief, because I have a slight back pain, which I have had for the past 20-odd years. I would not be surprised if it was due to that wretched weekend that I spent in Crickhowell, which has been referred to time and again in the House.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his success in the ballot, and on introducing this most important piece of legislation, which has all-party support. I look forward to it getting on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

I suppose that many of us, with the grace of God, look at the tragedy at Lyme bay and say that it could have been our children or those of constituents of ours. Therefore, I believe that we should take measures to protect members of the public. But at the same time, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree, we do not wish to over-penalise small businesses in this country that operate activity centres.

I pay tribute to the dedication of the people—young people in particular—who work in those centres, the vast majority of whom are decent and law-abiding and would not step outside any area if they thought that they were endangering the lives of young people. I believe that the Bill is in the best interests of those legitimate activity centres. I understand that, following the tragedy at Lyme Bay, the custom of those activity centres has dropped off quite dramatically because of the fear of many people that they would not be able to judge the standards of activity centres around the country. The Bill will correct that for the first time. It will be welcomed by many people who operate such centres.

I have tabled this probing amendment because I want to ensure clarity of purpose about the Bill. I believe it important that we attract as many young people as we can to activity centres. The River Ribble flows through my constituency, and regularly on a Sunday morning I see young people canoeing up and down the river, enjoying themselves. I want to ensure that there is not a similar tragedy in my constituency. We need to get young people involved in such activities. It was mentioned on Second Reading that too many young people are stuck in front of television sets or computers. With the Internet coming in, goodness knows how much daylight many young people will see in future.

I am not certain what constitutes an activity centre, but one area that may be covered by the amendment is the ski centre on Pendle hill in my constituency, which runs between Clitheroe and Sabden. Many young people use it to good effect. I am not certain whether it would be regulated by the Bill. Many groups—we all have them—in our constituencies, such as girl guides, cubs, beavers and scouts, use those activity centres, but also go on events that they have organised themselves. I am not too sure whether those groups or youth clubs will be covered.

My amendment is trying to ensure clarity for all sorts of groups that may exist within the term "activity centre". Clause 3(2) says that regulations under section 1 or 2

> "(a) shall be made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument;
> (b) may make different provisions for different cases"

I want absolute clarity as to what the provisions would be and the different cases that we are talking about. As we have stated time and again, we do not wish to see over-regulation for the sake of it. We do not wish to see regulations heaped on for the sake of it. It has been stated that we can introduce legislation to protect young people, but irrespective of whatever legislation we introduce, we will not able to legislate against people injuring or killing themselves. We are seeking in the Bill to minimise the risk of them doing that.

12.15 pm

I wish it to be made absolutely clear that people who operate those activity centres will not suddenly—particularly when they have made massive investments in their business and taken all precautions to ensure that their operation is run as safely as it can be—have new rules and regulations heaped on them, regulations which they may not deem appropriate, which may involve costs. I see in the Bill that transitional provisions may be introduced over a time. Therefore, the costs, whether in training or additional equipment, could be spread over a period.

Having said that, smaller organisations might suddenly be asked to abide by our requirements but may not be able to raise the money to fulfil their obligations and may go out of business. The ratio of instructors to pupils in some of the smaller centres might be greater than in some of the bigger centres, but I am sure that the standards vary throughout the country.

I am asking for clarity on the provision. Are we seeing the thin end of the wedge, with no regard paid to the costs that may be incurred by activity centres as a result of new rules and regulations? Such costs will be passed on to the people using those centres. I do not want to see those centres used only by the youngsters of wealthy parents.

Many parents in this country have to scrimp and save to ensure that their youngsters are able to take part in the activities that their friends take part in. It would be dreadful to put those parents in a position in which they would have to say to their children, "I'm terribly sorry, but you cannot go on that pursuit, because we can't afford it." We must ensure that any rules we introduce are framed in a sensitive and common-sense manner, and that they will not heap additional costs on to parents and the activity centres.

I am also concerned at the possibility of what I call the clipboard mentality, which we have seen in this country time and again. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, and others, have talked about deregulation, and we are in a deregulatory mood in many respects, but that does not mean that we are opposed to introducing new rules and regulations when they are absolutely necessary. I want to ensure that a cost-benefit analysis is done on any new rules regulations that are suggested for those activity centres. We must ensure that they are not over-burdensome, and that they are well within the costs of the activity centres.

I am also conscious that there might be different rules and regulations for different activity centres, some of which might be in public ownership, and some in private ownership. I want to get away from that completely. Surely we want to set a minimum set of standards that are clear for everybody at the outset, so that they will all know what they are to do to comply with the regulations. They should not be open to interpretation by officers in various parts of the country who interpret the rules and regulations more rigidly than officers who may use a light-touch interpretation. Some officers will move from one part of the country to another, taking with them the baggage that they have built up.

We must give the activity centres the ability to plan long term. The last thing they want, especially in the light of the difficulties of small businesses in raising capital for all sorts of projects, is to be presented with a Bill which will make it extremely difficult for them to raise money from the banks. The banks will say that they are not certain that the project for which the money is required will increase the number of people coming to the activity centre, and will not lend the money.

As I have said, the centres need to be able to plan long-term, and their prices must be kept as competitive as possible, because they are competing with many other activities, outdoor and indoor. I ask the Minister to address the needs of the activity centres and the flexibility he needs to be given to meet any future changes that we have not been able properly to address in debate on the Bill. The activity centres must be aware of a clarity of purpose, so that they know exactly where they stand.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) speaks with such eloquence that one might be tempted into believing that behind his plea for deregulation lies a deregulatory amendment. But he seeks to remove flexibility from the Bill, making it more rigid and probably more onerous to the operators of activity centres than would otherwise be the case. I trust that the House will not be taken in by the charm and blandishments of my hon. Friend. I am afraid that, in my case, they fell on deaf ears.

I should like to speak to my amendment, which is No. 11. Throughout the passage of the Bill, there have been numerous calls for the regulatory burden to be kept as light as possible—the light touch. There is a danger that, with the best intentions in the world—there can be few better intentions than to try to legislate to ensure that tragedies such as that which occurred at Lyme bay will never happen again—we shall end up with regulations that are too onerous and which work against the interests of young people by making it more difficult and costly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley has mentioned, for them to go on excellent activity holidays.

I make no apology for returning to the theme of regulation with amendment No.11. Despite the assurances of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) that the Bill will not impose undue restrictions on the operations of activity centres which would deny young people the opportunity to take sensible risks, there is genuine concern among those in the field that that may happen.

It is not the purpose of the Bill to draw up detailed regulations: it merely enables the Minister to draw up regulations at a later stage and to deal with them by way of the statutory instrument procedure. The Bill is sensible, and I stress again that I welcome it.

However, I remind the Minister that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said, the Bill is no part of the Government's deregulation initiative. It represents an inescapable extension of regulatory control. When presenting the statutory instrument which details and enacts the regulations, it will be for the Minister to ensure that they are not unduly burdensome or will hinder the enjoyment or experience of young people in participating in sports activities.

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Clause 3(3) requires the Secretary of State to consult only

> "the Health and Safety Commission and such other persons (if any) as he considers it appropriate to consult."

I do not like that "(if any)", because it gives the impression, deliberately or otherwise, that there may not be other people whom my right hon. Friend may see fit to consult before making his regulations. That would be a pity, but I shall let that point pass.

I do not doubt that the Health and Safety Commission is well qualified to provide expert advice on health and safety issues relevant to the regulations. But that is not the only organisation the Secretary of State should be required to consult in framing the regulations.

If a balance between health and safety and the personal development of young people through participation in adventurous activities is to be maintained, surely the latter deserves as much consideration as the former. That is why the amendment seeks to require the Secretary of State to consult representatives of the owners of activity centres before setting the regulations in stone.

I am sure that hon. Members are aware of the work that has already been done by the Activity Centre Advisory Committee working with the Council for Outdoor Education, Training and Recreation and the British Activity Holiday Association. I understand that all those bodies accept the need for statutory systems of regulation and that they have made that clear to the hon. Member for Devonport. In the absence of statutory regulation, they have over the past two years been developing their own voluntary body, and they have made it clear that they stand ready to offer the Secretary of State advice and the benefit of first-hand knowledge in the running of activity centres for young people when he is drawing up the regulations that are enabled by the Bill.

I understand that considerable dialogue has already been established between the Health and Safety Commission and those bodies. I am pleased to hear that that dialogue is taking place, but there is no requirement for the Secretary of State to consult the people on whom the burden of the new regulations will fall. The chairman of the British Activity Holidays Association has expressed concern to me over that.

Although the BAHA is enthusiastic about the Bill, it remains understandably anxious about numerous matters of detail which are likely to arise from it and which will need to be considered by the Secretary of State as he moves towards implementing his regulations.

I tabled the amendment in the interests of balance, which we have heard so much about during the passage of the Bill, and in the interests of the light touch which we would all wish to see. It is reasonable that there should be a requirement for my hon. Friend the Minister to consult the owners of activity centres as well as those whose business it is to ensure the safety of the public.

After all, once the Bill becomes an Act—as I hope it will shortly—it will, like any other piece of legislation, require the good faith and support of those to whom it is directed for it to be an effective law. It is surely right that the views of those on whom the regulations will fall are taken fully into account as the regulations are developed.

12.30 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks: My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) referred to the need for flexibility, and I agree. I do not, however, concur with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who is a passionate deregulator in industry, business and commerce. I do not believe that his amendment will make a substantial improvement to the Bill.

I am rather more persuaded by the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East, although I would not go so far as to say that he should not seriously consider withdrawing the amendment that he has tabled. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, who eloquently described the activities in his constituency—which I know particularly well—is seeking to do the opposite of deregulating. If the amendment were to form part of the Bill, it would take away the flexibility which should be inherent in it. The flexibility on which there has been agreement across the Floor of the House and which formed part of the foundation behind the Bill would be removed.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley in a number of other respects. He is entirely right to say that the same regulations should apply to both private and public sector activity centres. He is also entirely right to say that there should be no regional variation in standards in the running of activity centres, no matter what part of the UK they are situated in. It is important that standards are maintained, and regulations will follow the guidance as a result of the Bill.

But it is important to ensure that there is the maximum flexibility, and that would be inhibited if amendment No. 4 were agreed to. I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley will, having listened to my hon. Friend the Minister and to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson)—who I hope will have something sensible to say about the matter—will withdraw the amendment.

I referred to regional variations and to public and private sector regulations. When we seek to legislate for the safety of young people who are canoeing, abseiling or taking part in any other activity, it is important that we achieve the same safety measures and provisions, irrespective of the activity. To remove the part of the Bill which my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley is suggesting be removed would be inappropriate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East was entirely right to say that the British Activity Holiday Association is anxious about a number of items contained in the Bill, and I very much hope that, as we make further progress in the debate, some of the issues which my hon. Friend raised will be taken on board.

Mr. Forth: This has been an intriguing and important debate, because it has enabled us to focus on the direction which many of us would like the Bill to take. The debate has been particularly useful, because it has allowed us to concentrate on a key phrase in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has done us a service by drawing attention to clause 3(2)(b), which refers to the fact that the regulations to be made may make different provisions for different cases. He speculated on what the differences might be.

I do not often get the opportunity to use the notes so helpfully provided by the excellent officials who give me such superb support at the Department for Education. On this occasion, to repay them for their past kindness I shall read their notes—precisely because, in their usual way, they have accurately anticipated the sort of points that have been made. I shall do my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley the honour of using the notes, because they exactly answer the points he made.

There are a number of circumstances in which we can envisage requiring the sort of flexibility that my hon. Friend mentioned. First, regulations may need to provide for the possibility that licences should contain different conditions for different types of activity. It may be that, following consultation, we would want the regulations to specify that, for example, instructors leading rock climbing or canoeing expeditions should have leadership certificates. We can imagine other similar possibilities.

Secondly, consultation may lead us to conclude that providers should have licences classified as provisional until they are inspected, after which they might then receive full licences if appropriate. That provision, which would be removed if my hon. Friend's amendment was accepted, would allow different sorts of conditions to be imposed on provisional licences and full licences.

We may wish to provide regulations for a sliding scale of fees, so that small businesses are not unnecessarily burdened. That is exactly the point about which my hon. Friend was concerned, and I understand why. It is a flexibility that we want to include in the Bill.

The House will recognise immediately not only the prescience of the officials in the Department in anticipating the points raised by my hon. Friend, but the fact that their notes anticipate the sort of conditions in which we may want to make different provision for different cases—not in the way that my hon. Friend feared, but to provide exactly the flexibility that he said he wanted. That flexibility is included for good reason, and it would be applied in the sort of areas and in the sort of ways that I have mentioned, not in the ways that my hon. Friend feared.

I come now to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth). I am aware that he has carefully scrutinised the Committee proceedings, although he did not have the privilege and joy of serving on it. He will be aware that the point raised in his amendment has been mused upon previously. I hope that I will be able to persuade him, as I was previously able to persuade the Committee, that to include individual organisations in the Bill to ensure that they are consulted might be tempting, but not necessarily productive.

There is no question but that the sort of organisations that my hon. Friend has in mind will be fully consulted during the consultative process. I am happy to give that undertaking now. After all, it is in our interests that they should be consulted. If we want to bring before the House a set of regulations that are well formed, well thought-out, relevant and effective, we can do no other than to consult all the relevant and interested parties and bodies to ensure that we know their views, can use their expertise and, as far as possible, ensure that the regulations that we frame are relevant, workable and practical.

It follows that I want to ensure that consultations cover the widest possible spectrum of organisations and individuals. The Department has increasingly come to value that process as a method of operation. We have used it with the special needs code of practice and we are using it now with the development of policy for under-fives' education. It is not only a vital democratic process: it is valuable in the formation of policy, to ensure that those most immediately involved in an activity that we intend to regulate are consulted fully in advance. There can be no question but that that is case.

Having said all that, I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that, in some people's eyes, to single out a particular group or body, no matter how important they may be, might give them a dubious or spurious primacy in the matter.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: That was precisely my point in relation to the Health and Safety Commission.

Mr. Forth: The commission has a unique role, in that it is the body statutorily charged with ensuring health and safety as far as is possible. The other bodies involved have an important but different role. They would be consulted and listened to—they are, of course, active players and participants—but they do not have the statutory role that the commission and, with it, the executive will continue to have in acting to ensure that the highest possible standards of safety apply in every case.

For that reason, it is correct that the Bill singles out that unique, central and pivotal role for the Health and Safety Commission, but that it does not succumb to the temptation of seeking to provide a list, either exclusive or inclusive, or a list of priority consultees.

It is better that we leave it completely open, with the proviso, which I hope my hon. Friend will accept, that there can be no question but that the organisations that he has mentioned will be consulted. He may want to write to me to seek a further assurance if that is not sufficient, and to remind us, if we need reminding when it comes to the consultation, that those bodies should be fully consulted, as I have assured him they will be.

Mr. Jamieson: In the debate, I have been an interested observer, watching the split among Conservative Members elevate into open warfare. Being split eminently suits them for the Back Benches, but being in open warfare qualifies them for the Cabinet.

Amendment No. 4 was tabled by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). He may have misunderstood the part of the Bill to which it relates. There is no question that commercial centres should be dealt with differently from local education authority centres. It is proper that the measure, if and when it is enacted, should fall equally on both organisations. That was fully expected and explained on Second Reading and in Committee.

The Bill's intention was to ensure that charges for smaller centres could be made on a different scale from charges for larger organisations, and that those scales should reflect more the amount of usage and turnover of the centre, rather than its physical size.

The hon. Gentleman referred to charges on small centres and to the burden that is caused. In introducing the legislation, I did not intend to over-burden small organisations. We want them to thrive, and we want to encourage them to achieve further success.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has taken the trouble to read the evidence given to the Select Committee on Education by Ms Rawlinson-Plant, who is a committee member of the British Activities Holiday Association. She

[Mr. Jamieson]

referred to the small centre with which she is involved—the Mill on the Brue centre, which sounds like something out of Thomas Hardy. She said that the centre took only 50 people at a time. But when I asked her what its turnover was, she said that it was about £250,000 a year. I asked her what she thought was a reasonable accreditation fee to pay. She astonished the Select Committee by saying that she thought a reasonable fee would be £5,000 per year. I asked her to repeat it, just in case a zero had been misplaced, and she repeated it as a reasonable fee to pay. That came from a person who is running a small centre.

It would be unreasonable for a small centre to pay that sum. Ultimately, we look forward to a fee that will be considerably less than £5,000. I was nevertheless surprised to hear someone from a small centre, in evidence to a Select Committee, give that sum as the fee that it was prepared to pay for accreditation. It is an indication of how strongly many of those bodies feel about the accreditation scheme and its commercial value to them. As the hon. Member for Ribble Valley said, many centres have suffered a reduction in trade because of the lack of confidence caused partly by the Lyme bay tragedy and partly by other events that have occurred since.

12.45 pm

Amendment No. 11 was tabled by the hon. Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth). It is unnecessary to include in the Bill a set of organisations which represents specifically the providers of activities. I recall the Minister of State, in many of his illustrious contributions to debates in the Committee stage of what became the Education Act 1993, saying that too much weight should not be given to producer interests, and that the emphasis should be on consumer interests.

As I said to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), we must tread with caution with a body such as BAHA, which, as the amendment suggests, is an organisation

"representative of the owners of activity centres."

BAHA does not represent a substantial number of centres. It represents possibly 120 or 130 out of 3,000. I accept that Mr. Martin Hudson has made many changes to BAHA in the past two years—lest anyone think that I am criticising him, I believe that many of those changes have been for the good.

The reason why I counsel caution with the amendment is that, when the body was set up in 1986, the intention was to carry out a voluntary accreditation system. If the hon. Member for Surrey, East looks again at BAHA's evidence to the Select Committee, and especially at the record of my interrogation of Mr. Martin Hudson, he will see that I asked about the voluntary accreditation scheme and how it had been conducted in the late 1980s.

An inspector, Mr. Higginson, who I believe has a senior post in BAHA, visited hundreds of centres, and was paid to carry out the scheme. At the same time, he was running the Rock Park centre, which was found wanting by the Consumers Association and the Welsh tourist board, which declined to accredit it under its system.

Before we give too much prominence to such bodies and mention them specifically in the Bill, we should consider just how authentic they are and what their essential responsibility is for the safety of children, because that is what the Bill is about—it is not about protecting the providers of activities but about protecting the safety of those who use them. On those grounds, and for those reasons so clearly outlined by the Minister, I counsel the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I am extremely grateful for the advice and guidance given by my hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) about clause 3(2)(b), which has given it clarity of purpose. My fear was evident. The thrust of the Government's policies is deregulatory, and the last thing I wanted to do was to reverse that.

Due regard should be given to the costs of any changes that might have to be made, because they will have to be passed on to the customers of activity centres which we want to be used even more. I certainly want the Minister to have flexibility, but he must understand that, although I have every confidence in him and consider him to be a fellow traveller in this matter, in future someone else might be in a position to make a different interpretation of clause 3(2)(b).

However, in view of the Minister's assurances that my fears are ungrounded, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

12.49 pm

Mr. Kilfoyle: Like everyone here today, I welcome the fact that the Bill has reached this stage. We look forward to it going through this stage speedily and receiving Royal Assent.

I was quite taken by the late conversion of so many hon. Members to a lively interest in the Bill. I was pleased to see the hon. Members for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth), for Southport (Mr. Banks), for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), and others, tabling amendments and speaking on them today. However, I fear that many of the amendments were not even serious probing amendments, but were constructed to eat up valuable time in the House.

It should be put on record that today we have had another, more sophisticated attempt to ensure that the Transport of Animals for Slaughter Bill does not get the hearing that it deserves. That is especially sad because no one anticipated—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This is the Third Reading of the Activity Centres (Young Person's Safety) Bill. It is not a debate on other legislation or on tactics related to other legislation. I assure the hon. Gentleman that all the amendments selected today are fully in order.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am suitably chastised, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Having said that, I noted the comments of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). He said that this was a sad day in terms of his views on regulation and deregulation. For parents throughout the country, it is a happy day indeed. It is especially a happy day for the Walker, Dunne, Langley and Sayer families who lost children in Lyme bay. The

Bill cannot, of course, be any compensation for their terrible loss, but they can take some succour from the fact that the Bill has reached its Third Reading. We hope that, as a result of the Bill, there will not be such losses in future.

I was taken by the concern for military traditions shown by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, as reflected in amendment No. 3. Such traditions do not strike my fancy; I have never had a particular engagement with uniforms, boots and all things military. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which was endorsed by the Minister, that the issue had, in all fairness, not been raised earlier.

So that I cannot be considered to have extended, even inadvertently, discussion of the Bill on Third Reading, I intend to be extremely brief. We very much welcome the fact that the Bill has reached this stage. Yet again, I place on record the fact that credit must be given to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) who has conducted such a model campaign during the Bill's various stages. The Bill is a credit to him, a credit to the families concerned and a credit to all who have children as their primary concern. As I said, I am not especially concerned about what happens to military tradition. I am not really concerned about what happens in terms of regulation and deregulation in the context of this Bill. Like hon. Members on, I hope, both sides, my concern is for children, especially when they are at risk.

In these peculiar political times, the Labour party is more the party of deregulation than the Conservative party in many respects. The one question I have to ask myself is whether, with a Labour Government, the Bill would have been introduced without a strong campaign having been mounted by my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport. I believe that it would have been.

I congratulate the Minister on his productive and constructive attitude at each stage. The simple reason for his attitude is that he has reflected public opinion, and the sense of public outrage about what happened in Lyme bay and the potential for future disasters. I welcome everything that the Minister has said. I deplore the fact that—shall we say—time has been wasted in considering the Bill, for whatever reason. On that note, I hope that others will follow my model of brevity and speedily complete the Third Reading.

12.55 pm

Mr. Merchant: I shall take nothing but the briefest of time to speak in favour of giving the Bill a Third Reading. I am sure that all hon. Members, including Labour Members, will recognise that I have had—and displayed—a genuine interest in the Bill from the very beginning. Sadly, for some, this Bill will come too late, but it will substantially prevent previous abuses which left open avoidable levels of risk.

I am not generally in favour of regulation, especially unnecessary regulation, but there is a strong argument for the regulation that the Bill will enforce. It sets up a framework. On a constitutional note, I slightly regret the fact that so much is left to statutory instrument, but I recognise—and have been convinced—that it is necessary in this case. There will be a proper licensing, inspection and complaints procedure. The Bill will neither harm business nor the activities in its scope. Rather, it will encourage such activities by making them clearly more reliable, by answering doubts and by helping those who run the centres to run them with greater confidence. It will also encourage parents, teachers and those who take part to do so without the worry that they have had in the past few years.

For those reasons, I believe that the Bill is of benefit to all those involved. It will help the education of our children and help to protect them and I delighted to see it reach this stage.

12.55 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks: I had not originally proposed to catch your eye on Third Reading, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do so briefly to make one particularly important point. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Devonport, especially for the way in which he wrote to right hon. and hon. Members from all parties and kept us informed on the progress of his Bill.

A number of us who spoke to amendments on Report in the House this morning did not table our own amendments and were in our places to support the hon. Gentleman and the important measures which lie behind the Bill. I have no doubt whatever that if there had been any time wasting, as was suggested earlier, the Bill would not have made such progress. All of us on the Conservative Benches, in tandem with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), wish the Bill best speed.

12.56 pm

Mr. Forth: I join the sentiments which have been expressed and congratulate the hon. Member for Devonport on his wisdom and sagacity in bringing before the House a Bill to provide a framework for activity centres. It is an enabling measure and it will be followed by consultation. The regulations which will flow from it will be very much based on that process of consultation, as we emphasised over and over again. It will put in place a licensing regime with inspection and penalties to seek to ensure as far as is possible within the law and given human frailty that any centre which provides activities for young people under 18 will be as safe as we can make it, but will be consistent with providing the sense of adventure which we all believe is so important to the development of young people.

Scrutiny in Committee and on Report has demonstrated that the Bill achieves all the provisions required. I wish it well. I am sure that the hon. Member for Devonport knows that the Government, my Department and any others involved will seek to ensure that his Bill, once it has passed all its parliamentary stages, will be put into effect with speed and the thoroughness that it deserves to ensure that, when it finally takes effect, it will be balanced, effective and fair. That is the Government's intention and I am sure that it will meet the hon. Gentleman's approval.

12.58 pm

Mr. Jamieson: I rise at the close of the debate with a sense of humility and pleasure at having been able to steer the Bill through the House. I am humble because the House has given me the time to introduce a measure which is of great importance to my constituents and to people throughout the country. I have also been humbled

[Mr. Jamieson]

by my ability to persuade so many people to support the Bill, not just in the House, but in the much wider community outside in the country. I have been pleased that it has received so much cross-party support. I am also humbled to have been able to participate in that rare event—an Opposition Back Bencher steering a Bill through the House in tandem with the Government and with their support.

It has been a pleasure to represent my constituents and to reflect the much wider interest throughout the country. I have been pleased to be able to extract from an appalling disaster, which happened almost two years ago today, some hope for the future. I cannot pretend but that the Bill was initiated by the tragedy at Lyme bay. I cannot conceal how deeply saddened I am that four lives had to be lost before action was triggered. I cannot claim the high moral ground and pretend that I was campaigning for the measure before that event. That tragedy at Lyme bay triggered the need for the Bill and triggered cross-party support for it. That tragedy has led to a period of careful consideration and, now, to measures of plain common sense, which anyone can see are right.

With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to thank one or two people who have assisted me with the Bill. I pay tribute to the Minister of State, Department for Education for his support in getting the Bill through the House. Had it not been for his support, we would not be participating in the Third Reading debate today. I thank him for his contribution in getting the Bill through the House. I also thank the silent ones behind him, his civil servants, who have been so helpful in seeing the Bill through Parliament. The Minister did them credit today by reading out the brief that they had written for him—and excellent it was too.

I should also like to pay tribute, as I did on Second Reading, to the parents who lost their children at Lyme bay. The Walkers, Dunnes, Sayers and Langleys have suffered what can only be described as the unimaginable loss of a child. None of us can understand what those people have gone through unless we have been through it ourselves. But we all know what it is like to lose loved ones, and how deeply and profoundly it affects people when they undergo such a tragedy. It is significant that the parents used their loss not merely for internal grief, great though that may have been, but as a springboard to campaign for other people's children. That must have been the most noble position for anyone to take in the circumstances.

The Bill has received widespread support from local authorities, individual schools, sporting organisations, commercial centres that run activities and youth organisations, not least the scouts and the Young Men's Christian Association, as well as many other organisations. I have had considerable support from all the teachers' professional organisations, particularly the National Union of Teachers, which has played a large part. I am particularly grateful to Jonathan Hopkins and Elaine Derbyshire from the NUT, who helped enormously in the Bill's preparation and helped me to steer it through the House.

There are many unsung heroes behind the scenes, but I should like to thank one other person. I have the rare opportunity to thank one of my staff, a young man called Alex Ross, who has been with me since I was elected, nearly three years ago. He came straight from university and, not long after that, the Lyme bay tragedy occurred. He has helped me to deal with the distressed parents with enormous maturity, sensitivity and good sense well beyond his years. He, too, has shown quiet concern in ensuring that the Bill proceeds through Parliament. His tenacity behind the scenes has helped to get the Bill to where it is today.

The measure states that children involved in hazardous activities should have a framework of safety guidance that must be adhered to. It distinguishes between activities that are challenging and exciting and those that are dangerous and pose a risk to life. The Bill puts in place a system of proper inspection of activity centres, and when it is enacted, I hope that it will restore public confidence in that industry, which has been rocked by tragedy. As the regulations are implemented and the accreditation scheme begins to work, I hope that parents and teachers will have renewed confidence. All of us want to encourage young people to undertake such activities, for reasons clearly spelt out in our debates.

The Bill will assist good centres, which are in the majority, and support their commercial ventures and activities. It will send a clear message to centres that cut corners and compromise safety that either they join the scheme or go out of business. I hope that few centres will go out of business because of the Bill and that those that cut corners, as revealed by the Health and Safety Executive report, will bring themselves up to standard.

It was said many times in debate that the Bill cannot eliminate all risk, but it will permit challenging and adventurous activity for children in an environment that ensures that safety comes first.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Transport of Animals for Slaughter Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.6 pm

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

My Bill could not be more timely, but I said those words six to eight weeks ago. Unfortunately, when my Bill was originally due to receive its Second Reading, it was in a long queue of private Members' Bills and there was not time to debate it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his Bill, which commands respect in all parts of the House. It won broad agreement on Second Reading and in Committee, and there was support for amendments tabled today. Perhaps a little brevity, however, would have been in order, to allow more time to debate my Bill, which is also extremely important. I regret that the Government wheeled in the praetorian guard to speak at length on amendments to my hon. Friend's Bill.

My Bill is timely, given the widespread public feeling about the transport of animals for slaughter that even the media and the Government recognise. We have seen violence and even tragic loss of life as emotions have heightened, with confrontation replacing peaceful protest. That is a sad reflection on the fact that, as democratic representatives, we do not always arrange our time to ensure that the public's views are made known and acted upon. I do not support violent confrontation but condemn it, yet the House must realise that the transport of animals for slaughter has been an issue for many years and frustration has grown. To many of the sincere people who take part in these demonstrations, violence is anathema.

During Agriculture questions yesterday, the Minister was asked how many items of correspondence she had received on this matter. The answer was: more than 90,000. That is not to say that only 90,000 people are worried. I have been given petitions with more than 800 names on them. Far more people are concerned than have written letters to the Ministry. That goes to show the depth of public feeling about the live transportation of animals for slaughter.

I pay tribute at this point to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and I thank it for the help that it has given me with drafting this Bill since I was lucky enough to be drawn in the ballot. We all owe the RSPCA a debt of gratitude for the work of its undercover inspectors. The RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming have graphically illustrated severe instances of animal cruelty. One has only to think of the RSPCA video which revealed the appalling conditions in Greek abattoirs.

It is no good closing our eyes and saying that that has nothing to do with us, because the animals of this country are superbly reared by our farmers. Although we may not have a legal obligation, we certainly have a moral obligation to ensure that animals are not transported to such appalling conditions.

The Bill is an attempt to resolve the issue and to give temporary respite to animals involved in the live transport trade and to calves destined for veal crates.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems with legislating unilaterally in this country is that it means ignoring what may happen between the time when the animals reach the other side of the channel and their arrival at the Greek abattoirs? Surely the answer is to achieve Europe-wide agreed rules on the transportation of animals, in addition to dealing with the conditions in the Greek abattoirs.

Mr. Olner: I shall come on to that point.

The Bill expresses my constituents' anger and upset, which have been reflected in the floods of letters and petitions arriving on my desk during the campaign. I am sure that other hon. Members have been similarly deluged, and I am grateful for the fact that the Bill enjoys cross-party sponsorship.

Even before my election to this place in 1992 I used to take a keen interest in the welfare of all animals. Two aspects of the live transportation of animals have always struck me as ludicrous. We have all been affected by the frequent scenes of animals suffering which have brought long-distance live transportation into disrepute. It seems mad to ship live animals to somewhere 1,000 miles away and then to kill them within minutes of unloading them at their journey's end. That is not just my view. I have received a letter from the National Association of Women's Clubs—not exactly a far left organisation of the type often mentioned as taking an interest in animal welfare and rights. It describes horrific instances of pigs and sheep being transported for long hours in cramped, dirty conditions without food or water. The association stresses the fact that journeys lasting 30 hours are commonplace for sheep and cattle, and that journeys to Italian abattoirs last for as long as 45 hours.

I have been supplied with the results of a referendum conducted by Worcestershire Referendum Society. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the Minister of State, Department for Education, is no longer in his place, as he was for consideration of the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill. I was given the information by the referendum society after appearing on a television programme in the midlands, during which there was a discussion on the transportation of live animals. The information is the result of a referendum that was held in the Worcestershire area in 1993. People were asked whether they wished the overseas transportation of live animals for slaughter to cease.

The referendum revealed that 88.8 per cent. of those who participated thought that the trade should cease; only 6.3 per cent. were in favour of it continuing. I suggest that, two years on, public opinion has hardened towards the disgraceful trade involving the transportation of live animals and the conditions that surround it.

Like many hon. Members, I am aware of the closure of slaughterhouses. There was such a closure in my constituency, which led to the loss of jobs, trade and expertise. The slaughterhouse had only recently been modernised. It was forced to close not because the company had insufficient money to upgrade it to enable it to obtain the various licences to meet European Community law—thousands of pounds had been invested in the place and it fulfilled all the conditions that it had to meet to enable it to stay open—but, sadly, because of the increase in the exportation of live sheep from this country to the rest of Europe. The closure was not the result of operating conditions or a failure to meet licensing standards.

[Mr. Olner]

We are exporting animals in some awful conditions and we are exporting jobs. Slaughterhouse work is being undertaken in the rest of Europe but not in this country. It is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Hon. Members who wish to have meetings should hold them outside the Chamber.

Mr. Olner: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for bringing the praetorian guard to order. I appreciate that.

Why do more than 2 million animals leave the United Kingdom each year on the most horrendous and unnecessary journey of their lives when they could be transported to a local slaughterhouse, humanely killed and transported abroad as carcase? That is the humane and efficient way of exporting animals.

I am not a softy. I do not think that many people in the UK are softies, but all of us are decent and we respect the rights of animals. We respect the fact that animals can suffer pain. Most of us would rightly speak out against inflicting pain upon them. We know that live animals bruise easily and that carcases do not. We know also that the cost of transporting carcases is a quarter of the cost involved in transporting live animals. The live animals that are transported are subject to severe stress. I feel strongly that our farmers receive a raw deal in some respects. Their animal husbandry is second to none worldwide. The quality of the product is severely damaged when it travels miles across Europe, only to meet its death at the end. We are not giving our farmers the opportunity to market their excellent products in the best possible way.

I do not think that we will ever see the Danes shipping animals to this country crammed in the back of a lorry from Denmark. All their products arrive properly packaged and prepared, and it is a very marketable commodity. I see no reason why our meat trade should not be conducted in the same manner.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I entirely agree that we would all like to see more meat purchased in carcase form rather than on the hoof, but if we were to ban live exports would not abattoirs on the continent simply import live animals from other countries, which have far worse standards of animal welfare than us? Should not we therefore seek a European-wide improvement of animal welfare regulations?

Mr. Olner: If people on the continent buy United Kingdom meat because of its quality, I do not think that a substitute for it would be transported from other parts of eastern Europe, where the quality may not be as good. We have to be a little better in the way in which we sell our meat products in carcase form instead of on the hoof.

The nature of the market has been known for years; it was known before the single market was introduced. The European Union has had the task of agreeing rules that will operate in all member states to promote and protect those animals. There has been a great deal of frustration at the fact that the discussions on the details of the rules began shortly after I was elected in 1992. Yet, to date, no agreement has been reached and the misery continues.

In some respects, we have gone too far on what we would be prepared to accept as maximum journey times. We started from a low point, and in trying to secure an all-European agreement we have gradually increased the hours to such an extent that we cannot go any further. We have reached an impasse. The Bill says that we have waited far too long for European-wide regulations to be introduced.

The Bill will ban the export of animals for slaughter until such time as Europe has rules in operation to protect them. If, as the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food claims, the Agriculture Council reaches a conclusion in two weeks time, setting tough new rules to be implemented quickly to protect animals from unnecessary suffering, part of the purpose of the Bill will have been achieved. But if, as I believe, European Ministers cobble together an appalling compromise, with a long delay before introduction, questionable enforcement procedures and, above all, continued long journeys, my Bill will be a signal to Europe that we will not let the suffering continue.

Some people might ask what precedent there is for imposing such a ban. I know that Conservative Members have argued that we cannot unilaterally apply such a ban. Perhaps we have to take a leaf out of our European colleagues' book. The German Parliament announced that it would ban British beef. As we saw when Spanish trawlers were going to amass in the Irish box, a tough stand by one country can have a profound effect and can assist Europe in sorting out matters quickly. That is the impetus that my Bill will bring.

The Bill recognises a growing impatience in our society with this sordid trade and recognises that the public, the ferry companies and even many farmers are disgusted by the treatment of these animals. It was the ferry companies' decision to ban lorries carrying sheep and pigs and other animals that created the hiatus, at which point the people who conduct the trade started to move to other areas such as Brightlingsea where perhaps they thought their trade could continue unrecognised and unseen. The trade was being carried out on ordinary ferries that are used by the public and the suffering of the animals on board turned people from using ferries.

The Bill also recognises that if Europe is paralysed and cannot act, Britain should. It seeks to prevent the exploitation of calves destined for intensive systems that are illegal in the UK. Before I was elected to the House, Parliament set a standard for the veal crate system and individual pens. If Parliament recognised that veal crates were wrong and banned them, it is illogical for us to export calves to be subjected to those self-same conditions abroad. We should act immediately to ban that trade. If our fellow Europeans want to argue with that, let them. The trade is wrong and barbaric and it should be stopped.

I know—the whole House probably does so—that to some extent the trade affects my constituency because planes carrying animals overfly it. People in the Coventry area are concerned that the veal crate trade, with all its associated problems, is continuing at Coventry airport. I hope that the Minister will take a separate note of that and look at the condition of some of those young calves when they arrive at Coventry airport, where they stay before they are loaded on to an aircraft, and at whether proper lairage facilities are provided. I am advised that some of the young calves are taken from their suckling mothers at an extremely early age and are not in a condition or of an age to feed themselves properly. That adds to the misery of the trade.

The issue is not purely one of law but of political will. If the Government believe that EU law prevents them from taking action the Minister should attempt to negotiate for Britain the right to prohibit live exports. There is a precedent for that because for many years Britain has had a measure banning the export of horses for slaughter. That shows that the Government and Parliament can, if they wish, act to protect the rights of animals.

The British public wish to have a ban on such exports and that is what the Bill would achieve. It would also attract not only cross-party but widespread public support.

1.28 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): May I first congratulate the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) on his good fortune in securing a place in the ballot? As the Member for Shoreham—one of the ports used for the export of livestock—I am proud to support the Bill from the Conservative Benches, and to be a co-sponsor of it. Like the hon. Gentleman, I made it clear before I came to the House of Commons that I was against the inhumane export of live animals. Since becoming a Member, I have sponsored early-day motion 318 and have supported early-day motions 21 and 1654. I also supported the Shoreham Against Live Exports petition promoted by Compassion in World Farming.

I must make it clear at the outset that the Bill is not an attack on British farmers, who have a record second to none in the world for the care of animals. I can understand that British farmers might feel penalised on account of lower standards of animal welfare in other countries, in particular, the use of veal crates. I myself have protested to the ambassadors of France and Holland against the use of veal crates in those countries.

Britain has led the way in animal welfare. We have banned veal crates in our country, and we have imposed strict animal transport standards. On 23 January, the Government introduced new legislation to make it an offence to depart from a veterinary-approved transport plan, not only in this country but on the continent. The Government have been making strenuous efforts in the Council of Agriculture Ministers to bring European animal welfare standards up to a level that British people consider acceptable.

I would be grateful if the Parliamentary Secretary would give a report on the latest state of affairs in the Council of Ministers, and on the great efforts which she and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have been making in that connection. I would also ask her to give the House a report on the efforts which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been making to encourage British farmers to have their produce processed in the United Kingdom, rather than exported. I am sure that all Members agree that it is far better for British meat, rather than British animals, to be exported.

We must also draw the attention of some of our European partners to the practice of importing live British animals, killing them in a foreign country and marketing them as though they were meat produced in that country. That not only distorts the market but, in my opinion, is a fraudulent practice. The Government are well aware of the issues, as are most Members, but we cannot say that about our continental colleagues. I wish that Compassion in World Farming, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and others would put more pressure on the legislatures of other countries and on the European Commission.

Mr. Olner: I appreciate the help and assistance of the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for being a sponsor of the Bill. Is he aware that the RSPCA has run advertising campaigns in France to try to bring about a greater perception of animal welfare issues in that country?

Mr. Stephen: I was aware of that, and that is all to the good. I would still like to see more pressure being brought to bear on our continental colleagues.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): My constituency is a few miles from Brightlingsea where many of my constituents are protesting, just as my hon. Friend's constituents are protesting at Shoreham. Does he agree that our constituents would be better protesting to the Governments of other countries in Europe, rather than in this country where standards are higher?

Mr. Stephen: That is so, but many of our constituents do not have the financial resources to protest in other countries. It is fair to say, however, that the animal welfare organisations have millions of pounds at their disposal and could, if they wished, subsidise some people who might wish to protest on the continent.

I ask the House to give its full support to the efforts which my right hon. Friend the Minister is making in Europe, and I encourage all our constituents to put their full support behind him. There has been an unfair attack on my right hon. Friend. He and his family have owned a farm for many generations. There is a public service rule which requires Ministers to relinquish control of all assets which might cause a conflict of interest, and my right hon. Friend did so. The public cannot have it both ways. They cannot then hold my right hon. Friend responsible if something happens in relation to his farm which they do not like.

Efforts in Europe will take time. Rome was not built in a day, and European legislation takes time. Therefore, not only do I support this Bill, but I recently supported a Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) which would have imposed a unilateral ban on the export of animals until such time as European rules had been brought up to our standards. I was disappointed by the attitude of the Liberal Democrat party towards that Bill. Its rural affairs spokesman, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), said quite clearly that his party was not in favour of a ban on animal exports. Indeed, he called the protesters "naive and hypocritical".

I was sorry that no Second Reading was given to that Bill and at the time I raised a point of order with Mr. Deputy Speaker asking him to make more time available. The press reporting of the debate was, however, grossly distorted. The Bill was not talked out by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), who spoke for only 23 minutes—hardly of filibuster proportions—nor was it talked out by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who spoke for just 16 minutes, most of which was taken up by interruptions. Nor was it talked out by my right hon. Friend the Minister, who could have continued

[Mr. Stephen]

speaking until 2.30 pm, but actually sat down at 2.22 pm. That left sufficient time for the Bill to be moved and voted upon, had that been the will of the House.

In fact, the Bill was blocked by the use of a procedural device by hon. Members representing rural communities who considered the Bill to be against the interests of their constituents. It is a device that Opposition Members frequently use and I doubt whether any hon. Member, from any party, would wish to withdraw from Back Benchers the long-established rights that they hold in this House in relation to private Members' Bills.

I very much regret the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham had his house invaded and damaged. I do not agree with his view—my constituents have a different interest from his—but he is as much entitled to fight in this House for the interests of his constituents as I am to fight for the interests of mine. I hope that if there is any further attempt to intimidate a Member of the House, Madam Speaker will take the matter very seriously and make it clear that the persons responsible will be severely punished. I hope also that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will make it clear that whatever the issue may be, violence and intimidation will not be allowed to succeed in our democratic country. No matter how important any particular issue might be, none is more important than the rule of law and our democratic way of life.

Because it will take time to change European law, I believe that the Government should introduce their own a Bill to impose a unilateral ban on the export of animals. In the meantime, a court has decided that the port of Shoreham has no legal right to refuse animal exports. Back Benchers can support or introduce any Bill they like and I am proud to support this one. However, I understand that Governments must act on legal advice and I know that the Government have taken the best legal advice available. I also know that they have been advised on the provisions of the treaty of Rome—which, whether we like it or not, was accepted by the British people in a referendum in 1975.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that she will tell us whether the Government are prepared to introduce a Bill—and if not, why not. If that is the case will she, in particular, explain to the House why, having considered article 36, she thinks that we could not take advantage of its provisions.

1.38 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I say to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) that I am not a member of any praetorian guard. I am here because I represent one of the largest livestock-producing constituencies in the country.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) for his remarks. I did not object to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) simply because I am in some way in favour of animal cruelty; I did so to look after the interests of the many farmers and hill farmers in my constituency who would have been seriously damaged had that Bill been passed.

It is not the job of the House always to go with public opinion. I appreciate that there has been an enormous weight of opinion against the export of animals because the public do not see the difficulties and the nuances of unilaterally banning the trade. It is sometimes necessary for Members of Parliament to stand up against that weight of public opinion, to do something that they believe is right, and to try to achieve better animal welfare across the European Community, which I think is the Government's objective; it is certainly my objective.

There are one or two flaws in the Bill of the hon. Member for Nuneaton. He wants to achieve, as I and most hon. Members want to achieve, a reduction in the live export of animals. As he rightly said, it is nonsensical that we export live animals and not carcases because, obviously, slaughtering animals in this country is not only more humane but, practically, increases jobs and employment in the meat processing industry, which we are exporting to France and to other European countries.

However, a difficulty exists. To have meat and butchery of sufficient quality, we must invest vastly more in modern, up-to-date, multi-million pound slaughterhouses. Such things cost a great deal of money. The proper function of those slaughterhouses, of which there will be far fewer, requires the transporting of animals to them and a throughput of animals to make them economic. That is why animals are transported around the countryside.

Not least, later in the season, as the grass-growing season changes, a slaughterhouse in Nuneaton or in that region must buy lambs, for instance, from Scotland and north England. That is why animals are transported. That is the problem when Labour Members attack the Government over their slaughterhouse policy. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister is trying to achieve high-quality slaughterhouses that can process meat in the way that modern supermarkets demand.

In the old days, everyone used to eat joints of meat. It was no problem if slaughterhouses were unhygienic or inefficient in some manner because meat was sold for roasts, was put into an oven and cooked. Today, meat is sold as a meat product. It is frozen and chilled and hygiene is vastly more important.

Mr. Olner: How would the hon. Gentleman explain the closure of a slaughterhouse in my constituency? Many thousands of pounds have been invested in it, and it is relatively fully automated, yet it closed because it processed only sheep and the sheep trade went to France.

Mr. Atkinson: I have no knowledge of the circumstances of that slaughterhouse. I am aware that, in the United Kingdom, there is a problem of overcapacity in the slaughtering industry. Only some slaughterhouses will meet modern hygiene regulations. Those are not silly, nonsensical European regulations. As I explained earlier, they are necessary because of people's changing dietary pattern and the different ways in which they are buying food. That is why higher degrees of hygiene are needed.

As I explained, Labour Members state in their policy document that they want an eight-hour limit on the transportation of animals in the UK—well, they want that limit everywhere. If that were the position, it would be impossible to shift livestock from my constituency in north Northumberland to the west country or to south England. That would be prohibited unless animals were off-loaded, kept for a couple of days and then reloaded, which we consider to be much worse for animals than transporting them for a reasonable length of time.

Of the 2 million head of sheep that are transported alive out of the country, 80 per cent. go to north-western France—to the Loire, the Vendée, Nantes, Brittany and Normandy. They travel a comparatively short distance. They also go to Belgium and Holland. A few go to Germany. My hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that the vast majority of sheep that are transported from this country reach their destination in Europe within 15 hours of setting off from the UK.

The problem is that, when the port of Dover took the unilateral decision not to accept ships carrying livestock, and when the two ferry companies, P and O and Stena Sealink, made the decision not to carry the livestock, the best port in the UK, with the most humane transport and the best layering facilities, was closed to exporters, so they were forced to consider Brightlingsea and the port in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham. Those ports would involve the animals in longer sea crossings than would have been the case if they had used Dover.

The United Kingdom is not sitting back and merely reacting to circumstances because the British farming community and the Meat and Livestock Commission have long been trying to get more of our meet exported not on the hook, as we say, but preferably pre-packed for French supermarkets. The commission has been working on that for a number of years.

The export of live sheep to France increased substantially between 1990 and 1993, mainly because the number of sheep available in France declined. Many sheep farmers in the south of France went out of business and the big modern slaughterhouses in north-west France were short of animals to slaughter.

One factor that we hope to change through marketing is that the French housewife still prefers to buys meat stamped "French", a fact mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen). It is bizarre that in France one can buy "French" lamb which, only a few weeks previously, was gambolling around on a hill in Northumberland. The same is true of Scottish beef, although cattle are less likely to gambol as they are too large. It is a curious anomaly under the trade description legislation.

The Meat and Livestock Commission is making a great effort to increase the sale of our products abroad, especially in French supermarkets. The French housewife wants our quality, and our lamb is cheaper than French lamb. For a number of years, the commission has been running shows and exhibitions around Europe with considerable success.

We must move slowly but surely. As the necessity for live exports declines, we can replace the meat that is currently exported on the hoof with meat that is exported on the hook. I urge the hon. Member for Nuneaton and the public to be patient. A unilateral decision would simply drag down farming incomes, especially those of the hill farmers who are not involved in the veal trade but who produce naturally reared sheep and beef. Their incomes will decline as more meat has to be absorbed on the United Kingdom market. I ask the hon. Gentleman and the public to be patient—the trade in live animals will go, but it takes time and understanding, not a unilateral decision.

1.46 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) on promoting the Bill and the House on allowing us to have what I hope will be an even-tempered and reasonable debate on a very emotive issue. I am not the best person to lecture the House on even temper in relation to such an issue, but it is right that, when something is being discussed extensively outside, we should discuss it ourselves. I welcome the opportunity to do so.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) made a thoughtful speech. Of course, I understand his constituency interest and he is clearly serving his constituents well. I was not completely convinced by his philosophy that sometimes we have to resist public opinion—I should not have thought that this was one of those issues on which such resistance was wise or desirable—but I assure him that I should not be interested in seeing the income of his hill farmers decline if this country were to introduce a unilateral ban on the export of live animals. Public opinion must also face that fact.

One cannot say, "I am going to exercise my liberal conscience, and damn the consequences for someone else's salary or pay packet." I should certainly be prepared to put my hand in my pocket—once I have removed that of the Chancellor—to compensate farmers who might suffer. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton has considered those consequences, and the public should do the same. Given the strength of public opinion about the transportation of live animals, I feel as confident as I do about anything that the public would be prepared to foot the bill and ensure that our farmers did not lose out.

I am very open about the fact that I am a vegetarian. It is a pity that we have to kill any animals for food and, like the hon. Member for Hexham and others, I would prefer meat to be exported on the hook rather than on the hoof, if it has to be exported at all.

I give credit to farmers in this country. I believe that our standards of animal husbandry are probably higher than those of any other country; they are certainly among the highest. It is clear from footage produced by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and by Compassion in World Farming that the transport of animals from eastern European countries, such as Poland, Albania and Romania, is disgusting and obscene. I am not saying that British farmers behave like that; I know that this country is at the top of the league.

However, I am not interested in saying just that we are not as bad as other countries. I want this country to be the very best. I want us to set the highest possible standards so that we can be an example to the rest of the world. I see no reason why we should not do that. We could do that within the European Union. Spain, Greece and Italy are not far behind eastern European countries in terms of the lack of standards they apply to animal husbandry. It is right for us to call ourselves a nation of animal lovers. There are many animal lovers in the House, on both sides. However, there are still too many people who ill-treat animals. That is a matter of deep regret.

I accept, as has been said, that we need to try to get international agreement. In an ideal world, international agreement is the best agreement. However, progress is clearly very slow. It is because of the strength of public

[Mr. Tony Banks]

opinion that Ministers are now showing a greater sense of urgency. Ministers may say that I am doing them an injustice. It is, however, noticeable that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food responded swiftly, following pressure from the National Farmers Union, from farmers generally and from meat exporters, when people exercised their freedom of choice by saying to the ferry companies that they were not prepared to travel on their ferries if animals destined for slaughter on the continent were being kept in the cargo hold. That was an amazing and highly successful demonstration of people power; consumers exercised their muscle.

The anger that followed was understandable. Consumers had done something and it was claimed that there had been a great victory for those who opposed the live transportation of animals. Suddenly, alternative outlets for transportation were opened. Coventry airport, Shoreham and Brightlingsea came into play for the first time. The anger was understandable. I felt angry. People thought that they had won, but found that they suddenly had yet another battle. They had to carry on winning time after time. The anger then started to spill over. Some of it was a little unfortunate, but for the most part, the people demonstrating, as hon. Members who have spoken so far have acknowledged, were not from rent-a-mob. Many were people who had never been on a demonstration before.

I probably get more letters each year on animal welfare issues than any other hon. Member. As I have said time and again, many of the letters start with the words, "As a life-long Conservative voter". Many of the people protesting, perhaps for the first time, are Tory voters. If nothing else does, that should interest Conservative Members. I know that many Conservative Members are interested in the issue, but I also know that votes can often concentrate the mind. It is worth remembering that we are talking about people who have never been on a demonstration before and who consider themselves to be good supporters of the Conservative party, in so far as there are any left these days.

Mr. Stephen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that this is not a party political issue in the traditional sense? Does he accept that there are as many Conservative supporters as there are Labour supporters demonstrating?

Mr. Banks: I would go further. There are probably more Conservative supporters in the Shoreham area than there are Labour supporters. Although the evidence is only anecdotal, that is the impression I get. It is not a party political issue. People often tend to think—I do not mean hon. Members present in the Chamber—that anyone on a demonstration is in the pay of Moscow. It is not like that. It is time that some of the less aware Conservative Members realised that there are a lot of their own supporters out there. I realise that I am overdoing the point, but I stress it because many Conservative Members still do not seem to have grasped it.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton and others, I think that the Government must take the initiative. I have heard Ministers say that they have taken the best legal advice under article 36. I always say that the best legal advice is usually that with which one agrees in the end and what one wants. Lawyers come in many guises and if people do not get the advice that they want, I say go and buy another lawyer. It is an arguable point.

The law is uncertain in this area of animal transportation and slaughter. European Court judgments are only really developing now. The precedents are not there as they are in British law, so it is worth testing the judgments. All that we are saying to the Government is why not go for it, prohibit the export of live animals for slaughter and then let someone challenge it in the European Court.

If the Government's initial advice turns out to be correct and a unilateral ban is overturned, at least the Government can say, "Well, we did exactly what we were asked to do by Members of Parliament of all parties and by constituents and we have been turned over." Why should not the Government put themselves in the firing line at this point? They say that they know what is going to happen. Nobody knows for certain what would happen if the issue went to the European Court.

I am quite sure that if the ban on export of horses for slaughter were tested in the European Court, it would be overturned. No one has tested it. Why anticipate a battle which may never have to be joined? Why do not the Government go for it under article 36? I am no lawyer, but I would be quite happy, on the basis of article 36 as I understand it, to mount a defence of the Government's position.

I also draw the Minister's attention to early-day motion 893, tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), which is signed by members of all parties. It suggests that the Government should press to reclassify animals as sentient creatures at the intergovernmental conference in 1996. If we had been able to do that before, we would not have been involved in this argument now because we would have been able to apply a range of animal welfare legislation and standards to the export of animals.

During Agriculture questions on Thursday, the Parliamentary Secretary said that she had received 90,000 items of correspondence. That is a formidable array of public opinion and shows the degree of public concern. Of course I accept that the trade is lawful, but the Parliamentary Secretary and others must understand that so many people in this country find it unacceptable. Those people have a right to demonstrate against the law and, indeed, if they challenge that law, they will have to take the consequences. People feel very strongly.

Many people who are out demonstrating are prepared to go to gaol. If I were arrested, I would go to gaol—not happily, but I would be prepared to go on the basis that I feel that the trade is repugnant, lawful though it may be. I prefer not to defy the law, but I am prepared to take the consequences were that to be the case. I am not someone who readily makes heroic, useless sacrifices, despite the fact that I am a member of the Labour party.

The Parliamentary Secretary should recognise the strength of feeling outside and inside the House. If she takes unilateral action, she will have the overwhelming support of hon. Members of all parties. Go for it!

1.58 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) always seems to be making heroic gestures or offering to make them. I very much agree with what he has said today. If the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) has done his homework thoroughly—I do not know to what extent he has—he will know my views on this subject. I have always had a principled objection to the export of live animals for any purpose except the conservation of species because I believe that such export is essentially cruel and it is impossible, however hard one tries, to make the moving of animals, especially larger animals over long distances or during arduous passages such as by sea, acceptable and fair to them. I have long held that view. I am not a new convert, suddenly influenced by the strength of public opinion or by having a port in my constituency, which I do not. I have held that view for many years on the basis of principle.

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West rightly said, the issue goes further than simply taking a stand on principle. We can all wear our principles on our sleeves, and it is sometimes right and proper to do so and I am not bashful about so doing on this subject. But we also have to consider the consequences of our actions and how best practically to pursue our principles. The House has a responsibility to consider those aspects. There are some difficulties and I recognise the problems that the Government face. I strongly welcome the debate and I hope that we shall have other opportunities to return to the subject.

The hon. Member for Nuneaton made a judgment on the previous debate, having been in his place for only about 10 minutes of it. Having been in the Chamber throughout that debate, I can say quite simply that I did not recognise the hon. Gentleman's judgment. Procedures of the House exist to allow hon. Members to raise various subjects and it is invidious to try to measure which subject is of greater worth at any one time. At least we have the opportunity to debate the subject now, which I welcome.

We have heard of the abuses involved in the live export trade. The transport system involves abuses such as long journeys and insufficient watering and feeding. I do not need to go into the detail because that is accepted ground. We have also heard of the problems faced by animals when they are abroad and of their poor treatment in some parts of the continent. We cannot police such treatment as we have no authority to do so. Long-distance travel for animals in this country should be avoided and I am glad that opinion, including opinion within the agriculture and farming sectors, is increasingly moving that way. I accept that it is sometimes necessary to move animals over distances, but the shorter those distances are, the better. We should aim to develop different farming techniques to make such transportation a thing of the past.

I have mentioned popular feeling and there is no doubt that it is strong. Moreover, I believe that it will inexorably grow stronger. Pressure has been brought on past Governments. In 1973 the then Conservative Government banned the export of most live animals in response to that pressure. The only shame was that two years later that decision was reversed. When the ban took place in 1973 it was done on the basis of article 36 of the treaty of Rome and I see no reason why that article should not also form the basis for similar action now. I agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West that it is something worth trying.

This country could be taken to the European Court over the issue, and we could lose. But if that were to happen, it would be a clear sign of where the blame lies for the people of this country and all who feel so strongly about this issue. Let us put the onus on the European institutions which want to take on the responsibility. If they want to move against the will of the British people, so be it. At least people will know where we stand and to what extent the powers of the institution of Parliament are limited by agreements in Europe—something that I deprecate on constitutional grounds.

The subject will continue to excite great concern among the British people. I believe that it will come to a head at some time, although perhaps now is not the moment. I cannot foretell, but I would be amazed if the people of this country were to forget about an issue which has caused so much concern in recent weeks. Things move in cycles and I believe that there will be further great expressions of concern. What has frustrated so many people—it has clearly frustrated many of my constituents as they have made clear to me—is the feeling that they have lost the democratic right to express their views and have them carried forward by their representatives in the House. Ministers and others say, "We sympathise, but we cannot do anything because of our international obligations"; yet people with strong feelings on the subject have no parallel ability to bring their influence to bear on those international institutions—particularly the European Court.

The people who have participated in recent demonstrations would not normally think of demonstrating, but I know from speaking to constituents that some did so out of frustration. They feel that it is no use coming to see Members of Parliament because they have been rendered powerless to act. That matter is serious in itself.

For all those reasons, I support the Bill's principles, even though I have doubts about some clauses. I hope that action will be taken, under the Bill or by some other mechanism, to halt the trade in transporting live animals, which is unacceptable to this country in principle and in practice.

2.5 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): The Government understand the concerns that the welfare of exported animals should be fully safeguarded. We sympathise with the wish that lies behind the Bill—to do more to help to ensure the welfare of transported animals—but it presents legal and practical difficulties. It is not a question simply of legal constraints; the practicalities of implementation are also important considerations.

The topic has generated much comment, but it is only fair to make clear to the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) from the outset that the Government cannot support his Bill.

Mr. Olner: I accept that the Bill, which was roughly drafted, might present technical difficulties, but does the Minister agree in principle with its thrust?

Mrs. Browning: I will go into detail, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the three-hour Adjournment debate recently, when my right hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that the Government attach importance to animal welfare. We will continue to take steps to ensure that welfare is improved—particularly in Europe, to bring it

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up to the standards that already exist in our country. I want the hon. Gentleman to have as much information as possible about our reasons for being unable to support his Bill. I know that that will disappoint him, but it is the only honest thing to do.

Clause 1 would prohibit the export of live animals for slaughter but includes a repeal provision that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food could use if he were satisfied that the Community rules envisaged in directive 91/628, article 13, covering such matters as journey limits, feeding and watering requirements, loading density standards and staging points were in place.

Clause 2 would prohibit the export of calves for any purpose from Great Britain to another country unless that country certified that it had rules on treatment of calves that were at least equivalent to our own. The House will be aware that this country has banned the raising of calves in veal crates.

It is important to repeat the legal advice given to the House, because it is relevant to this debate. We examined carefully the issues of live exports and of veal calf exports, particularly the legal dimension. We recently considered the best legal case that could be made in favour of measures banning the export of calves, or imposing selective restrictions aimed at calves. Selective restrictions of that sort might seek to ensure—as does the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)—that calves can be exported only if they are destined for production systems that would meet British requirements. Alternatively, they might, as this Bill would, seek more sweepingly to prohibit the export of calves to countries where calves could legally be reared in conditions that are illegal in the United Kingdom.

The conclusion that emerges from the legal advice that we have obtained is that such selective measures could not be justified in Community law. Hon. Members will rightly want to know the reasoning that underlies this argument. I shall set it out, just as my right hon. Friend the Minister did in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 2 February. My right hon. Friend also wrote in some detail on 1 February to every hon. Member setting out the position in relation to current restrictions on calves. I know that the hon. Member for Nuneaton has received that correspondence.

First, the directive on welfare standards for calves forms part of the Community legislation governing trade in calves, and its terms preclude member states from introducing export restrictions. Article 36 of the treaty can in some circumstances justify export restrictions, on the grounds of the protection of the health and life of animals, which includes animal welfare. Several hon. Members have referred to that, but article 36 is available to member states only where there is no Community legislation governing the particular area. It is not applicable in this case, given the directive on welfare standards for calves, so a total ban on all calf exports would not on any basis be justified under article 36 because it would be disproportionate.

It is also highly probable that measures banning or restricting the export of calves would constitute an unacceptable interference with the operation of the common agricultural policy, as it relates to the market for beef and veal.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that he would be happy to pay compensation to hill farmers—

Mr. Tony Banks: Not on my own.

Mrs. Browning: It sounded generous, but no doubt the hon. Gentleman was speaking on behalf of a great many other people who might be prepared to pay. It is not, however, just a question of compensating people who can no longer export direct from their farms. Our legal advice is that there could be claims not only from the original farmer but from people right through the production chain, including transporters and businesses on the other side of the channel—in short, all the recipients in the chain of production. There is therefore no quick fix whereby a little extra money to help farmers will resolve all the possible financial implications for the taxpayers of this country, who would ultimately have to pay the bill following any legal challenge that found the Government of the United Kingdom to be at fault.

The aspects that I have already mentioned mean that a selective export restriction on calves destined for crates or for rearing in countries whose welfare conditions do not match ours would be extremely difficult to defend legally and would be at high risk of being struck down in court.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Lady has told us about the legal advice given to her Department, but will she detach herself from that for a moment and tell us who would actually make a challenge? Have there been discussions with other EU Governments to find out whether they are sympathetic to our position, given the strength of public opinion in this country?

Mrs. Browning: It is not just a matter of our being challenged in the court through the Commission if we were found to be infringing Community law. As I have just explained, companies and individuals who felt that they had lost financially because of the United Kingdom Government taking unilateral action that they were not in a position to defend legally could make financial claims against the Government and, ultimately, against the taxpayer. If Ministers deliberately contravene the legal advice that they are given—to the effect that a challenge would be most likely to be upheld in court—they knowingly put the United Kingdom taxpayer in an unfortunate position. There is a great precedent throughout all Government Departments that it would be extremely serious for a Minister, against legal advice, to take such action in the knowledge that ultimately the Department would be likely to fail in court.

It has been suggested that Ministers should tough it out and that legal advice would come from people thinking along the lines of Ministers anyway. Hon. Members will know of the constraints on Ministers in fully publishing legal advice. As I have said, legal advice was taken from more than one source.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend will have noticed that neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the Opposition Front Bench spokesman on agriculture is in the Chamber.

Has the Labour leadership challenged the legal advice that the Government have received, and is the Leader of the Opposition urging the Government to break European law?

Mrs. Browning: I can inform my hon. Friend that there seems to be a variation of opinion between Opposition Front-Bench agriculture spokesmen. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said:

> "We do not accept that the Minister is necessarily correct in his interpretation of the legal position with regard to calves, although we certainly accept the position with regard to sheep."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 299.]

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is also an Opposition spokesman on agriculture, supports the Bill. Confusion reigns.

Mr. Tony Banks: There is no confusion.

Mrs. Browning: It is a matter that the hon. Gentleman should take up with his Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. Banks: I do not want to score points. There is no confusion in the sense that the hon. Lady suggests. The point is that the issue is worth testing. I do not think that the legal case is watertight. That is all that I am saying. The Opposition no more have knowledge on the matter than, I suspect, the Government.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman says that the case is not legally watertight, yet in his speech he admitted that he was not a lawyer. I, too, am not a lawyer. As a Minister, I must take advice on behalf of the Ministry from lawyers. When advice is received from more than one lawyer and it is consistent, we must draw the conclusion that it will hold up. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that all Ministers take legal advice.

The same legal objections would apply to a prohibition on the export of live animals for slaughter given the existence of a directive on the welfare of animals in transit. I realise that many hon. Members will find the legal realities unwelcome. I understand the frustration of the hon. Member for Nuneaton. I have no doubt that it will be argued that if the case were worth going for, we should gamble on the result. I understand that the hon. Gentleman agrees with that. He is in a very different position from a Minister who takes legal advice.

Mr. Tony Banks: Make my hon. Friend a Minister.

Mrs. Browning: I invite the hon. Member for Nuneaton to cross the Floor. If he does so, we may consider the matter.

To gamble in the way that some hon. Members suggest could not possibly be defended as a responsible approach for the Government to adopt. I am sure that hon. Members recognise that.

Relating the legal advice more specifically to the Bill, it is evident that a ban on the export of calves to, say, France and the Netherlands would apply not only to calves destined to be reared under systems in countries that would be acceptable to the United Kingdom but to those destined for veal crates. I am sure that the House will be aware that countries such as the Netherlands have welfare-friendly systems and also rear calves in crates. When I have visited countries to discuss veal crates, it has been encouraging to note that their representatives are willing to consider what we are demanding and what the marketplace may ultimately demand in changing from the crate, which we abhor, to other more welfare-friendly systems.

We could not argue that the measure was proportionate, as we would have to under article 36. The legal problems with the Bill are conclusive enough in themselves, but I am afraid that there would be practical problems too. It is important to emphasise that, because it is not just, as Conservative Members have said, a case of our being trapped in some European directive, unable do anything about it. There are strong practical reasons why, even if the legislation were passed, the implementation of such a ban would cause difficulty.

Under clause 2, states wishing to receive calves from the UK would need to interpret our domestic legislation and compare it with their own. The person—we are now getting down to the practical detail of what might happen—responsible for the declaration about the compatibility of another member state's law with ours would be outside our jurisdiction. Given the scepticism that has been expressed in other discussions about the ability of other states to enforce Community requirements, I am not sure that the Bill would necessarily bring any practical welfare benefits. We would have to rely on the authorities of the importing member state to ensure that calves were, in fact, raised in conditions corresponding to those that apply in the UK, and there would be nothing in the Bill to prevent exporters from sending calves to other member states where the practical realities of animal welfare might not correspond to the terms of their legislation.

Some right hon. or hon. Members might be thinking that an alternative approach to that adopted in the Bill might avoid those legal and practical pitfalls. That line of thought might lead us to something like the provisions of the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Carlisle, which would prohibit the export of calves where the exporter was not satisfied that the calves would be reared in their country of destination under a system that would comply with UK requirements. That approach would, perhaps, be slightly more defensible as meeting the test under article 36: measures must be proportionate to their purpose.

The measure would not, like the Bill before us today, prohibit the export of many calves destined for rearing systems acceptable to us, but the other substantial legal objections, which I have just explained, relating to the existence of Community standards for the welfare of calves and of a common agricultural policy market regime for beef and veal would remain. There would be serious practical problems. If it were shown that calves exported from Great Britain had ended up in a continental veal crate system, how would we establish that the exporter in the UK had committed the offence? The exporter would say that he had relied on assurances from his continental customer and that it was not his fault if the rearing system was not in accordance with those assurances or if the customer had taken the calves to premises that were unsatisfactory. We would face an insoluble problem in trying to monitor and control the movement of calves in the jurisdiction of another member state.

The Government have repeated many times that, ultimately, if we really care about the standards and welfare of farm animals and animals in transit, whether they are calves or any other animal, it is vital to have European legislation that can be enforced throughout Europe, because the real problem, as hon. Members on

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both sides of the House have acknowledged, is not the difficulties of welfare standards in the UK or the good intentions of the vast majority of people who export from UK but ensuring high-standard, uniform enforcement throughout the EC.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am sure that the whole House would endorse those sentiments, but will the Minister tell the House what chance she has of getting that measure of agreement among our European Union partners? I spoke slowly so that she could finish her drink.

Mrs. Browning: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being welfare friendly. As I am rested and watered, I shall continue. I shall come to the matter that he raises in more detail, but perhaps I could give a more immediate response to the issue of veal crates.

The responses of other member states, most of which I have visited, have been quite encouraging. I include countries such as Italy, which has a huge commercial interest. However, I do not want to mislead the House. I do not suggest that there will be a quick fix or an immediate solution. Other member states wish to see the matter brought to a satisfactory conclusion and I am reasonably optimistic that there will be some movement.

The issue of live animals in transit is more difficult, but we are determined to try to secure an agreement. There has been some movement by other member states and, as the House knows, we have pressed on two issues that are the nub of the matter and cause the real difficulty—maximum journey times and resting periods compatible with welfare.

As the House will know, my right hon. Friend the Minister has had an opportunity to raise this matter in the Council and we hope that it will come before the Council again, certainly before the end of the French presidency. My right hon. Friend will continue to press and negotiate for an agreement on maximum journey time and a suitable period of rest. Perhaps I will deal with that later in more detail.

I was speaking about the difficulties that arise when calves are exported to a purchaser in another European country and about how we would enforce and monitor such exports. We would face an insoluble problem in trying to monitor and control the movement of calves that were in the jurisdiction of another member state. I do not think that it would work. However we sought to reformulate the provision, we would face the same insoluble problem of policing in another member state.

I do not want to drag the House into too much detail, but I want to make it clear that we have given these issues detailed consideration. I have given the House the flavour of that consideration. I emphasise, above all, that the Government, much as we sympathise with the Bill's underlying aims, cannot support the making of legislation that carries a high risk of successful legal challenge and that will not work. That is the basis of the legal problem that faces us.

Mr. Olner: We have been going down this path for two or three years, but the problem will not go away. There will continue to be protests about the conditions in which animals are being transported. I have a simple question for the Minister. If Denmark can ensure that its animal products are exported to the rest of Europe in packaged or in carcase form, why cannot we do the same with our excellent meat products?

Mrs. Browning: We are doing what we can. Several hon. Members have mentioned the Meat and Livestock Commission, whose marvellous efforts to try to get more trade on the hook rather than on the hoof I commend to the House. It has worked hard. For example, French cutters have come here to show how to cut carcases in the way that French supermarkets and housewives like so that more can be exported.

We are certainly in favour of more value-added products in the United Kingdom, but Governments cannot strike deals in the marketplace. It is for the market to determine the proportions of the live and on-the-hook trade. We shall help by the sort of efforts that we have been making with the MLC and by promotions such as the veal seminar that I held only a fortnight ago at MAFF headquarters to try to promote welfare-friendly veal.

Ideally, I would like to see pink, welfare-friendly veal exported to Italy on the hook. That would certainly be advantageous but it must be determined by the marketplace. I hope that the hon. Member for Nuneaton appreciates that although matters cannot be turned around overnight, we are working hard to maximise value added on this side of the channel. I hope that we will be more successful at that in future but even if we are there is a need for live animals to be sent across the channel.

We hope that the stance that we have taken on veal crates will result in a ban on their use throughout the European Community. We are also working hard to raise the standard of welfare of animals in transit, and some progress has been made. For example, it is accepted among our European partners that there should be a licensing system, and that licences should be revoked if transporters do not stick to the rules. If that could be policed on an EC-wide basis, it would be a great move forward.

We are stuck on the question of the maximum journey times and rest periods. Many other matters that have been agreed are waiting to be endorsed once we get over the final hurdle. My right hon. Friend, officials in the Ministry and myself have worked hard during the past month on the matter. If the message going out today from this House was that we in the UK—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 31 March.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

ENERGY-SAVING MATERIALS (RATE OF VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [*20 January*].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 31 March.

ANIMAL HEALTH (EUROPEAN LAW) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 31 March.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 31 March.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 31 March.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 31 March.

FINANCE BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of Bills brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions, more than one stage of the Finance Bill may be taken at any sitting of the House.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 29th March, the Speaker shall put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Amendment Regulations 1995 not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; the said Motion may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock; and Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against Statutory Instruments, &c. (negative procedure)) shall not apply.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Charles Hendry be discharged from the Select Committee on Procedure and Mr. David Martin be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Ordered,

That Sir Anthony Durant be discharged from the Select Committee on Members' Interests and Mr. Iain Duncan Smith be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Business Rates (Leominster)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I very much welcome the chance to raise on behalf of my constituents the subject of business rates in Leominster. I should say at the outset that I welcome the presence on the Front Bench of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, whom I last encountered in relation to domestic heating, when his contributions were most constructive. I trust that my hon. Friend will show the same spirit when he comes to reply to the present debate.

For the purposes of the debate—I shall try to make this point succinctly—I accept the system of the uniform business rate as it is. I must, however, declare an interest in that I spoke against the introduction of the rate, I voted against it and I remain against it now. There are two grounds for my opposition to the uniform business rate as a system, although I accept it for the purpose of proceeding practically with the debate.

First, I believe in the freedom of local government to tax in any local system of taxation. The present system is neither fish nor fowl, neither local freedom nor an effective central Government grant. Secondly—this is relevant to the present situation—any tax should relate as far as possible to the ability of any person or concern to pay it.

That brings me to the relevant points of background. When we came to reform the business and domestic rating systems, there was considerable delay. It took us from 1979 to 1985 to decide what to do about local government taxation. You will remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the cry of the time was "Abolish the rates." But when we tried to go beyond the abolition to decide what on earth we were going to do by way of a new system, there was considerable difference and discord within the Government, the party and the country. The result was that there was no revaluation of property, and in particular business property, from 1973 until the 1990 revaluation. At the same time the reform, post-1985, came as a breathless rush. Half the reform—indeed, the major part—which dealt with the domestic system, as represented by the community charge, was rapidly discredited and is no more. We still have the other half—business rates—for better or for worse.

That brings me to the 1990 revaluation. Because of some of the facts that I have already mentioned, that gave vent to very large rises. The delay was an obvious cause. Also, the new system produced a north to south drift. The position was exacerbated by the recession for my constituents and for many others in the south and west. That led to another element of the problem, although it is a more welcome element—the concession of transitional arrangements in the 1992 Budget and in the two 1993 Budgets. The result was that when we reached the 1995 revaluation, many businesses were still not making the full payment under the 1990 revaluation. It is self-evident in what I am saying that the system is perpetually struggling gallantly, but sometimes in vain, to catch up with itself.

On the matter of the 1995 revaluation, I want to cite a few references—in note form—from the helpful letter that my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for local government sent to colleagues. He said that under the 1995 revaluation there was little change in the total rateable value for businesses in England. He said that the effect on individual properties could be significant. He also said that the rentals of shops and offices in London and the south had been more depressed by the recession than those elsewhere. He then said that all that meant a shift in the rates burden from the south to the north.

What about us? What about the rural west midlands? What about many other areas that do not get the great boom that is claimed for the south of England? I speak for many of my hon. Friends in the border counties, the rural counties of the west midlands and the border marches. My constituency covers about 800 square miles and has two and a half sets of traffic lights. There are a large number of small rural businesses and many shopkeepers and traders in a number of market towns. It is such people, among others, who represent the bedrock of support for the Government my hon. Friend the Minister and I serve.

I know that my hon. Friend and his Department are concerned about the increasing menace to the traditions of the small trader from out-of-town supermarkets and, indeed, the whole cult of mechanised, motorised shopping—the large general stores, supermarkets, do-it-yourself stores, and so on. The result of all that is that many businesses, especially local shops, have gone out of business. Empty shops abound, as is all too frequently seen in our various market towns. The new shops that should usually replace them are not materialising. In many cases, would-be business men cannot afford to pay the full business rate that setting up a business would entail. What is more, they would find it difficult to compete with those who, ironically, are receiving the transitional relief that we have been good enough to grant them. That is seen as an unfair advantage, and the result is that when a shop closes it does not open again.

That leads me to some examples of the 1995 revaluation in my constituency. I have been given complete district figures by South Herefordshire district council. Overall, the rateable value increased by 26 per cent. Perhaps even more serious, the rateable value for factories and small workshops in rural areas increased by 36 per cent. I have four district councils, in whole or in part, in my constituency. In the Leominster district council region, the position is about the same.

I have received a petition from the Leominster chamber of trade. The rateable values of many shops included in that petition have increased by 50 per cent. The approaches that I have had from Bromyard show that those values have increased by more than 50 per cent. in many cases. One business in the border and market town of Kington came to see me in a somewhat irate condition. Its rateable value is up by 73 per cent.

In the village of Shobdon in Leominster district, there is a prime example. In 1990, a business there was assessed at a rateable value of £44,000. It appealed, but there was then considerable delay until just before the 1995 revaluation, when the rateable value was reduced to £25,000. However, in 1995 it then went back up to more than £40,000, and there will no doubt be another appeal. We could do without that kind of yo-yo situation.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of the examples that I have given of businesses and, in particular, of shops. We have a separate mode of assessment for public houses and garages, based on a turnover link. The increases are extraordinary, if not excruciating. They do not take account of those businesses' profits—only the turnover is taken into consideration. I have two specific examples, both involving beautiful inns where I hold my constituency surgeries. My hon. Friend will know how lovely the region is. The Government Whip on duty is already nodding his head, so I appreciate his enthusiasm for the cause of the Leominster constituency.

The rateable value of the Crown Inn, Woolhope in 1994-95 was £6,500, with £1,780, after transitional relief, payable by way of business rate. In 1995-96, that has gone up from £6,500 to £31,300. The full amount that will be payable is £13,521. Few businesses can afford such increases. In 1994-95, the Red Lion Inn in Stiffords Bridge, Cradley near the Worcestershire border had a rateable value £6,500. In 1995-96, it went up to £27,250. The question I put to my hon. Friend is why—what is the justification for that? Can it be described as a fair system of taxation and the best way to encourage the survival of businesses?

I shall make six substantive points. First, I accept the system, as I have said, for better or for worse, but I urge that, in accepting it and in carrying it out, we should make it as fair as possible. Surely my hon. Friend would accept that criterion. Secondly, the system in my constituency and in the region is working unfairly—I hope I have said enough to demonstrate that.

Thirdly, the combination of the five-year revaluations, together with the recent recession and the prolongation of transitional relief, which is compounding that unfairness, are worsening the position. How do we get out of that position? What progress can be made? Fourthly, new shops and small businesses will not arrive in anything like the numbers needed to replace those that are going out of business. I stress their unfair competitive advantage vis-a-vis those who are on continuing transitional relief. Clearly, I would not deny that transitional relief, but anyone considering occupying an empty shop faces unfair competition and the situation, sadly, is getting worse.

My fifth point relates to the appeal procedure. I know that the Department is concerned that it has been very slow. There is an urgent need to expedite the process. Some businesses have not even caught up between revaluations. If we go on as we are, many of those who have to appeal again will still be awaiting the outcome of the previous revaluation or, as in the Shobdon example that I cited, will just have received it when that for the year 2000 comes due. Goodness knows what that will yield, based as it will be on the 1995 revaluation with which we are all desperately trying to catch up.

My sixth point relates to the valuation procedure and the system itself. I appreciate that the 1995 revaluation is based on rental values in April 1993, which was the tail end of the recession. At that time, rental values were worse, if anything, but there are still to be increases. It is claimed that, by some miracle, London and the south does better for that very reason, but we, too, suffered from the recession but have to meet almost incredible increases. We now face revaluation in the year 2000, possibly without even having caught up.

Last but not least, I wish to make a straightforward political point, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will appreciate why I do so. In these perhaps not easy political times, we are still hanging on—often narrowly—to the title "the party of small business". As I have said, in many respects, small businesses are the bedrock of our support. I say quite simply that we are letting them down and in too many instances we are kicking our long-standing supporters in the teeth. If we do not help them, we shall be held to electoral account.

2.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) has given me an opportunity to explain the background to the non-domestic rating revaluation which takes effect on 1 April. I must also explain to him who is responsible for what. Naturally, my hon. Friend is concerned for businesses in his area, but I hope that I can persuade him that the Government, too, have the interests of businesses at heart. That is why we introduced the national non-domestic rating system in 1990. My hon. Friend has in the past opposed the scheme, although I note that he has this afternoon confirmed his acceptance of it as it stands.

It has been almost five years since the abolition of locally set rates, and it would be easy to forget the regimes under which many businesses were forced to trade. I remind the House of those times. During the 1980s, under the system then supported by my hon. Friend, rates rose by, on average, 37 per cent. above inflation. That was because many councils—I should be the first to concede that this does not apply to all—chose to spend more, knowing that local businesses would pick up the bill.

We now have one poundage for England which cannot increase each year faster than the rate of inflation. I assure the House that businesses have not forgotten the old rates system. They value the commitment that the uniform business rate offers them. Now, if authorities want to spend, the cost falls where it should—on the council tax payer.

Rateable values in 1990 were based on the market for rented property in 1988—the first revaluation since 1973, as my hon. Friend said. Another commitment that we made then was to update rateable values every five years. That time has now come. The 1995 revaluation will come into force on 1 April, based on the market for rented property in 1993. The revaluation has been performed by local valuation officers—an independent role given to them by the House and one in which neither I nor any of my right hon. and hon. Friends can intervene.

Ratepayers have now been notified of their new rateable values and, as in 1990, there will be winners and losers. I know that some are surprised at the change in their value. These values are, however, determined by local valuation officers. They are highly experienced and have evidence of actual rents collected—indeed, from ratepayers themselves. But this evidence needs careful interpretation and other adjustments so that it represents fairly the rent that a hypothetical tenant would have been prepared to pay in a new letting in 1993. It is quite possible that, for example, these rents will, in some cases, have been granted alongside incentives, such as lump sum payments or a period when no rent is payable. That is

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

why the valuation officer also collects details of these incentives so that headline rents can be adjusted accordingly.

Of course, valuation officers are always willing to examine new evidence of the rental market. If my hon. Friend's constituents have evidence that suggests that their rateable values are wrong, they should contact the valuation officer at once. Indeed, I understand that he would welcome such a discussion. This is the course of action being followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), who is well versed in the system that we are debating.

From the beginning of next month, ratepayers will have the opportunity to make proposals to change their value. During the 1995 rating list, there will be no restrictions on when proposals can be made. In addition, we are introducing new procedures to ensure that disagreements will be passed to the valuation tribunal as appeals within three months, not six months as is the case at present. I know that some ratepayers experienced delays in settling appeals against the 1990 list. My hon. Friend referred to that this afternoon. The 1990 revaluation was the first for 17 years, so that is not surprising. We hope that the new procedures for making and settling appeals will speed the process for the next quinquennium.

The Government are committed to helping businesses with their rates liability and to assisting them to adapt to potential increases. That is why we have introduced the transitional scheme. My latest information suggests that the scheme will limit increases in bills in both Leominster and Malvern Hills to, on average, 8 per cent. in real terms.

I shall remind the House of what the arrangements do. The transitional scheme will ensure that no business will face an increase of more than 10 per cent. plus inflation in 1995-96. For small businesses occupying property with a rateable value of less than £10,000—or less than £15,000 in London—increases will be limited to 7.5 per cent. plus inflation. Special rules also give further relief to small properties with both business and living accommodation. Their increases will be limited to 5 per cent. plus inflation. This will provide extra help to many sub-post offices and village shops, as well as many other small shops.

My hon. Friend is also concerned that new businesses will not be entitled to the relief. I assure him that this will not generally be the case. Transitional relief will continue on a property even if there is a change of ratepayer. New businesses moving into a property that has transitional relief will receive that benefit. However, property that did not appear in the rating list at 31 March 1995 will not get relief.

More than 4,000 ratepayers in the Leominster and Malvern Hills districts and 1.25 million in England will benefit from the scheme. Part of the cost of the transitional arrangements will be met by the Exchequer and part by limiting rate reductions. Further assistance would have been very expensive. The extra cost would have placed too great a burden on the national taxpayer or other ratepayers.

The arrangements are complicated and some ratepayers—and some hon. Members—will not have fully understood the way in which they work. However, most of them will now have received their bills and will see the genuine protection the scheme offers them. Equally, some will be disappointed that the reduction they were expecting has been delayed. However, most, if not all, of those ratepayers will have faced increases in 1990. Many will have benefited from the 1990 transitional arrangements which were funded by limits on reductions to other ratepayers' bills. Now it is their turn to contribute.

The limits on increases will continue to apply until the next revaluation in 2000. Rateable values will then be updated again, probably to reflect the market in 1998. Of course, many ratepayers will not be paying their full bill by that time. We will not penalise them for that. If market rents for their property then fall relative to rents for other types of property, their rateable values will also fall. As such, they may never reach the full rates bill on their 1995 rateable value.

I know that my hon. Friend is also concerned that the revaluation will affect caravan parks in his constituency. He is not alone. Caravan parks in England and Wales are facing large, often very large, increases in rateable values. That is because valuation officers have changed the basis from which they derive rateable values. However, as I have said, I cannot intervene in those assessments. There may have to be test cases. Like all ratepayers, caravan park owners will benefit from the transitional relief scheme and may therefore never reach their full bill.

Turning to more general points, my hon. Friend has said that rates do not reflect the ability to pay the bill. I think that that is an over-simplification. Rates reflect the rentals that properties command and businesses would not occupy property if they could not afford those rentals. So there must be a link of a kind between rates and overall business profitability. Of course, the rental value of property will not always reflect the profitability of a particular business, but rates are a tax on property rather than on individual businesses.

The transitional arrangements will target relief on smaller businesses by reference to the value of their property. Services have to be supplied by local authorities regardless of whether a business is in profit. I am sure that most businesses prefer the present system to the increase in corporation tax which would otherwise be required.

If, despite that, my hon. Friend would still prefer to end non-domestic rates, he should read the research commissioned by my Department on the impact of rates on businesses. The key finding is that rates are not, in most cases, a significant burden on businesses. In fact, for the majority of principal trading companies, rates accounted for no more than 2 per cent. of turnover. The figures tended to be higher for small businesses, particularly retailers, but we have recognised that by treating the lowest value properties more favourably in our transitional relief scheme.

The report also showed that the 1990 transitional arrangements had been a success in mitigating the impact of the 1990 revaluation. The 1995 scheme is even more generous to those facing increases and I am sure that it will be equally successful. I hope that this opportunity to comment on my hon. Friend's points will be helpful to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 27 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Opera Studio

1. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education regarding the funding of those students accepted for training at the National Opera Studio. [14177]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I have had no such discussions.

Mr. Gunnell: Is it not time that the Secretary of State got together with his right hon. Friend to discuss education funding for opera, dance and a number of other art forms? Does not he recognise that the high reputation that has been built up by the National Opera Studio is based upon the performance of those who have passed through it? It takes just 12 students a year, and many of those graduates are earning big reputations for Britain as well as considerable sums of money abroad. Surely those 12 selected students should be funded. Can the right hon. Gentleman provide the means to ensure that those 12 top students in that art form get the education and training that they deserve?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to pay tribute to the work of the National Opera Studio, which is an important, unique resource. That is why 40 per cent. of its bills are met by the Arts Council. As I have said, I have not met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education to talk specifically about the funding of students from the National Opera Studio, but we are working closely to deal with the wider issue of funding for dance and drama students.

Public Libraries

2. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met the Library Association to discuss the funding of public libraries. [14178]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): My right hon. Friend met members of the Library Association on 3 October last year. Discussions were wide ranging, around an agenda of topics provided by the Library Association. I met members of the association on 10 October, at the launch of London Libraries Week.

Mr. Hoon: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does the Minister happen to know when the Secretary of State last borrowed a book from a public library and its title? Is he not ashamed that the Government's policy has resulted in a £350,000 cut in this year's grants to libraries in Nottinghamshire?

Mr. Sproat: I do not know when my right hon. Friend last borrowed a book, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I borrowed a book last Friday entitled "Nelson", by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

Local authorities have been subject to a tight settlement, but the hon. Gentleman should remember that in the past 10 years the amount of money spent on public libraries has gone up by 9.3 per cent. Today, we have more libraries, more books borrowed and more books in our libraries than we had five years ago.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister is too complacent about this. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) has already drawn his attention to the problems in Nottinghamshire, but library authorities all over the country are cutting their budgets as a direct result of the Government's policies. Has he not been told that Somerset, for the second time in recent years, is not buying any adult fiction this year? Does he not understand the cultural damage that that is doing to literacy, reading and education and the economic damage that it is doing to the publishing industry, the book selling industry and companies that exist in every hon. Member's constituency that rely on information from the public library service?

When will the Minister understand that his Secretary of State has a statutory responsibility under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive public library service? He is failing to meet that responsibility in Somerset and many other library authorities around the country.

Mr. Sproat: I am acutely aware that it has been a tight settlement for local authorities. I am also aware that under the 1964 Act all library authorities have a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service.

The hon. Gentleman referred particularly to Somerset. My chief library adviser plans to go down there later this week or next week to see why it is proposing to make a cut in its allocation to its library service.

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in my area of East Sussex, the Lib-Lab pact that currently runs the county council has deemed it appropriate to spend money on buying so-called gay and lesbian literature to place in our public libraries?

Mr. Sproat: I did not know that item of information, but I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend will send me further details on the subject.

Holiday Statistics

3. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of holidays by British people are taken (a) in Britain and (b) abroad; and what were the figures for 1970. [14179]

Mr. Dorrell: In 1994, 54 per cent. of holidays of four nights or more by British people were taken in Britain and 46 per cent. abroad. In 1970, 86 per cent. of such holidays were taken in Britain and 14 per cent. abroad.

Mr. Coombs: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Department's report on tourism, "Competing with the

Best", has been warmly welcomed throughout the industry and almost everywhere? Does he agree that that is evidence that the Department of National Heritage takes the tourism industry very seriously, and is now in a good position to ensure that English and British tourism are made attractive to British people so as to persuade them to take more of their long and short-term holidays in this country?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right to draw attention to the importance of the tourist sector. It is only right that the DNH should accord substantial importance to the sector. It accounts for 5 per cent. of national income; it employs 1.5 million people in Britain. It is part of the answer to the question, "Where do the jobs of the future come from?" A 25 per cent. increase in employment in tourism in the past 10 years is reason enough for us to take real interest in the future success of that sector.

Sir Peter Emery: Does my right hon. Friend realise that the south-west provides the greatest stimulus to the increase in the encouraging figures that he gives? Will he therefore bear in mind the fact that some of us are fed up with the fact that Wales and Scotland receive very much larger amounts of money to spend on their tourist boards than we do in England? We would like him to rectify that.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend will know what I mean when I say that I am not responsible for the budgets of the Welsh and Scottish boards. I am responsible for the success of the industry in England and for the promotion overseas of the British industry as a whole. That is why we have increased the budget for promoting Britain as a tourist destination overseas, and it is why we attach real importance to improving the quality of the tourist product in England.

I do not believe that public funding is the key to improving the English tourist product. It is a huge wealth-creating sector, and the key is to ensure that the structure within which it works allows it to continue to expand and, indeed, allows the rate of expansion to increase.

School Sports Facilities

4. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about the progress which he has made with the Secretary of State for Education about the greater use of school sports facilities by the wider public. [14180]

Mr. Sproat: The community use of school sports facilities will be a key element in the sports White Paper, which my right hon. Friend announced on 23 March 1995.

Mr. Booth: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the cross-Government importance of sport and of the importance of using school sports facilities, not least in inner-city regeneration, in health and in law and order policy. Will he assure the House that cross-party or cross-Government talks are going on between those relevant Departments, including the Department for Education, which he has just mentioned, and will he come to the House with a policy that assures us that there will be a presumption—indeed, that there will always be permission for schools to use their facilities for the benefit of the local community?

Mr. Sproat: Yes. My hon. Friend makes an extremely important argument. We do want more school facilities to be used by the local community. I hope that, if plans are submitted seeking national lottery funding that include a large community as well as schools element, they will have a good chance of being accepted.

As far as other Departments are concerned, I am currently having talks with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education on that very subject, to discover whether we cannot reach a happier solution than has sometimes obtained in recent years.

Mr. Barnes: Ten per cent. of the people referred to in the original question are disabled and many disabled people wish to make considerable use of sports facilities. Is anything being done in connection with the Department for Education to ensure that they are able to do that? Is it not unfortunate that the Disability Discrimination Bill excludes most educational institutions from its provisions?

Mr. Sproat: The provision of sports facilities for persons with disabilities is extremely important. When the Sports Council awards grants to governing bodies for sporting provision, it takes directly into account the question of provision for persons with disabilities.

Dr. Spink: I know that my hon. Friend is aware of the great sporting tradition of Canvey island, and particularly that of Furtherwick Park school. Will he consider very carefully with his colleagues in Education any developments regarding the CTC sporting initiative?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I certainly will. My hon. Friend has, with his usual persistence, brought that important matter to my attention privately and I will certainly do everything that I can to help him.

Public Libraries

6. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the provision of public libraries. [14182]

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for providing public library services rests with local library authorities. My Department's task is to monitor developments and to ensure the provision of a comprehensive and efficient service.

Mr. Janner: In monitoring developments and particularly in imposing what the Minister referred to as a "tight settlement", does he appreciate that libraries all over the country have had to cut their facilities? In Leicestershire, for the sake of £50,000, the Information in Business partnership between De Montfort university and Leicestershire county council has been ended. Will the Minister re-examine the situation and see whether he can suggest some way of restoring that previously invaluable service to business and to employers in Leicestershire?

Mr. Sproat: As the hon. Gentleman will know, such management details are matters for the local authority.

However, if he will send me the details of the incident to which he refers I will gladly pass them to the proper authorities.

Mr. Garnier: Is my hon. Friend aware of the disquiet in the whole county of Leicestershire about the consequences for public library services of any reorganisation of local government? Will he ensure—I am sure that my right hon. Friend will—that no matter what happens to local government services in Leicestershire, there is always a good, across-the-county provision of public library services?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, is the short answer. My Department has established an expert working group to ensure that the results of the Local Government Commission's inquiry and the Government's decisions about the commission's report on unitary authorities are carried out in such a way as to ensure an improvement in library services.

Mr. Corbyn: In monitoring the performance of library authorities around the country, what information can the Minister give to the House about libraries which have been saved from closure by local campaigns to defend them but which, as a consequence, are seldom open, usually understaffed and unable to purchase any new books? Does he not think it a disgrace that in Britain in 1995 library opening hours are declining constantly, the number of new books purchased is declining and the number of children able to use those libraries is also declining?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman is not accurate in some of the things that he has said. It is certainly true that, in certain areas, the number of hours that libraries are open has been cut. That is often due to demographic changes. It is up to the local authorities and to the libraries themselves to work out which libraries should be open at what hours.

Notwithstanding the fact that some library opening hours have been cut, there are now more libraries than there were 10 years ago. More books are being borrowed from those libraries, with the average person borrowing about nine and a half books per year.

Pools Promoters

7. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from pools promoters regarding equality of treatment with the national lottery. [14183]

Mr. Dorrell: I have received a number of representations from pools promoters about the national lottery.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that the pools promoters are now in very serious difficulties—indeed, they face a crisis—because of the phenomenal success of the national lottery which is taking away their natural custom? As a result, hundreds of people have lost their jobs and, more importantly, many of the charities which benefited from the pools are being deprived of their incomes. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to equalise the situation and create a level playing field over and above the steps that he has taken already in terms of advertising and opening further retail outlets?

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly acknowledge that the introduction of the national lottery has had an effect on pools companies' operations. Before we introduce more changes to the regime applying to such companies, it is important to see the effect of those already agreed—particularly the change that allows pools companies access to television advertising, which was announced by the Government in the last six weeks. We want to see the effect of that work through before we decide what happens next.

Mr. Orme: Many people want to know what effect the introduction of scratch cards is having, not only on football pools but on small lotteries—many of which will face extinction unless something is done. Will the Secretary of State present a review of that situation in the not-too-distant future?

Mr. Dorrell: I have repeatedly given assurances that we will monitor the effect of the national lottery on a range of institutions that feel that their operations may be affected. However, the House must also keep an eye on the national lottery's achievements. It has already mobilised about £300 million for good causes since it started last November, which is a huge increase in the resources available. While the national lottery has had an effect on others operating close to it, we should not lose sight of its achievements in mobilising resources not previously available to good causes.

Competitive Sports

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to produce proposals to encourage the development of competitive sports amongst young people. [14184]

10. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his support for the development of competitive sports by young people. [14186]

Mr. Sproat: The development of competitive sports among young people will be a key element in the sports White Paper that my right hon. Friend announced on 23 March. The White Paper will be published in the early summer.

Mr. Marshall: Did my hon. Friend read the editorial in today's *Daily Telegraph*? Does he agree that there is a risk of producing a generation of overweight kids due to over-indulgent diet and inadequate exercise? What does my hon. Friend mean by "in the early summer"? Will that coincide with the start of the cricket season or of the shooting season?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I did read the *Daily Telegraph* leader, which I thought was overwhelming correct. I hope that the White Paper will direct itself to positive solutions, to put right the problems that my hon. Friend mentioned. The White Paper will certainly be published before England beat the West Indies in a test match.

Mr. Arnold: Is my hon. Friend aware of the Gravesham cup competition, which is organised by teachers of grant-maintained and county schools in my constituency? It involves leagues of various age groups in football, rugby, cricket, hockey, basketball and tennis. Does my hon. Friend agree with the headmaster of Northfleet school in my constituency, who states:

> "Competition is good—it drives up standards and fosters links between schools"?

Is it not the case that if there were more such competition, Army recruiters would not have expressed the opinion that our young people are unfit?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. I was interested to hear about the schools in his constituency and would be glad to receive more details. I hope that the spur of competition within schools and between schools, and traditional competitive team games, will follow the White Paper.

Ms Hoey: Can the Minister give an assurance that the White Paper will not take as long to appear as that on the Sports Council, which took two years? Schools cannot be persuaded to compete among themselves unless local authorities have the resources to fund travel by pupils. Will that aspect be covered by the White Paper?

Mr. Sproat: On the hon. Lady's first point, I hope that the White Paper will be out in a matter of months, which will be rather quicker than the paper to which she referred. Her point about travel was a good one. School teams often want to travel to play other schools but cannot, because they cannot get the transport to do so. I hope that the White Paper will direct itself to that issue.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Minister recognise that there is no popular support for concentrating solely on competitive games in our schools? About three quarters of those who responded to the recent consultation on the national curriculum were opposed to compelling our 14 to 16-year-olds to play competitive sport. Is that just one more example of the Government not listening to those at the sharp end?

While we are on the subject of listening, what did the Minister make of last week's finding by the Secondary Heads Association that these same 14 to 16-year-olds are playing sport of all kinds for only about 60 minutes a week, when, only six months ago, the Prime Minister backed Labour's claim for a minimum two hours a week?

Mr. Sproat: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I did not say—I certainly would not say—that schools should play only traditional team sports. But it is in those sports that the decline has been greatest. We must therefore ensure that they are played as well as individual sports. We want a proper mix.

I too read the Secondary Heads Association's paper and found it extremely interesting. It made some forceful points—in particular, the central point that physical education in schools has declined by 35 per cent. in the past four years. All of us find that worrying. It is exactly that sort of problem that we want to help to remedy by means of the White Paper.

Mr. Tracey: In his deliberations, will my hon. Friend recognise that young people, especially teenagers, want to play individual sports far more than they want to play team games? The Minister may personally regret that but it is a fact. Is he aware of a pilot study going on in four London secondary schools, led by Mr. Mark Barker and others, which deals precisely with that point?

Mr. Sproat: Of course pupils at schools must have the opportunity to play individual, as well as traditional team sports. But because there has been too much decline in traditional team sports in recent years, I must emphasise the great advantages that pupils can derive from them. We are talking not just about generating champions but about lessons of discipline, commitment, courage, winning modestly, and losing gracefully. All those are well learned from traditional team sports, which is why we want to revive them beside individual sports.

Television

9. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for encouraging the production of television programmes in the United Kingdom. [14185]

Mr. Dorrell: There are provisions in the Broadcasting Act 1990, and there will be provisions in the new BBC agreement, which encourage programme making in the UK, both nationally and in the regions.

Mr. Mitchell: The Minister will recognise that the production of high-quality programmes has always been one of the main strengths of British television, but that it was undermined by the Broadcasting Act 1990. Why does he not now seek to revive it by giving television production some of the tax concessions that the film industry needs; and use the opportunity of the relaxation of the rules on cross-media ownership to require those who want to take transmission facilities to produce programmes and invest in production too? That would ensure that the Gadarene, greedy rush—of whatever creatures want to get into television—makes a commitment and contribution to programme production as well.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's description of the effect of the Broadcasting Act 1990. It was that Act which introduced the 25 per cent. independent production quota, which has been the chief cause of the flowering of the independent production sector in Britain.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we have contemplated introducing tax concessions for programme makers. Given the quality of British television compared with that available through most foreign broadcasting sectors, there is precious little evidence that further tax concessions are necessary. British television, as the hon. Gentleman says, is good.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend positively discourage the increase in programming that seems to be of the factional variety, in which fiction and fact get confused—with special reference to current affairs broadcasting? Will he initiate an inquiry into that issue? The first witness that he might like to call to give evidence might be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr. Dorrell: Responsibility for the terms of individual programmes rests with the broadcasters. The distinction between fact and fiction, in which my hon. Friend is interested, is one that any broadcaster must be concerned about. Legislation places obligations and requirements on broadcasters clearly to demarcate the difference between opinion and fact.

Mr. Chris Smith: Is not a crucial part of producing television programmes in the United Kingdom making sure that we have an independent-minded BBC? Does not the Minister agree that tough, vigorous and probing questioning of us politicians by BBC journalists is an essential part of the democratic process? Will he tell his right hon. Friends the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Environment that the BBC is doing its proper questioning job, must continue doing it and must not be allowed to cave in to spurious Tory pressure?

Mr. Dorrell: That is a bit rich, coming from the Opposition. We have heard complaints over 15 years from the Labour party about broadcasters and the media being allegedly biased against it. As practising politicians, we have all had experience of questioners or journalists going beyond, we thought, the bounds of the task that they had been given. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is right to say that it is important that when people transgress they learn by their mistakes and seek better in future to deliver the obligation that is imposed upon them by legislation.

Departmental Report

11. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the working of his Department. [14187]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department published its annual report on 9 March; it includes an overview of its performance and plans, its expenditure details and information on the management of the Department. A copy is available in the Library.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the national lottery has been a great success, and because of that a number of good causes will benefit? Does he see some red faces on the Opposition Benches among those who opposed the lottery?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the achievements of the national lottery. It is certainly one of the great achievements of the early years of the Department of National Heritage, although the principal responsibility for having made it possible rests with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rather than the new Department. It would be nice to think that there were Opposition Members with red faces at their failure to endorse enthusiastically my right hon. Friend's initiative, which has provided £300 million for good causes since November. That is a new source of money for sport, the arts and the heritage, which no other means of mobilisation could possibly have provided. The hon. Gentleman supported it, but not all his hon. Friends gave their support.

Mr. Maclennan: To correct the balance with reference to the Secretary of State's answer to the question about the BBC, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that he has a prime responsibility to ensure freedom of expression as guaranteed by the European convention on human rights? Although individual Ministers and Members may become irritated from time to time, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that responsibility is one to which he must attach the highest importance?

Mr. Dorrell: Is it really the hon. Gentleman's case that all human kind is fallible except BBC interviewers? Surely we should all aspire to high standards of independence and recognise that occasionally we do not meet them. The important thing is to learn by our mistakes.

Mr. Jessel: Far from correcting any balances, does my right hon. Friend recognise that the arts in Britain have a high standard of excellence? Britain is one of the arts capitals of the world. We have tremendous talent in the theatre, music and all the other arts as well as in our splendid national heritage. My right hon. Friend's Department is doing an extremely fine job and we should continue to build on that.

Mr. Dorrell: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. He is entirely right to draw attention to the strength and vigour of our artistic tradition in Britain. He is right also to stress the importance of ensuring that that continues as part of a healthy and vigorous society. It is fair to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) did, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative in introducing the national lottery will, when the project is mature, provide over £300 million a year of new money to reinforce the strength of the arts sector to which my hon. Friend draws attention.

Mr. Grocott: As we all know from reports in the weekend press, all Government Departments are thrashing around trying to find something popular to do in the next Session. In a bipartisan spirit, may I offer the Secretary of State my Television Sport (Public Access) Bill, which had overwhelming support in the Commons when it was presented as a ten-minute Bill a few weeks ago and which would ensure that major sporting events are available on the channels that most of us and all our constituents can see? I suggest that he should adopt it in time for the autumn, when yet another sporting event—the Ryder cup—will be lost to the major television channels. It must be bipartisan for me to want to suggest something helpful to the Government, but I suggest that the Minister should adopt that Bill. It is tremendously popular. Will he break the Government's habit of a lifetime and do something that is popular?

Mr. Dorrell: Even in the days of the European Union, I am cautious of Greeks bearing gifts. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's approach, because I do not believe that it is in the interests of sport or heritage to reduce the value of the broadcasting contracts on offer. The difficult question that the hon. Gentleman fails to answer is how he would explain to the representatives of English cricket that his policy would leave them many millions of pounds poorer because they would be unable to enter a multipartite discussion for their contract rights. It is the open market which mobilises large extra sums of money into sport and, increasingly, into the heritage and the arts as well.

Mr. Luff: What message will my right hon. Friend send to the group of business men whom I shall be entertaining at the Swan theatre in Worcester on Saturday to encourage them to sponsor productions in that theatre and to tell them about the work that the Department does to encourage business sponsorship of the arts?

Mr. Dorrell: I invite my hon. Friend to draw their attention to the fact that one of the growing budgets in my Department is for what we now call the pairing scheme, which offers public support to businesses which engage in sponsorship activity with arts organisations. I would also encourage him to point out to his business men that if they get involved in arts sponsorship they are following the precedent established by many other British businesses over the past 20 years, during which business sponsorship of the arts has grown from virtually nothing to about £70 million a year today. British businesses sponsor the arts because they recognise that associating their businesses with high quality arts products is in the interests of their business as well as of the arts organisation.

Public Libraries

14. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information he has on expenditure by public libraries on books. [14192]

Mr. Sproat: For the past three years, with the help of the library and information statistics unit at Loughborough university, the Department has collected information from local authorities about their expenditure plans for each year. That specifically includes expenditure on books and other library materials. I also have access to the public library statistics produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Ms Church: Perhaps the Minister will tell the House when he last went to a public library and borrowed a book. What advice can he give my constituents in Dagenham who are living on income support? Can he tell us what proportion of income support is designated for spending on books? My constituents do not have the money to purchase books, the stocks in school libraries are depleted, and the public libraries are becoming a disgrace.

Mr. Sproat: The answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is 2 pm on Friday 24 March 1995. On the second part, as books from public libraries are free, one does not have to pay for them through income support or anything else.

Television Licences

15. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the operation of the current rules governing eligibility for concessionary television licence schemes; and if he will make a statement. [14193]

Mr. Dorrell: The Department receives many representations on the subject of the concessionary licence scheme. The Government's White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", published in July 1994, made it clear that we had no intention of undertaking a further review of the scheme. That remains the position.

Mr. O'Brien: There could be no more disappointing response from the Minister than that. Is he aware that many of my constituents and old people throughout the country are in despair because the licence fee increases each year and television is the only means of entertainment that many of them have. It is disappointing that the Government will not even contemplate reviewing the rules. The old people of this country have been let down tremendously by the Government. We have an opportunity for a Minister to do something to help the old people and he is refusing. That is shameful.

Mr. Dorrell: The reason why I am refusing is that I do not think it a sensible use of public funds to regard television licences as a form of social security. I am in favour of resources to support old people being concentrated on those in real need. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to abolish television licences for pensioners, he must explain why he thinks that that would be a sensible use of £500 million of public money and whether he could not do more good by better concentrating that money on those in real need.

Public Libraries

16. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the future of the public library service. [14194]

Mr. Sproat: The Department is undertaking a comprehensive review of the whole of the public library service. I hope to make a further statement on the review shortly.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister state unequivocally that in no circumstances will he, as part of that review, countenance the privatisation of any public library or any service within public libraries?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman must wait for the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy will make in due course. However, I can tell him that the consultants that we used recommended against privatisation of the public library system. I should therefore be very surprised if that were to be recommended. Indeed, it would be contrary to the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

On the question of contracting out, which the Labour party sometimes regards as privatisation, KPMG Peat Marwick delivered its report on this important subject last Friday at 10 o'clock, and we shall look at it closely. Whatever is or is not contracted out, however, the 1964 Act—which requires all local authorities to maintain a comprehensive, effective and efficient service—will remain in force.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cabinet Committees

29. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to allow people and organisations outside Government the opportunity to have access and input into the deliberative processes of those Cabinet Committees of which he is chairman. [14208]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): Input into the policy-making process is always welcome, but Cabinet Committees meet in private.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us the terms of reference of the so-called banana skins

Cabinet Committee? Will people attending that Committee be subject to the constraints of the Privy Council oath? Will it be possible for the chairman of the Conservative party to deliver documents from Conservative central office to that Committee or report from that Committee to Conservative central office? Is there not some incompatibility in his membership of that Cabinet Committee, which is served by civil servants?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman asks a number of questions which display his ignorance of these matters. It is a Committee of Ministers charged with co-ordinating and presenting the policy of the elected Government of the day and it is serviced by civil servants. Under any previous Administration, the hon. Gentleman and the House would not even have known of the existence of the Committee. Thanks to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, its terms of reference are already in the public domain, as is its membership.

The Cabinet Minister without Portfolio attends the Committee in his role as a Minister. Indeed, he is also a member of eight other Cabinet Committees. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the membership of the Committee is published and it operates under the normal rules affecting all Cabinet Committees.

Mr. David Shaw: Despite the Government opening up a great deal of information about how Cabinet Committees meet and operate, is there not still a large amount of information available that the press does not always report? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he announced recently that Britain is spending a record amount on research and development—£13.8 billion last year—but that that information was not widely reported?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been responsible for a number of open Government initiatives under which more than 24,000 records have now been released. I confirm that, on 17 March, the Central Statistical Office released figures showing that the United Kingdom's gross domestic expenditure on research and development was £13.8 billion, which represented an increase in cash terms of 6 per cent. from the level in 1992. I hope that that will be as widely reported as the other matters to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Labour Members welcome the presence of the Conservative party chairman on that and, indeed, any other Cabinet Committee because it is in our interests that he should stay there. Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster give us a clue about the responsibilities of the new Government presentation Committee? Is it responsible, for instance, for the threat that nurses could lose their pay review body unless they toe the Government line, or for the fact that ambulance staff have been awarded a pay increase of 28p per day at the same time as "Panorama" is disclosing that water bosses are sitting on £4 million of personal profit in addition to massive salary increases? The Committee may be responsible for the presentation of such acts, but there is no way in which it can make them palatable to the public.

Mr. Hunt: At least the Government understand the importance of policy. First, we have the policy and then we concern ourselves with the presentation. The Labour party in opposition seem to believe that it can handle things the other way round: it is over-concerned with presentation and leaves a policy vacuum at the heart of the party.

National Science Week

30. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to visit schools during National Science Week. [14209]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. John Horam): My right hon. Friend visited nine events at which school children were present during National Science Week. I managed to outscore him by visiting 12. In all, more than 20 events involving school children were visited by my right hon. Friend and myself during science week.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by their activities last week, he and my right hon. Friend have shown their wholehearted commitment to supporting science and education in schools, which are contributing so much to our economic success? Will my hon. Friend join me in promoting the top flight bursary scheme, which gives £500 extra per year to every top student who chooses to do engineering at university?

Mr. Horam: I hope that we have shown our support for National Science Week. It was a fairly exhausting week, so I would be disappointed if we had not achieved something. My hon. Friend's point about the top flight scheme is well made. It is an excellent scheme, which means that school children can go to university and obtain a bursary funded partly by the Government and the Engineering Council. To promote the scheme, we sent out a leaflet last summer to all secondary schools, further education colleges and higher education courses. Perhaps we should consider what my hon. Friend has said and send out a further leaflet this summer to ensure that the message is really banged home.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister agree that the one thing that will encourage school children to welcome and embrace science is a degree of openness? Has not one of the problems been that they scientists have not been as open about their work as they could have been? Will the Minister comment on the report in *The Observer* yesterday that British scientists who have examined the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl have been prevented by the European Commission from making their findings known at a proposed London press conference? If there is a major problem there, British scientists who are part of the international team looking at the plant need to be as open as possible about the difficulties, so that this country, with its expertise, can offer all possible help to prevent a second catastrophic explosion.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. As he knows, the European Union is financing work on the feasibility study for a shelter over Chernobyl. It would be a serious matter if there were problems in relation to that. I take what the hon. Gentleman says seriously. Obviously, all information on the matter should be made available.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend build on the success of National Science Week by campaigning to correct public misconceptions about science, and in particular about the importance and excellence of our national science base and its significance for this country's future? That is evidenced by the large increase in funding for science and technology in 1992-93, showing the commitment of both Government and industry to achieving the fruits of science for the benefit of our people.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend makes an important point, because the United Kingdom's great strength has been in the biological and life sciences. The general opinion, which I am sure is right, is that those are the important sciences for the 21st century. The fact that we are putting so much effort into those sciences, and that my right hon. Friend has slightly shifted the balance towards life sciences during the current review of research council spending, shows our intention to support them strongly.

Contract Researchers

31. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he is taking to improve conditions for contract researchers funded from the science vote. [14210]

Mr. David Hunt: The policies in the White Paper, "Realising Our Potential".

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Chancellor agree that contract researchers have been undervalued for all too long? Will he give his full support to proposals by the research councils to give research contractors terms and conditions of employment equivalent to those of permanent staff?

Mr. Hunt: A number of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman are matters for the research councils and the universities. I welcome the fact that the number of researchers has grown. The number of PhDs has also grown. We need to ensure that that continues if we are to invest wisely in our future.

Research Councils

32. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will pay a visit to the research councils in Swindon to discuss funding. [14211]

Mr. Horam: I hope to visit the research councils shortly to discuss both funding and other issues. It is a high priority.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that the recent increase in the science budget was warmly welcomed by the research councils? Does he agree with me that the success of National Science Week is likely to lead in due course to a large increase in demands for the science budget to be enlarged—supported, as it was, not only by my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy, but by the BBC and by staff at the research councils in Swindon?

Mr. Horam: I was glad that the research councils played a significant part in the whole of National Science Week. They established a video link whereby young people could question the director-general of science, research and development in the Brussels Commission on his priorities. I found that very interesting. They also ran a science quiz, which I gather operated successfully around all the pubs in Swindon, although I think that that was a rather more light-hearted approach.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the Government's response to the proposal by the Royal Microscopical Society, backed by research councils, that it is highly desirable that there should be a microscope in every school, if only to increase the sense of wonder that is so important in education?

Mr. Horam: Decisions on such matters are rightly for the research councils, but I will consider what the hon. Gentleman says. It is an interesting suggestion.

National Science Week

33. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimates he has made of the total number of children involved in National Science Week; what proportion were girls; and if he will make a statement. [14212]

Mr. David Hunt: At least 1.5 million, of whom I understand that approximately 50 per cent. were girls.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful for that response. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that we pin down those figures accurately and that we analyse why, even though a large proportion of girls participated in National Science Week, as they did last year, we still have not broken through and persuaded more girls to participate in science at A-level and beyond? Will the Chancellor ensure, with his colleagues at the Department for Education, that urgent research is undertaken to correct that huge anomaly?

Mr. Hunt: First, I pay tribute to the many organisations which put on events during National Science Week to increase public understanding of science, engineering and technology. Many of those were directed at boys and girls. I understand that at least 1.5 million people watched children's television such as "Blue Peter" and "Newsround", which carried many items. As for the hon. Gentleman's point about girls, we want to see equality of opportunity. Indeed, the Royal Society's new Dorothy Hodgkin fellowships, for which I recently announced support, should help retain young women in post-doctoral research. The hon. Gentleman is right that we have to start at the earliest possible age by attracting more boys and girls into science as a career.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, following the success of "Realising our Potential" in 1993—the first White Paper on science for more than 20 years—we have seen a continuing concentration on science education and that the success of National Science Week last week was proof positive of that? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that the success of Conservative policies in the past 15 years derived from one of the best lady scientists ever?

Mr. Hunt: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's comments about Baroness Thatcher. As for the future, much of the strength in our science and engineering base is due to our free enterprise system, and we have a reputation throughout the world as a centre of free enterprise. We published today the reports of the Technology Foresight exercise, which contain examples of what must happen in the future, including a more positive partnership between industry, Government and our best brains.

Research

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the development gap between basic and industrially relevant research. [14213]

Mr. David Hunt: I find difficulty in knowing to what gap the hon. Lady is referring. If she has in mind the translation of good research ideas into marketable products, the Government help through programmes such as Link and Technology Foresight. Only this morning, I published five Technology Foresight panel reports.

Mrs. Campbell: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster himself referred to the development gap in his interview with the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, so I am surprised that he does not know what I am talking about.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the present situation has a great deal in common with near-market research, which was slashed by Baroness Thatcher during the latter years of her reign as Prime Minister? Does he further agree that science and technology should not pick up the tab for research and development projects which are being cut by Departments?

Mr. Hunt: First, if the hon. Lady looks at her question, she will realise the point that I was making. Secondly, it is important in Technology Foresight for there to be a positive partnership. I take pride in the fact that we have had a world-leading Technology Foresight exercise involving 15 different panels in which our best brains from science, the universities and industry have come together with the Government to look 10 to 20 years ahead. I hope that all the reports that we have published will be carefully considered by all the industries involved.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that universities and industry must collaborate on research if universities are not to become ivory towers and so that industry can benefit from the brains within the universities?

Mr. Hunt: While stressing the importance of basic research, which is an important ingredient in the competitiveness of the United Kingdom, I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that he will have found that a new partnership is developing following on from the initiative started by my predecessor, the present Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in bringing together industry and academia in a positive way. That will have benefits for everyone concerned with improving our standard of living and quality of life.

Executive Agencies

35. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to improve relations between members of the public and executive agency offices not located geographically close to their clients; and if he will make a statement. [14214]

Mr. Horam: Many—the "Next Steps Review 1994" is full of examples.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is difficult for my constituents to feel a personal relationship with the people in Glasgow, Blackpool and beyond who are dealing with their problems, particularly when they often seem to speak a different language? Can something be done to make the relationships more personal, to the advantage of my constituents as they deserve that?

Mr. Horam: I hope that my hon. Friend was not talking about differences in accent, but about terminology and jargon. There is a problem in the link between distant centres and the local Benefits Agency offices, but we are trying to improve that through local customer surveys, visits by Benefits Agency staff to local libraries, health centres and community centres, a one-stop shop and improved opening hours. All those improvements are being put into the melting pot to try to improve the relationship. The National Audit Office said recently—I am not sure whether this relates to my hon. Friend's local office—that there had been an improvement in the relationship between the London district offices and the Glasgow and Blackpool centres as a result of those efforts.

Mr. Enright: Is the Minister aware that a constituent of mine rang up one of those agencies—situated in Belfast—to explain her problem, only to be told, "If you were living here, you would know what problems really were"?

Mr. Horam: Perhaps in the first instance the hon. Gentleman's constituent should have gone to her local office. The staff there could then have rung Northern Ireland.

Scientific Inventions

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new proposals he has to improve the application of scientific inventions to industry. [14215]

Mr. David Hunt: Extensive.

Mr. Flynn: Are not the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's laboratories at Harlow among our finest institutions for scientific invention, especially in non-nuclear, renewable energy resources? Should not such work be applied to arrest the development of nuclear installations at Ignalina in Lithuania, Privdannekransk in Odessa and especially at Chernobyl, which, as we heard earlier, are in imminent danger of causing a problem? Should they not be applied to prevent the European investment bank from using money to create a potential new Chernobyl reactor at Mochove in Slovakia?

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, although I would have preferred a little more notice of the detailed nature of his question. I will consider carefully all the matters that he raised, but I have two comments. First, I was already aware of the tremendous work performed by the energy technology support unit, which I first experienced when I was Energy Minister about 10 years ago.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary said a moment ago, the European Commission is funding a feasibility study into the stabilisation of the shelter over the damaged remains of reactor 4 at Chernobyl. The Alliance consortium of western engineering companies carried out phase 1 of the study, which was completed recently, and its findings were presented to a panel of Ukrainian and western experts in Kiev from 14 to 16 March. The report is understood to confirm doubts about the long-term stability of the shelter and the need for early action to construct a replacement. Nuclear safety at Chernobyl is a matter for the Ukrainian authorities, but further EU-funded work is planned on design requirements for a new shelter in the second phase of the project, and I am keeping in close touch with the situation.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any request from a Foreign Office Minister to make a statement on the increasingly ugly situation that is developing in Washington in relation to wild talk of military action against Iraq? Is it not highly desirable that the Commons should at least hear about that and have an opportunity to discuss it before any military strike?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that the Government are seeking to make a statement on that matter, but there will be questions to the Foreign Office later this week, and the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members might be able to raise that matter then.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder what redress is available to hon. Members who find themselves coming under undue pressure from outside organisations on subjects that are of interest to the House. I have in mind the reports about the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union in respect of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), and consideration of the future of clause IV.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. Our standing orders and our procedures have not been breached, but if the hon. Gentleman will let me have a copy of the report that he is referring to, I will take a look at it. I have not seen it, and I need to be fully informed before I can comment.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, on a matter that affects the responsibilities and duties of the House. At the weekend and on Friday, there were extensive leaks to the media of what the Government are hoping to include in a Queen's Speech that cannot be delivered until November at the earliest—assuming that a general election does not intervene.

Clearly nothing is more important to the responsibilities of the House than knowing the Government's plans for the following parliamentary year. I have no strong views on whether it is good to leak those plans six months in advance, but surely anything as important to the House should at least be announced to the House by the Leader of the House, and should not be dealt with in leaks to the media.

Madam Speaker: I make no comments on leaked documents or leaked information. I have enough to do in dealing with authoritative information, let alone leaked material.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. I know that you uphold the principle that any hon. Member who receives payment on a matter that might affect his judgment should make a declaration to that effect. Should not the same rule apply to political journalists who deal with this place?

Would it be appropriate to refer to the Nolan committee, through you or by some other means in this House, the fact that it is now being reported that a political journalist, John Humphrys of the BBC, failed to disclose during his interviews on the "Today" programme that he would receive payment for his involvement in the overtly anti-Government education rally last week?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman believes that it is a matter that he can refer to the Nolan committee, knowing the terms of reference of that committee, as an individual Member he is perfectly free to do so.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today's Order Paper shows that the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) intends to raise on the Adjournment, under Standing Order No. 9, the proposed sale of the RAF Bentwaters base in Suffolk. You have ruled in the past that, when hon. Members refer in questions or Adjournment debates to a matter that concerns another hon. Member's constituency, they should at least consult the hon. Member concerned.

I understand that the hon. Member for Ipswich has not advised my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that he intends to raise that matter on the Adjournment. Should not that strict convention, to which you normally like us to adhere, be observed for the sake of future good practice?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct. When an hon. Member wishes to raise, especially in an Adjournment debate, the question of some development or project that concerns another Member's constituency, not only is it a matter of courtesy to let the other hon. Member know but it is a matter of good custom and practice. I deprecate the fact that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has not been informed that that Adjournment debate is to take place this evening.

Orders of the Day

Disability Discrimination Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order refers to the selection of amendments to the Bill before us. Could new clause 17 in my name be debated in association with new clause 1 on the Disability Rights Commission, which has been selected for discussion? My new clause is very much in line with new clause 1, and I believe that it would cause no difficulty if we discussed the two together.

Madam Speaker: I had that entirely in mind, and I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman and I think alike on those matters.

Ordered,

That the Disability Discrimination Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses relating to Part II of the Bill, new Clauses relating to education, new Clauses relating to Part IV of the Bill, other new Clauses, Amendments relating to Clause No. 1, Amendments relating to Schedule No. 1, remaining Amendments to the Bill, new Schedules and remaining Amendments to the Schedules to the Bill.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

New clause 6

SMALL FIRMS

'(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to have regard to the needs of employers who have fewer than 20 employees and to take such practical steps as he deems appropriate to enable them to meet their obligations under this Act.

(2) The Secretary of State may make regulations specifying the circumstances under which adjustments may be considered reasonable for employers who have fewer than 20 employees'.—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.37 am

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 16—*Small firms (No. 2)*—

'(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to have regard to the needs of employers who have fewer than 20 employees and to make such financial provision by way of grants or loans as he deems appropriate to enable them to meet their obligations under this Act.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations specify the circumstances under which adjustments will be considered reasonable for employers who have fewer than 20 employees, and such regulations may specify appropriate periods within which such adjustments shall be made.

(3) Regulations under this section may make different provisions for different circumstances and different sizes of employer and specify different periods within which different adjustments shall be made; and regulations made under this section may be varied by subsequent regulations.'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 7, page 5, leave out lines 10 to 14.

Government amendment No. 122.

Sir John Hannam: As we embark on this important Report stage of the Disability Discrimination Bill and on this debate on the small firms exemption, it is right for me to offer my congratulations to the Government on bringing forward this anti-discrimination legislation. After many years of campaigning for acceptance by the Government of the need for such a measure, I feel that, since the consultation paper last July, we have seen real progress in strengthening and widening the proposals that were then put forward.

I pay tribute to the personal endeavours of my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. I hope that further progress will be made on Report and in the other place, so that disabled people will feel that a comprehensive piece of anti-discrimination legislation has been put in place. I am confident that that will happen.

Clause 7 exempts firms that employ fewer than 20 people from its provisions. That means that, unless the Bill is amended, small firms will be able to discriminate legally against disabled people. In fact, the Bill provides the power not only to reduce the number of employees but to increase that number by regulation. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give me a clear assurance today that there will be no intention ever to use that power to increase the number to more than 20 employees—and that, in fact, the reverse will be the case.

I understand the reactions of small firms' organisations, which genuinely fear the impact of extra regulations and, of course, the costs that could be involved. In my view, however, there is ample protection in clause 6, which allows for the reasonableness of an employer's adjustments to be determined with reference to cost.

The small firms sector is the fastest growing sector in the economy. It employs some 34 per cent. of the work force in some 60 per cent. of firms. It is also the area of employment which is most suited to disabled people, and where quite small adjustments may result in a work opportunity being created.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I am grateful to the hon. Member, whose work in this policy area is well known in all parts of the House of Commons. The hon. Member knows—indeed, no one knows better than him—that the organisations of and for disabled people, almost without exception, want the Bill to apply to employers of fewer than 25 people, just as much as it would apply to those who employ more than 25. Will the hon. Member give the House his indication of support for that proposition? The amendment goes some way, but, I think that he will agree, it is identical treatment that the organisations want.

Sir John Hannam: The right hon. Member was saying 25—I think that he meant 20 employees.

Mr. Morris: Merely a slip of the tongue.

Sir John Hannam: My keen objective is to see that figure brought down. I am still concerned and rather puzzled that we did not adopt the figure of 15, which was adopted in the American legislation. I want to develop that point.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister, who took the trouble to visit the United States to see for himself how the Americans with Disabilities Act, was working, said:

"'reasonable accommodation' . . . cost nothing in 43 per cent. of cases because it involved just moving the furniture around or doing something sensible and practical like introducing different working hours."

He went on to say:

> "A large proportion of other adjustments costs very little."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 149.]

We know from evidence in the United States that the cost implications for firms over there to achieve the removal of discrimination were in most cases very small.

It is interesting to note that, in its response to the Government's consultation document last year, the Confederation of British Industry, an employer organisation—although it represents mainly larger firms—voiced concern over the exclusion of small employers from employment rights. It argued for a phasing in of compliance requirements, and with it more support for small firms through schemes such as the access to work scheme, which the Government introduced and which is very welcome.

I should also like to point out that, in rural areas, small firms are the only possibility of employment for disabled people, especially in view of transport problems that they experience, which are as yet not included in the Bill. I hope to make progress on that front tomorrow when we address new clause 11.

Another quirk of the Bill is that franchises are counted as separate firms, which means that individual outlets of firms such as McDonalds, which employs fewer than 20 people in each of its individual outlets, would not be covered by the Bill's provisions, despite the enormous resources of such companies. McDonalds, incidentally, does a great deal for disablement causes.

An example of the sort of discrimination which may exist in a firm was given to me by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The name of the girl involved was not given. She was told that she could not use her Braille equipment in work because it was considered too noisy. The Bill would make such an instruction unlawful if it was given by a company with more than 20 employees, but smaller firms will be given a free rein to discriminate in any way they wish. Many examples of such discrimination can be produced.

Surely we should create a fully accessible labour market as possible. That would result in economic benefits as disabled people came off social security benefits and began to pay taxes. We know from talking to them that they always dream about doing that.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that this probing new clause has been tabled because his current proposals need to be adjusted to remove the possibility of the employee exemption figure being increased. I hope that he will say that he intends to bring us in line with, at least, the American figure of 15 employees at the earliest possible opportunity. On Second Reading my hon. Friend promised to review that employment level; I believe that that should be conducted at the earliest possible stage. Today, I hope that he will accept the principle behind the new clause, which would point us in that direction.

3.45 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on tabling the new clause, although it does not go anywhere near far enough; nor is it likely to get there quickly enough. I understand, however, exactly why he has tabled it. If the Minister was minded to accept it, it would certainly get us marching in the right direction.

It was hard on Second Reading and in Committee, and it remains hard today, to understand why the Government are telling 96 in every 100 firms that it is perfectly legal to discriminate against people with disabilities who seek jobs or who are employed. The reason for the Government's stance was given in paragraph 3.10 of the White Paper, to which the Minister referred several times in our earlier considerations on the Bill. It states:

> "It may be more difficult and burdensome for small firms without specialist personnel to get to grips with the new right and obtain the advice they need in particular cases"

I hope to demonstrate that that is no more than a shabby excuse.

Of course small firms have different problems from larger ones, and of course they have smaller resources, but the Government do not use that argument to exempt them from legislation dealing with discrimination on grounds of race or gender. They do not use that argument when it comes to the intricacies of income tax, VAT, national insurance, sick pay, health and safety and all the rest of it. Every employer is treated equally in such matters. It is only in the case of people with disabilities that the Government say, "Carry on discriminating."

The Government opposed the establishment of a disability rights commission, because they said that those needing help to enforce the limited rights conferred by the Bill should turn to citizens advice bureaux or other such agencies for assistance. Why cannot small firms do the same? If it is good enough for a would-be employee, seeking to enforce the rights conferred in the Bill, to be sent in the direction of the CAB, why is that not good enough for the would-be employer? A ready source of advice is available. The Minister is negotiating on its funding, and I believe that a meeting about that will be held on 29 March.

Things get even more curious in the Government's silly argument when we consider paragraph 3.5 of the White Paper, which states:

> "The majority of disabled people who want to work, need no, or only very modest, help."

In Committee, the Minister reminded us that the "reasonable accommodation" employers are expected to make as a result of the Bill cost nothing in 43 out of every 100 cases in the United States—as the hon. Member for Exeter has already said—because it involved nothing more than moving furniture around or adjusting working hours. The Minister helpfully added that a large proportion of other adjustments cost very little.

There is another curiosity. We know that the Government will set financial limits on the cost of adjustments that an employer can reasonably be expected to make, perhaps based on rateable value to take rough account of company size.

What, then, is the problem? Having argued against a duty on every employer not to discriminate, the Government get pious. Paragraph 3.10 of the White Paper optimistically adds:

> "organisations representing smaller employers will be among those consulted on the proposed code of practice, and small firms will be encouraged to follow it voluntarily."

That is novel. After telling smaller employers that it is perfectly legal to discriminate against people with disabilities, the Government raise the fond hope that they will do voluntarily what they are not required to do by

[Mr. Robin Corbett]

law. They truly are a Government who have been too long in the unreal world to know what goes on beyond those windows.

It is not as though the Government can claim that they have public opinion on their side. Of the 254 responses about whether small firms should be covered by that part of the Bill, 81 per cent. said they should, and only 17 per cent. said they should not. I immediately acknowledge that that was far from a scientific sample, because the number of responses about that issue was disappointingly small.

However, the missing opinion comes to us copper-bottomed. The Confederation of British Industry, even the illustrious Institute of Directors and the Employers' Forum on Disability, linking more than 100 top companies, say that it is wrong to have two categories of people in the world of work on the basis of drawing an arbitrary line.

That is not the end of it. One in every six people at work works in a small firm. In large parts of England, and more so in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, small firms are the only employers. Indeed, in the inner-city areas of Birmingham, for example, small firms vastly outnumber larger ones.

It will not wash for the Government to say that the four in every 100 firms that do employ more than 20 people are the only ones that matter. It is the 96 in every 100, now excluded, that provide the main opportunities for jobs for people with different abilities.

If the Minister does not know that, I shall tell him: larger firms are becoming smaller, employing fewer people, and there are fewer of them. The growth in jobs, even though many are part-time, is taking place among small firms. Also, as the hon. Member for Exeter said, some apparently large firms, such as McDonald's Restaurants and many others, are to be treated as small ones because they are franchise operations.

I believe that the amendments must be regarded in a wider context. Under the Bill, disabled people are to lose what protection the present quota scheme provides—and that is precious little. Under the scheme, only 10 employers have ever been taken to court, and not a single prosecution has succeeded in the past 20 years.

The Government are also to do away with statutory registration of people with disabilities so that, under the Bill, some people who are now at work will have even those protections taken away from them, whatever the size of the firm they work with. Where is that supposed to leave the 8,654 people with disabilities working in the 95 Remploy factories? Their work force is almost wholly drawn from people who are registered, and identified as such, through jobcentres.

While we are at it, does the Minister know that the replacement for the priority suppliers scheme, which was of such assistance to Remploy and sheltered workshops run by local councils and others, is causing immense problems? The special contracts arrangements limit possible rebids for work to a contract ceiling of £147,000.

Does he know, for example, that the Ministry of Defence usually places orders for uniforms and protective clothing in parcels of about £2 million? Does he know that some of the 12 Remploy factories specialising in textiles are running out of work, and that one at Alfreton is due to close, while the Ministry of Defence has £10 million of unplaced contracts for uniforms hanging about as a result of the chaos in the change between the two schemes?

No one expects any firm, of whatever size, to meet unreasonable costs in employing people with disabilities. However, as the Employment Minister and his hon. Friend know full well, there is assistance available already through the access to work scheme and via PACTs—placement, assessment and counselling teams. As the Disability Alliance suggests, the national insurance holiday in the Jobseekers Bill could also be offered to employers in order to help to meet the cost of offering jobs to people with disabilities.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the discrimination that the Government want to retain for small firms is put by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, when it argues, quite properly, that new technology, especially in the widening field of information, will open up vast new job opportunities, many of which will be with small specialist firms. It is simply intolerable that people with different abilities, including the visually impaired, should be locked out of those opportunities.

I believe that the Government are making big fools of themselves over the exemption for small firms, which is no more than a bone-headed deregulation dogma by the Secretary of State for Employment. It is indefensible, and he and his Ministers know it. I hope that, tonight, enough hon. Members in the House will put equal treatment at work for all disabled people ahead of party labels.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I do not know how many people are employed in small businesses in this country. Various statistics have been cited, but the actual figure does not really matter. The point is that many people are employed in small firms, particularly in towns and villages in rural areas such as in south Warwickshire, which I represent. In the major economy, the trend towards downsizing, subcontracting and franchising makes it plain that we must regard small businesses as central to our economy. Small business constitutes the fastest growing sector in our economy.

The distinction that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) seeks to make between businesses employing fewer than 20 people and those employing 20 or more is an arbitrary one, which, in the end, does not stand up to scrutiny. I am not aware of any serious organisation representative of business which wants that distinction to be made. The Employers Forum on Disability, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors certainly reject that proposal.

My hon. Friend and his colleagues in Government are correct to be concerned not to lay gratuitous or unnecessary burdens on business. However, it is a question of whose burdens matter. It is not only the burdens on business men that matter, but also those on disabled people. Disabled people carry enormous burdens, and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to lighten their burdens.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, the Government's new clause 6 concerning reasonableness would provide ample security to small businesses and prevent them from suffering undue and genuinely burdensome responsibilities. Ironically, the Government's own proposals would involve somewhat burdensome responsibilities.

One can imagine that firms will move in and out of this legislative jurisdiction. On occasion, a business may employ 19 people and at other times it may employ 20 people. Is it helpful to require a firm to commute between two legislative regimes? I do not think it is. In any case, let us think less about imposing burdens on business and more about the contributions that people with impairments can, and desire to, make and of which we are depriving ourselves by allowing discrimination to be perpetuated.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State expressed concern that small firms would not have the specialist personnel functions or the expertise to cope with the requirement that they should not discriminate against disabled people. It does not require any expertise or administrative sophistication to do the decent thing and behave properly. That is all that we require of small businesses. If they need support and advice, the PACT teams will assist them.

The Government should continue and further develop the access to work scheme, which provides some financial subvention in reasonable circumstances to assist disabled people into employment. That policy benefits all firms, including small businesses. My hon. Friend's amendment moves at least some way in the right direction.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister at least to remove the power in the Bill to raise the threshold above 20 employees. It is unimaginable that there could be any circumstances in which the Government would want to backtrack on the Bill's provisions. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) suggested reducing the number to 15, to match the practice in the United States of America. If the Minister will do that, will he make a further commitment to phase out the small business exemption altogether over time?

4 pm

Those are all compromises and halfway houses, but the right thing would be to abolish the distinction altogether. After all, the Bill is an affirmation of the values of our society. It would be extraordinary and deeply offensive to propose that it should be within the law for a business employing fewer than 20 people to discriminate on the grounds of race or gender. We should equally accept, in a clear-cut fashion, that it is entirely unacceptable for an employing organisation or any other to discriminate unjustifiably against people who are disabled. One's basic rights as a human being and citizen should not depend on who happens to be one's employer.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Far fewer people are covered by the Government's Bill, including those in employment, than would be covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. In the Government's measure, a whole list of exemptions and exclusions exclude four categories of persons. That would be true even if the argument for ending the distinction introduced by the 20-employee barrier was won.

The costs argument does not take account of the fact that some companies that employ fewer than 20 people are highly profitable, especially in a high-technology age in which the capital employed rather than the number of people may be the most important consideration. Often, companies that employ a large number of people are strapped for cash.

If there is to be a distinction—and I do not agree that there should be—it should not be in terms of the number of people employed. It may be argued that there is some rough and ready justice in terms of profitability and the ability to absorb the costs involved, although it is argued also that the costs could be minor. If a distinction is to be made, there could be an argument for making it elsewhere.

The worst thing about the existing distinction is the message that it sends to disabled people that 96 firms out of 100, and many areas of the country where only small firms operate, will be no-go areas, and that disabled people will have to rely entirely on the good will of small firms to employ them. That creates the wrong atmosphere in which to pass legislation that the Minister claims represents a significant step forward for disabled people.

In north-east Derbyshire, Remploy, based in Alfreton, is closing. It has offered one of the rare opportunities for employment in an area of pit closures. Small firms, with fewer than 20 employees, have been important providers of jobs in the area. What alternative jobs are there, now that the mines have closed, and with them, the firms that serviced them? Such firms often employed more than 20 people, so this legislation would have applied to them.

Disabled people working for Remploy now have to travel further afield, to the Mansfield area. Meanwhile, their other commercial opportunities are beginning to disappear. That is why serious consideration must be given to access to employment for disabled people.

It is when we come to franchises that the Government's cut-off—20 staff or fewer—is shown up for what it is. McDonald's, which employs masses of people around the world, manages to avoid these provisions by operating under franchises. That is another good reason for rejecting the Government's contentions.

The new clause offers an opening—not complete change. The only way to bring about complete change would be to introduce the principles of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and to get rid of the distinction, based on size, between firms. In other Government legislation, the factors to be taken into consideration—reasonableness, cost, organisational and other difficulties—are considered before the law case by case.

That is why this legislation is wrong. The new clause, like our other amendments, tries to make the best of a bad job. It is fairly limited; we do not ask that the numbers come down to 15, or that other factors be taken into account. We are simply nudging the Government towards consideration of such points. That is worth while in itself.

Hon. Members of all parties ought to support the amendments in this batch, which in effect open up the legislation. I hope that the Minister will at least admit that there is some possibility of change. He should remember, when it comes to definitions and the areas of employment to be covered, that there is massive support in this House for the principles in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which has been supported and sponsored at various times by 10 political parties in the House, including the two Conservative parties.

It is time for the Government to face up to the situation, and not to hide themselves away, preventing proper discussion in Committee of the measures in the other Bill that should have been included in this one.

Mr. Wigley: I am glad of the opportunity to speak on this new clause, although it is really amendment No. 7 that appeals most to me—it would cut out the offending words altogether.

[Mr. Wigley]

It is wrong to enshrine in law the unjustifiable principle that discrimination against disabled people in their place of work is acceptable if they work for companies with fewer than 20 employees. Passing the Bill unamended would lead to that position in law. It also leads to the position where more than half of employers in Wales will not be subject to the provisions that we are discussing. That is because more than half of them employ 20 or fewer people. That cannot be right.

The Government have tried to deal with the problem that small companies are sometimes unable to cope with all the responsibilities that are placed upon them and sometimes respond in an incorrect fashion. In some small companies, there may be lack of expertise in all directions.

The results of the survey undertaken by the Employers Forum on Disability reveal that even large companies that do not employ disabled people have a negative attitude towards disabled people. They believe that there are considerable problems in employing them. When a company gets into the habit of employing disabled people, however, whether it is a large or small company, it finds that the problems are massively overstated, and that it is possible to deal with those that arise.

The survey revealed that, at some stage, larger companies will find themselves employing disabled people. When that happens, they start to relate to how that process can be facilitated. They begin to understand how problems can be overcome. Their experience in dealing with one disabled employee will no doubt help them to develop suitable provisions for other disabled people.

It may not be possible to implement the process of facilitation in a small company. The likelihood is, therefore, that a small company that has not employed a disabled person will continue from year to year under the misapprehension that employing such a person causes immense difficulties. Enshrining rights to opt out in law creates a road block to stop us breaking through and encouraging small companies to employ more disabled people, which will lead to a greater willingness to employ them in future.

The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) talked about the representations that we have received from the Royal National Institute for the Blind. I was impressed by a case it quoted involving a man from Scotland, who was dismissed after only three days of being appointed an assistant supervisor, despite stating his need for a large print package for his computer. His manager ignored his, the employee's, advice that the PACT team could offer assistance, and that necessary adaptations could be undertaken through access-to-work arrangements. That was an example of ignorance. The likelihood is that smaller companies will have that ignorance.

There may be some circumstances in which small companies will be unable to cope with massive changes that might be needed in extreme cases of disability. That situation is covered by other provisions in the Bill. Such changes would not be regarded under those provisions as reasonable. Required changes would have to fall within what is regarded as reasonable before they could be considered, whether a small or large company was involved.

The same approach should be adopted to companies of all sizes. If necessary, we could apply the test of reasonableness in a slightly different way to companies that are very small and do not have the resources to do what larger companies might be able to do. It would be better still if the Government could help by providing adequate financial resource where needed.

The opportunity for disabled people to express themselves and develop can be much greater within a small company than a large one. They may get the support they need in a small company. They may find that, in such a company, they are members of a small family of workers, who will bring them on in a way that is not always possible in the less personalised arrangements that exist in large companies.

A plethora of companies employ about 20 people. There are numerous companies of that sort in my constituency. Perhaps they will employ 20, 21 or 22 people this year, and perhaps 17 or 18 next year, or vice versa. In those terms, they will be going backwards and forwards. How can we justify a system in which a disabled person's rights under the law depend on the vagaries of the market and a company's response to them?

I also point out to the Minister the danger of less scrupulous companies. It may not be all that likely in this instance, but if we start to discriminate between companies on the basis of size, in other circumstances it might be tempting for a company to federalise itself or whatever—franchise has been used as an example—to avoid the requirements of the law. It is a bad law that says that there may not be discrimination in companies above a certain size, but that it would be allowed to exist in smaller companies.

I now deal with the attitude towards disabled people. I have a letter from the mother-in-law of someone in Cardiff who had suffered cancer while in the Royal Air Force but made a total recovery. He then tried to find work in civvy street. Despite the fact that he had recovered and had no problems whatever, he is unable to get work because,

> "in filling application forms, he's been completely truthful and honest and when he's told them all he doesn't even get an acknowledgment of his application. I'm sure you'll agree Mr. Wigley that this is prejudice and discrimination."

That is the point. When someone with a disability applies to a small company for work, there will be the temptation not to give him or her an interview. Without that small company going through the process of meeting a disabled person and giving the interview, it will not be aware of the positive things that disabled workers can give to a company, and will be aware only of the prejudice and the negative aspect that goes with it.

4.15 pm

We are losing an opportunity to break down barriers. If we did away with the clause, we could indeed break down the barriers that that person in Cardiff was experiencing when applying to small companies for work. That is the challenge for the Government. I believe even that, even at this stage, the Government have it within their capability to say, "Yes, perhaps we have got it wrong. Even if we cannot change it on Report, we will look again in the other place to see whether the whole approach can be reconsidered." I hope that the Government will be willing to do that. I believe that the well-being of countless thousands of disabled workers depends on it.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who has made a distinguished speech in this debate, won enormous respect for his constancy in support of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. That support made it crystal clear long before today that he is opposed to differentiating between firms that employ more or less than 20 employees. That is also the view of nearly all the organisations of and for disabled people.

Did the Government consult before today's debate Sir Peter Large for his view? It was Sir Peter Large whom I appointed, as then Minister in 1979, to chair the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People. That Committee recommended as long ago as 1982 that we should have legislation on the statute book to make it unlawful to discriminate unfairly against disabled people. The Minister must surely agree that Sir Peter Large, who has served so long and with such distinction the Disablement Income Group and, for an even longer period, the Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People, is well worth listening to on the subject of this debate.

Has the Minister consulted Rachel Hirst or Richard Wood, of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People? They are in no doubt that it will make bad law to distinguish between firms that employ more and those that employ fewer than that number. Have the Government spoken to Professor Ian Bruce of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, or to Ann Robinson of Scope?

Not only they, but all the representatives of the major disability organisations have said over and over again that it would make discrimination in employment worse to distinguish between employers with fewer than 20 employers and those with more than 20.

We hear that view not only from distinguished representatives of disabled people—those to whom I have referred among many others—but from many employers who are strongly opposed to the drawing of any such distinction. The Employers Forum on Disability, much to its credit, has said that it is wrong. This is our opportunity to correct a part of the Bill that is resented and bitterly criticised throughout the disability world.

There is deep resentment of unfair discrimination in all its forms. There is also resentment about condescension towards disabled people and about patronising attitudes towards them. Is it not patronising to act as though the views of Sir Peter Large, Rachael Hirst, Richard Wood, Ian Bruce, Ann Robinson and other leading representatives of disabled people count for very little? It must be bad government not to listen to people who are experts in any policy area—and who is more expert about the effects of discrimination than those who suffer from it? We could have tackled the problem in 1982 by making discrimination unlawful on the basis of Sir Peter Large's report.

Yet, disturbingly, we are now introducing a very painful sort of new discrimination. The House of Commons accepts that there are groups in society that need protection if they are not to have their problems compounded by unmerited discrimination. If the Bill stays as it is, the House will be drawing a distinction between discrimination against women and ethnic minorities, as compared with discrimination against disabled people. If it is right for people who are black and from the ethnic minorities to have protection regardless of how many people their employer employs, it must be right to protect disabled people irrespective of the number of people a firm employs.

This is our first debate on the Report stage of the Bill. I appeal to Ministers to think carefully about the strong reservations that have been expressed from their side of the House, and to all the compelling points made by my hon. Friends, as well as by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—I regard him as an hon. Friend, too. I am sure that people who are not committed to any particular point of view will accept that their arguments were worthy of support by the House.

Let us start this Report stage in the right way by accepting the proposition that it is wrong and indefensible to distinguish between employers in the way proposed by the Government.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I should like to place on record my support for the new clause. Other people outside are beginning to call the Bill the "Disability Discrimination Justification Bill", and for good reasons. One of those reasons is the exemption for small firms. The Bill has more or less become an exemption charter. It is riddled with caveats, qualifications, exemptions and let-out clauses. The exemption for small firms is a stark example of that.

The exemption is wrong for three main reasons. First, there can be no degrees of equality. Someone is either equal or not equal. People are not more equal than others. That is why the small firms exemption is wrong. It is absurd and legally inept to have different rights for people, based only on how many people they work with.

Secondly, at a stroke, the exemption undermines the argument and necessity for the measure. Thirdly, the exemption is superfluous. The Bill's main exemption clause, which includes the words "reasonable accommodation", can cover all the things that the Government are worried about. If a small firm is suffering undue hardship and unreasonable costs, under "reasonable accommodation" it can claim that it is not liable That should meet everyone's concerns.

What evidence is there of those concerns? It is not coming from businesses. For instance, the Employers Forum on Disability supports the removal of the exemption. I agree that it is made up of larger companies, but, as other hon. Members have said, it includes firms like McDonald's, which have franchises. I cannot understand how a firm with such a large amount of money and such large resources can be exempted when it has franchises that employ fewer than 20 people.

Where is the evidence from other countries that the Government keep on putting forward? In the United States of America, thousands and thousands of small businesses and shops are benefiting from the disabled persons legislation that was passed there. One example is a small pizza delivery company employing between 15 and 20 employees in New York. It decided to install a minicom for its deaf customers. Its profits have risen enormously. Another example is an attorney's practice in Houston, again with 15 to 20 employees.

I cannot understand why the Government have gone for 20 and not 15. I would prefer them to go for 15 now, and then to reduce it to none. That is the compromise that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) was talking about. I hope that the Government will accept that.

That small attorney's practice installed ramps, lifts, surfaces with bold colours and tactile variations for the blind. The word got around that it was disability-friendly. It had a totally untapped client group who wanted its

[Ms Liz Lynne]

services, and its profitability went up. All that happened because of compliance with—not avoidance of—the legislation.

That is the difference between the USA and this country. Before the legislation was enacted there, people were talking about the benefits. They did not talk about its negative aspects. This Government, however, are concentrating on the negative aspects of compliance with the legislation. The USA talked up how businesses could benefit from the legislation.

The Government offer no incentives. Again, the USA offered incentives to small firms. The only thing that the Government are saying is that small firms can opt out if they have fewer than 20 employees. We want from the Government the positive approach that was taken in the United States, but we are not getting it.

There have even been cases in the United States of small firms employing fewer than 15 people which wanted to opt in because they could see the benefits of doing so. They introduced facilities within their companies to cater for disabled people.

The Bill sends out the wrong signals to people throughout Britain. More important, it sends out the wrong signals to disabled people. I repeat that the exemption is unnecessary. It is covered by the "reasonable accommodation" provision. I certainly hope that the Government will take that point into account. I support the new clause, and I hope that other hon. Members will do likewise.

4.30 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I suspect that this time last year no one would have thought that we would be here debating an exemption for small firms from a Disability Discrimination Bill introduced by the Government: certainly, 12 months ago no one said to me, "Hang on for 12 months and we shall have a Government Bill." No one suggested that the first debate on Report would be on whether small firms should be excluded. We did not expect that the campaign by organisations of and for disabled people such as the Rights Now campaign would be so successful in forcing the Government, first, to publish the consultation document and then to introduce a Bill of their own.

I speak as someone who is bitterly disappointed with most of the content of the Government's Bill. I do not disguise that fact, but there is a measure of success in today's debate—the very fact that the Government now recognise that legislation is required. A mere 12 months ago, they did not believe that we should legislate on discrimination against disabled people in employment or anywhere else. Twelve months ago they were not talking about rights for disabled people at work. Indeed, to talk about the need for rights and to talk the language of legislation to secure equal opportunities was to invite comments that one was obsessed with being politically correct, that one was out to bankrupt the economy or similarly foolish comments.

I have grave reservations about the Government's Bill, especially clause 7, but we must acknowledge the movement that has taken place. Although the principal tribute should be paid to organisations and individuals that have campaigned for the full civil rights Bill, I acknowledge that many members of the Government and other Conservative Members have consistently supported such legislation.

Yes, there has been movement; yes, the Government now finally talk the language of rights for disabled people; yes, the Government are finally saying that we should legislate to secure those rights; and, yes, there has been a shift. But we find some odd things in the Bill. We are debating the exemption for small firms. Why on earth should firms employing fewer than 20 employees be exempt from the employment provisions of the Bill? I am happy to give way if a Conservative Member would care to intervene and offer some reason for the exemption.

I note that so far in the debate no one has offered a reason why there should be exemptions. We have had a flood of speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House who have said that to exempt small firms makes no sense whatever. I am awaiting a speech in which someone will say why there should be an exemption for small firms. I am more than happy to give way at this point if a Conservative Member would care to explain. Clearly, there is not enormous enthusiasm in the Chamber to do so.

Mr. Barnes: Perhaps there is some movement among Conservative Members. Perhaps their silence means that they are going through a process that leads them to realise that there is a point in the arguments that have been advanced in the House. After all, the Government made two adjustments to the Bill in Committee by making it apply to Northern Ireland and to property provisions. They now have a chance to say that there is some sense in the proposals before the House.

Mr. Berry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out again that the Government have moved their position in relation to discrimination against disabled people. In Committee, there was movement—not a lot, but there was some—and today there may be further movement.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman cast his mind back to consideration of his Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in Committee last year? Will he remind me whether that Bill included a restriction on small firms before it was amended?

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The Bill, which I took over from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), included an exemption for small firms. *[Interruption.]* I have said that the hon. Gentleman was correct, but one of the first things that members of the Committee who supported the Bill did was to propose that there be no such exemption, and I moved that it be deleted. It seemed to the supporters of the Bill—and to most Members present—that there was no reason to exclude small firms.

Small firms are not excluded from the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976 or the Sex Discrimination Act 1986. If they are not excluded from that anti-discrimination legislation, why should they be excluded from legislation that aims to outlaw discrimination against disabled people? Why should disabled people be treated as second-class citizens? Sponsors of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill did not support the exemption for small firms precisely because they believe that disabled people should be treated equally.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Congdon) gives me the opportunity to refer to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The Bill now being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) does not exclude small firms for the simple reason that if equal rights in employment are right and proper for women and for black people, they must also be right for disabled people. All organisations of and for disabled people are outraged at the suggestion that disabled people should be treated in a second-class manner in employment.

Mr. Barnes: Is not the purpose of Committee to examine measures and to propose amendments to consider the means by which improvements can be made? Debates in Committee are important, and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) was considerably improved by the time it was considered on Report. I picked up the amended measure to promote the current Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, and it would be valuable if we could debate its provisions on employment and other matters to see whether polishing and improvement are necessary.

Mr. Berry: Reference has been made on two occasions now to the Committee's discussions of my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year. In relation to that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The fact that reference has been made to that Bill does not mean that we should go down that route. The hon. Gentleman should return to the amendment.

4.45pm

Mr. Berry: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If the exclusion of small firms were so important, why did not the Government raise that point at any stage in our debates on the employment provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year? We had an extensive discussion on the use of legislation to outlaw discrimination in employment against disabled people, but not once—this is a matter of record and can be checked—did the then Minister express concern that small firms should be exempted.

I do not want to repeat important arguments made last year on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and it would be out of order for me to do so, but there is something strange about the Government now saying that we should exclude small firms from the employment provisions of this Bill when that proposal was not made in Standing Committee last year. I wonder why they are doing so. Could it be because of the outcome of the consultation exercise? One outcome of the Government killing off the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year was that they consulted on anti-discrimination legislation and focused on employment.

It is extremely important for us to recall what the Government said about the employment provisions of their plans at the time and to note the responses of those who were consulted. The Government state in paragraph 2.37 of their consultation paper:

> "The Government proposes that a new right would apply to people who are or would be employees or apprentices and to people who contract personally to provide services. The right would apply to work at establishments in the United Kingdom. This would be consistent with the approach under race and sex discrimination."

The small firms exemption is not consistent with that approach.

In paragraph 2.39, the Government continue:

> "Research and experience indicate large organisations are more likely to have positive policies for employing disabled people and therefore should experience little difficulty in complying with the new right. Smaller firms could find it disproportionately difficult to consider and implement some of the adjustments that may be required under the new right."

The argument seems to be that we need not worry about large firms because they are doing okay and research shows that they are more likely to have positive policies already—that is what the Government are saying.

The Government's consultation document makes an important point—that one should address legislation to small firms as well as larger firms. Finally, in paragraph 2.41, the Government offer not a firm recommendation but the comment:

> "Views are sought on the exclusion of firms with fewer than 20 employees in line with the quota scheme."

Most hon. Members will probably agree that the scheme is not a good precedent, so one can leave that comment aside.

The Government were offered views on the exclusion of firms with fewer than 20 employees. Right hon. and hon. Members who have studied the red book, "An Analysis of the Responses"—I always enjoy reading the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Red Book, but this book has become almost as interesting—will know that table 26 analyses what consultees said. Let us ask ourselves the question, "How many employers felt that it was really important that the Government's Bill excluded smaller firms?" Was it 5,000, 2,000, 500, 100, 50 or five?

One employer in the United Kingdom, when responding to a Government consultation document that asked, "How do you feel about excluding firms with fewer than 20 employees?" said that it did not like it. Most employers did not have much of a view on the subject—one employer amounts to 3 per cent. of those who responded.

If consultation exercises, spending taxpayers' money on such consultation documents and producing responses like that mean anything, how can the Government ignore the very obvious point that only one employer felt that it was necessary—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): If the hon. Gentleman is going to quote from the Red Book and that table, will he tell the House how many employers' organisations supported or opposed the exemption for small firms?

Mr. Berry: I am always happy to assist.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Berry: I have just given way to the Minister and I will happily give way to my hon. Friend in a moment. I should have thought that the Minister might make such points in his speech, but he asked me a factual question and I have no problem in giving him the answer.

In table 26, six employers' associations wanted the exclusion of small firms and three did not—

Mr. Paice: Precisely.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister allow me to finish reading from table 26? In answer to the question, "Should

[Mr. Berry]

small firms be excluded?", six employers associations said yes, three said no and 30, the overwhelming majority, had no comment—precisely, Minister.

Mr. Corbett: I am sure that my hon. Friend heard me say that one should not set too much store by these figures, but perhaps he would like to remind the Minister of the fact that the organisations that speak for the majority of employers—the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Employers' Forum on Disability—are all of one mind and believe that there should be no exemption for small firms.

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend is correct. The Confederation of British Industry is on record as stating firmly that there should be no exemption for small firms, as is the Institute of Directors. I have grave reservations about the views of the IOD on disability matters generally, but as my hon. Friend said, it opposes a small firms exemption, as do the Employers Forum on Disability and the Law Society, which represents many small firms, as well as many other employers' organisations.

Since the Minister pressed me, it is a matter of fact that only six, or 15 per cent., of employers' associations supported the small firms exemption and I am grateful to him for enabling me to clarify that.

Reference has been made to the United States and the fact that the Americans with Disabilities Act provides an exemption, which stands at firms employing 15 or fewer people. It has been asked why if 15 is good enough for the United States, should we not accept the same figure. Reference has also been made to the Minister's visit to the United States, and I am sure that many other right hon. and hon. Members have visited the United States. I was there a fortnight ago and had several meetings with the principal architect of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and many others.

The point that is not made is that, in framing the Americans With Disabilities Act, supporters were trying to ensure similar anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people as that provided under the Civil Rights Act 1964 dealing with discrimination on the grounds of gender and race. The figure 15 is included in title 1 of the Americans with Disabilities Act for the simple reason that the terms "employer" and "employee" used in title 7 of the Civil Rights Act have been transferred lock, stock and barrel to title 1 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The exclusion from the Americans with Disabilities Act of small firms that employ fewer than 15 workers exists simply because it was in the Civil Rights Act. Disability groups and organisations campaigning for equal rights for disabled people argued for equal treatment.

I see no logic in having a small firms exemption. Labour Members are not totally out of touch with what happens on the other side of the Atlantic. We know that the exemption exists in America because those who drafted the Americans with Disabilities Act were anxious to have the same provisions as existed in their civil rights legislation, which deals with discrimination on the grounds of gender and race, and they urged equal treatment on the American Congress. In opposing any small firms exemption, I argue for treatment for disabled people that is equal to the treatment provided in our other anti-discrimination legislation—no more and no less.

Unless the Bill is amended, we shall have the ludicrous position whereby small firms cannot legally discriminate on the grounds of race and gender—I am delighted about that—but can on the ground of disability. That lack of equal treatment is fundamentally unacceptable.

Had any Tory Members taken up my invitation to intervene and offer a reason for this provision, they might have said that small firms would experience difficulties with the costs of what the Bill calls "reasonable adjustments"—modifying the workplace to enable disabled people to take up employment opportunities—or what the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill calls "reasonable accommodations". As the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) said at the beginning of the debate, clause 6 provides specific protection by deploying the concept of reasonableness.

The Government make it perfectly clear, and I agree with them, that the adjustments required at the workplace to enable disabled people to secure rights at work should be reasonable. They will specify in regulations what is "reasonable", just as they would in the case of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East. The hon. Member for Exeter is absolutely correct to say that the concept of "reasonable" in clause 6 provides all the protection for small firms that is necessary.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Gentleman recall experience in the United States that, where "reasonable expenditure"—that was the term used—was undertaken to accommodate the needs of disabled people in their workplace, average costs amounted to $200 and, in 68 per cent. of instances, the total cost was less than $500? That is not an excessive burden on any company.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I have with me the latest publication of the Job Accommodation Network in the United States, published by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, which includes precisely the figure to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It says that 68 per cent.—more than two thirds—of all the adjustments and accommodations made under the Americans with Disabilities Act cost less than $500. Our exchange rate fluctuates, but let us assume that that is about £350.

The hon. Member for Exeter quoted the Minister's comments on Second Reading to emphasise the fact that the Minister had stressed that reasonable accommodation costs, in many cases, nothing and, in some cases, very little. Interestingly, the latest analysis of the cost of adjustments made in the United States as a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act showed that, in 18 per cent. of cases, no costs were incurred; in 68 per cent. of cases, costs of up to $500 were incurred; in 78 per cent. of cases, costs of up to $1,000 were incurred; in 86 per cent. of cases, costs of up to $2,000 were incurred; and only 5 per cent. of adjustments cost more than $5,000, or £3,000 to £4,000.

The story does not end there. Throughout this debate, not just today but in recent years, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) has consistently said that there are not only costs but benefits. The Job Accommodation Network asked firms what were the benefits of making adjustments. The survey asked

"which of the following benefits did your company realise?"

These are the latest figures covering the past two years or so of operation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and 52 per cent. of companies responded "yes" to

"Allowed you to hire or retain a qualified employee".

If an employee becomes disabled or suffers an impairment at work, and if the employer provides reasonable adjustments to enable the person to continue to work, the employer saves money on retraining and redundancy costs and retains a skilled worker. In answer to that first question in the survey, the majority of employers said that there were significant benefits in retaining a disabled person.

The benefits that employers typically mention, in addition to retaining qualified employees, are: saving on cost of training a new employee; saving on workers' compensation and other insurance costs and saving as a result of increasing the workers' productivity. Employers in the United States are now asked to put a dollar value on the benefits of providing reasonable accommodation or making reasonable adjustments.

I have the document before me and can make it available to the Minister, but his civil servants have frequently visited Washington and I am sure that it is already available to him. He will know that the current estimates of the Job Accommodation Network are that for every dollar spent on providing reasonable accommodation for disabled employees under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers save $27; employers receive $27-worth of benefits. Before people go running away with the idea that providing reasonable accommodation only incurs costs and never confers benefits, they should take on board the evidence from the United States, which shows explicitly that costs are often very modest and benefits are often substantial.

Mr. Barnes: The example of Macdonalds in Britain has already been given. The Bill, inadequate though it may be, will apply to Macdonalds, which because of its provision of goods and services, will incur some costs. The costs, however, will be outweighed by the returns that my hon. Friend has mentioned. The Bill applies to companies in other matters, so why should we not say to Macdonalds that its employees should be provided with access to work? That extra cost, if any, would be very marginal.

5 pm

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have been partly surprised and partly angry about debates on the cost of legislation in recent months. The compliance cost assessment of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was simply fraudulent. More significantly, people have always looked at the costs and have ignored the benefits. To the best of my knowledge, the Government have not yet offered any estimate of the benefits of anti-discrimination legislation on, for example, employment. I would be happy to give way if any hon. Member would like to offer advice on the issue.

Indeed, a compliance cost assessment of the Government's Bill has been made but, to the best of my knowledge, no estimate has been made of its benefits. Nobody would produce a budget without looking at the benefits as well as the costs—not if they were producing it seriously. No employer would consider expenditure without looking at the benefit that that expenditure may confer. No economist would dream of looking at costs and excluding benefits.

It is extraordinary that we still face the ridiculous situation in which Conservative Members—if one eventually contributes to the debate—tell us that small firms have to be excluded because of the costs that the legislation would impose. I suspect that, yet again, there will be no acknowledgement of the importance of benefits. Why, I ask myself, have no estimates of benefits been prepared by the Government? Why has the Department of Employment confined itself simply to looking at the costs of anti-discrimination legislation and not its potential benefits?

It is absurd. We live in a society in which we happily throw away £30 billion keeping people out of work, instead of investing that money in jobs, which explains our culture. We never look at the benefits of creating employment; we only ever look at ways of trying to deny people jobs. It cannot be overstated that, if the Government were serious about this matter, they would be considering the benefits involved.

The small firms exclusion is supported not only on the grounds of the costs of adjustments implied by the Bill but it is also sometimes said that small firms cannot respond to complaints. The idea is that, even if somebody's complaint about discrimination was unfounded, the firm would have to make some response and, in extremis, it might end up at an industrial tribunal. It is sometimes argued—I am doing my best to try to identify arguments that others should be putting—that the very fact that complaints may be made imposes a burden on the small firm because it would have to respond to those complaints.

Under anti-discrimination legislation that seeks to deal with gender and race discrimination, we do not worry about the possibility of complaints. We do not say that small firms should not have to deal with complaints on the grounds of gender or racial discrimination, so why on earth should we use that excuse for disability? We do not exempt small firms from having to deal with a whole range of requirements, such as health and safety, building regulations and so on, so why should we select this area of discrimination for special concern?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, a properly staffed and resourced commission with powers to investigate complaints—such as the commission in the United States—could deal with frivolous complaints quickly and protect small firms or, indeed, any large firm. It would be extraordinary to argue that small firms should be excluded from employment provisions because even though they are able to deal with complaints of discrimination on the grounds of gender and race, they cannot deal with complaints of discrimination on the grounds on disability.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am faced with an interesting situation. I have been inviting Conservative Members to speak. The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East made an important point, with which I dealt and agreed. There was no dispute between us and, as a long-standing supporter of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, the hon. Gentleman knows that what I say is exactly correct. I have been trying to identify arguments that Conservative Members would deploy in support of

[Mr. Berry]

the small firms exemption should they be minded to do so, but I have noted that, so far, not a single Conservative Member has been minded so to do. I have not heard any other arguments in favour of the small firms exclusion. I honestly believe that, briefly, I have dealt with the usual arguments that are deployed. I think that, equally briefly, I have pointed out that the arguments that are occasionally deployed in favour of a small firms exclusion are totally without foundation.

I have also pointed out—I hope that it is taken on board by the Minister—that those who have responded to the Government's invitation to comment on proposals have not been jumping up and down and saying, "Please can we exclude small firms?" Only employer one wanted a small firms exclusion and only 15 per cent. of employers' associations wanted it. The clear majority of firms do not want such an exclusion or, frankly, do not care one way or the other.

I very much hope that the Government have listened to the consultees who responded to the White Paper in the summer, I hope that they have listened to the debate on Second Reading, in Committee and again here today and I hope that they will acknowledge that equity demands that employment provisions should be essentially the same as those in the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. There is no small firms exclusion in those Acts and there should not be in this Bill.

The Bill's employment provisions would be unacceptable if a small firms exclusion were to be retained. Will the Government please indicate as quickly as possible that they are convinced by those arguments, will show further movement on the issue and will recognise what disabled people have a right to demand—no small firms exclusion?

Mr. David Congdon: I listened carefully to the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). He put his case well—I hope that that comment does not undermine his position in any way—and he was right to praise the Government for their response to the difficulties that he encountered last year when he introduced the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I did not think then that I would be speaking on Report on a Government Bill on disability discrimination, and I should like to thank the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People for all he has done to enable us to reach this stage.

It is partly for that reason that I do not want to be difficult about part II of the Bill. That is also why I intervened earlier on the hon. Member for Kingswood, because I genuinely could not remember exactly how we started out, many months ago, when we first discussed exemptions. Having asked that question, I now remember which way round the debate went in Committee.

To begin with, the Bill contained an exemption for small businesses. I was relatively happy about that because I think that certain aspects of small businesses are different from those of larger ones. I accept, of course, that we could debate the extent to which those differences are significant and the extent to which the Bill should take account of them.

I now recall, having had my memory jogged, that an amendment was moved early on in Committee to remove that exemption. I had some difficulty with that, because I was ambivalent about its removal. I am still somewhat ambivalent about that amendment to the Bill. I accept the logic of the argument that all firms should be included in the legislation, but it is important to consider carefully the needs of small businesses.

I would therefore like my hon. Friend the Minister to spell out in detail exactly why the Government believe that small firms should be granted an exemption. In particular, I should like to know why that decision was reached when, as the hon. Member for Kingswood has pointed out, businesses were hardly unanimous in opposition to their inclusion in the Bill. That is an important point to consider.

I noted Ministers' arguments that small firms should be excluded because they are not equipped to deal with complaints because they do not have personnel departments. I previously worked for a large company, and I am not sure about the truth of that argument. Large companies may have the apparatus and resources to deal with complaints, but that machinery is sometimes overly bureaucratic, and it can take a long time for a complaint to be dealt with.

At the other end of the spectrum, I am conscious that firms employing one or three employees do not have the resources to deal with any complaints. One can therefore construct an argument—I would not wish to push it too far—that an employee limit should be set at which certain firms should be exempt from the Bill. I am not suggesting that firms employing 20 employees should be exempt, but I certainly accept that certain circumstances should be taken into account when considering firms that employ one man, two men or two women and a dog.

The reasonableness test could counter that argument, because it is important to apply that test to any aspect of legislation. I accept that the Bill does that, but the new clause tabled by my hon. Friends and I, and other hon. Members, was designed to achieve even more than that provided by the routine reasonableness test in the Bill. It recognises that, notwithstanding that test, the Bill should be extended a bit further in relation to smaller firms. It would give the Secretary of State the power to specify what would be reasonable conduct by those firms. I should like the Minister to explain specifically why he feels unable to accept the new clause.

The new clause is important, because it was designed to try to break through the log jam that had been created by the argument that because small firms are different, they should therefore be exempt from the Bill. People recognise, however, that any cut-off is arbitrary. Some people have argued for a lower employee limit, but, as a compromise, I believe that small firms, especially those with just one, two or three employees, should be treated a little differently in recognition of their special circumstances. I hope that the Minister will consider that option.

I am pleased that Government amendment No. 122 removes any ambiguity about whether the exemption limit could be raised upwards. I know that assurances on that have been given before, but it is important to be unambiguous and to make it clear that the only change to the limit would be downwards.

5.15 pm

If the Minister feels unable to accept new clause 6, I urge him to give serious consideration to whether a commitment should be made as soon as possible—in the

House or elsewhere—to lower the employee limit from 20. The danger is that the existing limit will be considered as set in tablets of stone. If my hon. Friend is wrong and we find that, in the light of experience, the Bill, once enacted, does not cause any particular problems for firms employing between 20 and 25 people, but causes problems to disabled people who want to work for firms employing between 15 and 20 people or 10 and 20 people, the limit should be lowered. That change would be based on practice rather than theory.

Surely the ultimate goal must be to ensure that all firms treat disabled people fairly when they seek employment. We may argue about the pace of change, but the goal must be to ensure that no employee, disabled or otherwise, is discriminated against when seeking employment.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I must first thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving instructions to pull the shades down against the glare of the sun.

I have some sympathy for what the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) said about companies which employ two or three people—be they one man, two women and a dog, or whatever. I accept that such firms may encounter difficulties in some circumstances.

New clause 16, which is grouped with new clause 6, is designed to end discrimination relating to all firms, large or small. We have a long history of Administrations who have sought to provide legislative exemptions for small firms. Today's debate reminds me of the Industrial Relations Act 1971, which sought to introduce labour law directly into industrial relations. That Act also provided an exemption for small firms. I thought that that was a mistake, just as I think that clause 7 is a dreadful mistake on the present Government's part.

The 1971 Act had some good parts to it, because it introduced disciplinary and grievance procedures, but those procedures should have been made available to those working in small firms as well. Similarly, it is utterly wrong to discriminate against employees of small firms.

As for employment opportunities for disabled citizens in small firms, medium or large ones, I am confident that the experience I have gained in my constituency is no different from that gained by other right hon. and hon. Members. Some of my local firms, large and small, have an excellent record on employing people with disabilities. One that always comes to mind is Lithgow Electronics, which, given its total work force, employs a large number of disabled people. Those people with disabilities are treated in exactly the same way as those fortunate enough not to suffer from disabilities. That company in my constituency provides us with a remarkable and heart-warming record in that regard.

There are also smaller companies in Inverclyde which are only too anxious to provide good terms of employment for their employees with disabilities. It is likely that such firms—whether in Inverclyde, elsewhere in Scotland, south of the border or in Northern Ireland—do not require the type of regulations that would be imposed of new clause 16 were introduced into the Bill.

However, in Inverclyde and elsewhere in Scotland, there are small firms and large firms which have an extremely poor record regarding the employment of people with disabilities. New clause 16 would provide many people with employment opportunities that are denied them now—with reasonable pay and good conditions of employment which do not treat people with disabilities as second-class employees, as has all too often been the case.

I appreciate that there may be some difficulties with new clause 16 for small companies, but they need only consider other small companies in their region with excellent industrial relations records to dispel some of their anxieties about the external checks and restraints which would be brought into small companies to defend the needs and interests of employees with disabilities.

Such employers need to be guided and, if possible, helped financially, to recruit, train and employ disabled people. It is important that those external checks and balances are introduced to defend the interests of employees of small companies because it can be exceedingly difficult for such employees in small firms to draw attention to their grievance if they believe that they are being unfairly treated by the employer. It is better that employees in those circumstances should be protected by what I have called elsewhere "external checks and balances" on the discrimination exercised by employers.

Small companies employing fewer than 20 people have little or no experience of trade union involvement and trade union representation of employees, so it is important that we introduce other measures by which such employees' interests may be defended.

If costs are an issue, as the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East seems to suggest, I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said earlier: that issue can be considered in terms of the costs and benefits to employers of taking on people with disabilities. If there are problems of costs in respect of people with learning disabilities, cannot the Government and the European Union provide financial assistance to implement training programmes and introduce modifications to a company's premises and equipment?

Over the years, research has shown that people with learning disabilities can carry out many of the functions in a company which are performed by others with no disabilities. Given the right training, they can acquire a range of occupational skills. Such training may be more extensive than that needed to bring other employees to a defined benchmark, but, with the right training and with the right modifications to plant and equipment, it can be achieved. I wonder whether the Minister has taken advice about whether help can be obtained by such small firms by way of European structural funds.

Mr. Barnes: Is not the atmosphere of a small firm rather than a larger one often more suitable for a person with learning difficulties? A small group of people who link and work together, as one hopes happens in the best small firms, creates that important atmosphere. The small firm would seem especially appropriate for people with learning difficulties rather than the larger, perhaps more impersonal firm, which might be more difficult to handle. The assistance to which my hon. Friend refers is therefore justified.

Dr. Godman: That is an important argument. In small firms, others people can guide the person with disabilities, acting as protectors and mentors. The same may also happen in large firms in which relatively small teams of employees work together. Research has shown that it is not difficult to introduce a person who is physically

[Dr. Godman]

impaired into such a team. However, my hon. Friend makes the important point that, in a small firm, other employees will willingly, indeed happily, look after someone with disabilities.

We all know that, when a person leaves the social security system for full-time employment, the person and their family benefit immediately and there is a self-evident benefit to the state. There are other benefits, too. When people with disabilities are employed in small or large firms, there is the psychological benefit of finding full-time employment; an immediate boost is given to a person's self-esteem. A person knows that he or she is part of the community in a much more comprehensive and more rounded way when in full-time employment.

We should not lose sight of the fact that there are benefits to an employer in taking on someone who has found it immensely difficult to find work in the past. Often people who are handicapped in one way or another become loyal, hard-working employees. Some employers do not deserve that type of loyalty, but that is another matter. In terms of costs and benefits, therefore, a small firm can indeed benefit from taking on people with learning difficulties or people who are physically impaired.

I visited a company in my constituency recently and spoke to a person who is physically handicapped, who has been confined for much of his life to a wheelchair. He said that, even though the terms and conditions of employment were not so good in that company—and by God, they are not, in comparison with those offered by many other local employers—the fact that he was in employment for the first time in about 15 years gave him enormous self-respect and lifted the burden from his family of having to care for someone who, I think, had been psychologically bruised by his constant rejections by local firms when seeking employment.

Now here he is, earning what I regard as a poor wage, but nevertheless he is out every morning, going to his job, he is highly regarded by his workmates and he is delighted to be in work. I believe that that example could be multiplied many thousands of times.

The small firms sector—which is very important in the west of Scotland and elsewhere—has a role to play. Some small firms in my constituency would not require the regulations that implementation of new clause 16 would impose, but I believe that others would need such regulations because they would seek to exploit disabled employees who were not members of a trade union.

I believe that the Government should certainly accept, if not new clause 16, then new clause 6, in order to defend rightly and properly the interests of those who are often unable to defend themselves. Disabled employees often do not have trade union representation and therefore cannot avail themselves of a formal collective bargaining system. The Government must accept that firms which employ fewer than 20 people should not be able to dodge the external checks and balances which protect the interests of those who, in many instances, are unable to defend themselves.

5.30 pm

Mr. Hanson: It has been a quite marvellous experience this afternoon. We have debated for some two hours the new clauses standing in the names of my hon. Friends, and hardly any voices have been raised against them. The hon. Members for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) have joined the hon. Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and many of my hon. Friends in supporting amendments to the legislation that will ensure an end to discrimination in employment against disabled people.

It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to learn that I support new clause 16, which would remove the 20-employee limit and would assist firms with the undoubted difficulties that they may face in some circumstances. I attended Committee sittings for several weeks. To be honest, at the beginning of the Committee process I did not think that the Government would accept any amendments from the Labour party during consideration of the Disability Discrimination Bill. As it happens, the Government did not accept any amendments from the Labour party during consideration of the Bill, so perhaps I was justified in feeling jaundiced.

However, I came out of the Committee sittings feeling better than when I went in. I think that—I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), will prove it in his winding-up speech—the Under-Secretary and the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People impressed all members of the Committee with their sense of fairness. I genuinely believe that they wish to end discrimination against disabled people, and tonight they will have the opportunity to do just that.

The Bill will not end discrimination against disabled people in employment. There is the potential for disabled people to be discriminated against if they work for firms that employ fewer than 20 individuals. That will create a two-tier source of discrimination, which flies in the face of the aims of all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate and of everyone who has responded, and who intends to respond, to the legislation as it progresses through the House.

The Bill's provisions are illogical. If I were the managing director of a firm that employed 21 people, I could not discriminate against disabled people on the ground of their disability. However, if I were the managing director of a company that employed 19 people, I could discriminate on that basis. Where is the logic in that?

Conservative Back Benchers who wish to speak in the debate may allude to the cost associated with employing disabled people. If I am the managing director of a company that employs 21 individuals, I must bear the cost associated with their employment. However, if my company employs 19 individuals, I can discriminate and choose not to bear that cost. We could dispute—as we have done today—whether there is a cost to be borne, but, if there is, the situation is totally illogical.

If there is a cost associated with employing disabled people—we would dispute that claim—why should a highly profitable company that employs 10 people discriminate against disabled people, when perhaps a company that does not make a profit but employs 25 people cannot? There is no logic in the Government's position to date.

If Government Members were to say that they proposed to amend the race relations legislation to include an exemption for small firms, that might justify the

Government's position in this instance. If Government Members were to say that they intended to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1976 to include an exemption for small firms, there might be some justification for the Government's current position. However, the Government will not do that. Under the Government's legislation, it will be legal to discriminate against disabled people if a company employs fewer than 20 people, although it is not able to discriminate on the basis of race or sex.

According to the current legislation, it will be legal for hon. Members to discriminate against those disabled people who might apply to work for them. We would not wish to sanction that sort of situation, but there could not be one law for those outside the House and another for hon. Members.

The Government's position takes no account of that well-known expression "downsizing". Many companies in my constituency have downsized considerably—notably, the steelworks at Shotton, which has downsized from 20,000 to 1,000 employees under a Tory Government. Some companies will employ fewer than 20 people for part of the year and more than that number at another time. According to the Government's current proposal, some companies will be able to discriminate against disabled people in January, but not in February, or perhaps in March, but not in April. There is no logic to that position. It is a person's right not to be discriminated against, and that inalienable right should be protected in every circumstance.

The small firms sector, which we have been examining in detail today, accounts for one in six workers in the United Kingdom. That figure is far higher in rural areas. Both Ministers represent, as I do in part, rural areas. The hon. Member for Caernarfon and I represent constituencies in Wales. Wales comprises large rural areas where most people are employed by firms with fewer than 20 employees. Therefore, many disabled people in Wales face potential discrimination in their place of employment.

The Bill will ensure that disabled people will not be able to apply for jobs in large areas of my constituency without the fear of discrimination. In the agriculture sector, a small, rurally based business may be the sole employer. Large firms may not be appropriate in that area.

My constituency covers a large part of the north Wales coast. The holiday resort of Prestatyn is in my constituency and it attracts many thousands of visitors each summer—I hope that many hon. Members will visit it this summer. Businesses in Prestatyn face the same difficulty as many others in rural and coastal areas of Wales: they have temporary and seasonal employment. Companies may employ fewer than 20 people for part of the year and at other times more than that number. As a consequence of the legislation, different laws will apply to the same companies depending on the time of year and on how many people choose to visit Prestatyn for their summer holidays. They cannot plan.

The Bill will impose burdens that my hon. Friends' measures would remove. Eighty-four per cent. of firms in Northern Ireland have fewer than 10 employees, so it is reasonable to assume that 90 per cent. of them have fewer than 20 employees. How will a disabled person be free from fear of discrimination when the Bill will make it legal to discriminate in 90 per cent. of cases in Northern Ireland? Small businesses are a fast-growing sector of the economy and we must encourage them. At the same time, we must ensure fairness and justice across the board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) made great play of the various representations made. Only one company wrote in favour of the exemption and only six employer associations did so—hardly an avalanche. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, the consultation document may not be fulsome and detailed, but it shows strength of feeling. Individuals usually tell the Government when they are fearful of something, but they have not done so in this case. That has not been done either by the Confederation of British Industry, the Employers Forum on Disability or the Institute of Directors—God bless it. The institute stated:

> "if the Government believe that disabled people should have the right, it should apply equally to all employees."

What a marvellous organisation—and I never thought that I would say that. One down and a few more to go.

I never fail to be surprised by the strength of feeling evident among organisations in my constituency when they suspect that the House is acting against their interests. Licensed victuallers, newsagents and other small shopkeepers, chambers of commerce, chambers of trade and others are all employers or represent them and they often bang on my door about urgent issues—but they have not done so over the need for exemption. The Law Society and other organisations had the opportunity to make representations to hon. Members but did not do so.

I look forward to hearing the Under-Secretary's justification for retaining the exemption and legalising discrimination against disabled people in companies with fewer than 20 employees. The new clauses and the amendment will not bring any onslaught against small businesses. In Committee, the Under-Secretary said:

> "The Government are trying to strike a balance between the desire to eliminate discrimination and the desire to ensure that over-burdensome regulations that might jeopardise small businesses' primary functions are not put on them."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 14 February 1995; c. 252.]

Are the Government really worried about imposing burdensome regulations on small businesses? If the Under-Secretary is concerned, perhaps he will tell the House what would be the cost to small businesses if the exemption were lifted. How many small firms would go out of business? How many people would be made unemployed? What burden would be imposed in this instance that does not exist in respect of race relations or sex equality legislation?

I hope that the Government will be positive, end the exemption and give small businesses help from the Employment Service and other organisations in respect of good practice, to assist them to meet their obligations under the Bill as amended by the proposed measures. Scope, for which I worked for eight years prior to entering the House, suggested that a personnel pack should be produced, to inform firms how to comply. It could illustrate good and bad practices, provide information and give practical support.

Would it not be more positive for the House to abolish the exemption, say that it believes in ending discrimination in employment and acknowledge the value of a programme of help for small firms—rather than to allow companies to evade their responsibilities and to make disabled people face discrimination in their daily

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lives? I hope that the Under-Secretary will respond positively, and I look forward to his acceptance of the measures.

5.45 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) mentioned the employment problems confronting disabled people living in rural areas. Several organisations pointed out that the 20-employee limit will dramatically affect such people. In Committee, the Under-Secretary responded to my questions about the difficulties confronting would-be disabled workers in agricultural areas, which may be more graphic than those facing disabled people in urban areas.

I must not touch on other clauses, but I shall place that matter in context. The much lower density of population in rural areas leads to greater isolation, less access to disabled groups and support groups of all kinds, and more remoteness from usually concentrated local authority services. The decimation of public transport in recent years also makes it harder for disabled people in rural areas to seek work. Their choice of school or college is limited by travelling distances and the lower density of such institutions. The Bill does not address any of those problems.

Changes in the nature of agricultural employment and practices have already massively reduced the number of people working in that industry. Most farms are little more than family employers. The encouragement of diversification in the countryside has introduced small firms, most of which have fewer than 20 employees.

The Bill will exclude most disabled people living in rural areas from the right to challenge discrimination in employment. We have no reason to suppose that a smaller proportion of rural residents than urban dwellers are disabled. In fact, given the dangerous nature of agricultural work, with tractor and machinery accidents, chemical accidents with substances such as organophosphates and the danger of using pesticides in greenhouses, it may be that country areas have a higher proportion of disabled people. Certainly the figure will be no lower.

The chief employment characteristic in horticulture is its seasonal nature, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn referred in respect of seaside resorts such as Prestatyn—or, in Lancashire, those of Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport, which purports to be in Lancashire. Incidentally, Blackpool has the worst unemployment rate in Lancashire.

Such areas are also characterised by large numbers of part-time workers. In Committee, the Under-Secretary helpfully told us that the Bill made no distinction between part-time and full-time workers. That is to be welcomed. He also said that it would be the time when discrimination occurred that mattered, in terms of a challenge to a tribunal, not the time when an accumulation of incidents of discrimination provoked a disabled employee into making a challenge. That comment, too, was helpful and clarifying.

I am still very worried, however, about the practical oddities that will be created by the figure of 20. They were mentioned by the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). The latter pointed out that a business may employ more than 20 employees one year, but fewer employees the next. That sort of thing could happen quite often. Even more important, some firms change the number of their employees month by month, or even week by week. In horticulture, probably the largest source of employment in most of my constituency, for much of the year an employer will have only a handful of workers—four, five or six—but for several months of the year he will have well over 20, and perhaps as many as 60.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that for half the year the employees will be covered by the Bill's discrimination provisions, but for the other half they will not; that, of course, includes any disabled person who happens to be one of the core of permanent employees. For half the year, a disabled person will have the right to challenge discrimination—not so for the other half.

This is an immensely difficult situation for employer and employee alike, and it lends itself to possible abuse by bad employers. I do not want to exaggerate, but there will be employers who use these circumstances to get around the Act.

Where would the criterion of reasonableness come into all this? Ironically, many occupations in horticulture lend themselves to workers with, say, mobility difficulties. Many groups from the horticultural industry, recently giving evidence to the Select Committee on Agriculture, strongly asked the Government to allow more foreign students into the United Kingdom to take up the extra work during the summer. That clearly shows the seasonal need for workers; at least some of the jobs could be taken up by disabled people living near the horticultural enterprises.

Every means of persuasion to get rural employers to engage disabled people who can do the jobs, and to treat them equally once they are in work, should be adopted—but the Bill does not set the requisite framework for that. The application of the rights of disabled people in firms with more than 20 employees to smaller employers would serve as a backstop in the process.

Obviously there are difficulties and imponderables that need sorting out. The CBI documents make some intelligent references to that fact, but a clear benchmark in law, coupled with help and guidance for small employers, could make an enormous difference to a significant number of disabled people in rural areas.

The Under-Secretary must also explain how he hopes to deal with the franchising problem mentioned by the hon. Member for Exeter, and with contracting out. The splintering of large firms into smaller firms, using these methods, may already be a way of getting around the legislation, and it will prove even handier for the purpose in future.

Areas such as mine face other problems, too. The town of Skelmersdale has been badly clobbered by two recessions in the past two decades. Agencies of all kinds—for instance, Lancashire Enterprises—have scurried to put up small industrial units, which usually can accommodate only between four and 10 workers. Hopes for the future of the town lie very much with these small firms, which occupy an ever greater part of its economy. It is quite possible that the exclusion of small firms under the 20 employees proposal will effectively exclude disabled people in Skelmersdale from the town's economic future, which the small firms are trying to build.

I cannot understand why the Under-Secretary might object to this group of amendments. I candidly admit that they are not measures that I would have chosen to table. New clause 6 states:

"It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to have regard to the needs of employers"—

"have regard" is rather woolly—

"and to take such practical steps as he deems appropriate".

Again, it states:

"The Secretary of State may make regulations specifying the circumstances under which adjustments may be considered reasonable for employers".

The new clause is full of conditionals, qualifiers, maybes and perhapses. New clause 16(3) is in the same vein:

"Regulations under this section may make different provisions for different circumstances and different sizes of employer and specify different periods within which different adjustments shall be made; and regulations made under this section may be varied by subsequent regulations."

What could be more accommodating than that wonderful sentence for any Minister wanting to please everyone and get away with murder?

Mr. Paice: I begin by dealing with an issue not directly related to the Bill but mentioned by at least two hon. Members—Remploy. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) will know that clause 7, to which the new clauses relate, does not directly concern Remploy; but the decision to end the priority supplier scheme was taken only because of clear legal advice, since endorsed by the European Commission, that it contravened European legislation. The amount of £147,500 which the hon. Gentleman quoted is not a UK-derived figure: it is a European figure, and the figure put into the new special contracts arrangements reflects that.

Remploy is facing competitive pressures, especially in textiles. I do not think that it expects to win every contract for which it bids, but it is competing hard for MOD contracts, and we hope that it will win some. In the meantime, it is doing everything it can to diversify into the commercial retail clothing sector, where perhaps it will find greater scope.

Several Members referred to the benefits of employing disabled people. I hope that those who served on the Committee with me will take my word for it that I entirely recognise that disabled people have a vast amount of skill and expertise to offer the businesses which employ them now and which will, we hope, employ them in the future. Over the past few months, I have been excited by the number of places where I have seen disabled people working and fulfilling a useful role for themselves and their employer. Let no one be in any doubt that we recognise the benefits that derive from their employment.

6 pm

There are positive advantages for businesses in employing disabled people. Ultimately, we want employers to be willing to employ disabled people without any thought of legislation, and without knowing that they might have to employ them because otherwise they will be taken to a tribunal. We want employers to employ the disabled because they want to employ them, because they believe that they have something considerable to offer to their business.

If that is our long-term objective, I suggest that legislation must be couched in a way that has the support of employers, not their resistance. If their first approach is cynicism—doubts and resistance to legislation—the battle to change their hearts and minds and consequent behaviour will be that much harder.

Successive Governments have recognised that small businesses need special help to survive and prosper as well as protection from over-burdensome regulation. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have said during the debate that small-scale employers do not necessarily have specialist staff easily available to them, staff who have knowledge of the more detailed aspects of employment law.

That was recognised by the Labour Government, who introduced the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. The approach of race and gender legislation is different, of course, from that of the Bill. The 1975 Act introduced a small-firm threshold of five. In recognition of the unique difficulties of small firms—for example, the extra costs of providing separate washing facilities and cloakrooms—the threshold had to be abolished through an EC ruling. The Labour Government's objective was notable, however.

The threshold was provided for in a relatively straightforward piece of anti-discrimination legislation to eliminate employment discrimination on the ground of sex. There are no ifs, buts or degrees. We all know that people are men or women. I understand that one or two have doubts about where they stand, but the majority know clearly where they are. Everyone understands that.

The Bill is far more complex than previous legislation. We have heard the argument that reasonable adjustment would cover the difficulties faced by small firms. I do not agree. I am not convinced that that is so. The small-scale employer, who is usually the owner of the business, will have many issues on his mind. It is unrealistic to expect him or her to know what might or might not be reasonable, to take advice or to follow case law as it develops, especially in the early years of an Act's implementation.

Recruitment of new staff in small businesses is often a rare event or infrequent. That means that employers of small businesses will be unable to learn quickly from experience. I suggest that the recruitment of new or extra staff would be even less frequent if small-scale employers had to spend ages before making each appointment genning themselves up on the latest employment legislation.

The point is amplified by the fact that such businesses have not hitherto had to deal with disability legislation. As we all know, small firms have been exempt from the quota legislation for about 50 years. It is a fact that, for those 50-odd years, no Government have attempted to change the threshold. Accordingly, the figure of 20 has not been plucked from the air. It reflects precisely current legislation.

Inevitably, new anti-discrimination legislation takes time to settle down. Practice needs to be established, and case law has to be developed from tribunal deliberations. It will be burden enough on large firms that have resources sufficient to enable them to cope. It will be

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much more difficult for small businesses without specialist knowledge to keep up with what is happening in the early years of implementation.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister is suggesting that, as time goes on and experience is garnered, it might become easier and more acceptable for small companies to live with either a lower threshold or to be brought in, as it were. Government amendment No. 122, which we are considering with the new clause, refers to

> "'a different number (not greater than 20) for the number for the time being specified there.'"

Will the Minister confirm that the number could be zero, and that that would be within the purview of the proposed legislation?

Mr. Paice: I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear with me. I shall talk about the amendment to which he has referred in my later remarks.

Several hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have referred to the apparent lack of support from employers' organisations and other bodies for the exemption for small businesses that we propose. It is a novel event to hear Opposition Members—I think they had difficulty in swallowing it—putting forward the views of the Institute of Directors. I am glad, however, that they have recognised that the institute is usually worthy of note.

The hon. Member for Erdington referred to the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry as representing the top 100 companies.

Mr. Corbett: I did not.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman says that he did not.

Mr. Corbett: I referred to the forum.

Mr. Paice: All right, the Employers Forum on Disability.

Even so, the CBI, the institute and the forum are not renowned for representing businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Probably very few of the businesses they represent have fewer than 200 employees. They are not speaking on behalf of small businesses.

By contrast, the Federation of Small Businesses speaks specifically on behalf of small businesses. It has issued a statement, which reads:

> "The Federation is particularly concerned with any amendments aimed at bringing all employers, irrespective of size, within the remit of the legislation."

It urges Members to

> "vote for the retention of the exemption rule for small employers with under 20 workers. Adding further burdens to this wealth-creating sector of the economy will seriously damage its potential for job creation."

Those are the views of an organisation that clearly represents small businesses.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the Minister address the point about the artificiality of selecting the number 20? He as a Member represents employers with fewer than 20 employers and employers with more than 20. He is a great expert on horse racing. As the House knows, there are in the Newmarket part of his constituency people in that industry who employ fewer than 20, and others who employ more. Why create this fundamental difference, as it seems to many, between employers in the same industry?

Mr. Paice: With great respect to the right hon. Gentleman, whose commitment to the cause of the disabled is renowned, I do not think that he was in the Chamber a few moments ago when I specifically said that we have opted for 20 because that reflects the quota legislation. That was why we chose 20.

I shall continue with the thoughts of outside organisations. In the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), I shall read the comments of two organisations. One writes:

> "The cost of adjustment could fall disproportionately upon smaller firms, especially in the early years of new legislation, before suitable premises and equipment become more generally available."

The second quote reads:

> "Small businesses face particular difficulties in interpreting guidance and advice from central and local government. They seldom have the personnel expertise available to a larger company, and each decision as to whether to introduce modifications to work practices or the premises must be weighed carefully against the impact on company viability."

There is ample evidence that some organisations that represent small businesses clearly recognise the problems that small businesses face.

Mr. Berry *rose—*

Mr. Paice: I shall give way once more, but then I must press on.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister acknowledge that small firms made similar comments about the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act? Will he please acknowledge that the lack of a personnel department in a small firm is as much a problem in abiding by those Acts as it would be in this case? Why on earth should disabled people yet again be treated as second-class citizens?

Mr. Paice: No. I would contend, as I tried to earlier, that it is not the same to compare directly the gender and race legislation with the proposed legislation, because of the complexity. The other pieces of legislation do not contain the concept of reasonable adjustment. They are much more simple, straightforward pieces of legislation, and are much easier for a small business man to grasp than the implications of the proposed legislation.

Mr. Wigley: What about the tax legislation?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), for whom I have immense respect from our long acquaintance with each other, says from a sedentary position, sotto voce, "What about the tax legislation?" to which the hon. Member for Erdington also referred. There are special arrangements for tax legislation—the VAT threshold, for example. *[Interruption.]* There is no exemption from tax. Perhaps many wish that they were exempt. The lower rate of income tax and VAT clearly recognises that small businesses deserve special judgment.

Having said everything that I have, I want to stress to the House, particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), who moved the new clause, that of course we do not want small firms to discriminate against disabled people—any more than we want large firms to discriminate against them. Many small firms do employ disabled people. I can assure the House, as I have before, that we will encourage them to follow the new code of practice. To that end, they will be consulted in drawing up the code.

We have always emphasised that there are benefits in employing disabled people. We have always said that it is in an employer's interest to have access to the widest possible pool of talent, but we do not believe that it is possible to produce an accurate estimate of those benefits. So when the hon. Member for Kingswood challenged me on why we do not put the benefits on the equation, it is simply because we have not been able to find a way of financially measuring the benefits. We recognise that they are there and, as I have already said, we see considerable benefits in employing disabled people.

Several hon. Members referred to the Americans with Disabilities Act and its exemption for small firms. The figure was originally 25 when the Act was introduced, but it was subsequently reduced to 15. Unlike our Bill, that figure of 15 cannot be lowered further. Our Bill brings in the flexibility.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who referred to a pizza parlour—I assume that it was a small employer—and to the fact that it would need to install a minicom and so on for customers, saying what a wonderful company it was and how much new business it had gained. That is precisely what we propose in part III of the Bill—the goods, facilities and services aspect. She did not address a single comment on the pizza parlour as an employer, but spoke of the service that it was providing its customers. I can wholeheartedly go along with everything she said about the benefits to a businesses of being seen to welcome disabled people as customers.

Small firms are also eligible for help from the Employment Service and from our specialist advisers, as well, we hope, as becoming users of the disability symbol "Positive About Disabled People". Already, some 10 per cent. of symbol users are firms employing 24 or fewer employees.

6.15 pm

Much has been said this afternoon about figures. The hon. Member for Kingswood, of course, paraded his use of figures from the Red Book, of which he showed himself a master—at least of how to read it, if not how to interpret the figures—when the Bill was being considered in Committee.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: Of course, I will happily give way.

Mr. Berry: Can the Minister give one example of where I have misinterpreted the figures in the Red Book? Just one example.

Mr. Paice: I was just about to do that.

The hon. Gentleman again paraded the fact that the majority of respondents, be they employers or employers' organisations, did not say that they were in favour of the exemption.

Mr. Berry: Correct.

Mr. Paice: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He can clearly still read his book.

The fact is, as the hon. Gentleman said this afternoon, that the consultation document clearly set out the proposition that businesses employing fewer than 20 people would be exempt.

Another hon. Member—I have forgotten which one—said that he found it surprising that organisations are not usually backward in coming forward when they feel strongly about something—

Mr. Corbett: It was my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson).

Mr. Paice: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not remembering him.

The fact remains that, when one starts off with a positive proposition and people do not respond to say that they do not like it, it is reasonable to assume that they are agnostic. If they felt clearly that the proposition that we were making was wrong, they would have said so. I am the first to recognise that they did not take the opportunity to say that they like it, but they did not say that they did not like it. *[Interruption.]*

It is no use hon. Members starting to suggest that perhaps the organisations did not bother to reply. They did reply to the overall consultation document, but chose not to express a view on this particular issue. Therefore, the least that one can conclude is that they did not have strong feelings one way or the another: otherwise, they would have so done. If that is the case, I come back to the point that twice as many employers' organisations supported the exclusion as opposed it. That was the point that the hon. Gentleman tried to ridicule when I intervened on him earlier.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister acknowledge that the employers associations that supported the small firms exclusion amounted to 15 per cent. of respondents to that question?

Mr. Paice: We can all do the maths, but the fact is that the organisations that did not respond on that issue clearly did not feel strongly about it one way or the other.

Another aspect of the figures that has been used this afternoon is the fact that small firms play an increasing role in the labour market. Nevertheless, as drafted, the Bill covers some 83 per cent. of employees, or job opportunities. I must be straightforward and tell the House that, if the Government's amendment proposed tomorrow are passed, that figure will drop to 80 per cent., but it is in that bracket.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend accept that the other 20 per cent. really do matter equally as much? Will he further accept that, in Australia and New Zealand, which do not accept that it should be lawful for any firm of any size to discriminate unjustifiably against disabled people, it is not probable that firms will be driven out of business wholesale? Will he accept that there are some 6.5 million disabled people as against the very small number of unreconstructed organisations whose objections he is citing, and that it is for the Government to lead in that field?

Mr. Paice: I was going to come in a moment or two to some of my hon. Friend's specific comments. Of course I understand the points he made, and if he will allow me

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just a moment or two, I will respond to them all during the course of my remarks, which I need to pursue at this moment.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: This must be the last time.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the Minister giving way, and apologise for the fact that I was not here earlier for the debate, for reasons that the House will understand.

Does the Minister accept that, taking global figures, one may discover that 85 per cent. of the people are outside the small business area, but does he also accept that, in some areas, a higher number of people are looking for employment in the small business sector, and that they should be encouraged to do that?

Mr. Paice: Of course I accept the hon. Gentleman's apologies for not being here earlier. I am sure that all of us would have wished to be at the same funeral, where I assume he was, paying tribute to our former hon. Friend, the Member for North Down. I was about to address precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman raised.

I recognise, as the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, that there are many parts of the country where small businesses tend to be the norm. Of course, "small" in the normal context does not just mean employers with fewer than 20 employees. Since this subject was debated in Committee, I have thought through my constituency—which I like to think I know well. It is a fairly large rural constituency, but even there I can think of many, many employers who are certainly small, but in no way near being below the 20 limit.

Even with a threshold of 20, and even in rural areas, there will be considerable opportunities for disabled people in organisations that are covered by the Bill. However, even that presupposes that organisations with fewer than 20 employees will want to discriminate against disabled people. We do not want them to do so; we are not encouraging them to do so; we are simply saying that, at present, we do not believe that we should create legislation to require them not to do so, for all the reasons that I stated earlier.

We hope that small businesses will continue to grow, to prosper and to become a larger part of the economy. That is one reason why the Bill includes provision for the Secretary of State to raise or lower the threshold. I said in Committee that we would need mightily compelling evidence to increase the threshold above 20. I resisted an amendment that would have removed the upward power in case the threshold was moved to a figure that experience then proved to be too low.

Obviously, since the Committee stage, we have looked at the matter again, and I am pleased that we are able, through amendment No. 122, to deal with any concerns about a possible future move to a threshold higher than 20. The amendment inserts a maximum figure of 20 into the Bill. That was one of the points referred to specifically by my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Exeter. I hope that I have satisfied them.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter not only for moving new clause 6 so excellently, but for his sterling work for disabled people over many years—work matched by very few in this House. He rightly recognised the special position of small firms by proposing that, for those with fewer than 20 employees, the Government should make special provision to help them comply with the law. That presumably assumes that amendment No. 7 is passed, although that is not entirely essential.

I have explained to my hon. Friend and the House that we believe that the threshold is necessary anyway, not least because the action that he proposes in subsection (2) of his new clause would be highly unlikely to deal with the position of all small firms, from farms to factories, shops to offices, or any other organisation. We believe that the code of practice will be drawn widely enough to cover all types of businesses. As I have said already, we will encourage small firms to adopt it, and they will be consulted upon it.

New clause 16 was tabled by the Opposition, who have striven for flexibility, but I am afraid that they have achieved complexity. First, the new clause does not make it clear that the financial provision to which it refers would have to be provided through a scheme or similar arrangement that would need complicated rules in order to operate fairly and effectively. The new clause purports to make provision, but does not provide the means to do so.

Secondly, I do not believe that it would be sensible to attempt to set down in regulations every circumstance in which the wide range of possible adjustments could be considered reasonable for any given employee in any type of small firm—or, for that matter, that it is practicable or sensible for regulations to set deadlines by which particular adjustments must be made. The new clause appears to be an inflexible and bureaucratic approach.

It would be an administrative nightmare to introduce regulations as set out in subsection (3). The use of the word "different" five times in that subsection shows the complexity of the problem that hon. Members seem intent on creating. The permutations would be endless. The new clause would be most unwelcome to small firms, because they would not want to be confronted by such a degree of uncertainty. What we propose is much better and clearer—a clause that sets a clear threshold.

On several occasions today, hon. Members have referred to franchises. A franchise is a business arrangement between one business and another, under which one agrees to sell the goods or services of the other. A firm that takes on a franchise may or may not be a small firm in itself, but if it is small it will face the same difficulties that any other small firm will face, and it will be in no better position to cope with them than any other organisation that is not a franchise.

If it is a larger firm, even one operating at several locations—although we are talking not about locations, but about the firm itself—it will come within the framework of the Bill.

Mr. Wigley: When I intervened earlier, I pressed the Minister for an interpretation of whether "number" includes zero. In other words, by passing amendment No.

122, would that give the Government the facility, by order, to include all companies? It is important for the House to know that.

Mr. Paice: Yes.

Several hon. Members have referred—and I listened carefully—to concerns about the potential for uncertainty when a firm employs seasonal workers or people on fixed-term contracts, so the size of the work force moves up and down through the exemption threshold. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) mentioned that, together with the hon. Members for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Lancashire, West and some of my hon. Friends. I recognise that concern, and I shall consider whether action needs to be taken to clarify the position. It may require a new regulating power. I recognise that the concern is real and needs to be dealt with.

I think that I have dealt with most of the comments by hon. Members from both sides of the House. There are already a number of exceptions for small firms in legislation. The one point to which I have not referred was raised by the hon. Member for Erdington, who said that the cap that he envisaged the Government proposing on the financial costs of alterations would somehow help small businesses. I am afraid that he has misread our proposals. We are not proposing a cap on part II of the Bill; our cap refers to part III—the adaptation of premises for goods and services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter and other hon. Members who have spoken feel extremely strongly about the issue, and I respect that, as does my hon. Friend the Minister of State. However, I hope that they realise that our intent to get rid of discrimination is just as strong as theirs. Our desire to see all firms acting properly towards disabled people is just as strong as theirs.

Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend will not pursue his new clause. The Government want to eliminate discrimination against disabled people and to use legislation as a vehicle for ultimately changing attitudes. That is best achieved by a Bill that strikes the right balance between the needs of disabled people and the proper priorities of businesses to succeed. Too onerous a Bill would create resentment among the very people whose attitudes we are trying to change.

I have no doubt that, when the Bill is enacted and implemented, we will all learn from experience. That is why I am willing to give an undertaking to the House that we will table an amendment in another place that will require the Government to review the operation of this measure within five years and to give the House the opportunity to debate the issue.

In the light of my comments and the very genuine concern that I and my hon. Friend have to ensure that the Bill's objective is achieved, I hope that the House will reject the new clause.

6.30 pm

Sir John Hannam: The debate has been extremely useful, with a clear message coming from hon. Members who have participated. My hon. Friend the Minister has shown that he is trying to find a way through small firms' fears, and the desire of all hon. Members to avoid leaving a large number of small firms outside this important anti-discrimination legislation. I welcome Government amendment No. 122, which removes the power to increase the level of 20 employees. I hope that, as the Bill progresses, a commitment to reduce that figure of exclusion will be made even more strongly.

My new clause 6 is a probing amendment that does not go far enough to satisfy Opposition Members—who, I understand, want to vote for amendment No. 7, which removes the exclusion. Whatever happens tonight, the issue will return to the foreground of debate in the other place. I hope that the Government will consider all the arguments that have been advanced by hon. Members today, and that they will introduce further changes in the other place. However, I recognise the inadequacy of my new clause, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) misunderstood the views of Opposition Members. We were far from convinced by the Minister, and we ask that our new clause 16 be put to the House.

New clause 16

SMALL FIRMS (No. 2)

'(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to have regard to the needs of employers who have fewer than 20 employees and to make such financial provision by way of grants or loans as he deems appropriate to enable them to meet their obligations under this Act.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations specify the circumstances under which adjustments will be considered reasonable for employers who have fewer than 20 employees, and such regulations may specify appropriate periods within which such adjustments shall be made.

(3) Regulations under this section may make different provisions for different circumstances and different sizes of employer and specify different periods within which different adjustments shall be made; and regulations made under this section may be varied by subsequent regulations.'.—*[Mr. Tom Clarke.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 297.

Division No. 115] **[6.32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean

Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Owen Jones and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain

Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 3

DISCRIMINATION IN RELATION TO EDUCATION

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of an education authority to take all reasonable steps to ensure that a disabled person (including any disabled person who is a minor) shall not, for a reason which relates to the disabled person's disability, be treated less favourably than a person without the disability in being given access to the education which it provides.

(2) The duty under subsection (1) above extends to education and library boards in Northern Ireland.

(3) It shall be the duty of any statutory or incorporated body which provides higher or further education to take all reasonable steps to ensure that a disabled person shall not, for a reason which relates to the disabled person's disability, be treated less favourably than a person without the disability in being given access to the education which it provides.

(4) Schedule (*Consequential Amendments Relating to Access to Education*) shall have effect in relation to education authorities and bodies.

(5) It shall be unlawful for any charitable body or incorporated body of a kind prescribed under section 12 which provides education or educational services to treat a disabled person less favourably, for a reason which relates to the disabled person's disability, than a person without the disability in giving access to the education or educational services which it provides.'.—*[Mr. Tom Clarke.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.45 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 7—*Code of Practice: Education*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may issue a code of practice containing such practical guidance as he considers appropriate with a view to eliminating discrimination against children with special educational needs in the field of education.

(2) The Secretary of State may from time to time revise the whole or any part of a code of practice and re-issue it.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), a code of practice may include practical guidance as to—

(a) the circumstances in which it would be reasonable to place a child with special educational needs in a special school;

(b) the overall planning of education for children with special educational needs; and

(c) how access to education for children with special educational needs may be ensured.

(4) It shall be the duty of a Local Education Authority in England and Wales, the Funding Agency for Schools, the Schools Funding Council for Wales, an Education Authority in Scotland and governing bodies of schools to have regard to the provisions of any code of practice issued pursuant to this section.

(5) A code of practice issued pursuant to this section shall be admissible in evidence in any proceedings before a court.

(6) The Secretary of State shall publish any code of practice for the time being in force.

(7) In this section "special educational needs" shall have the same meaning as in section 156 of the Education Act 1993.'.

New clause 8—*Further and higher education*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may issue codes of practice containing such practical guidance as he considers appropriate with a view to—

(a) eliminating discrimination against disabled persons in the field of further and higher education;

(b) encouraging good practice in relation to the further and higher education of disabled persons.

(2) The Secretary of State may from time to time revise the whole or any part of a code of practice issued under subsection (1) and re-issue it.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) a code of practice issued under the provisions of this section may include practical guidance as to circumstances in which it would be reasonable, having regard in particular to the costs involved, for a further or higher education establishment to be expected to make adjustments in favour of a disabled person.

(4) Further and higher education establishment authorities shall have regard to any code of practice in the exercise of their powers.

(5) A code of practice shall be admissible as evidence in any proceedings under this Act before a county sheriff court.

(6) If any provision of a code of practice appears to a court to be relevant to any question arising in any proceedings under this Act it shall be taken into account in determining that question.

(7) In this section "code of practice" means a code issued by the Secretary of State under this section, and includes a code of practice which has been revised and reissued.'.

Amendment No. 47, in clause 12, page 9, leave out lines 17 to 41.

Amendment No. 5, in page 9, line 17, leave out 'to the contrary'.

Amendment No. 6, in page 9, line 18, leave out 'does not apply' and insert 'applies'.

Amendment No. 10, in page 9, leave out lines 30 to 33.

Amendment No. 11, in page 9, leave out lines 34 to 39.

Amendment No. 4, a new schedule—

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS RELATING TO ACCESS TO EDUCATION—

Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (c. 44)

1. After section 60 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (function of education authority in relation to children and young persons with certain special educational needs); insert—

"*Education of children and young persons with special needs in schools which are not special schools*

60A. It shall be the duty of an education authority in respect of a child with special educational needs who belongs to their area (in accordance with section 23(3) of this Act), and who receives school education, to secure that the young person is educated in a school which is not a special school, unless that is incompatible with the wishes of the young person or, where the education authority are satisfied that the young person is not capable of expressing his views for the purposes of this section, his parent.".

Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (c. 13)

2. In Schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, in paragraph (j), the words "which prepares them for entry to another course falling within paragraphs (d) to (h) above" shall be omitted.

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 (c. 37)

3. In section 6 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 (further education to which section 1 applies), in subsection (1) after paragraph (f), insert—

"(g) is designed to teach independent living and communication skills to persons having learning difficulties".

Education Act 1993 (c. 35)

4. In section 160 of the Education Act 1993 (qualified duty to secure education of children with special educational needs in ordinary schools)—

(a) in subsection (1), the words "if the conditions mentioned in subsection (2) below are satisfied" shall be omitted;

(b) subsection (2) shall be omitted.'.

Mr. Clarke: The purpose of new clause 3 is to bring education within the purview of the Bill. The Bill makes provision for tackling discrimination in employment, which we have discussed and which will be discussed again in another place, and in access to goods and services. We all agree that discrimination in such matters should be tackled. The rights of disabled people as workers and as consumers are of great importance to their lives, but the Government appear not to recognise the need to open the gateways of opportunity for disabled people to take a full part in employment and in our social and cultural life.

The Government have failed to open three gateways of opportunity, which all need to be included in the Bill. Those gateways are education, access to information and means of transport. All of them are dealt with in new clauses and amendments and we think that it is logical that the first of them to be debated should be education.

The crucial principle that we wish to establish is that no school or college should be permitted to exclude disabled pupils or students on the grounds of their disability or to offer them a second-rate service. That is why we seek to require local education authorities and other bodies which provide education to take reasonable steps to ensure that a disabled child or adult is not treated less favourably than a person without disability in being given access to the education that they provide. That is not a terribly radical proposition.

At first sight, it would seem reasonable to expect a Bill designed to deal with discrimination against disabled people to include education as one of the most influential services in the lives of all of us and to make specific proposals to ensure equality of access to education. Yet the Government have not done so. Perhaps, in the context of a mounting crisis of confidence and resources in the Government's schools policy, that is not so surprising. However, Ministers have argued that they have specifically excluded education not because there is a general crisis in education policy but because of the progress which they claim has already been made in improving the position of disabled pupils and students.

Ministers argued in Committee that education was excluded because enough was being done, particularly in terms of the Education Act 1993 and the new code of practice. That argument was explicit, but what was implicit in the White Paper published in January, which discussed the situation brought about by the Act, was that the Government had very little to say about what more needed to be done.

If things were as rosy as Ministers suggest, there would be no need to exclude education from the Bill. Educational establishments which complied with the existing legislation would have passed with flying colours the tests of accessibility and equal treatment as set out in the Bill. That is not the situation at all. Ministers have excluded education because they know that far too many schools and other establishments simply do not comply with the standards set for other services in the Bill.

The only improvement offered in the White Paper was to extend part M of the new building regulations on disabled access to schools in England and Wales. Those regulations apply to further and higher education colleges and to schools in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, so the innovation would merely bring English and Welsh schools into line with what is required in the vast majority of new buildings of all types.

The reality is that building new schools is not a key feature of the Government's education policy, and the issue of physical access to school buildings must be dealt with in relation to existing buildings. That seems to be a not unreasonable proposition, particularly if the Government accept their responsibility for funding our schools system, which is crucial.

Many pupils with motor impairments could gain access to the curriculum enjoyed by other pupils if they could only gain safe access to the school building itself. Relatively simple changes involving the provision of ramps and lifts and the suitable adaptation of toilets and internal fire doors could transform the situation. For pupils with impaired vision, suitable illumination and painting could make all the difference.

A good deal can be done within classrooms with even fewer cost implications. Low benches in school laboratories and technical rooms could be provided, as could additional lighting and angled writing surfaces for those with a visual impairment. Changes could be made to improve the acoustics of classrooms designed without the needs of pupils with hearing difficulties in mind. School pupils should be able to benefit from special tools and technology available for those who have difficulty with the standard issue tools. Those can range from simple innovations, such as rulers with raised markings, to sophisticated electronic control systems. The current situation is simply not good enough.

Scope—the organisation previously known as the Spastics Society—carried out a survey in 1993 which found that many schools were either physically inaccessible or had not made the kind of simple low-cost adaptations that are required. A majority of secondary schools and nearly two thirds of primary schools had no suitably adapted toilets. One secondary school in 14 and one primary school in seven was completely inaccessible to wheelchair users—children, parents and teachers alike. That continuing inadequacy of provision must be addressed, but it appears to have been ignored by the Government in the White Paper, in the consultation document and—above all—in the Bill.

The Opposition recognise that the Education Act 1993 was a step in the right direction, but we do not believe that including education in the Bill would cut across the Act in any way. On the contrary—according to Ministers themselves—the intention and spirit of the present measure is to reinforce, rather than undermine, the Act.

The Government have made provision both in the 1993 Act and in the existing Bill to ensure that costs are kept under control. If education is included in the Bill—as it should be, comprehensively—education providers would be protected from undue costs by the existing legislation, which requires them to have due regard to the effective use of resources, and by the test of reasonableness applied to other service providers under the Bill.

Including schools in the terms of the Bill would not add unreasonable costs, and certainly not unreasonable extra costs, to the present troubles of the Department for Education. It would ensure that cuts could not be made which would have adverse and compelling effects on the educational opportunities of disabled pupils and that, in my view, is no bad thing.

As well as physical access to schools, the education of children with special needs is affected by the exclusion of education from the Bill. Here again, Ministers have taken the view that the 1993 Act is sufficient, and that it is therefore legitimate to withhold the right to non-discrimination from children, but the evidence simply does not bear that out.

We believe that the parents and guardians of children with special educational needs should have the right to choose between mainstream and special schooling. The 1993 Act provides such a right, but with qualifications which in practice allow enormous variations between one education authority and another. The Department for Education figures for 1992 showed that the proportion of children at special schools was five times higher in Lambeth and East Sussex than in Cornwall and Barnsley. That discrepancy is too great to be explained in terms of different levels of disability, and it shows that the opportunities for mainstream schooling vary greatly from one part of the country to another.

The 1993 Act and the code of practice may have improved access to mainstream schools, but they do not place an obligation on education authorities or grant-maintained schools to improve access and support for children with special educational needs. There is therefore no incentive for those authorities that traditionally placed large numbers of children in special schools to increase their investment in mainstream schools, by providing support for children with special educational needs.

[Mr. Clarke]

Our new clause and amendments will require local education authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools to plan for progressive improvements in access and support, without denying special schooling to children whose parents choose to follow that course. They will build on the positive aspects of the 1993 Act and give more disabled young people an opportunity to share the experience of school with other young children, to the benefit of both groups.

7 pm

The Government's White Paper was even weaker on further and higher education than on schools. They, too, are excluded from the Bill, which is extraordinary. The White Paper could only say:

"the Government now intends to set in hand a programme to review the effectiveness of the current legislation".

If Ministers genuinely want to test the effectiveness of present legislation, what could be better than to include further and higher education in the Bill that they have devised, and see whether it passes the examination?

The plain fact is that, since 1992, the Further Education Funding Council for England, the FEFC for Wales and the Scottish Education Department have been under an obligation to provide for disabled students, and rightly so, but colleges are under no such obligation. Disabled students often find themselves unable to attend their local further education college, and are forced to travel up to 60 miles a day to find a college that is willing to accommodate them, with no guarantee that the extra travel costs will be met.

There is no guarantee that the necessary support services will be in place as a consequence of the Bill. For example, less than one further education college in five has a policy to provide deaf children with education and only one in four employs a tutor with responsibility for deaf students. Many further education colleges provide no support whatsoever for deaf students.

In higher education, the situation is even less satisfactory. Neither the institutions nor the funding councils are duty bound to offer equal opportunities to disabled students—a disgraceful state of affairs with which the Bill does not deal. In the past two years, special funding initiatives have certainly improved the situation, but have affected less than half of all higher education institutions.

Far too many universities and colleges do not cater for physical access by disabled students, or fail to provide the necessary material or professional support, which is totally unacceptable in a modern age. Schools, colleges and universities provide a gateway to employment—to jobs—and can liberate disabled people from dependence and enable them to play a full part in adult life, as they are entitled to do. It is therefore essential that they should be open unreservedly to all and the Government should not be afraid to subject their education policies to the same test of adequacy and reasonableness that they apply to the other services covered by the Bill.

I have moved the new clause and the amendments in that spirit of promoting real and genuine equality of opportunity for disabled children and adults.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): It may be for the convenience of the House if I intervene in the debate now, as I have some announcements to make about Government policy on these matters.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) moved new clause 3 and the associated amendments and did so for worthy reasons with which we can readily agree. He wants to provide for disabled pupils and students the opportunities in education that are available to other people, but the new clause and the amendments are emotive and not objective, impractical and not realistic, and would lead to the waste of valuable resources. They would result in a policy for special education that would be muddled, imprecise and unworkable.

New clause 3 and the Opposition amendments would undermine new legislation, especially the Education Act 1993, which is widely recognised as a landmark for special education. That Act used a system that provides for an appropriate school placement and curriculum for every child, irrespective of his or her disability; allows for precise, detailed and rapid assessment, to produce statements for the children with the most severe needs; gives parents of such children fundamental rights of preference for any maintained school, backed by a new, independent tribunal and subject only to conditions that are analogous to those for non-disabled children; and, makes all schools and governors more accountable than ever before for making appropriate provision for all children with special educational needs.

The framework is comprehensive—indeed, it is excellent—and our measures, cemented together by the code of practice on the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs, have given an enormous boost to special education. The Audit Commission has given strong support and no little praise for what the Government have achieved in that sector in the past two years.

This series of amendments cuts across, and would ruin, that very successful new legislation, for the following reasons. First, integration into mainstream education is not a simple question of parental choice, as the hon. Member for Monklands, West would have us believe, but is more complex than that.

Special education ranges far more widely than sensory and physical disability. We are in danger of forgetting the many children with emotional and behavioural difficulties who frequently need special school provision. That is especially significant, because children without special educational needs in mainstream schools also have rights—for example, to have their education protected from the disruption that could be caused by children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is no convincing strategy for handling some children with such needs in mainstream education. Sometimes, withdrawal and a temporary placement in a special school is the only option and parental choice for a mainstream school, however desirable, cannot be allowed to prevent other children from learning efficiently.

We have a fine record of promoting effective integration into mainstream schools. At the moment, two out of three pupils with new statements are entering mainstream schools. Nearly 99 per cent. of all pupils are in mainstream schools and the Government strongly welcome that. None the less, we need a range of special schools. Some parents demand that and many hon. Members—including the right hon. Member for

Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is reported to be receiving many local representations on the matter—know that, when a local education authority tries to close a special school, there is sometimes a furore from local parents and supporters. These are community schools just as much as local comprehensives.

In many cases, as we know from detailed inspection evidence, children are worse off in mainstream schools that are unable to provide the necessary support than they would be in special schools. As I argued in Committee, and the hon. Member for Monklands, West acknowledged, our available resources are finite. He said that, like me, he could make no commitment about whether full accessibility to education could be achieved during a full Parliament, even in a Government of which he was a member. He knows that the resources are finite. The capital cost of making all mainstream schools accessible for all the purposes that might be covered by the Bill is enormous.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I am especially grateful that the Minister has given way, as he did not intervene in my speech. Does he accept that the Committee that considered the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) last year made it clear that it was absurd for the Government to pretend that we were seeking all that we want to achieve in terms of civil rights in one Parliament, and that the views that I expressed in Committee reflected those views as well?

Mr. Hague: Yes, I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members made that point. However, he seeks to write something into legislation which he knows he has neither the means nor the capability to deliver in practice, and which no Government could deliver in practice. He raises the prospect of damaging the position of disabled students.

We do not want sensible and realistic local authorities that want to concentrate their resources where they will be most effective, both geographically and with an eye to pupils with the most pressing needs, to have their plans thwarted because of this legislation. Under the new clause, such an authority might be forced to spread its existing resources, with the effect that fewer pupils benefit.

Instead of several schools in an authority, each with excellent resources, being able to take many pupils with a wide range of special needs, we would end up with nearly all schools in that authority with a few ramps, no lifts and improved curriculum access for only a small minority of pupils. I do not believe that that is what the Opposition want. It is certainly not what the Government want, and I do not believe that the Opposition have thought the measure through.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Minister consider the case of a school in my constituency that teaches 11 to 16-year-olds, is especially geared for the needs of the physically handicapped and does a fine job by them, but when it comes to 16 to 18-year-olds, neither the sixth form college nor the district college can offer a satisfactory continuation? Should not the Minister bear in mind such cases, which are quite disgraceful?

Mr. Hague: Clearly, the authority concerned should concentrate the resources available to it on rectifying that problem. The solution is probably not to place a duty on the local education authority or other education providers to make some changes to all schools or place of further education. I shall come to further education in a moment.

Mr. Enright: The Minister should note the anomaly that the 11-to-16 school receives local authority provision, but both the sixth form college and the district college have been launched into the stratosphere in terms of management. The fact that they are different bodies causes immense problems.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman will be interested in what I have to say about further and higher education.

Those are the reasons why I believe that new clause 3 is mistaken with regard to school education. Similarly, I see many good reasons to retain and build on the existing legislation covering the responsibilities of further and higher education funding councils, local education authorities, the voluntary sector and independent institutions of further and higher education.

Let us be clear that, in discharging the duties and powers imposed on it, the Further Education Funding Council must always take account of the needs of people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The funding council already has a duty to secure sufficient full-time education for all young people over the age of 16 and under 19, and the provision of adequate facilities in respect of part-time students on courses leading to vocational and academic qualifications. It must ensure that the education is provided at locations that meet the reasonable needs of all those to whom the duty extends and are equipped appropriately.

Local education authorities have a complementary duty to secure adequate education for adults which falls outside the scope of the funding council's duties, including provision for some independent living and communications skills, for which they have retained funding.

7.15 pm

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education's launch letter of guidance to the Higher Education Funding Council drew particular attention to the importance of provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities and the need for access to higher education for those students to be facilitated. The Further Education Funding Council has demonstrated its commitment to securing effective and coherent provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities through its committee chaired by John Tomlinson of Warwick university.

The Government are rightly proud of their record on widening access. The number of students in higher education has risen from under 750,000 to nearly 1.2 million in the past decade. Particular attention has been paid to increasing the participation of groups that have been under-represented in the past, including those with disabilities. The Higher Education Funding Council allocated £3 million in 1993-94 and a further £3 million in 1994-95 for special initiatives to widen access, which included projects related to physical access, accessible curricula and support services. Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, has been contracted to organise dissemination as well as evaluation.

The new clause would undermine the strategic and planned approach of the funding councils, which already recognises the needs of disabled people. I have already

[Mr. Hague]

pointed out that available resources are finite. We cannot pretend that the new clause, if carried, would give all disabled people unrestricted access to all further and higher education institutions. Indeed, that is not the case for their peers. Instead, it risks dissipating scarce resources on piecemeal and ineffective measures. I suggest that hon. Members examine the existing statutory framework, which provides a sound basis to underpin continued development of provision for students with disabilities, before seeking to undermine and disrupt it. For that reason, I urge the House to reject the new clause.

The approach in new clauses 7 and 8 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and other hon. Members is a good deal more constructive than that in new clause 3. They provide that schools be included in the provisions of the Bill—

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister says that those new clauses are more constructive than that proposed by the Opposition. Which organisations of or for disabled people support them?

Mr. Hague: I am concerned with the merits of each of the new clauses and amendments. It is not my job as Minister with responsibility for disabled people to add up the number of pressure groups on each side of an argument and say that that is the reason for my decision when it affects the policy of the nation. My task is to come to a sensible and balanced policy that advances the causes of students and pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities.

My hon. Friend's new clauses would include schools in clause 12 and establish a new code of practice on children with special educational needs covering questions such as when a placement in a special school would be reasonable; the overall planning of education for children with special educational needs; and how access to education may be insured for such children. They would also include further and higher education in the provisions of the Bill. A further code of practice would be drawn up for HE and FE institutions.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's motives in suggesting those provisions, but must point out several substantial practical difficulties. For example, a second code in parallel with the widely acclaimed special educational needs code of practice would be confusing. It would leave parents, schools and local education authorities uncertain about its relationship with the present code. The Government do not believe that it makes sense to set up completely new rights or mechanisms for appeal against non-admission of children with special educational needs but for whom the question of a statement does not arise. None the less, I have noted my hon. Friends' points in the amendments with care, and I intend in a moment to propose an alternative approach, which will achieve in practice what they are seeking.

In further education, the amendments would undermine the strategic and planned approach of the Further Education Funding Council by placing a separate duty on individual colleges. The council ensures that a coherent pattern of educational provision is available to students with disabilities. It looks beyond its own colleges to courses in maintained and non-maintained schools and independent colleges to avoid duplication and to secure the most effective use of resources. Placing duties on individual colleges under the Bill would cut across the duties placed on the funding council by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Scarce resources would therefore be dissipated, and there would be a period of confusion at a time when the 1992 legislation is bedding down.

The Government wish, however, to build on existing education and on the considerable progress achieved to date. In conjunction with my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for Education, who are in their place on the Front Bench, I have a number of announcements to make. In the case of further and higher education, we wish to leave the way open to take account of the outcomes of the review programme, which was announced today in answer to a parliamentary question tabled my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter.

That review programme will include consideration in higher education of how flexibility in capital spending can be used to improve facilities for students with disabilities, ways in which the arrangements for increasing the awareness of staff at further education colleges of the needs of students with disabilities can be improved and whether any further funding incentives could be given to colleges to encourage the enrolment of students with disabilities. It will also consider the administration of the disabled students allowance and the advice and information service provided by Skill, and whether charters for further and higher education can be improved in respect of availability of information to students with disabilities.

The Government have great reservations—

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I have a number of announcements to make, and I must give priority to making them.

The Government have great reservations over the amendments but we accept that it is desirable to find sensible and realistic ways in which to achieve greater access to mainstream schools, ways in which to strengthen the hand of parents who believe that a disabled child is being discriminated against in being refused admission to a school and ways of making both the higher and further education sectors more sensitive and responsive to the needs of disabled students. The Government have therefore decided to bring forward significant amendments to the Bill in another place to achieve those ends. The amendments build on, and add importantly to, existing education legislation.

One of the most important parts of the Education Act 1993 was the requirement for the first time that all schools should have a published policy for special education and should make it available to all parents. By reporting annually to parents, schools will ensure that they are accountable for the work that they do and will benefit from the comments that parents are able to make.

We want greatly to strengthen those measures by making it a requirement in primary legislation that the published annual report should specify the admission arrangements for pupils with special educational needs, the steps that the school takes to avoid discrimination against disabled pupils and a description of facilities which increase or assist access to the school by pupils who are disabled. We therefore hope to amend the Education Act 1993 within the Disability Discrimination Bill to achieve those requirements in law.

In further education, the Government intend to amend the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to require colleges, as a condition of grant from the Further Education Funding Council, to give information on provision for students with disabilities. We envisage that this would give the Secretary of State the power to specify the timing and nature of such information. The reporting requirements would, in themselves, encourage all colleges to give further attention to the needs of students with disabilities. We also propose to amend the 1992 Act to give the Further Education Funding Council an express statutory duty to report to the Secretary of State on progress in facilitating access for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to further education and its plans for the future.

As to redress, disabled individuals would be able to complain in the first instance to colleges if they considered that the institutions had failed to fulfil the expectations raised by their policy statements. In the event that that proved ineffective, the individuals would be able to take their complaints to the Further Education Funding Council. I am considering with my hon. Friends whether an additional amendment might be required to enable the FEFC to take action where it judged a college's response to have been unsatisfactory.

The Government also envisage two amendments bearing on higher education. The first would be a statutory duty for the Higher Education Funding Council for England to have regard to the needs of disabled students in its allocation of funds. That would embody in legislation a requirement at present covered only in guidance from the Secretary of State. Secondly, we envisage that the Secretary of State might take an unambiguous power to enable her to require the funding council to seek policy statements from universities and colleges covering their arrangements for access for disabled students. We shall be consulting representative bodies about the details of the amendments, and, in the context of the review programme, we shall be exploring how it might be given practical expression.

I remind the House that the new proposals make substantial new legislative provision and I believe that they go to the heart of the concerns expressed about further and higher education in particular and education more widely. They are above and beyond our existing legislation, but they build on it in a sensible fashion. They supplement the non-legislative measures already announced—the further and higher education review and the access funding scheme for schools, about which I can now also give further details.

As hon. Members will recall, the schools access initiative was announced in the White Paper which accompanied the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will very shortly be publishing a consultation document on how that scheme might operate in the 1996-97 financial year. We envisage that around £10 million will be available in the first year to encourage imaginative and cost-effective projects aimed at increasing mainstream schools' accessibility to pupils with physical and sensory disability. It should facilitate voluntary involvement by local communities and it aims to build on existing good practice and to act as a spur to improved access, which includes physical access to building and curriculum access to equipment and teaching.

I therefore commend the Government's proposals to the House, and I look forward to their formal introduction in another place in due course. I believe that the proposals will substantially satisfy the concerns of my hon. Friends and of many people outside this House and demonstrate to the House and to the nation that we fully intend students and pupils with disabilities to share in the opening up of opportunities and access for disabled people, which we are dedicated to bringing about.

Dr. Godman: I had hoped to intervene on the Minister to ask him what the comparable figure for Scotland would be, as he mentioned a figure of £10 million for the English funding council. I also wanted to ask him, if I can capture his attention for just for one moment—I listened very intently to him—if, in his role as Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, he had held discussions with his Scottish Office colleagues concerning the performance of the 43 further education colleges in Scotland in relation to meeting the aspirations and interests of students suffering from disabilities.

In a letter that I received just today, Catherine Buchanan of the Scottish Association for Mental Health and her colleagues expressed their very serious concern about the Bill and what it fails to do for disabled students. The Scottish mental health and discrimination group, to which Catherine Buchanan's letter refers, states inter alia:

> "The group believes that the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill is severely flawed and that, in particular, it discriminates unfairly against people with mental health problems."

The group says that what is needed, among other things, is a law to outlaw discrimination in education and training. It further argues:

> "without fair access to education and training, the employment rights given by the Bill are inadequate."

That is one reason for my support of new clause 3, which has been tabled by the Opposition.

In fairness, I should point out that the association also notes:

> "There are examples of good practice developing in higher education"

in Scotland,

> "and a legal requirement not to discriminate would underpin and extend such good practice."

That is offered by the new clause. The association also argues:

> "A law to outlaw discrimination in education would give a powerful incentive to colleges and universities"

throughout Scotland

> "to continue to improve practices."

I accept that a range of performance tables already exist to record improvements in practice.

7.30 pm

In relation to new clause 3, I acknowledge that certain Scottish educational institutions already set a fine benchmark for others to try to match. In my constituency, James Watt college of further education provides many course for people with learning disabilities. Such a college would have no fear of any regulations imposed as a result of new clause 3. That is the kind of quality of education for disabled people that I should like to see extended throughout Scotland.

My constituents with learning disabilities are encouraged by James Watt college to undertake studies such as photography, printing, woodwork and keyboard

[Dr. Godman]

skills. That college, which leads the other 42 in its concern for disabled people, provides, through its faculty of learning support and adult resources, educational and training courses for upwards of 800 people throughout Argyll, from Campbeltown in the south to Oban in the north, as well as many areas in Renfrewshire. I should like such a uniform pattern of educational opportunity to be offered throughout Scotland.

I believe that the Scottish Association for Mental Health is right to express its concern at the failure of some universities and colleges of further education to provide the kind of education opportunity offered by James Watt college in Greenock and a few other colleges. Much more needs to be done.

I am sorry that the Minister devoted all his speech to amendments to be tabled in another place which will relate to English universities, colleges and schools. He used the singular "council" about everything he said. That is why I sought to intervene, because the Scottish Association for Mental Health is absolutely right and proper to express its concern about those youngsters who are denied access our colleges of further education and universities north of the border.

I remind the Minister that this is the Parliament of a multinational state—the so-called United Kingdom. He should have voiced some concern and sympathy, which I am sure he feels, for disabled students north of the border. Next time I seek to intervene on behalf of fellow Scots, I hope that he will give way.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I warmly welcome the common sense, practicality and thoroughly constructive spirit in which the Minister made his important announcements. It seemed strange that education had been left out of the Bill, as education should surely be central to it. Education is fundamental to the life chances of everyone—including, of course, disabled people—and I am pleased that education will now be prominent and important in the Bill.

The Bill will follow on a sequence of important reform measures introduced by the Government: the Education Act 1981, the Education Reform Act 1988, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the Education Act 1993. The latter Act was a particularly important milestone, on which I should like especially to congratulate the Minister of State at the Department for Education.

Even that Act was insufficient, however, because it still left it within the law for schools to discriminate against individual children. As I understand it, it is still lawful for schools to refuse to take a child because he or she is disabled and to treat that child less favourably. I do not know any teacher who would regard such behaviour as tolerable, but it is important that we legislate to ensure that discrimination against disabled people is illegal in education as it is elsewhere.

Legislation has an enormously important declaratory significance. It is, of itself, a great educative force. If we state the standards and decencies that our society expects of schools, colleges and universities, they are fed through into the ethos of those institutions and, in turn, those institutions influence the better development of our society. In that way, we reinforce the values of mutual care, responsibility and good citizenship.

I welcome the announcements that my hon. Friend the Minister has made and his determination, with colleagues at the Department for Education, to ensure that a series of important reforms are incorporated in the Bill. My hon. Friends at the Department for Education have clearly heeded the maxim of R. A. Butler, who said that the way to make progress on the Education Act 1944 was to grasp a good bunch of nettles all at once.

I do not think that the apprehensions that some professionals in education may express will be realised. They may argue that the proposals will be prejudicial to the efficient use of resources or will distort capital programmes. I do not think that those apprehensions will be justified. It is particularly important that the law governing further and higher education should be developed, as it has been significantly weaker than that governing education in schools. We must declare the principle. It is almost universally accepted within the further and higher education sectors. It is right to affirm the values set out in the Bill.

There should be no fear of a threat to academic freedom—I believe that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals acknowledges that—and the institutions should not take fright at the cost implications because the concept of reasonableness will apply.

I add my tribute to the constructive work of the Further Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council. In particular, I pay tribute to Sir William Stubbs and Professor Graeme Davies. Professor Davies sent me a copy of the HEFC's recent publication, "Access to Higher Education: Students with Special Needs", and emphasised to me that he regarded the programme of work set out in that document as being among the key objectives of the HEFC. The practical benefits include reporting on and disseminating good practice and encouraging and assisting institutions to review their practice and to do better.

My hon. Friend the Minister rattled through a series of important announcements, so there is much for hon. Members to digest. I am unclear whether he was suggesting that to attach conditions for funding would in itself be sufficient or whether he wished to go further by establishing a broad legislative duty. It is needful to strengthen the obligations in that regard.

I was pleased to hear that my hon. Friend intends to institute some sort of appeals system. The duty to report to the Secretary of State will be extremely useful. I hope that my hon. Friend's further consideration of the possibilities will lead him to invest in the FEFC the scope to take action where it considers that an institution may be defaulting on its proper responsibilities. I would encourage him to be bold about that.

As for the student support system, I believe that the distinction that we continue to make between support for part-time and full-time students is increasingly anachronistic. The majority of students embarking on courses in higher education are aged over 21. We all acknowledge the importance of lifelong learning opportunities in the changing economy and the developing society into which we are moving. Inevitably, those opportunities will have to be taken by large numbers of people part time. I recognise the cost of providing that broader range of support for part-time students, but it is an aspiration that we should firmly establish for ourselves.

Although the lack of mandatory awards for part-time students and the ineligibility of part-time students for disabled students' allowance are not direct discrimination because all part-time students are disqualified from certain awards, they none the less operate as indirect discrimination because, of necessity, a greater proportion of disabled people than of others have to study part time.

My hon. Friend the Minister suggested that the Government would consider the administration of the disabled students' allowance. I wonder whether that alone will be sufficient, or whether they will need to consider the legislative basis and possibly to reconsider the 1962 legislation. I hope and believe that the outcome of the Government's review of higher education, in which those issues will be considered, will be constructive, but I am worried that they may miss the legislative bus. I hope very much that the Government will, in a precautionary way, take powers in the Bill to enable them to enact any changes in student support that the review may suggest are appropriate.

I very much welcome the announcements, and I congratulate my hon. Friends on them.

Ms Lynne: I, too, welcome the announcements. They are rather like a last-minute conversion. We have not had time to study them in detail, but I am glad that the Minister has been forced to accept, to a certain extent, some of the things that have been proposed by organisations representing disabled people. I always thought that education was a glaring omission from the Bill, and that that was one of the Bill's most serious flaws.

However, the announcements do not go far enough. I recognise that, especially in the past few years, enormous strides have been made in assessing people with special educational needs and attempting to meet those needs. For all that, there is not full accessibility of mainstream education. I believe that all children should have equal rights of access to state education. They should have a choice between mainstream and special schools.

I agree with the Minister that some children will need special schools, but it is wrong for children to be forced into them simply because there is no mainstream school that is accessible. They should have a choice. Some children attend mainstream infant and primary schools but are then denied mainstream secondary education or further and higher education. That is disruptive to their schooling and the problem should be tackled.

One in five further education colleges, for instance, has no specific policies for the deaf. Many deaf students opt to attend a specialist college as a result. If they opt to attend one outside their area, it will not be paid for and they have to pay for it themselves. That is an impossible situation. Good will on the part of the schools, colleges and universities is not enough. It must be laid down by statute. However, I urge the Minister to go further than he has with the announcement.

A survey by Scope, formerly the Spastics Society, said that the majority of polling stations were not accessible. It is interesting that most polling stations are in schools, and it is a sad indictment that those people are thus denied in one fell swoop their electoral rights and their educational rights—the two key elements of a modern democracy.

Mr. Barnes: Following the Minister's statement, there may be provisions in the Bill to aid that access, which would feed through into polling station provision. The problem is that the Minister has placed us in considerable difficulties by making a statement of such complexity at this stage without being able to say what the details are, so that we shall have to wait until the Bill goes to the Lords to know what those arrangements are. Those should have been before us now in a series of amendments.

Ms Lynne: I take the hon. Gentleman's argument. As I said, it is an announcement that the Minister has been forced into making. It would have been preferable if we had seen the proposals beforehand so that we could have examined them. I agree with the hon. Gentleman: let us hope that our polling stations will become more accessible, as it will mean that schools are more accessible, because polling stations are mainly in school buildings. People should have a right to vote and a right to be educated, but those rights are denied to them because they are not included in the Bill. It is scandalous that that should be the case in 1995.

My final argument—I am rushing through, as I know that we are short of time—is that we cannot afford not to extend the provisions of the Bill. How can we justify not equipping people with the skills for life? How can we justify not allowing people to realise their full potential? How can we justify not recognising their achievements? The Bill should be inclusive, not exclusive, especially on education. As a former president of Yale said,

> "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

I hope that the Minister will take note of that.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I wish briefly to express my thanks to Education Ministers who met a delegation as recently as a couple of weeks ago in which we set out the objectives to bring education into the Bill. In the short time available, they have made those recommendations and proposals to be implemented in the House of Lords. I am extremely grateful, on behalf of the all-party disablement group, for the remarks that have been made about the provisions embodied in our new clauses. The Bill has begun to take the shape that we want it to have, incorporating those aspects previously omitted. I very much welcome their inclusion and the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Minister.

7.45 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be extremely brief in my remarks. Although I welcome the comments and concessions made by the Government today, I ask strongly for some guidance as to what consultation took place with the Scottish Office and what funding will be available for similar requirements in Scotland. Our statutory and voluntary organisations have followed the debate closely, and it is only right that they should know what will be available to them in relation to the requirements placed on them.

Mr. Hague: The announcements that I made and the figures that I gave relate to England because they relate to the Department for Education. There will be further announcements in due course about provision elsewhere in the country. As the White Paper said, the Scottish Office Education Department will be considering further

[Mr. Hague]

the scope for authorities and schools to improve accessibility for disabled pupils, so further announcements will be made in due course.

Mrs. Ewing: Obviously, I welcome that comment, but I hope that "in due course" does not mean that it will be a substantial time before those announcements are made. The authorities have a right to know what is happening.

We have been worried about the attitude of the Scottish Office to some aspects of the Bill. I draw specific attention to clause 14(3)(a)(ii), as I wish to know whether that will apply to the aspects of education to which the Minister has referred, especially further and higher education, where a person with learning difficulties may not be in position to give formal consent. A letter sent by the Scottish Office to Enable of Scotland on 16 March 1995 appeared to be in stark contrast to the advice being given by the Disability Council to similar organisations in England and Wales.

We certainly do not want that clause to apply in education. Indeed, I do not believe that it should apply to any aspect of the Bill. It would be interesting to know whether the Government intend to delete parts of the Bill and make them inapplicable to the reforms in education that the Minister mentioned today. I am willing to send the Minister the correspondence so that he may study it in detail and perhaps make a measured response at some stage.

Mr. Hague *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tom Clarke: With the leave of the House, I wish to say briefly—I sense that the House is of a mood to take an early decision—that we are disappointed with what the Minister has said. He was unimaginative and far too slow about integration. We already had in the White Paper the contents of his announcements about further and higher education; there was nothing new in what he said. He was slow to present those aspects in the Bill and he did so today purely as a result of my hon. Friends' success in embarrassing him into so doing. The Minister's reference to local colleges hardly fills us with enthusiasm as the Government appointed the business men and others who run those local colleges.

In common with my hon. Friends, I found the Minister unconvincing. I welcome the fact that, because the other place is more radical and progressive than the Minister on these matters, our new clause 3—instead of being muddled, imprecise and unworkable—is clear, precise and workable. For that reason, I recommend it for the support of the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 277, Noes 297.

Division No. 116] **[7.49 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, M[illegible]hael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Norm[illegible]nton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*

Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Estelle Morris and
Mr. John Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*

Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt. Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David

Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 1

DISABILITY RIGHTS COMMISSION

'—(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act the Secretary of State shall appoint a body which shall be named the Disability Rights Commission ("the Commission").

(2) It shall be the duty of the Commission—

(a) to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled persons;

(b) to carry out general investigations with a view to determining whether the provisions of this Act are being complied with;

(c) to investigate such complaints as may be made to them of failure to comply with any provision of the Act in an individual case, and where it seems appropriate, conciliate in relation to such complaints;

(d) to provide, where they deem it appropriate, assistance, including legal and financial assistance, to disabled persons in enforcing their rights under this Act; and

(e) to keep under review this working of this Act and, when they are so required by the Secretary of State or otherwise think it desirable, draw up and submit to the Secretary of State proposals for amending this Act.

(3) The Commission shall issue a draft Code of Practice or draft Codes of Practice setting out the requirements of this Act and the manner in which they may be met, whether generally or in the circumstances of each particular case.

(4) Before issuing any draft Code of Practice under subsection (3) above, the Commission shall consult—

(a) such organisation or organisations of disabled persons; and

(b) such organisations or associations of organisations representative of employers or of workers; and

(c) such other organisations, or bodies

as appear to the Commission to be appropriate or which the Secretary of State has directed the Commission to consult, and shall consider any representations made to it about such drafts.

(5) The Commission shall, within eighteen months of the passing of this Act, publish a Code of Practice or Codes of Practice resulting from its consultations under subsections (3) and (4) above, and shall transmit these to the Secretary of State.

(6) The Secretary of State shall lay copies of any such Code of Practice transmitted to him under subsection (5) above before Parliament, and if either House of Parliament resolves that the Code of Practice be withdrawn, the Commission shall withdraw that Code of Practice, and prepare another Code of Practice in substitution for the one which is withdrawn.

(7) No motion to withdraw a Code of Practice shall be made in either House of Parliament under subsection (6) above after the expiration of a period of forty days beginning with the day on which a copy of the Code of Practice was laid before that House, but for the purposes of calculating this period no account shall be taken of any time during which Parliament is dissolved or prorogued or during which both Houses are adjourned for more than four days.

(8) Unless a Code of Practice is withdrawn under the provisions of subsection (6) above, it shall come into effect on such day as the Secretary of State may by order appoint, not being later than six months from the date on which it is published by the Commission.

(9) The Commission shall keep under review each Code of Practice published under this section and shall, at such times as it considers appropriate or when the Secretary of State so directs, revise the whole or any part of any Code of Practice, and the provisions of subsection (4) to (8) above shall apply (with appropriate modifications) to such revisions.

(10) A failure on the part of any person to observe any provision of a Code of Practice published in accordance with this section shall not of itself render him liable to any proceedings; but in determining, in respect of Parts II and III of this Act, what actions are permitted or prohibited under those Parts, whether generally or in the circumstances of a particular case, an employer or (as the case may be) a person or body to whom Part II of this Act applies shall have regard to any Code of Practice published in accordance with the provisions of subsection (5) above.

(11) In proceedings under sections 8 and 20 of this Act, any provision of a Code of Practice which appears to an industrial tribunal or, as the case may be, a court, to be relevant to an allegation in those proceedings of the commission of an act of discrimination which is unlawful by virtue of Part II or III of this Act shall be admissible in evidence and—

(a) observance or failure to observe any such provision on the part of any person may be relied upon by any party to the proceedings as tending to negative or to establish any liability which is in question in those proceedings; and

(b) a document which purports to be a Code of Practice shall be taken to be such unless the contrary is proved.

(12) Schedule (*The Disability Rights Commission*) to this Act shall have effect in relation to the Commission.'.—*[Mr. Tom Clarke.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 14—*Investigations by the Council: procedure*—

'In respect of general investigations, or investigations of complaints, undertaken by the Council, the Secretary of State shall by regulations prescribe—

(a) the procedure whereby the Council may require a person to furnish such information as will assist in any investigation and the time, manner and form in which such information is to be furnished;

(b) the procedures to be followed in the case of a person failing to supply such information;

(c) the penalties to be imposed in the case of a person failing to supply such information, save that such penalties shall not exceed level 3 on the standard scale on summary conviction in respect of such a failure and level 4 in respect of each day on which the failure continues after conviction in respect thereof;

(d) the circumstances in which the Council can make recommendations and reports in the light of its findings in an investigation; and

(e) the manner and form in which such recommendations and reports may be issued.'.

New clause 15—*Investigations by the Council: anti-discrimination notices, etc.*—

'.—(1) In respect of general investigations, or investigations of complaints, undertaken by the Council, the Secretary of State shall by regulations prescribe—

(a) the circumstances in which, following such an investigation, the Council may issue to a person a notice of prohibition of discrimination, which shall be known as a non-discrimination notice;

(b) the manner and form in which such a notice shall be issued;

(c) the procedures to be adopted in investigating whether such a notice is being complied with; and

(d) the procedures to be followed in the case of a non-discrimination notice not being complied with.

(2) Regulations made in accordance with subsection (1) above shall prescribe, in the case of an alleged discrimination by one person against another, the arrangements whereby the Council may—

(a) in the case of discrimination in contravention of Part II of this Act, refer the matter to an industrial tribunal, and

(b) in the case of discrimination in contravention of Part III of this Act,apply to a county court for an injunction, or a sheriff court for an order, restraining the respondent from such discrimination,

but nothing in those regulations shall prevent an individual from making a claim of discrimination the subject of civil proceedings.'.

Amendment No. 20, in clause 23, page 16, line 24, leave out from beginning to end of line 15 in clause 25 on page 19.

Amendment No. 52, in page 16, line 27, leave out from beginning to end of line 18 on page 17, and insert—

'(2) It shall be the duty of the Council—

(a) to work towards the elimination of discrimination on the basis of disability; and

(b) to keep under review the working of this Act and, when directed to do so by the Secretary of State or when it otherwise thinks it desirable, to draw up and submit to the Secretary of State proposals for amending this Act.

(3) In discharging its duties under subsection (2), the Council shall have the power—

(a) to investigate such complaints as are made to it of failure to comply with any provision of this Act in an individual case, and where it considers it appropriate, to conciliate in relation to such complaints;

(b) to provide assistance, including legal and financial assistance, to disabled persons in enforcing their rights under this Act;

(c) to carry out investigations with a view to determining whether the provisions of this Act are being complied with; and

(d) to undertake, or assist (whether financially or otherwise) the undertaking by other persons, of any research and any educational activities, which appear to the Council necessary or expedient for the purposes of subsection (2) above.'.

Amendment No. 45, in page 16, line 35, at end insert—

'(d) on matters related to the provisions or operation of other enactments or government policies relating to disabled persons insofar as they affect the opportunities of disabled persons other than in the field of employment.'.

Amendment No. 53, in page 17, line 21, leave out from beginning to end of line 48,

Amendment No. 1, a new schedule:—'*The Disability Rights Commission*—

Constitution of the Commission

1. The Commission shall consist of at least eight but not more than fifteen persons ("Commissioners") appointed by the Secretary of State, after consultation with organisations of disabled people, on a full-time or part-time basis, four of whom, including the chairman, shall be full-time members.

2. At least three-quarters of the total number of the Commissioners shall themselves be persons who, at the time of their appointment, are disabled persons or the authorised representatives of disabled persons appointed pursuant to section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 or section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

3. So far as is reasonably practicable, the Secretary of State shall ensure that the Commission includes at least one member who resides in each of England, Scotland and Wales.

4.—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint one of the Commissioners to be chairman of the Commission and one of the Commissioners to be deputy chairman of the Commission.

(2) Both the chairman and the deputy chairman shall be persons who, at the time of their appointment, are disabled persons or authorised representatives of disabled persons appointed pursuant to section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) 1986 or section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

5. On the appointment by the Secretary of State of the first Commissioners, the Commission shall come into existence as a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal.

6.—(1) The Commission is not an emanation of the Crown, and shall not act or be treated as the servant or agent of the Crown.

(2) Accordingly—

(a) neither the Commission nor a Commissioner not a member of its staff as such is entitled to any status, immunity, privilege or exemption enjoyed by the Crown;

(b) the Commissioners and members of the staff of the Commission as such are not civil servants; and

(c) the Commission's property is not property of, or held on behalf of, the Crown.

Tenure of Office of Commissioners

7.—(1) A Commissioner shall hold and vacate his office in accordance with the terms of his appointment.

(2) A person shall not be appointed a Commissioner for more than—

(a) where he was appointed on 31st March in any year, five years; and

(b) in any other case, the period which expires with the first 31st March after the fifth anniversary of his appointment.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(3) With the consent of the Commissioner concerned, the Secretary of State may alter the terms of an appointment so as to make a full-time Commissioner into a part-time Commissioner or vice versa, or for any other purpose.

(4) A Commissioner may resign by notice to the Secretary of State.

(5) The Secretary of State may terminate the appointment of a Commissioner if satisfied that—

(a) without the consent of the Commission, he failed to attend the meetings of the Commission during a continuous period of six months beginning not earlier than nine months before the termination; or

(b) he is an undischarged bankrupt, or has made an arrangement with his creditors, or is insolvent within the meaning of paragraph 9(2) of Schedule 3 to the Conveyancing and Feudal Reform (Scotland Act) 1970 or who is otherwise unable to pay his debts; or

(c) he is incapable of carrying out his duties.

(6) Past service as a Commissioner is no bar to re-appointment.

Tenure of office of chairman and deputy chairman

8.—(1) The chairman and deputy chairman shall hold and vacate those offices in accordance with the terms of his appointment, and may resign by notice to the Secretary of State.

(2) The office of the chairman or deputy chairman is vacated if he ceases to be a Commissioner.

(3) Past service as chairman or deputy chairman is no bar to re-appointment.

Remuneration of Commissioners

9. The Secretary of State may pay, or make such payments towards the provision of, such remuneration, pensions, allowances or gratuities to or in respect of the Commissioners or any of them as, with the consent of the Minister for the Civil Service, he may determine.

10. Where a person ceases to be a Commissioner otherwise than on the expiry of his term of office, and it appears to the Secretary of State that there are special circumstances which make it right for that person to receive compensation, the Secretary of State may with the consent of the Minister for the Civil Service direct the Commission to make to that person a payment of such amount as, with the consent of that Minister, the Secretary of State may determine.

Staff

11. The Commission may, after consultation with the Secretary of State, appoint such officers and servants as they think fit, subject to the approval of the Minister for the Civil Service as to numbers and as to remuneration and other terms and conditions of service.

12.—(1) Employment with the Commission shall be included among the kinds of employment to which a superannuation scheme under section 1 of the Superannuation Act 1972 can apply, and accordingly in Schedule 1 to that Act (in which those kinds of employment are listed) the words "Disability Rights Commission" shall be inserted at the appropriate place in alphabetical order.

(2) Where a person who is employed by the Commission and is by reference to that employment a participant in a scheme under section 1 of the Superannuation Act 1972 becomes a Commissioner, the Minister for the Civil Service may determine that his service as a Commissioner shall be treated for the purposes of the scheme as service as an employee of the Commission; and his rights under the schemes shall not be affected by paragraph 9.

13. The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 shall not require insurance to be effected by the Commission.

Proceedings and Business

14.—(1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, the Commission may make arrangements for the regulation of their proceedings and business, and may vary or revoke those arrangements.

(2) The arrangements may, with the approval of the Secretary of State, provide for the discharge under the general direction of the Commission of any of the Commission's functions by a committee of the Commission, or by two or more Commissioners.

(3) Anything done by or in relation to a committee, or Commissioners, in the discharge of the Commission's functions shall have the same effect as if done by or in relation to the Commission.

15. The validity of any proceedings of the Commission shall not be affected by any vacancy among the members of the Commission or by any defect in the appointment of any Commissioner.

16. The quorum for meetings of the Commission shall in the first instance be determined by a meeting of the Commission attended by not fewer than five Commissioners.

Finance

17. The Secretary of State shall pay to the Commission expenses incurred or to be incurred by it under paragraphs 11 and 12 with the consent of the Minister for the Civil Service and Treasury, and shall pay to the Commission such sums as the Secretary of State thinks fit for enabling the Commission to meet other expenses.

18.—(1) The Commission shall keep proper accounts of their income and expenditure, and shall prepare and send to the Secretary of State statements of account in relation to each financial year of the Commission.

(2) The financial year of the Commission shall be the twelve months ending on 31st March.

Disqualification Acts

19. In Part II of Schedule I to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 (bodies of which all members are disqualified under those Acts) there shall (at the appropriate place in alphabetical order) be inserted the following entry:

"The Disability Rights Commission".

Investigations

20. In respect of general investigations or investigations of complaints undertaken by the Commission the Secretary of State shall prescribe by regulations—

(a) the procedure whereby the Commission may require a person to furnish such information as they think will assist in any investigation, and the time, manner and form in which such information is to be furnished;

(b) the procedures to be followed in the case of that person failing to supply that information; and

(c) the penalties to be imposed in the case of that person failing to supply that information; save that such penalties shall not exceed level 3 of the standard scale on summary conviction in respect of such a failure and level 4 in respect of each day on which the failure in continued after conviction in respect thereof.

21.—(1) In respect of general investigations of complaints undertaken by the Commission the Secretary of State shall prescribe by regulations—

(a) the circumstances in which, following such an investigation, the Commission may issue to a person a notice of prohibition of discrimination, which shall be known as a non-discrimination notice;

(b) the manner and form in which such a notice shall be issued;

(c) the procedures to be adopted in investigation whether such a notice is being complied with; and

(d) the procedures to be followed in the case of a non-discrimination notice not being complied with.

(2) Regulations made in accordance with sub-paragraph (1) above shall prescribe, in the case of an alleged discrimination by one person against another, the arrangements whereby the Commission may—

(a) in the case of discrimination in contravention of Part II of this Act, refer the matter to an industrial tribunal, and

(b) in the case of discrimination in contravention of Part III of this Act, apply to a county court for an injunction, or a sheriff court for an order, restraining the respondent from such discrimination,

but nothing in those regulations shall prevent an individual from making a claim of discrimination the subject of civil proceedings.

Annual Report

22.—(1) As soon as possible after 31st March in each year, the Commission shall make to the Secretary of State a report on their activities during the year, hereinafter referred to as an "annual report".

(2) Each annual report shall include a general survey of developments during the period to which it relates in respect of matters falling within the scope of the Commission's duties.

(3) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of the annual report before each House of Parliament and shall cause the report to be published.'.

Amendment No. 23, in schedule 3, page 32, line 32, leave out from beginning to end of line 13 on page 34.

Amendment No. 56, in page 33, line 3, after 'chairman', insert

'provided that both the chairman and the deputy chairman shall be persons who at the time of their appointment are disabled persons or authorised representatives of disabled persons appointed pursuant to section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 or section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.'.

Amendment No. 57, in page 33, line 13, leave out 'try to'.

Amendment No. 58, in page 33, line 15, leave out

'parents or guardians of disabled persons'

and insert

'authorised representatives of disabled persons appointed pursuant to section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 or section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.'.

Amendment No. 59, in page 33, line 32, leave out from beginning to end of line 43 and insert—

'6. The Council may, after consultation with the Secretary of State, appoint such officers and servants as it thinks fit, subject to the approval of the Minister for the Civil Service as to numbers and as to remuneration and other terms and conditions of service.

7.—(1) The Secretary of State shall pay to the Council—

(a) expenses incurred, or to be incurred, by it under paragraph 6, with the consent of the Minister for the Civil Service and the Treasury, and

(b) such other sums as, with the approval of the Treasury, he determines to be required for enabling the Council to meet other expenses which it has incurred, or will incur.

(2) The Council shall keep proper accounts of its income and expenditure and shall prepare and transmit to the Secretary of State statements of accounts in relation to each financial year of the Council which shall be included in the annual report made under paragraph 9 below.

Amendment No. 25, in schedule 6, page 37, line 7, leave out from 'Act' to end of line 9 and insert

'for "Disability Rights Commission" substitute "Disability Rights Commission for Northern Ireland".'.

Amendment No. 26, in page 37, line 10, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 on page 39 and insert—

'(2) In section (*Disability Rights Commission*)—

(a) in subsection (1), for "Disability Rights Commission" substitute "Disability Rights Commission for Northern Ireland";

(b) for "Secretary of State" in each place where it occurs substitute "Department of Health and Social Services";

(c) in subsection (6) for "Parliament" in the first place where it occurs substitute "the Assembly" and for "either House of Parliament" substitute "the Assembly";

(d) in subsection 7, for "either House of Parliament", "that House", and "Parliament" respectively, substitute "the Assembly" and for the words from "prorogued" to the end of the subsection substitute "or during which the Assembly has not sat for any continuous period of more than four days.".'.

Amendment No. 60, in page 37, line 10, leave out from 'State"' to end of line 33 and insert

'substitute "Department of Health and Social Services".'.

Amendment No. 62, in page 39, line 20, leave out from beginning to end of line 8 on page 40 and insert—

'16. In section (*Investigations by the Council: procedure*), for "Secretary of State" substitute "Department of Health and Social Services".

16A. In section (*Investigations by the Council: anti-discriminatory notices, etc.*)—

(a) in subsection (1), for "Secretary of State" substitute "a Northern Ireland department", and

(b) in subsection (2)(b), leave out ", or a sheriff court for an order,".'.

Amendment No. 63, in page 44, line 24, leave out '6'.

Amendment No. 64, in page 44, line 26, leave out '7(d) for "Treasury"' and insert

'6 and 7 for "Treasury" in each place where it occurs'.

Amendment No. 27, in page 45, line 43, at end add—

'29. In Schedule (*The Disability Rights Commission*)—

(a) in the heading, after "Commission", insert "for Northern Ireland.",

(b) for "Secretary of State" in each place where it occurs, substitute "Department of Health and Social Services";

(c) in paragraph 3 for the words from "the Commission" to the end of the paragraph substitute "the Commissioners are resident in Northern Ireland.";

(d) in paragraphs 9, 10, 11, 12 and 17 for "Minister for the Civil Service" or "Minister for the Civil Service and Treasury", substitute "Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland";

(e) for paragraph 19 substitute—

"19. In Part II of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975 (bodies of which all members are disqualified) there shall be inserted at the appropriate place the following entry:

'Disability Rights Commission for Northern Ireland'.".

(f) in paragraph 21(2)(b), leave out ", or a sheriff court for an order,";

(g) in paragraph 22(3), for "each House of Parliament" substitute "the Assembly".'.

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted with the growing support for our measures.

New clause 1 and the associated new clauses and amendments deal with the disability rights commission and go to the heart of the Bill. The first test of good law is whether it is enforceable: the Bill fails that test. Ministers have resisted a disability rights commission, despite the overwhelming force of the arguments in its favour—not least those expressed in Committee.

Why do not the Government listen even to Conservative Members? The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who has made distinguished contributions on the subject, made clear his view on Second Reading—and no doubt he will do so today if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He

[Mr. Clarke]

described the Government's proposals for an advisory council as opposed to an effective commission as insufficient, and he was right.

The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) suggested that something stronger than an advisory organisation might be required, and he called on the Minister to reconsider his opposition to a commission. We will learn tonight whether the Minister has paid any heed to that call, and whether, in the absence of any response, Conservative Members will join us in the Lobby voting for a positive response.

In *The Guardian* last Wednesday, Jonathan Kaye, who is a member of the Conservative party and has responsibility for disability policy in the Bow group, joined the chorus of support for a fruitful, powerful commission. He predicted that, if the Government do not create a commission now, they will be forced to do so in two years' time because the Bill will not work without one—a view with which I entirely agree.

Mr. Kaye noted that, under Government proposals, Britain will be the only country to pass such legislation without creating a suitable enforcement body to ensure compliance. He asked why a party claiming to be dedicated to law and order—as the Conservative party increasingly does—seems reluctant to provide the means to enforce a law. He asked why the Government have placed themselves in that unbelievable position. The Minister should try to give a convincing answer.

New clauses and amendments on the amendment paper include those in the names of the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon and for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), and propose to add to the powers of the national disability council powers similar to those that we propose for the disability rights commission. Conservative and Opposition Members are on common ground on that issue, and I hope that we go through the Lobby together at the end of this debate. That which matters more than anything else is not the name but the substance, and in substance we are agreed. The Bill needs more than any other improvement the establishment of a body with powers to investigate and to eliminate discrimination against disabled people.

The Government's proposals will not only make British law uniquely unenforceable by international standards but put disability discrimination in a new legal category at home. Models for anti-discrimination law exist, and legislation on discrimination on grounds of race or gender include provision for enforcement—and so they should.

That is the right road to follow, yet the Government have deliberately chosen not to follow it in respect of disabled people. They propose to give disability discrimination a lower status than race or sex discrimination. If the commission model works in other areas, it should work for disability, yet the Government ignore the existence of other models of anti-discrimination law at home and abroad. Parliament has provided the best protection that it can devise against race or sex discrimination, as it should, but it is asked to provide second-class protection for disabled people.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be far better to have just one commission named the commission for fair employment to deal with race, sex, disablement and other forms of discrimination—instead of establishing another miniature empire?

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman takes that view, it would have been more helpful if he had tabled an amendment or a new clause. His idea may sound progressive, but for that reason the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People would have resisted it. Even the logic that he promotes is not something that the Department would find appealing.

Disabled people should have more than just the law on their side—they need law enforcement. Our proposals would create a commission with a range of powers. The disability rights commission would be able to provide assistance, including financial and legal assistance, to disabled people seeking redress for acts of discrimination. That alone is profoundly important for what we regard as a free society. The commission would be able to carry out general investigations, to determine whether discrimination—including indirect discrimination, of which there is much evidence—was taking place and to encourage employers and service providers to comply with the law.

The commission would, where necessary, be able to bring proceedings to compel employers or service providers to obey the law. There is no reason why it should not. The idea squares with the Government's approach to many other matters, including race and gender.

We believe that the onus should not always be on disabled people to prove that they have suffered discrimination, or to take action to obtain a remedy. Alleged discriminators should be obliged to show that their practices comply with the law. Investigative powers for the commission will ensure that practices that discriminate are found out and remedied sooner rather than later. The very existence of such powers will encourage compliance with the law.

Most cases brought to the Commission for Racial Equality under the Race Relations Act 1976 are settled without the need to go to court. That is important to the overwhelming case for a commission. The Government appear to anticipate that the same will happen here—and we hope that they are right. But the point that they seem to miss is that most race discrimination cases are settled out of court precisely because the alleged discriminators know that the CRE has the powers to enforce the law, so they sensibly choose to comply at an early stage.

The disability rights commission would have a general duty to work towards the elimination of discrimination—as the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission do. This duty would involve promoting awareness of the profoundly important issue of disability discrimination. That would save many people and organisations from finding themselves in breach of the law in the first place. The commission would be free to initiate its own research and education in pursuit of its wider objectives. That too would allow it to achieve prevention rather than cure—an idea that should appeal to the Minister and the Government.

The powers that we propose are complementary. The commission that we envisage would quickly build up the necessary expertise to allow it to draft effective codes of practice and to recommend to Ministers practical improvements to the law. That is far more effective and efficient than the Government's approach. It is a way of promoting equality, instead of relying on complainants pursuing their cases, given that so many impediments are placed in their way.

The Commission for Racial Equality has found that

> "promotional work is greatly strengthened by the awareness of employers that, if it fails, formal investigations are possible . . . Guidance and codes are heavily based on the information that has come . . . through formal investigations and individual complaints."

Investigative powers and promotional duties go together, therefore, and form a coherent package which we propose and support. Disabled people want that package too, and for employers and service providers the existence of a credible national body with the authority to oversee and to enforce the law provides a clear point of reference and source of guidance for those who wish to know how to proceed.

The Institute of Personnel Development and the Employers Forum on Disability have both called for a national body with powers, status and resources equivalent to those of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. The CBI has also expressed disquiet about the lack of clarity in the plans for the Government's national disability council—in particular about whether it can carry out independent research, and about its interaction with the other equality commissions and the arbitration service ACAS. In the CBI's words:

> "The latter is particularly important given the potential complications arising from overlaps of jurisdiction in cases of compound discrimination".

That is a diplomatic and technical way of putting it.

8.15 pm

Let me put it another way: employers want to know what happens when an employee or job applicant is discriminated against more than once. For example, what happens when a disabled woman is refused promotion for no apparent reason? Most employers do not want to discriminate unfairly, and rightly want to ensure that their competitors do not obtain an unfair advantage by unfair discrimination.

The unacceptable answer is that, under the Government's proposals, a disabled woman will have much more effective redress if she suffered discrimination on account of her gender than if she did on account of her disability. If the former applied, the Equal Opportunities Commission might take up her case, provide her with legal and financial support, issue a notice of non-discrimination against her employer and impose financial penalties if the employer failed to co-operate—all laudable and practical steps. If the same disabled woman suffered unfair discrimination because of her disability, however, the Government-proposed national disability council would be able to do absolutely nothing.

The plain fact is that the council will be able to monitor discrimination but not do anything about it. It will be able to advise the Government in certain areas, but not to tell anyone if the Government choose not to follow its advice. It will be able to offer draft codes of practice, but only when asked to do so by the Secretary of State. That is simply not good enough. Disabled people want and are entitled to first-class protection under the law.

Lord Snowdon recently reminded me of what Martin Luther King said about discrimination:

> "Morality cannot be legislated, but behaviour can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrict the heartless."

With the benefit of 30 years' experience of race relations law in this country, we can and should go further in this area. Effective law can make unthinkable forms of discrimination that were standard practice only a generation before. Enforceable regulations can change the rules of the game and allow those who have suffered discrimination in the past the benefit of the level playing field to which they are entitled in a modern democracy.

A disability discrimination Act—even the measure before us, with all its weaknesses and omissions—can transform the prospects for disabled people in future generations, especially if it is accompanied by an effective enforcement body that can ensure its implementation and inform Ministers of what more needs to be done to make discrimination against disabled people a thing of the past.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have tabled new clauses 14 and 15 and amendments Nos. 52 to 59 to extend the powers of the national disability council. My objective is very much the same as that of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), but I proceed by a different route. Instead of seeking to establish a disability rights commission, I seek to build on the institution that the Government propose to create, the NDC. My amendments would extend the powers of the council. At present, its role will be purely advisory. The amendments would give it a role and powers that would be in line with those of the commissions that have been established under other equal opportunities legislation.

Why do I wish to extend the powers of the council? I do so because I believe that for us to create rights without providing the means to sustain them is a hollow act. The rights of disabled people and our support for them should be no less than the rights and support that we accord to our fellow human beings on grounds of race and gender. Any discrimination against people because they belong to a particular group or category is odious, dehumanising and deeply offensive to the principles of a liberal and humane society.

It is not good enough to leave disadvantaged people to use their exiguous resources to assert and gain their rights against others richer and more powerful than themselves. Major employers, such as those in membership of the Employers Forum on Disability, agree with that proposition. For example, British Rail and the Midland bank have observed that, without an enforcement agency, too many firms will continue to do what they want and what is convenient to them.

We have always accepted in Parliament that it is the role of the state to step in to protect the weak and the vulnerable from the abuse of power, whether exercised by mediaeval barons, mill owners, landlords, trade union bosses or the limited number of today's employers who insist on acting in a discriminatory fashion.

We should have a disability rights commission or a strengthened NDC. I do not mind what the body is called, so long as it does the job that it is needed to undertake. It must have powers to investigate and enforce.

We need a commission that has a strategic role, in the same way as the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. The legislative model

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

that we have in relation to those two bodies will serve us well in the establishment of the body that we need to sustain the rights of those who may experience discrimination because of their disablement.

Any such body should work with a light touch. No one wants a commission that bears down heavily and is excessively bureaucratic, excessively litigious and looking to interfere and to pick fights. I know that those are the fears of some of my hon. Friends, but I believe that they are very much misplaced. If my hon. Friends look open-mindedly and fairly at the record, they will recognise that that is so.

Nor is the organisation that I have in mind to be compared with the American Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which has a particular role that I do not propose for a strengthened NDC. The commission has a remit, I understand, to screen all cases that may come to court. It is much better to do as the Government propose and to provide direct access to tribunals and courts for complainants. The strengthened council's role would, in a sense, be more selective. It would always be seeking to advance the principle of equal opportunity and the unacceptability of unjustified discrimination. It would proceed by taking up cases where there was a special cause to do so—for example, because of their representative importance or because of the wider beneficial impact that its involvement in a case would have.

The need for that is vital, as are the other needs that have been acknowledged by my hon. Friend the Minister. There is a need for the Government to receive advice and a need for individual disabled people to be assisted by the adoption of practical remedies.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister has argued against a broader enforcement role for the commission or strengthened council on the basis that all disabled people are individuals and disabilities are unique. That is true, but we wish to act against the evil of unjustifiable discrimination, which occurs in an all too regularly repeated range of ways.

I shall give the House an example. Where there are medical screening procedures with overly restrictive criteria, a procedure that is simple in itself will act differentially and, in effect, involve indirect discrimination. If an organisation has a broad-brush policy, it is wrong to require individuals who may be unfairly affected by discrimination to seek an individual remedy.

I am assured that the Post Office—I was surprised and disappointed to hear this—has a policy of not allowing its employees who have diabetes to drive its vehicles. It is not against the law for diabetics to drive, but the Post Office has adopted a blanket policy. That is my information. If what I have said is incorrect, I shall apologise and readily withdraw. I am advised on good authority, however, that what I have said is, indeed, the position. The Post Office does not make an individual assessment of the ability of an employee who has diabetes to drive its vehicles.

The Post Office's policy seems unreasonable, especially as it does not apply the policy to someone who was diagnosed as diabetic before 1984. The policy seems to be comprehensively confused. That is surely a good instance of a broad employment issue in an enormous organisation which a disability rights commission or a strengthened NDC could usefully investigate.

Mr. Pickthall: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I am insulin dependent and know a little about what he is saying. I had not thought of myself as disabled. It is important to understand that the licensing authorities will not allow the driving of public service vehicles by diabetics. That is true of the fire brigade and of heavy goods vehicle drivers, who automatically lose their licence if they become insulin dependent. They can apply for the restoration of their licence after a period, but it is extremely rare for such a driver to regain his licence.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was interesting and helpful. We are clearly in debatable territory. It seems eminently suitable for a public-spirited and expert agency to investigate it and to consider what the appropriate criteria may be, and to make recommendations, if it judges that necessary, for improved employment policy or, possibly, improved legislation.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will note that the body that has instilled that practice is under Government direction. Does he agree that it is important that the Government do something to change that direction?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He makes the point well. The Government have a responsibility to promote good employment practice throughout our economy and society, especially where large public service organisations are involved.

Let me give the House another instance where a commission could usefully be involved. I am advised again—on the evidence of a consultant psychiatrist writing in *The Lancet*—that it is the policy of some health authorities not to employ anyone with epilepsy. That seems quite extraordinary and to my mind is disgraceful and indefensible. If an employer does not take a rational view of the nature and prognosis of epilepsy, a disability rights commission or a strengthened national disability council, could look at the issue—for example, in health service employment—and make recommendations.

Mr. Devlin: Hang on a minute. Suppose a local health authority or health trust were to be sued by a patient for the results of an epileptic attack during a medical procedure, how would the national health trust justify itself to the patient in those circumstances?

Mr. Howarth: It is interesting that practice between health authorities is very different. Some health authorities—to my mind in this particular respect, the better employers—look carefully at the individual circumstances and the health of particular people whom they might employ, and they do not invariably take the view that there are no circumstances in which they could responsibly employ someone with epilepsy. There may well be certain responsibilities than an epileptic should not be expected to carry out, but I do not think that my hon. Friend, on reflection, would really wish to argue that there are no jobs in the health service that someone with epilepsy could reasonably be expected to perform.

8.30 pm

What my hon. Friend says bears out my contention that we badly need an intelligent, expert body charged with the responsibility to help us to evolve good practice in such fields. It seems to me that the system that my hon. Friend the Minister envisages would place unreasonable demands on individuals affected by such discrimination. Certainly, if the individual is left to fend for himself or herself, to try to establish his or her own rights, that will not help adequately to generalise good practice. Indeed, we may be left with a series of piecemeal, confused—even contradictory—resolutions by different industrial tribunals.

It is tempting for employers in the unhappy situation where they have to make redundancies to look for rather simple rules of thumb, to look for simple criteria, for example, rates of absenteeism. If that is to be the criterion for selecting those who are to be made redundant, it is all too likely that it will bear heavily on people who have good cause to be absent, because they need medical appointments. Those people have valid reasons, because of their condition, to be away from work from time to time. Again, that seems to be the kind of problem with which a commission could deal.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The absenteeism rate of people with disabilities is normally lower than that of others because disabled people are so exceptionally conscientious.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I accept her implied chiding.

Let me give one instance of the useful work that the Equal Opportunities Commission carries out. I refer to its investigation, the results of which were published in March this year, into employment agencies. The EOC found that there was indeed widespread sex stereotyping, and opportunities were restricted for all too many people. If individuals had been simply left to take their own cases in this matter to tribunals, they would not have had access to the knowledge and experience that the EOC had.

If some of those individuals had been successful in bringing their cases, I still do not believe that the outcome would have been sufficiently generalised to influence practice in the way in which an EOC investigation is able to do. Within five days of the EOC report being published, 250 organisations contacted it for further advice. I would like to see such opportunities and developments occurring in respect of disability.

The EOC and the Commission for Racial Equality provide invaluable advice to businesses. Similarly, advice and help will be needed in the disability field—certainly advice and help that go beyond what I believe, with the best will in the world, the placement, assessment and counselling teams or, indeed, citizens advice bureaux, will be able to provide. The citizens advice bureaux do a marvellous job in advising citizens on how they may find remedy for their grievances. I do not think that the CAB would wish to be entrusted with the major role of advising employers on what proper practice should be.

I very much welcome the Government's commitment to remove the restriction in the National Assistance Act 1948 on the provision of direct payments to disabled people. It always seemed to me to be an unfortunate provision. I recognise the complexity of what will be entailed, however. I was sorry that my right hon. Friends felt unable to incorporate in the Bill a clause that would at least have cleared away the legislative roadblock to further detailed progress. That is one more example of where I believe that a commission would be helpful.

There will, indeed, be much to be thought about, to be considered carefully and to be learnt from subsequent experience. My amendment No. 45, which has been selected, says that the national disability council should have a duty to advise on policy developments in a range of fields, apart from employment. That is one such instance in which it could play a valuable role. I hope that, in due course, it will do so.

I have proposed that the national disability council should be given additional powers. The strengthened national disability council should have wide powers to provide assistance to people who complain of discrimination. It should have broad law enforcement powers, including the ability to conduct formal investigations and to take certain forms of legal action in its own name. It should have the power to conduct formal investigations either to examine whether a particular organisation is discriminating or to promote equal opportunities within a specific area, such as the practices of employment agencies, to which I referred just now, or estate agents. It should have the power, in specified circumstances, to issue non-discrimination notices and to make recommendations about improving practices to specific organisations.

It should have the power to apply to the court for orders restraining persons from persistent discrimination. It should have the power to draw up codes of practice, subject to approval by the Secretary of State and Parliament, and to make recommendations for the improved operation of the law.

The existence of a national organisation, able actively to promote equality of opportunity, both through advising organisations and through taking legal action in specific instances where necessary, is crucial to developing our culture, to changing entrenched attitudes and to working effectively towards removing the patterns of discrimination which still disfigure our society, and which my hon. Friend the Minister deplores as much as I do.

It is important to recognise that the various powers, duties and activities that a strengthened council would undertake are mutually interdependent. They would reinforce one another. The capacity of the council to carry out successful investigations and to make valuable recommendations will depend on the accumulation of its practical experience: in advising individuals and in taking individual actions, as well as its broader overview.

It is through operating the totality of their responsibilities that the CRE and EOC have been able to build up the expertise that then makes it possible for them to draft effective codes of practice and recommend practical improvements to the law. It is not only the Government or the individual who is the victim of discrimination who would benefit from that, but organisations of many sorts, especially businesses.

The credibility and the depth of experience that the existing commissions possess enable them to work pro-actively to remove discriminatory barriers and to promote equality of opportunity. They wish to do that and, almost invariably, they indeed do so in a conciliatory manner. It is not their desire to seek recourse to the courts.

[Mr. Howarth]

However, the existence of a strategic enforcement power enables the commissions, when necessary, to influence recalcitrant individuals and organisations as, sadly, is necessary from time to time. I am certain that that long-established mode—we now have 20 years' experience of it—is effective and efficient and would be more so than what the Government propose in respect of disability, which is to rely solely on individual claimants, if they are driven to it and if they can manage to do so, having recourse themselves to legal remedies.

As the hon. Member for Monklands, West said, that is why organisations such as the Employers Forum on Disability and the Institute of Personnel Management have called for a national body to oversee the operation of disability law, with powers, resources and status equal to those of the EOC and the CRE.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is willing to reconsider his position. I feel strongly that if we do not have either a disability rights commission or a strengthened national disability council, there will remain a hole in the heart of the Bill—a Bill that represents an enormous advance, for which my hon. Friend the Minister should be personally congratulated. I hope that he will recognise this necessity, and be able to persuade our right hon. and hon. Friends of the necessity, of completing the task that he has set himself.

Mr. Wigley: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, not only to new clause 1, which I support, but to new clause 17, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friends. I am grateful to Madam Speaker for including my new clause in this group.

My new clause provides for the position in Wales, but before discussing that I want to deal with the generality and to follow the remarks of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). We all know from our constituency surgeries and from work in our own areas of the difficulties and frustrations faced by disabled people and their families because they cannot get what they need, what they know they need and what they feel they have a right to have.

Our challenge is to make the Bill meaningful for them; for it to be more than just a tablet of stone that says, "Yes, you have a right, but you cannot have that right delivered to you." The Bill needs to be accessible to them, usable by them, understandable, comprehensible, sensitive, quick acting and within reach. It also needs to be effective—and for it to be so, I cannot but feel that there needs to be more than the council provided for in the Bill.

The danger is that the council may well give good advice, may well look at the generality of the scene and may be able to help individuals with conciliation services and so move their cases forward, but when it comes to the really hard cases, the ones that conciliation cannot crack, stronger measures may be needed. Existing bodies already try a conciliation process. For example, disability organisations such as RADAR, Mencap and Scope play their role within their client groups to try to get answers to problems. The citizens advice bureau does the same. Numerous agencies try, on a voluntary basis, to get people together to solve the problems, but fail to do so.

8.45 pm

I could cite individual cases in my area. In earlier debates, I have mentioned people with disability not being able to get work and not knowing where to turn to get the support that would ensure that the discrimination practised against them was set aside and that they got the opportunities they deserved. I know of a case in the Swansea area, which has been running for some months, of a family with a disabled son who need substantial adaptations to their house. That is within the power of the local authority's grant-making structures, but the machinery is not working and is highly unsatisfactory. There was a need for somebody to get in there and sort it out, but it was only when one of the voluntary sector bodies began to play it rough that the problems began to be sorted out, although they are still not totally sorted out.

In one of our earliest debates on civil rights, I cited the case of a cinema in Cardiff that would not allow access to someone in a wheelchair because of the difficulties should there be a fire. We have heard all that before. We need a body to which people who have been treated in that way can turn and which they know will take action on their behalf and make it stick. They need to know how to get access to such a body.

With all the good will in the world, the council, as it is described and defined in the Bill, will be much too passive a body. It will need to have teeth. Although it may be in only a small minority of cases that people need to go to court—the last thing I want to do is to give money to lawyers on either side of the argument—the ultimate sanction of being able to go to court, with an Act of Parliament behind them, must be significant for those who are trying to enforce all the other rights embodied in the Bill and the further rights that we want built into it now or at a later stage.

If we are to overcome discrimination in employment, leisure services, the provision of facilities, transport and education, there must be a cast-iron guarantee. Without one, people will not have the confidence to come forward. They need to be sure that someone is there who will make sure that their case is heard.

Having referred to the generality, and having expressed my support for new clause 1 and the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, I want to deal with my new clause 17, which provides for the establishment of a disablement commission for Wales. Such a body is needed; Wales specifically needs to have the structure of a commission, with the rights outlined in the new clause. The same case can be made for Scotland, and I am aware that new clause 19, tabled by the Scottish National party, provides for a similar body in Scotland. However, I shall confine my remarks to Wales.

I believe that such a body in Wales is necessary for three or four reasons. First, there is a high level of disability in Wales—some 300,000 disabled people. The profile of disability has, to some extent, grown out of our industrial past. The characteristics of that manifest themselves in, for example, the high level of invalidity benefit in Wales, which is some 50 per cent. higher than it is in other parts of the United Kingdom. There is a high level of need in Wales, which I am sure Welsh Members of Parliament from all parties recognise.

Secondly, the Welsh Office in Wales has a one-stop-shop function for a number of critical responsibilities relevant to disability. It has responsibility for health, social services, education, employment, housing and planning. All those functions are relevant to disabled people. I have heard friends in the voluntary sector in the west midlands say how sorry they are that they do not have such a government structure that brings those various facets together to develop disability policy.

No doubt the existence of the Welsh Office enabled Wales to take strides that, I think, were not taken elsewhere in the early 1980s, when Nicholas Edwards was Secretary of State for Wales. The all-Wales strategy for mentally handicapped children and adults was a significant advance. Other advances have been made in Wales in other aspects of disability. We must have a body that relates to public policy, as has already been developed in Wales under the structure in the Welsh Office.

It is equally important that an interface exists between local government and either the commission, which the new clause would give us, or the council, which the Government have put forward. A new local government structure comes into force in Wales in April next year. The elections are in May of this year. That unitary structure throughout Wales will again bring together at local level all local government departments that deal with disabled people—social services, housing, education and planning. Again, a close working relationship should exist between what we would call the disablement commission for Wales, or the council as the Government would put it, and local authorities. No interface exists in the Government's model, but it is provided for in subsection (2)(a) of new clause 17.

We believe that it is important that that interface exists and that there should be a close working relationship between the commission and the voluntary sector. Goodness knows, in the world of disability, the voluntary sector is vital. In the past 20 years, that sector in Wales has reorganised itself to shadow the Welsh Office. There used to be a Mencap in north Wales, north-west England and south Wales. Mencap in Wales was established to respond in a strategic manner—I use the words "strategic manner", which were mentioned earlier—to disabled people's needs.

That is equally relevant in relation to the disablement commission for Wales, for which we are pressing. Coterminosity and co-operation on a day-to-day basis should exist between that body and the voluntary sector. It can be the provider of links with individuals. It can be part of the fine tuning of policy that is needed for feedback to go through to the Welsh Office and to the Secretary of State, as would happen on a general level in London.

One additional dimension is covered in subsection (12) of new clause 17. In the event of a parliament or legislative assembly for Wales, which is likely to happen after the next general election within a year or two—*[Interruption.]* I see the Under-Secretary of State for Employment smiling. He may feel that the Conservative party will win the next general election, but opinion polls suggest otherwise.

When such elected bodies are set up in Wales and Scotland, there will be a question of answerability. The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is not here but, equally, I suggest to him that his model should include provision to ensure that such a structure is answerable to a Scottish or Welsh Parliament or Assembly. A close working relationship must exist with the decision-taking mechanism that affects disabled people. In the Scottish model, most of the powers would be devolved to a Scottish Parliament and, in the Welsh model, to the Welsh Parliament or Assembly. Those ideas are on the cards.

Any commission must be close to the people whom it is serving and who are taking decisions on a day-to-day basis. It should not be remote or faceless. We have felt the lack of a race discrimination structure in Wales. Some cases have been followed in an unfortunate way because of that lack. Developments are afoot to try to overcome that. We have recently established the Welsh Language Board. For many disabled people, the language dimension must be taken on board. An interplay exists between language ability and provision of services, not least in relation to speech therapy services, which are often inadequate.

Those are the reasons why we introduced our new clause 17. We want to ensure that there is a commission in the context of Wales. We would equally like the new clause moved by the hon. Member for Monklands, West to be brought into effect after Report. The Government may succeed in withstanding the new clauses in this group, but I hope that the Minister will say clearly how the council, as he has envisaged it, will interface, in Wales and in Scotland, with government structures. I accept that he may not go down the road of envisaging the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly, but how will his council make adequate provision for the needs of Wales with the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office, the different local government structures, and the voluntary sector? There appears to be no provision on that in the Bill. That perhaps was not given an adequate airing in Committee.

If the Government, after considering the debate tonight, withstand our attempt to write in new provisions, will they at least say that some fine tuning is necessary in the other place to ensure that the structures that arise are responsive to regions such as Wales, where circumstances are slightly different and where we need the mechanisms to respond to that? Then and only then will disabled people in Wales receive the full benefits of the legislation that we are enacting. There is a responsibility on us to ensure that that takes place.

Mr. Devlin: In new clause 1, we have a foretaste of what would come if a Labour Government were ever elected. In the past, Labour Members have made a general onslaught on quangos throughout the country. Representing a constituency that is covered by an efficient quango—the Teesside development corporation—I know that such attacks are regularly on their lips. Despite that, tonight they are trying to establish yet another regulatory body to go along with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. I am not sure that that is in the interests of the country or of disabled people.

The country is very much over-regulated. People constantly complain about the European Community coming in and interfering, in the niggly way that it does, with a range of regulation and red tape. They feel that the country is gradually being ground to a halt under a great burden of regulation. I do not wish us to have yet more interfering commissions to regulate the affairs, business and every other feature of life. Some hon. Members may be keen to make well-intentioned changes, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that disabled people are possibly the most regulated group in

[Mr. Berry]

the country by virtue of the fact that they are denied access to transport, jobs and leisure opportunities? Would it not be nice to deregulate life for them?

Mr. Devlin: Yes, it would be very nice. I have been a member of the all-party disablement group for many years. I have examined many different ways in which these things could be done. I do not see that to create yet another commission is the right way to go about it.

When I asked a question of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who is not here any more, I said that perhaps the best way forward would be to merge the existing two commissions, put the further commission in with it and create a single commission called something like the fair employment commission. To carry on building yet more bodies which will turn out to be great empires of bureaucracy, officials and inspectors with investigating powers issuing codes of practice will create yet another industry all by itself.

I have seen the Equal Opportunities Commission, and in particular the Commission for Racial Equality, in action. They take the attitude that anyone who does not agree with the positive discrimination measures that they suggest is politically incorrect and to be treated in an offhand manner.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Devlin: No. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already, and he did not make a good point then.

The House should be wary of creating any more such bodies. I dealt with a complaint to the Commission for Racial Equality not many months ago. The initial reaction was negative, even though my constituents had a perfectly valid point. They wanted to know why there was positive discrimination in respect of Asian women in a particular situation. The next thing we knew, there was some fobbing off comment in the local press. People got angry about it and the whole thing became ridiculous, simply because the people in the commission would not accept that there was another point of view which should be treated in a valid and sensible way. I wonder whether we would not be going down the same road with the disablement commission which has been proposed by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

I listened with great care to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who always makes eloquent and impressive speeches. I have known him for a long time—since he was at the Conservative research department. I know how well informed he is and how much he cares about disabled people and the voluntary sector. I was worried when I heard him say that the commission should work with a light touch. It should not be bureaucratic, overbearing or self-advancing—I think that those were the words that he used.

My experience of the two commissions is that that is precisely what they are—bureaucratic like nobody's business, overbearing, intrusive and self-advancing in every aspect of life. If we set up another commission, having had experience of the two commissions, we will find ourselves in yet further trouble.

9 pm

Mr. Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Devlin: I do not wish to detain the House for long.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Devlin: I give way to my hon. Friend, because I mentioned him.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is kind. He has explained to the House why he does not think that it would be a good idea to have a disability rights commission. He is a lawyer. He will undoubtedly have a commitment to justice. If he does not think that a commission is a good way to promote justice and insists on seeing a commission as only a regulatory body and not a suitable agency to promote justice in our society, what constructive means does he propose?

Mr. Devlin: If we are to advance further rights for disabled people, which is the purpose of the Bill, we must encourage them to use the court system if they find themselves prejudiced in any way. As my hon. Friend says, I am a lawyer. Rights are enforceable in the courts of law.

I should like to see, and I am sure that the vast majority of my constituents would like to see, legal aid given to deserving disabled people taking action against bad employment practices rather than handed out to the Maxwell brothers or to people who want to sue the tobacco industry, having spent their entire life smoking and knowing the risk. There is a great deal that we could do with legal aid to make it more accessible to people so that we could make the justice system work rather than allow it to be the perquisite of people who could afford to pay lots of money.

In my time at the Bar, I took a percentage of cases for nothing because I believed that poor people who cannot afford to go to law should be able to do so and be represented at tribunals. I have appeared before medical appeals tribunals and other tribunals for nothing. That is the way it has to be if we are not to reduce the ludicrous charges which are passed on to the consumer of law.

Mr. Pickthall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Devlin: No. I am sorry. I have taken two interventions. I am trying to keep my speech short because I know that many hon. Members are anxious to have a go. If the hon. Gentleman wants to debate law with me, I will be happy to do so in a debate on a more appropriate piece of legislation.

The debate tonight is about whether we should have a commission for disabled people. I firmly believe that we should have no more commissions and that the commissions that we have should be merged. We should have something like a fair employment or equal employment rights commission. We should have no more extra bureaucracies, no more inspectors, no more codes of practice. Let us leave the people of this country to get on with the serious business of creating wealth and adding to the value and quality of life in our country.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Again, I follow the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) who, as before, made well-informed, highly principled and strongly persuasive speeches. I also wish to say a brief word about the speech by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). The House ought to be grateful to him for letting us hear in this debate the authentic voice of Conservative opposition to the very concept of a disabled rights commission.

Having brought to this House more legislation on disability than anyone else—all of which has stood the test of time—I offer the present Minister a word of well-meant advice. It is that nothing does more to damage to the reputation of a Minister or to that of this House than to enact legislation that cannot be enforced. That is what could happen in the case of this Bill if the Government persist with their proposal for a mere advisory council in place of what we propose in new clause 1. My inclusion in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill of provisions for a strong commission to enforce the Bill's other provisions was to avoid the serious danger of unenforceable legislation.

Nothing upsets the disability organisations more than the Government's refusal give disabled people in this Bill the same protection against discrimination as the law already affords to women and to ethnic minorities. They cite that as proof positive that, in their Disability Discrimination Bill, the Government are offering only second-class rights to second-class citizens. The Minister must have heard that statement from the disability organisations, as all of us have heard it from them in their condemnation of the Bill for failing to confer full citizenship on disabled people.

The Government said year after year that to legislate on discrimination against disabled people would lead to a lawyers' paradise; that there would be a glut of litigation. But the disability rights commission we propose is about reducing, not provoking, litigation. It is about keeping differences within bounds, not about encouraging litigation. Disabled people are not looking for avoidable trouble. They have enough problems to contend with already.

The Government's Bill provides only for an individual to take an action at a tribunal or in the county court, but there will be issues to be determined that affect whole groups of disabled people and that a disabled rights commission could tackle in a constructive way. As I said at an earlier stage of the proceedings on the Bill, the Government's proposal for an advisory council is, in the words of Sir Peter Large, a whey-faced ghost of what is required.

Not only does it lack teeth: it enjoys no life of its own. It can act only in response to summonses of the Secretary of State. Its subservience is blatantly obvious in that it will be specifically excluded by statute from even daring to offer advice on any of the important issues covered by the Government' Bill. In saying that, I was reflecting the opinion in the organisations of disabled people. They reject the national disability council, and they want, in its place, the disability rights commission for which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill provides.

The Government's attitude has not basically altered since an hour-long meeting I had with the Prime Minister after the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was first talked out in January 1992, for which the then Member for Kingswood had to make a personal statement of apology for misleading the House. The Prime Minister said to me at our meeting:

> "The proposal for a Disability Rights Commission sits uncomfortably with the Government's policy of deregulation."

That is what he said and what the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) has said again tonight. I repeat that the hon. Member has given the House tonight the authentic Conservative view to the very concept of a disability rights commission.

Mr. Barnes: The view of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) was so strong that, logically, he should also oppose the national disability council. Even though we think that it is a limited measure, it has certain functions to fulfil and considers such things as codes of practice put to it by the Secretary of State. That is the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position, and he should oppose the Government's Bill.

Mr. Morris: I welcome the opportunity to pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friend, who has done marvellous work in carrying on the battle to enact the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I am absolutely certain that, if his energy and commitment can turn that Bill into law, then the battle between the two Bills is not yet over by a long chalk.

I agree with the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). The lives of disabled people are very heavily regulated by the limitations imposed upon them by their disabilities. They want their very lives to be derogated by a disability rights commission with the full powers of enforcement.

I return to what the Prime Minister said about the commission being inconsistent with the Government's policy of deregulation. If that is the case, then so is the Equal Opportunities Commission. That also sits uncomfortably with the Government's policy of deregulation. So does the Commission for Racial Equality. That sits uncomfortably with the Government's policy on deregulation as well.

So I use this debate to warn the millions of people who benefit from the Equal Opportunities Commission and from the work of CRE that there is an implied threat to the EOC and the CRE in what the Government are saying about our disability rights commission. I hope that people other than disabled people will wake up to the significance of this debate. I hope that they will recognise that the bodies that exist to protect them are in danger if we cannot protect the proposal that we are making for a similar body to protect disabled people.

There are many views about what precisely it was that plunged this Government to their unprecedented unpopularity last year. Different Members will have different views about that phenomenon, but all of us here should listen to the views of others as well as to our parliamentary colleagues.

In Wales the week before last, in the constituency of my good and hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), I was in discussion with constituents of his who work in the professions supplementary to medicine. Let me confide to the Minister that they were in no doubt why the Government's standing plummeted to an all-time low last year. They agreed without exception that nothing did more to damage this Government than their wholly scandalous treatment of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

They were disgusted, like millions of other people all over Britain, that such a Bill could lead to three Members of Parliament having to make personal statements of unreserved apology for misleading the House of

[Mr. Morris]

Commons about the Bill. The best way to make good for their malfeasance is for the Government now to concede what the organisations of and for disabled people want from this debate. They want, like the vast majority of other people want, a strong and effective Disability Rights Commission that will fully enforce their rights.

The House knows my views on unfair discrimination against disabled people. It is that such discrimination is morally wrong, and that what is morally wrong ought no longer to be legally permissible. That requires a strong and effective disability rights commission, and I implore the Minister not to persist in obstructing that vitally important safeguard for disabled people.

9.15 pm

Ms Lynne: I support the new clause, because of a desire to assist the Government in seeming consistent and logical.

The Bill reminds me a little of a cardboard cut-out policeman. It is cost-effective to start with, because it slows traffic and stops people speeding. Placed at the side of the road, it looks like a policeman from a distance and cars slow down. Everyone thinks what a great success it is, until they suddenly realise that it is a cardboard cut-out, and they will not be stopped or fined. Car drivers then ignore it and continue speeding. Without force, without compulsion or without legal sanction, the Bill will be as weak as that cardboard cut-out policeman. It is a public relations novelty with limited effect. Ultimately, unless we have a commission, it will appear to be ridiculous.

The Bill needs teeth. It needs a commission with the same monitoring and investigative powers as the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, both of which support the setting up of a disability rights commission. They demonstrate that we cannot rely on good will and good practice alone for equal opportunities legislation to be adhered to.

By introducing the Bill, the Government admit that education and persuasion simply have not worked, and that legal sanction is required. Why, then, do they introduce an advisory council, which is a neutered body whose remit is purely to advise? Might it be that they could not withstand the criticisms or see their failure to adhere to UK or European legislation? I appreciate that they may be resistant to it, but the overriding importance for any legislation we pass is that it be effective and adhered to; otherwise, what is the point of passing it?

To remain consistent with existing legislation and precedent, the Government must accept this new clause. Our constitution is an unwritten and unspoken acceptance of parliamentary trust, and it requires detail and clarity. Our laws need detail and clarity, but also force. The Bill will be simply academic and will lack credibility unless we have a commission to enforce it.

It was traumatic enough to start with; the Government were forced kicking and screaming into providing it, and they introduced it in a hurried and embarrassed way. Let us hope that, when it reaches maturity, as I assume it will, it will have a few more teeth and be a little stronger and healthier than it is today.

I hope that the Government will accept the new clause.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I support the new clauses moved by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and, at the same time, welcome the strength that they would give the Bill. It is good that the Minister has moved forward in positive ways. I hope not only that will he be able to accept the proposal in the new clauses and amendments, but that he will persuade his right hon. and hon. Friends to support them too.

The argument that we should deregulate was set forth by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). The harsh reality is that this Government have regulated more than they have deregulated. The areas in which they have pursued deregulation have been specifically connected with market forces, yet, if one considers the proposal for this advisory council, one notices that one of its main thrusts is that the council should deal with finance rather than with the specific needs of people who have been blatantly discriminated against.

Such a proposal comes rather strange from a Government who changed the Fair Employment Agency in Northern Ireland to the Fair Employment Commission. Indeed, it is fascinating that some people in Northern Ireland are agitating for the extension of the Commission for Racial Equality to Northern Ireland. So, in future, a Chinese woman may be able to raise issues of discrimination, but if she happened to be disabled, there would be absolutely no redress in law. Per head of population, however, Northern Ireland has a higher percentage of disabled people than any other part of the United Kingdom.

Considering the pressure on our time tonight, I simply urge the Government to think again. They have moved with the feeling so far and I welcome that, but I ask them to go a little bit further and to give us a commission, or a council with increased powers, which will strengthen the case of people with disability. Incidentally, it may be rather significant that the Northern Ireland Employers Forum for Disability has employed a person who once worked with the Equal Opportunities Commission in Northern Ireland so that it may forward the case of people with disabilities.

In other aspects of the Bill, one cannot find a scrap of evidence of support for the most deprived section of our community. If the views of the hon. Member for Stockton, South were accepted, those people would be in a fascinating position. Lawyers approached by disabled people could be dilatory in taking up their cases because they had a remit from the firm which could be sued for disability.

There is a place for an independent commission or a council with teeth to take up the rights of people with disability. I support, on behalf of my colleagues, the cry from the Conservative and Opposition Benches that the Government should accept such a proposal with good grace and go forward with vigour and power.

Mr. Barnes: There have been some important votes tonight and we shall have some important votes tomorrow on this Bill, but the most important of them all is that on new clause 1. If the disability rights commission were to be established, it would entirely transform the nature of the Bill. The Bill would still have imperfections if definitions were not put right, and whole areas of exemptions would not be covered, but agreeing to the proposal in new clause 1 is exactly what we should do.

There are two main factors about the disability rights commission. First, it has already been stressed considerably that it would be the key enforcement agency.

It is no use giving people rights, even if under this Bill they are restricted rights, and having no means by which we may begin to put them into operation. That would be a cruel deception, and we do not want the Bill to be guilty of that. Conciliation services, legal back-up and the other items described by Opposition Members and certain Conservative Members are the key elements.

The other thing that annoys the Government, and certainly annoys the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), is that the commission would be a dynamic force. In time, it would help to extend the areas covered by legislation, so that discrimination against disabled people did not take place.

The concept of reasonableness runs through the Bill, as it does through the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. What is reasonable now depends on current circumstances, the interpretation of the courts, back-up and understanding. That concept is not necessarily static, because the boundaries of its responsibility will be extended as fresh interpretations of that concept are made. The commission would have a key role in that regard. It would monitor, conduct research, issue reports and codes of practice, as well as publish annual reports which would be available to the House. The commission would push the fight against discrimination across different areas of responsibility.

Because of its intended work, that commission would come to realise that the Bill is subject to certain limitations and restrictions. In time, it would recommend that the enactment of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill represented the final required means of removing exemptions and clarifying definitions. The commission is the key to the Opposition's support for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, as distinct from the Government's stance.

The commission would not be bureaucratic, nor would it dominate and control, as the hon. Member for Stockton, South has suggested. It would make reports available to the House, which would then have the opportunity to investigate and respond to them. The House might even recommend that certain of the commission's notions should not be adopted, or that the direction of the commission should be altered.

The commission would do a service for disabled people; a service for others in society and a service to Parliament by resolving the problem of discrimination. A future Secretary of State for Social Security, of whichever party, will always need to be pushed and nudged to ensure that the concerns of disabled people are always before him or her at all times.

I hope that the key vote on the new clause will be carried, so that we are left with an entirely different Bill.

Mr. Hague: As hon. Members have explained, the large group of new clauses and amendments is intended to substitute a commission for the national disability council or provide that council with powers akin to those of a commission.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) reminded us that, if we pass legislation, we must ensure that means of redress and enforcement exist. I thoroughly agree that we must be confident of being able to enforce legislation that we pass. The Government have no interest, and I have no interest, in securing the passage of legislation that would not work in practice.

I believe, however, that the assumption that the creation of a commission represents the only means of approaching the problem is flawed. It is not the only way, and it is certainly not the best or most effective way, of providing for enforcement.

Hon. Members have maintained that disabled people need a commission with powers similar to the commissions that deal with discrimination in sex and race. We must decide whether disabled people will be best served by a single organisation with those powers. I ask the House to be open to the concept that there are other ways to provide for the needs of Government and Parliament to receive expert policy advice and for the needs of disabled people to be able to seek redress.

9.30 pm

There are other ways that will be highly effective in taking us towards our goal of ending discrimination that provide for much of the role carried out by commissions but are better suited to that purpose. They will be better suited because they recognise the need for a high-level organisation to advise Government about policy and to prepare clear, practical codes of practice for business and disabled people, and because they recognise and provide for the specific needs of disabled people for accessible mechanisms to resolve disputes. They will be more effective because they have been developed taking account of the social and economic circumstances of disabled people and business, and will provide technical assistance and the individual approach necessary to overcome discrimination against disabled people.

Before I discuss the Government's proposals, let me respond to one or two of the specific arguments made during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to employment policies in the Post Office and in health authorities. I cannot necessarily comment in this debate on the specific examples he gave, although I can tell him that the example that he gave of Post Office drivers with diabetes is one that I am pursuing in my role not as Minister for Disabled People but as Member of Parliament for Richmond, Yorks on behalf of a constituent. I have written as a constituency Member of Parliament to the Post Office and asked it for the basis of that policy.

The employers whom my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon mentioned would be required by the Bill to consider whether a reasonable adjustment might allow disabled people to work for them. My hon. Friend cannot sustain his argument by saying that employers such as the Post Office or the national health service would flout the law proposed in the Bill. Indeed, as he said earlier in another debate, legislation itself has a great declaratory force, and I think that, especially with organisations of that type, we would discover that it has great declaratory force. The question of whether the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency permits people with diabetes to drive certain types of vehicle is exactly the type of question that the national disability council may wish to consider and advise the Government on.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), with all the consistency and force of someone who sits in the House as a nationalist, made the case for new clause 17 and for a specific organisation for Wales. The Bill relates to the whole of the United Kingdom. Although there is considerable precedent for setting up a separate Northern Ireland disability council because of the different body

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of Northern Ireland legislation already in existence, and because Northern Ireland has its own advisory bodies such as the transport advisory committee and committees for the employment of disabled people, that is not true of the rest of Great Britain, where a unified approach has traditionally been taken to such matters.

I said in Committee that we intend that the national disability council will include members representing Wales, Scotland and England as well as the regions of England. Experience of other Great Britain organisations—and of the House, too—suggests that Welsh Members are well able to argue their point of view and to ensure that their interests are appropriately taken into account.

There are considerable benefits in one organisation taking a consistent approach in advising on the elimination of discrimination—for example, in ensuring that the best and most effective practice can be shared. We are not aware of a need for a separate Welsh or indeed Scottish organisation of any type. Of course, the national disability council will want to listen to the advice and the representations of local government throughout the country—throughout Wales, Scotland and England—and there is no reason why there should not be contact and discussion between the council and representatives of local government.

There are two reasons why people are asking for a commission to be created in relation to the legislation.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister regard the council as a fairly centralised body, or will it have offices not only in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast but in English cities, such as Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham and Leeds? What role will such offices have? It is vital that disabled people should feel that they are able to access a body that is close at hand rather than a remote body centralised in London.

Mr. Hague: I do not envisage that the body will have offices around the country, but I expect that it will take steps, through its membership and the way in which it organises its discussions and seeks information, to keep in touch with views from all over Great Britain—and, in the case of the Northern Ireland council, views from all over Northern Ireland. I agree with the hon. Member for Caernarfon that disabled people must have an easily accessible and available body to which they can turn for advice about the matters to which the Bill relates. I will return to that point in a few moments.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: No, I must continue with my speech. The hon. Gentleman and I have had many constructive discussions in Committee. I will give way to him later if time permits, but I wish to afford the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) the opportunity to respond to what I have said and to enable the House to reach a decision.

People seek a commission for two purposes: first, to give advice, follow progress and provide a forum and a focus of expertise; and, secondly, to help people to seek redress. As to the first purpose, I believe that our proposals for the national disability council provide for a strong and well-informed body that will advise the Government on issues relating to discrimination against disabled people.

It will be a powerful voice for disabled people that will focus on the wider issues, informed by the skills and experience of its members and by information collected by its advice and support services, to which I shall return shortly. It will also be assisted by research commissioned on its behalf and by consultation with existing advisory bodies. I am confident that it will fulfil the important advisory function every bit as well as a commission would and every bit as effectively as the National Council on Disability in America.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: To be fair to both sides of the House, I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is extremely generous. Will he explain to the House how he foresees the national disability council being able to provide advice of the reach and the quality that he requires if it does not have powers of formal investigation?

Mr. Hague: I have mentioned that it will have the range of information that is provided by research that can be commissioned on its behalf. It will be able to consult existing advisory bodies, information will flow from the operation of the advisory and support services and it will have the continuing day-to-day experience of its members—at least half of whom will be disabled people or their parents or guardians and all of whom will have a great interest in the matter. I do not think that the national disability council will be short of views, evidence and examples of what is happening around the country with which to inform its discussions about the future progress being made in tackling such matters.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I must carry on, as I wish to give the hon. Member for Monklands, West time to respond.

The national disability council's code of practice will be invaluable in providing clear and practical advice to disabled people and to business in what could potentially become a very complex area, given the vast range of businesses that will need to comply with the legislation and the varying and possibly conflicting needs of disabled people with different impairments.

Our proposals for the national disability council to prepare codes of practice clarify the responsibility of Government and the council, while permitting an open exchange of advice on which to base policy decisions. We have no wish to silence the voice of the national disability council. It will be open to its members to recommend, for instance, that a code of practice be prepared or that an existing code requires updating. The council will be a continuing, powerful voice that will speak to the Government and have its reports laid before Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I intend to ensure that the council's membership will be such that it will be in a strong position to be that powerful voice.

Some hon. Members advocated a commission not so much to provide advice to the Government and Parliament but to help people seek redress. The Government recognise that disabled people will have a need for advice and support, but that role does not have to be played by the same body that advises the Government on wider issues. The skills needed to advise individuals and to resolve disputes are in many ways different from those needed in giving advice and making policy recommendations.

The discrimination suffered by disabled people is different from that faced by others, and is unique. While the disadvantages may have a similar effect, it is too simplistic to suggest that the causes are the same as those that give rise to sex or race discrimination. The Bill recognises and seeks to address the wide range of causes of discrimination against disabled people.

It requires service providers and employers to go much further than they have had to do in the past to overcome discrimination against other groups. They are being asked to do more than change their attitudes to those commonly considered proper in a civilised society, as in other legislation. In this case, service providers and employers must act to ensure that their employment practices and their services are accessible to disabled people in the manner required by the Bill.

An important plank in ensuring that the Bill is enforced and effective is communicating its provisions properly to employers and service providers. The hon. Member for Monklands, West rightly spoke of the CBI's concern that clear and impartial advice should be available to employers both nationally and locally. We will discuss with the CBI and other business organisations how best to make such advice available. We will consult them on draft regulations and the operation of the legislation, and they will have an opportunity—as will other people—to comment on any codes of practice.

We know from the experience of the Americans with Disabilities Act how important it is to make information available as widely as possible. Despite all the commissions and enforcement bodies in the United States, several years after the enactment of the ADA, most of the public had not heard of it. In those circumstances, of course it is difficult to provide for enforcement.

I am determined to ensure that employers, service providers and traders across the nation will be in no doubt of what they are expected to do and why. As well as written guidance, we are considering freephone advice lines and other facilities so that employers and service providers can be sure of their responsibilities under the legislation. I am sure that the vast majority of them will want to act in accordance with the measure, provided that we make clear to them the measures passed by this House and the other place and the reasons for our doing so.

We are determined not only to communicate but to provide conciliation, advice and support. Because the Bill reflects the needs of disabled people, our proposals in those regards also take a different approach. In goods and services, we intend to provide a nationwide, locally available advice and support network whereby people can meet face to face if necessary, without travelling long distances—a point of particular concern to many disabled people.

That process will inevitably involve an exploration of the facts, and local knowledge could play an important role in bringing greater understanding to resolving disputes involving physical access. We also intend that a standard investigation procedure should apply throughout the country—service providers will welcome a consistent approach, which will consequently help to maximise the number of disputes which are settled in a spirit of co-operation. Where disputes cannot be resolved in this forum, there will be recourse to the courts.

The Employment Service will be able to help employers and disabled people to identify suitable adjustments at the workplace to overcome the practical effects of a disability. This should help to avoid many disputes arising in the first place. When a complaint is made to a tribunal, there will be access to the conciliation services provided by ACAS, which has many years of experience of conciliation on employment issues. Should these not reach a resolution, there will be access to industrial tribunals, which are tried and tested mechanisms for securing employment rights.

9.45 pm

I know that some hon. Members are concerned that the conciliation, advice and support services will not actually provide financial assistance in taking cases to industrial tribunals and courts; they fear, therefore, that disabled people will not be able to enforce their rights. I believe that those fears are unfounded. The procedures in both small claims courts and industrial tribunals are relatively simple. The decision makers in each institution are familiar with, and used to, ensuring that individuals are helped to present their case.

I would also, however, draw to the attention of the House the evidence of experience with other legislation. Experience of the Commission for Racial Equality suggests that the vast majority of cases are settled without recourse to legal action. Furthermore, of the cases brought to industrial tribunals under the Sex Discrimination Act, 90 per cent. are not assisted by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

I believe that our proposals will provide the assistance that disabled people will need without setting up the centralised bureaucratic monitoring and policing body proposed in new clause 1 and the amendments.

I also believe that conciliation, advice and support services will be more effective in achieving resolutions and encouraging employers and service providers to go that bit further to end discriminatory practices when they slip up. We cannot ignore the fact that this legislation, in giving new rights to disabled people, places considerable duties and obligations on business. It will need good guidance to comply with it—we shall give business that—and to increase its understanding and awareness of the needs of disabled people. This we intend to provide through extensive publicity, through guidance about the Act and through practical codes of practice.

I believe that the new rights can and will be enforced under the arrangements that I have set out, but that they could not be achieved without obtaining the good will and efforts of both service providers and employers. Another policing body could well prove counter-productive. A commission positioned entirely as an advocate for disabled people would not be best placed to encourage those efforts, and as such its success, in my view, would be limited.

I believe that the combination that I have set out will work. There will be a national disability council to provide continuing advice in the coming years to this House and to this and future Governments. Its membership will include strong representation of disabled people and of others with expertise. We shall make extensive efforts to communicate thoroughly with all those who have duties placed on them, to tell them what those duties are, why they have been placed on them and what, in detail, they are expected to do about them. In

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addition, there will be a locally available advice and support network, where people can talk to people who know the high street in question and who know the circumstances of the employer. All these provide the right combination and will encourage the right kind of attitude across the nation to ensure that the legislation works well in practice.

I therefore hope that the House will reject the new clauses and associated amendments.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The more I listened to the debate, including the Minister's speech, the more convinced I became that the rights of disabled people will be well served by the decision of the House to endorse new clause 1. It was moved from the Opposition Benches, but it became clear during the ensuing debate that the divide was not on cross-party lines. We heard the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), whose views we deeply respect, say that rights without means to sustain them are unenforceable. Nothing that the Minister and a handful of his hon. Friends have said has altered my view about the realism of the approach of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon.

The Minister has said otherwise. He has asked the House to ignore the American experience, to ignore what has taken place in Canada, Australia and New Zealand and to ignore the impact of the Equal Opportunities Commission on gender and race discrimination. Instead, he has asked us to embrace an advisory council that is still ill-defined and still promoted by a Government who are appallingly lethargic in advancing the rights of disabled people and their carers. Given the Government's record of talking out Bill after Bill which would have delivered genuine civil rights, the Government are on trial and I do not believe that they were convincing to a national audience.

We have heard some interesting speeches. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who makes such excellent contributions on these issues, seemed to be looking forward to a time when we have genuine subsidiarity—which I think that the Father of the House would endorse—in Scotland, Wales and elsewhere. Contrary to the Government's claim that they are handing power to people, the Minister struggled and struggled again in resisting the new clause. He failed hopelessly in his efforts to persuade 6.5 million disabled people, 7 million carers and those who are determined to embrace civil rights that their rights would be recognised.

It would be churlish not to admit that there was some support for the Minister's view. It did not come from organisations of disabled people or for disabled people. It did not come from the two commissions which exist to ensure that there are equal opportunities and no discrimination. It did not come from the Confederation of British Industry or from the Employers Forum on Disability. It did not come from the overwhelming majority of people who responded to the consultation document which was hastily published and submitted to the British people during a recess last year. There was no support from those organisations and people for the Minister's views.

There was support from the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin)—

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Devlin: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As the hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber during my contribution to the debate, I do not understand how he can comment on it.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman was attempting to intervene. It is up to the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide whether to allow another hon. Member to intervene.

Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have an efficient colleague in my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), who took the trouble to write down even that which was uttered by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin).

What was the hon. Member for Stockton, South saying? The overwhelming body of opinion which advised the Standing Committee that considered the Bill, and which advises the House, took the view that there was a case for a commission. The hon. Gentleman said that the Opposition were offering no more than a quango. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that a quango is indeed on offer in the Division Lobby today, but it comes from Ministers on the Government Front Bench, not from my hon. Friends or from Members of other parties, to whom I pay tribute.

Right hon. and hon. Members have travelled from all parts of the United Kingdom tonight to take part in a vital vote, and I welcome their presence. They are not here to support a quango. They say that, in the light of our experience and on the basis of everything that we have talked about today—education, vital though it is, transport, jobs and human rights—the Government have failed miserably in their attempts to reject the case for a commission.

It is true that the Minister said tonight, as he did this morning on BBC Breakfast News when he spoke from his ivory studio, as I sat elsewhere, recognising the rights that some of us will introduce in a few months' time—or no more than a few years' time—that we would not have a commission, as we rightly have for race and gender, but a little advisory body. He suddenly decided, almost as a flash of inspiration, when questioned on television, that the citizens advice bureaux would have a network of opportunity, which had not been mentioned hitherto in any of our discussions. That is an interesting development.

The Minister did not say that on Second Reading. He did not say it during the weeks of Standing Committee sittings. Not until this morning, and confirmed tonight, did he announce that he intended to depend so firmly on the activities of that admirable organisation, the CAB. I shall tell the House why he did not say it—

Mr. Hague *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Perhaps the Minister will allow me to finish.

Far from suggesting that our new clause is unworkable, the Minister knows that to make further demands on the CAB is unworkable, not least because of the staff reductions that have taken place from one constituency to another as a result of Government policy.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman and I, and our colleagues in Committee, discussed the Bill for five weeks earlier this year. In Committee, I set out my proposals and how they related to the CAB, and I explained the discussions in which the Government are currently engaged with them. Does the hon. Gentleman have no recollection of that at all? It was clearly set out in Committee.

Mr. Clarke: I have a full recollection of the ideas that the Minister floated as to the "options"—as he called them—that were before the Committee. Not only do I have a vivid recollection of the fact that there was no agreement, but I challenged the Minister—I will give way to him even in the closing minutes of our debate—to say whether the CAB agreed at any time to accept that responsibility. Of course they have not, because of the reductions in resources and manpower.

In a letter of 27 March, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux said to my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington:

> "As you know, NACAB strongly supports the call from many organisations for a Disability Commission to ensure enforcement of disabled people's rights. Without a body along the lines of the Commission for Racial Equality or the Equal Opportunities Commission, disabled people will find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to enforce their new (albeit limited number of) rights."

That does not sound to me like an organisation determined to co-operate with the new ideas that the Minister has produced.

I end by referring, not to hon. Members' important views—if they will forgive me—but to two recent opinions that have been expressed to me as I have travelled around the country, in support of the commission and of civil rights. A woman in Leicester told me last Friday, while sitting in a wheelchair, that her dream was to travel to London—something that she had never achieved and will not achieve because of the limited transport provisions in the Bill. A man from Birmingham told me that he had gone to see a film, as all of us are entitled to do, and was told at the door, "We have three wheelchairs here already." He replied, "I am not a wheelchair—I am a person."

On behalf of people like that—6.5 million of our fellow citizens—I plead with the House to endorse our new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 299.

Division No. 117] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. George Mudie.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John

Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

RAF Bentwaters

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): Before opening this debate, I would like to make a brief statement. I understand that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) criticised me on a point of order this afternoon for not formally notifying the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that I had arranged an Adjournment debate on a place within his constituency.

If the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes had done me the courtesy of notifying me of his intention, I would have been present in the Chamber to explain and apologise. He did not, so I must apologise now. I was not aware of that convention, and I would not have breached it had I known. I accept your strictures on the matter, Madam Speaker, and I apologise unreservedly to you.

The root of the matter is the question of the future of RAF Bentwaters. Its history—for those Members who are interested—is that, until 1993, there were up to 13,000 US service men based at Bentwaters. Their departure in 1993 had a significant economic impact across the whole of east Suffolk, including my constituency of Ipswich. All Suffolk Members should be concerned—I certainly am—about its future use.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cann: No, I will not.

The assets involved in Bentwaters include 1,000 acres of land, 77 homes, 41 flats, 1,000 apartments and 2 million sq ft of offices, industrial space and storage. It is a major asset for the future of east Suffolk and Ipswich, and it must be used properly.

One can imagine the concern that many of us felt when the decision was announced on 8 February that the Government proposed to sell the site—a valuable asset which could create hundreds of jobs—to an organisation known as the Maharishi Yoga Foundation.

The stated aim of the organisation is to achieve a 4,000-place university of natural law which would be accredited to proper universities and which would produce degree courses, each of which would involve twice-daily, 20-minute sessions of transcendental meditation which—for those not in the know—is bouncing up and down on one's backside while shouting out mantras for the security and well-being of the rest of us. The reaction of many people in my constituency was that they were—rightly, in my view—against the proposal.

First, it is unrealistic, as the projected university will not achieve accreditation. The Foundation proposes to make the dead father of the Maharishi himself the chancellor of the university in perpetuity, which gives many of us little faith in the future of the enterprise.

We should look at what the organisation has achieved previously. Mentmore Towers—a huge mansion—was sold to the Foundation in 1978, and there are only about 40 people in occupation of all of those rooms. There will be no economic gain to my constituency—or to the constituency of the grinning Secretary of State for the Environment—if the proposal goes ahead.

[Mr. Cann]

Secondly, Suffolk is one of the few counties in the country which has no university of its own. Many of us in Ipswich are working hard to try to achieve a university for Suffolk based on the existing Suffolk college in Ipswich, and anything misnaming itself a university within Suffolk will only cut against that legitimate aim.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cann: No, the hon. Gentleman will not give way. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is a Suffolk Member."] Suffolk Members turn up when Suffolk Members choose. They usually do so only to cause trouble, and never to support Suffolk.

I saw the junior Minister responsible, Lord Henley, to discuss the matter recently. I was assured that the price offered by the foundation was the best offered, and I accepted that. He further assured me that the Maharishi Yoga Foundation is—God knows how—a registered charity, and that its business plan fits the planning brief for the area. Therefore, he had no choice but to go ahead.

Since then, because of the publicity, I have received a deluge of letters from people all over the country—London, Birmingham, Yorkshire, the west midlands, Wales, Canada, the United States of America and Australia—telling me about what has happened when people have joined that organisation.

The gist of the letters is that young recruits are drawn into the cult—that is what it is—and are charged the earth, even for an introduction, never mind for taking the courses. They are promised peace and enlightenment through transcendental meditation, which involves chanting a mantra, bouncing up and down and pretending to fly, and jumping on to mattresses in the lotus position. They are told that, if they achieve the £3,000 course, which comes later, they will be able to fly properly, although they must never show anyone else that they can do so, and to go through walls—even thick ones, I am told—or, more importantly, they are told.

Some people may say that that is fair enough, and that it is a scam, but that is all. It is not all. The maharishi now controls a £2 billion empire from headquarters in Switzerland, with places in America and Skelmersdale and the one projected in Suffolk. Courses are sold at colossal cost to people who are taken in.

The cult pretends to provide medicines. Two members of the organisation—I was going to say the tendency—were struck off by the General Medical Council for selling medicines made of faecal matter to help people with acquired immune deficiency syndrome. They persuaded people to come off AZT, which is the medicine best known for helping people with AIDS. A long list of people have presented themselves to various organisations. After the organisation has dealt with people, they have to attend self-help groups because of mental damage, depression and epilepsy.

I am aware that some Conservative Members will not accept my word, so, with your permission, Madam Speaker, I will quote briefly from six of the letters that I have received, which I have offered to the Ministry of Defence.

This letter is from several people—one has a BA and another a PhD—who write:

"We know of one person in particular who, after practising TM"—

transcendental meditation—

"and teaching the subject for many years would have periods of catatonic states where she was unable to work or function properly for days at a time. Another boy suffered epilepsy after practising TM for several years and believes it to be the cause. Another branch of TM is the prescription and selling of certain 'medication', claiming to be Indian Ayurvedic medicine. Two English Doctors who were prescribing this medicine have now been struck off the medical register for attempting to cure people of diseases such as Aids with medicines which when examined in a laboratory were found to contain faecal matter."

Another letter reads:

"My own objections are based on the knowledge we have gained from those who have had first hand experience of the movement and its founder. A few years ago we met someone who was once one of the right-hand men of the Maharishi. He is now writing a book . . .

He has said that he saw how crooked and irreligious this so called 'holy man' actually is. He extorts money and takes the virginity of young female disciples; the family suffered loss of all their money and his wife was actually forced to have sex with the 'guru' under the pretence that it might be good for her spirituality. She became a manic depressive after using and teaching all the techniques of TM for some years. Finally desperate and ruined they left TM after realising that his wife had lost the will to live and that he had in addition to all this never found the enlightenment that he had been seeking.

Another friend of ours who is an ex-Barrister and well educated from a wealthy and established background was literally reduced to a barking, growling and totally degraded wreck. We saw this with our own eyes and were extremely shocked having had no previous preconceptions about this technique."

[Interruption.] I notice that the committed Christian on the Government Front Bench laughs about that technique.

Another letter is from a psychiatrist, who says:

"I am deeply suspicious of the motives of this group as I have had several patients who have been troubled with depression and in some cases epilepsy"—

letter after letter claims that epilepsy has been caused—

"subsequent to long-term practice of this 'meditation'.

The patients have had a feeling of being brain-washed by the group, which in some cases has taken years to shake off, despite the fact that the group purport to being an innocuous form of relaxation."

Another letter states:

"I have known a number of people, several of them close friends, who, having taken TM courses over a period of time, developed mental and physical problems, some of a subtle nature, and others . . . resembling symptoms of epilepsy. After an initial sense of wellbeing, depression, confusion and an inability to deal with day to day living were commonly experienced.

A substantial fee is charged for TM courses, especially for so-called 'advanced' courses and 'flying techniques' (which you may have seen demonstrated on . . . broadcasts some years ago). Through charging high fees TM has become an extremely wealthy organisation, while gradually destroying the wellbeing of its customers."

A psychiatric report published in 1976, entitled "Psychiatric Problems Precipitated by Transcendental Meditation", said:

"The first 'meditation casualty' I encountered was a 34-yr.-old woman who made a serious suicidal attempt following a weekend training course in Transcendental Meditation. Since then I have come across several people who allege that such meditation exacerbated their depressive affect. Similarly, several agitated, restive individuals have reported that the basic procedure of repeating a mantra"—

which is often a word like "teapot" in Indian—

"tended to heighten their ongoing tension and restlessness."

My final letter is from the mayor of Rantoul in Illinois, where the outfit tried to buy an ex-base. It says:

"This letter is in response to your request for information about the Maharishi organisation that we dealt with in Rantoul in 1992. It was a most frustrating experience and I am happy that we no longer are involved. Representatives of the Maharishi International University"—

which is what they call it over there—

"of Fairfield, Iowa, visited us and represented themselves as a reputable university. We gave them the benefit of the doubt for quite a while and shared with them our plans for re-use of Chanute Air Force Base which involves a diverse plan for some 2,500 acres of land.

We did find that MIU made many claims that they could not substantiate. They indicated that US News and World Report magazine had rated MIU among the top universities in the United States. A check with US News revealed this not to be true."

Hon. Members who represent Suffolk will recognise the kind of thing that they are being told by that organisation.

The letter went on:

"When the time came for anyone to make application to obtain any of the CAFB properties, MIU ignored completely any of Rantoul's plans for redevelopment, and contrary to any of their discussions with us, they applied for the entire base property.

We found them not to be what they professed at all. They are interested in obtaining lots of property at no cost and excluding anyone not associated with the mediators."

Since receiving those letters, I have written to the Secretary of State for Defence, and sent a copy to the Secretary of State for the Environment. The letter was dated 7 March but, to date, I have not had the courtesy of a reply from the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cann: No. The right hon. Gentleman would not let me in on a previous occasion.

Mr. Gummer: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman said that he has not had the courtesy of a reply. He wrote to me but did not include the letters that he claimed to include. He has given me no notice of tonight's debate nor informed me of anything else that he has done. Moreover, he has not apologised to me this evening. [HON. MEMBERS: "He has."] He has apologised to you, Madam Speaker, but not to me. He has shown discourtesy throughout this whole performance, and he now suggests that I have not replied to his letter.

Madam Speaker: I dealt with that matter on a point of order earlier today.

Mr. Cann: I reiterate that the Secretary of State for the Environment has not replied to my letter. I understand that the Secretary of State for Defence has not replied, because he has a Minister here to respond in person, which I appreciate.

This Adjournment debate is an attempt to bring something out into the open which has been dealt with consistently behind closed doors in the Ministry of Defence. What we are dealing with is not what we initially thought it was—just a matter of economic regeneration in my area of the country. It is not only a matter of the future use of a base. We are talking about Her Majesty's Government, wide-eyed and open, selling the base to a cult which, as we all know, like all other cults, is inherently unstable.

If anybody had said that Waco meant wacko before it happened, they would have been accused of trying to scare everybody. If anybody had talked about Jim Jones and what went on in Guyana, where 400 people poisoned themselves with cyanide at the behest of the head of that cult, they would have been accused of exaggerating. Indeed, they would have said the same of what happened recently in Switzerland.

Are we sincerely—this must surely go across the political divide—considering putting this property in the hands of a cult which will attempt to pull in 4,000 young people? If it is possible that the cult will pull in youngsters to be indoctrinated at Bentwaters, as has happened in the rest of the world, where the cult has pulled in 4,000 youngsters who did not quite make it to a proper university, who were desperate and whose parents could afford to pay, I cannot believe that the Government would dream of allowing that sale.

I know that the Government cannot possibly say no to it tonight, but I hope that they can see their way clear, for goodness' sake, to reviewing the matter before the final signature goes on the contract.

10.31 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for allowing me one minute to speak in this debate.

I have listened carefully to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann), and I welcome the fact that he has apologised to you, Madam Speaker. I noticed, however, that he did not feel able to apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, in whose constituency affairs the hon. Gentleman has been meddling for some time.

The hon. Member for Ipswich did not say whether this debate was just a publicity stunt, although that is the most charitable interpretation that we may put on his actions. The hon. Gentleman did not say why he did not advise my right hon. Friend of his visit to the constituency of Suffolk, Coastal, and I regret that he was so ill informed about the conventions of this House, after almost three years, that he waited until after he had been rebuked by you, Madam Speaker, before apologising to the House. Neither his predecessor, Michael Irvine, nor his predecessor's predecessor, Ken Weetch, who was a respected Member of this House, would have displayed such ignorance and discourtesy.

I wonder whether the real agenda is the Labour party's desire in Ipswich to dump Ipswich airport on to Bentwaters, against the wishes either of the local community or of the users of Ipswich airport. My right hon. Friend, to whom the arrival of the Maharishi has not been exactly welcome, is now doing his best to reconcile the local neighbourhood to the change of ownership of Bentwaters, and to ensure that any harm which may result can at least be minimised. I deplore the heavy-handed intrusion of the hon. Member for Ipswich, which can only inflame the local situation.

Such intrusion has obviously been undertaken for purely political purposes, regardless of the damage to the lives of the constituents of my right hon. Friend. The presence of three Labour Front Benchers in the House, which is extremely unusual for an Adjournment debate, shows that they approve of and connive at the disgraceful behaviour of the hon. Member for Ipswich, whose

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

manoeuvring will be remembered in this House and in Suffolk for some time to come. This is the face of the modern Labour party, which clearly has the full backing of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

10.33 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): May I start by saying that the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) has made a thoroughly reprehensible, naive and foolish speech, showing a degree of malevolence and ignorance almost unparalleled in the time that I have had the honour of being a Minister? Despite the fact that he has offered you, Madam Speaker, an apology, his behaviour tonight is all the more reprehensible, because he has failed to apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of the State for the Environment, in whose constituency affairs he is clearly meddling.

Mr. Cann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: No, I will not.

RAF Bentwaters is in the heart of the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). He has been working on the matters for nearly two years. He is the chairman of the consultative committee of the local authorities and parish councils concerned with planning the future of RAF Bentwaters.

He has been in constant touch with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence. My right hon. Friend has been concerned with both the principles and details of this difficult case. By local meetings and postal surveys, he has represented with great diligence and care the views of his constituents.

Neither the borough of Ipswich nor either of its two Members of Parliament have been consulted—and quite properly not. The planning authority for the sale of Bentwaters is the Suffolk county council. Indeed, it was only when the Natural Law Foundation emerged as the lead bidder that the hon. Member for Ipswich decided to take an interest in his neighbour's business. I understand that he has a well-known reputation for doing that, and for trying to stir up trouble through the press.

No one could suggest that my right hon. Friend would be a pushover for oriental religion! There cannot be many in the House who could be better equipped to argue forcibly with the proponents of transcendental meditation. It is not for me to judge the hon. Member for Ipswich on such matters, but, between the two of them, I know where I would put my money.

Because of the bad faith of the hon. Member, it is not right for the Ministry of Defence to take sides, but it is right for me to reveal to the House that my right hon. Friend is deeply opposed to the views of the Natural Law Foundation. He has made that clear to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and other Ministers involved. He has had long and detailed discussions about the legal position, but once it became clear that the foundation was the likely purchaser, my right hon. Friend quite rightly sought to deal with it in the best interests of his constituents.

My right hon. Friend has met its leaders, and has secured the agreement to provide community facilities, the use of sporting facilities, and the ecumenical use of a Church building. He has maintained his own view with integrity, but, above all, he has sought to do all that is possible to secure good neighbourly relations. That is the proper activity of a highly diligent and active Member of Parliament.

Into that picture has come the hon. Member for Ipswich, who will not have to live with the people involved, who can walk away, having caused as much ill feeling as possible, and who has no responsibility for the future of RAF Bentwaters and its people. That is why I am surprised at this Adjournment debate, of which my right hon. Friend received no notice until he got his Whip and read it last week.

The primary role of the MOD is, of course, to defend the realm. To allow us to do so, our armed forces must have sufficient land to train upon, and be adequately housed—as must the forces of our allies stationed on our soil.

A major objective of my Ministry has always been to ensure that, in restructuring the services and planning the current drawdown from overseas, we do not miss any opportunity to reduce the size of the defence estate, and thereby carry out our obligation to the taxpayer to ensure the best value for money.

The disposal of the United States Air Force base at Bentwaters, Suffolk, forms part of that programme, but it is an element that has generated considerable public interest, particularly as it is the first large American base to be placed on the open market following the recent rundown of the USAF in this country.

The base itself comprises more than 1,000 acres of land and just under 2 million sq ft of building space. It is situated in a rural area, and much of it is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty. The announcement of the USAF withdrawal was made in August 1992 and the closure date set for September 1993.

In the usual way, the most careful consideration was given to any other defence use which may have been appropriate for Bentwaters. We heard nothing from the hon. Member for Ipswich while those discussions were going on. No such alternative use was found for the site, and the whole station was therefore handed to the defence land agent for disposal.

The base, and its sister base at Woodbridge, were home to about 13,500 service men and women, and civilian employees and their families. It was inevitable, therefore, that the closure would have a significant impact on the local economy. That, of course, could not affect our decision on closure, but it was a factor that was very much to the fore.

A working group was established as soon as the United States Air Force withdrawal was announced, and my Department liaised extensively.

In September 1993, an examination in public was held to consider changes to the Suffolk county council's structure plan. That was used as a public forum for the ideas of the working group. A revised draft planning brief was broadly agreed in June 1994. That was formally incorporated within the local plan and the county structure plan in September 1994.

From that explanation, it will be obvious that we sought to obtain the broadest measure of agreement concerning the issues in planning terms which could be considered for the site on leaving the Government's ownership. Early interest in the domestic site was shown by Suffolk college, based in Ipswich, and some preliminary discussions took place. However, Suffolk college did not pursue its interest further.

Other expressions of interest were received, and the marketing process was concluded, after critical examination, by the announcement on 8 February 1995 that the offer for the purchase of the whole of the former base made by the Maharishi Foundation had been accepted. The offer made by the Maharishi Foundation, which is a registered educational charity, was the best received and fully conforms with the planning brief agreed during the consultation process.

The foundation has said that it intends to establish a university based on the domestic site, using as many of the existing buildings as possible. In addition, I understand that the foundation intends to set up a related science and business park using other parts of the base.

It is also worthy of note that the foundation has consulted widely since the announcement that its bid had been accepted. It has had detailed discussions with Suffolk Coastal district council, and public meetings have been held to consult local communities around Bentwaters. The local residents in the privately owned houses adjoining the base have been consulted, and the foundation has said that community facilities will be made available on the former domestic site.

There has been some suggestion that my Department should have accepted one of the other bids that was made, and that the Maharishi Foundation is in some way an unsuitable purchaser. On the first issue, I believe that the procedures that are followed allow all the prospective purchasers a fair and equal opportunity.

I can confirm that the foundation's offer was the best deal for the taxpayer. I also believe that the planned uses have the potential to be of significant benefit to the local community, as does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Nor can I find any basis for the opinion that the foundation is an undesirable organisation. It is a registered educational charity, which has operated in this country and elsewhere for about twenty years and is widely known. There is certainly no reason for rejecting its bid.

As I have said, we received several other offers for the purchase of the site, and some of the prospective purchasers have naturally lobbied hard in support of their bids. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ipswich will understand, however, that I cannot discuss those commercial details, as they are a matter of confidence.

In conclusion, I can confirm that the offer accepted from the foundation is a good deal for the taxpayer, and the normal criteria in assessing proposals made for the purchase of redundant defence property have been followed in full. I therefore remain of the view that the proposed disposal to the Maharishi Foundation should proceed.

I should not like to end without placing again on record my contempt for the disgraceful behaviour of the hon. Member for Ipswich, and my hope that the House will understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has done all in his power to ensure the very best terms and conditions for his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

1. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last visited Northern Ireland to discuss the current security situation; and if he will make a statement. [14624]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I visited Northern Ireland on 15 to 16 August 1994, when I met the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland and his senior officers to discuss operational matters.

Mr. Merchant: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on being able to redeploy some troops out of Northern Ireland—an early dividend of the peace process. However, can he reassure the House that, whatever the results of troop redeployments, there will not be an overall reduction in the strength of the British Army?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I am happy to give such an unequivocal assurance. I can state categorically that, if the position in Northern Ireland were to permit further reductions in troop levels in Northern Ireland, that would not lead to any reductions in the size of the services. It would enable us to provide more time for training, create a position in which there was less pressure on our troops and enable them to have more time with their families.

Mr. Trimble: I urge the Secretary of State to proceed very cautiously in any rundown of troop levels in Northern Ireland, especially when there are so many uncertainties and while terrorist organisations remain in existence and continue to be active, as evidenced by the shooting in south Belfast at the weekend, by yet another savage beating-up in Strabane yesterday and by the attacks on the homes of five prison officers in my constituency last night. Those incidents demonstrate that the organisations are still there and that it is not enough to tackle the issue of decommissioning of weapons without dealing with the disbandment of the terrorists.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is right to advise caution. He can take comfort from the fact that it is now, about six months after the beginnings of the ceasefire, that we have withdrawn the first roulement battalion. Any further changes will be based on the operational and security advice of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and of the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, if we err, we shall err on the side of caution, for precisely the reasons that the hon. Gentleman states.

Lady Olga Maitland: I accept the decision to bring the battalions back to the mainland, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is essential that they must be on standby duty, and that we must have the facility to return them to Northern Ireland, should the need ever arise?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, my hon. Friend is correct. The Drummadd roulement battalion, which we have withdrawn to the mainland, was one of two roulement battalions first deployed to Northern Ireland as recently as 1991 and 1992. My hon. Friend can assume that, if it were necessary to redeploy it back to Northern Ireland, that could happen very quickly indeed. The battalion that has been withdrawn was due to finish its tour in April 1995. The successor battalion continues to train on the basis that it might be required, and would be available to go if that were necessary.

Ministry of Defence Police

2. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the MOD police. [14625]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The Ministry of Defence police is a disciplined body of about 5,000 civilian police officers, who are also civil servants. It is a national police force with full constabulary powers and all its officers are trained to carry arms.

Ms Squire: Does the Minister agree that full and detailed information should now be provided about the future of the Ministry of Defence police, as members of the force have received only bland general assurances? Does the Minister further agree that the police force performs a unique dual-purpose function throughout the country, a combination of police and security roles? Will he assure the House that the future of the force at UK-wide defence establishments is secure?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I understand completely her desire to resolve the difficulties at Rosyth. Although a number of MDP will remain at Rosyth, interim reductions are planned, as she knows, for October 1995 and January 1996, but no final decisions have yet been taken.

On the other half of the hon. Lady's question, I entirely endorse her opinions. Ministry of Defence police are essential protection for Ministry of Defence property, for equipment and for the men and women and their families who live and work on the defence estate. The recent Blelloch study firmly underlined the continuing need for the Ministry of Defence police, whose services we greatly value.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend take it from me that the Ministry of Defence police will always be welcome in Wiltshire, where they perform an important function, not just within the Ministry of Defence estate, but at the vital interface between the civilian, the Home Office police force and the rest of the community? Their presence is welcome as a deterrent against crime.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The Ministry of Defence police are an important part of any of the communities where there is a defence presence. They constitute the sixth largest police force in the United Kingdom; they have full constabulary powers and they operate extremely effectively with our own ordinary local police. I am pleased to endorse my hon. Friend's views and am most grateful to him for drawing them to the attention of the House.

Officers (Ethnic Origin)

3. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers of (a) Asian and (b) Caribbean origin above the rank of major or equivalent serve in Her Majesty's forces. [14626]

Mr. Soames: Of the 57 per cent. of service personnel who have so far responded to my Department's survey, 23 officers above the rank of major are of Asian origin and 11 are of Afro-Caribbean origin. That survey did not include the Brigade of Gurkhas.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful for the Minister's answer, which shows, I hope, that the Army is becoming sensitive to some of the statements that it was not fully reflecting our society. Given that the soldiers and officers whom most of the British public and overseas visitors see are from the Household Division and the Brigade of Guards, will the Minister assure us that this year's trooping the colour will be the last example of white supremacy in Her Majesty's forces?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman makes, in one sense, an important point. He is right to suggest that we need to encourage ethnic minorities to join the Household Division—we are conscious of the need to do that. A special Army youth team has been established to do just that and to make contact with schools, youth organisations and other groups to encourage the young to undertake adventure training and see something of Army life and Army establishments. The team's task is to target areas of high ethnic minority populations to show children in those areas the excitement of an Army career, particularly the possibility of the honour of guarding the sovereign's life.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, particularly in relation to the Royal Air Force, the only means of recruitment will be based on the individual's ability to do the job? One cannot fly a fast jet aircraft or carry out highly technical jobs or any of the other specialist activities unless one is competent. That is the only basis on which the Royal Air Force has ever recruited. It has never cared where people come from.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good and valid point. The armed forces are fully integrated, non-discriminatory organisations that are subject to the Race Relations Act 1976. We are keen to encourage people from wherever they come, and whatever their colour, race or creed, to join the armed forces, where they will be warmly welcomed and will find an important, challenging and worthwhile role.

Conference on Disarmament

4. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to respond to the speech made by the Russian ambassador, Grigory Berdennikov, to the 23 February meeting of the conference on disarmament. [14627]

Mr. Rifkind: We noted the Russian ambassador's speech with great interest, and particularly welcomed the reaffirmation of Russian determination to secure the unconditional and indefinite extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Smith: Does the Minister agree with the Russian ambassador, who argued that all nuclear weapon states should be working towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and, in the meantime, should make a commitment not to increase their existing nuclear armaments or to put into service new sorts of strategic weaponry?

Mr. Rifkind: We recognise the desirability of working towards nuclear disarmament, but we must also be realistic and realise that nuclear technology cannot be disinvented. It is necessary to ensure that any progress in the direction recommended by the hon. Gentleman is based on a verification procedure that ensures that all countries observe the new requirements, otherwise the world would be much more dangerous.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my right hon. and learned Friend concerned about the dispersal of the nuclear arms of the former Soviet Union? Is he taking action with Russia to contain that?

Mr. Rifkind: After the break-up of the Soviet Union, there were nuclear weapons in Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine, as well as in the Russian Federation itself. Thanks to the measures that have been taken in the past few years, that situation seems to have been resolved—particularly as a result of the Ukraine agreeing to carry out its obligations as a non-nuclear power.

Courts Martial

5. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the system of courts martial within Her Majesty's armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [14628]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): The Service Discipline Acts are updated every five years by an Armed Forces Bill. The next such Bill is due in the forthcoming Session of Parliament.

Mr. Galloway: Is it not more urgent than that? A number of cases give cause for concern. My constituent Staff Sergeant John Menzies and his wife, who are in the Gallery today, are living evidence of that, as their daughter was murdered by a British soldier. The military police, who were soldiers with armbands, and the military prosecutor, who was a soldier in a wig, bungled the case and—for the interest of Tory Members—a murderer, Corporal Darren Fisher, walked free. He is still at large and is serving in Her Majesty's armed services. Is it not about time that we overhauled the archaic, anachronistic system of military justice which is widely discredited, even within the armed services?

Mr. Freeman: I think that the whole House will understand the grief and concern of the parents concerned and anyone who is a parent will share their deep shock at their tragic loss. Therefore, I join the hon. Gentleman in offering them my condolences.

It is not up to Defence Ministers to reopen that particular trial. The trial has been held and the hon. Gentleman has his deeply held views about its progress and conclusion. It is not for a Minister of the Crown to reopen that trial.

However, I believe that when we debate the Armed Forces Bill it will be perfectly appropriate—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will take that opportunity—to raise the question of procedures used within the services, including the courts martial procedures. I am sure that it will be entirely appropriate to raise that matter on the Floor of the House or during Committee and I look forward to that occurring.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of my constituents who was serving in Northern Ireland has been convicted of murder while undertaking an act of duty? Does my right hon. Friend sympathise with the trial judge who suggested that an option other than murder—that of culpable homicide—should have been given to the court? Does he agree that in such cases it would be more appropriate for soldiers on active service to come before courts martial?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out what he believes is an anomaly in the law. As he is aware, certain cases in Northern Ireland have been tried before the civil courts and not the courts martial. I am sure that my hon. Friend will take the opportunity, which I mentioned earlier in response to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), of raising the issue during parliamentary debate on the Armed Forces Bill.

Mr. Martlew: In view of the Minister's announcement today and last week that the Armed Forces Bill will come to the House in the next parliamentary Session, will he use the intervening period to consult fully with regard to court martial procedures? There is no doubt that there is a great deal of disquiet about that issue—which has been expressed today in the House—in the community and within the military. Will the Minister use that time to consult the Opposition, as we would like to take a bipartisan approach to the matter? Will the Minister guarantee that he will consult us before he lays the Bill before Parliament?

Mr. Freeman: The Government are happy to accept that suggestion. The offer of bipartisan discussions is very much in keeping with the importance of getting the Armed Forces Bill and the service disciplinary procedures right. The legislation comes before the Parliament only once every five years, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his offer.

Angola

6. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British forces deployments in Angola. [14629]

Mr. Rifkind: The Government have agreed in principle to a request from the United Nations for a logistic battalion on a three-month deployment to support the peacekeeping operation in Angola. A final decision to deploy such a battalion can be considered only once we are satisfied that a ceasefire is in force and that the necessary facilities will be provided.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that there was a small British contingent in Angola before the election which carried out precisely the services that he has outlined. It is clear that, as a result of its excellent work at that time, that contingent will be welcomed back to Angola. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that the commitment of that battalion will not become open-ended?

Mr. Rifkind: I most certainly can. I said in my initial response that we are considering a three-month deployment. My hon. Friend will remember the successful deployment to Rwanda, which was also on a three-month basis. The United Kingdom believes that it would be of great value to the United Nations if it considered as a matter of course that countries which contribute towards operations should contribute much more often on a time-limited basis and then be replaced by another country, if the mission continues, or that the task should be continued in some other form or fashion. Our contribution in Angola is strictly limited to three months. The United Nations understands and accepts that.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Secretary of State join me in condemning the increasing isolationism of the United States Congress and, perhaps, the US Government? Does he also regret their condemnation and criticism of UN peacekeeping and their unwillingness to fund it? Will he take some action to try to persuade his counterpart in the United States Administration of the great importance of supporting the United Nations and its peacekeeping role for the future peace of the world?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman makes far too sweeping a condemnation in his remarks. I am entirely satisfied that the United States Government are very much aware of the need for them to support peacekeeping and to help fund those efforts. Indeed, even after the reforms that are to be introduced, the United States will still provide some 25 per cent. of the total United Nations cost of peacekeeping—a sum far greater than any other country. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that some members of Congress take a different view, and it is very important that they should fully realise the implications for the United States and for the western world as a whole if those matters are not satisfactorily resolved.

Sir Jim Spicer: Is my right hon. and learned Friend convinced that in Angola at the moment peacekeeping is the order of the day? Have both sides—the Government and UNITA—accepted that peace is what they both want, because all my information points the other way? Will he give an assurance that in no way will our troops will deployed in a situation where they might be involved in fighting?

Mr. Rifkind: A ceasefire has been in operation for some time and it has generally held, although not exclusively so. I can, however, reassure my hon. Friend that the proposal for any United Kingdom contribution is that it should be deployed to Lobito, on the coast, where there has been no military action for many years, and where it should set up a logistics support structure for the United Nations and should have little likelihood of penetrating into the interior of the country. My hon. Friend's concerns are well understood and can be responded to with confidence.

Procurement (Cost Overruns)

7. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions his Department has taken to reduce cost overruns in procurement purchases. [14631]

Mr. Freeman: In the financial year 1980-81, 22 per cent. by value of our headquarters contracts were let on a cost-plus basis. Last year, the figure was 1 per cent. Hence, last year, virtually all contracts had fixed prices or arrangements to protect the Ministry against contractors' cost overruns.

Ms Church: I thank the Minister for his answer, but does he not accept that there are considerable cost overruns on a large number of projects, which show that his Department has lost financial control of much of the defence budget? Is that not another sign of the Government's failure in running the country?

Mr. Freeman: It is not the case, as I am sure the whole House will appreciate, that we have lost control of the defence budget. Far from it. Our procedures identify at an early stage where there are cost overruns, which can be due to a whole number of factors. In the development of the Eurofighter, which hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench support, with new technological development—the leading edge of new technology—that very expensive aircraft has already experienced some justifiable cost increases. The hon. Lady might wish to know that the National Audit Office recently reviewed our procurement policies. It compared the Ministry of Defence with 11 other Defence Ministries in other countries and concluded that, in Britain, the Department performed relatively well and particularly well in terms of pursuit of competition.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend take it from someone who worked with the defence industry before being elected that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I have no financial connection with any company in the defence industry now. Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that the transformation that has taken place in our defence procurement purchasing over the past 10 years has been remarkable? Does he agree that the only way to remove all risk of cost overruns is to give up altogether on taking any commercial or technical risk and accept second-rate, second-hand equipment?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that it has been this Government and this Secretary of State for Defence who have announced an augmentation—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Opposition do not want to hear this but, last July, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced an increase in the equipment budget to include highly capable aircraft and ships and artillery for the armed forces, which is among the best in the world. There is inevitably some risk in developing new weapons and weapons systems.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the Minister not realise that he sounds remarkably complacent? When the Ministry was asked to give information on projects to the National Audit Office, I remind him that it got the calculations wrong in eight out of its 10 responses. Is it not the case that there is an overrun of 2.7 years on projects, that 80 per cent. of them have failed to reach their targets and that, on many serious and important individual procurement projects, the Government have spent literally billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on overshoots? Is this not a catalogue of unexpected and unanticipated defence cuts, waste and inefficiency on the part of a Ministry that is better known for waste than for any other characteristic?

Mr. Freeman: I understand why the hon. Gentleman, as an Opposition spokesman, has to attack—that is his job—but it would be much more effective if he got his facts right and concentrated on specific projects to explain the reasons why he thinks the Government have got it wrong. Broad-brush comments about a Department of waste cut no ice. The truth is that, as I said, the NAO has given us a clean bill of health. It regards our procedures as competent and efficient, which it would certainly not do under a Labour Government.

Mr. Mans: Bearing in mind the less than satisfactory track record of GEC in the past few years in the production of defence equipment, and especially now that we know of the waste of public money involved in the Phoenix project, will my right hon. Friend consider carrying out an audit of that company's activities in relation to the procurement of military equipment, and pay particular attention to its involvement in the ECR90 programme?

Mr. Freeman: I would not share my hon. Friend's criticisms of GEC. It is a large and efficient defence manufacturer that employs many tens of thousands of people in the defence industrial base. As for the Phoenix programme, I assure my hon. Friend that proposals are shortly to come before Ministers to decide on the future of that project, which I know that the Select Committee on Defence is considering. We need to decide whether to cancel the project and to seek contractual damages from GEC or to continue with it but protect ourselves against any increase in costs and any diminution in our contractual position in relation to the company.

Nuclear and Chemical Weapon Proliferation

8. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new proposals he has to discourage nuclear and chemical weapon proliferation. [14632]

Mr. Rifkind: We are currently working towards the indefinite extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the effective implementation of the chemical weapons convention and are active participants in the work of the nuclear suppliers group, the missile technology control regime and the Australia group.

Mr. Flynn: Was not the attack in Tokyo by sarin gas a reminder of the catastrophic dangers of chemical weapons—even do-it-yourself chemical weapons—now that the materials and the technology are accessible to everyone? When will we join France, Germany and the many other countries which fully ratified the chemical weapons convention? Does not the new world chaos now need measures to build confidence and reduce fear?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course that is important. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the chemical weapons convention has been signed by 159 states, including the United Kingdom, and ratified by 27. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, who is responsible for questions of ratification in this sphere, attaches considerable importance to early ratification of that treaty, and I must ask the hon. Gentleman to await further developments.

Mr. Jopling: Is the Secretary of State content that, as the dangers of the proliferation of those weapons grow, together with the proliferation of biological weapons, his discussions with the Home Office on civil defence and on the possible use of those dreadful weapons here, and our preparedness in the event of such use, are adequate?

Mr. Rifkind: As my right hon. Friend would expect, of course we try to anticipate any threat that might emerge to the country's people or territory. The question of what might happen in relation to an incident in the United Kingdom is a matter for the Home Office primarily, but he can assume that if, unfortunately, any such attempt were made, the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces would be able to make a significant contribution, both in preventing and deterring any such incident, and in dealing with its consequences.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Would we not be able to discourage nuclear weapons proliferation by others if we showed a little self-restraint? If the Polaris system provides an effective independent nuclear deterrent, why is it necessary to replace it with Trident and to have many times as many warheads? Would it not be right to limit Trident's deployment to the number of Polaris warheads that it is to replace, not least because it has approximately twice the range, is accurate within 250 m, and its warheads are capable of being independently targeted?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. and learned Gentleman is characteristically uninformed as to the consequences for the UK's nuclear weapons overall of the implementation of the Government's policy. I am able to inform the House that when, in the next few years, Trident takes over the sub-strategic nuclear role and the WE177 free-fall bomb is withdrawn, the UK will have 21 per cent. fewer nuclear warheads than it did in the 1970s, after the non-proliferation treaty came into effect. The total explosive power of those warheads will be some 59 per cent. lower than the 1970s figure. That clearly shows that the UK is playing its full part in the objectives to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Secretary of State not understand that the chemical weapons convention, which the Government have singly failed to ratify, is vital not only for international security but for the country's chemical industry? Did he note that, in that most unusual presentation to the press last week of the surrogate Queen's Speech, no announcement was made of legislation to ratify the chemical weapons convention? Why not?

Mr. Rifkind: Her Majesty the Queen will announce the Queen's Speech and no such announcement has yet been made. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the ratification of the chemical weapons convention requires the laying of legislation before the House. The time to announce what legislation the Government have in mind is the Queen's Speech. That is not taking place today.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that proliferation is not the only problem in relation to nuclear weapons? The knowledge of how to produce such weapons is becoming more and more widespread. The genie cannot be put back in the bottle. Is it not right and proper, therefore, that we maintain our nuclear deterrent, and resist the siren voices of the Opposition?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct. The Opposition's views continue to fascinate me. They were against nuclear weapons at the height of the cold war, but now that the cold war is behind us, they try to persuade us that they are in favour of them. I know that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) will wish to take an early opportunity to clarify the Opposition's view on nuclear weapons, which is a shambles.

Armed Forces (Deployment)

9. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the redeployment of armed forces when they are removed from Northern Ireland. [14633]

Mr. Rifkind: The 5th Regiment, Royal Artillery returned from Northern Ireland on 22 March to its home base at Catterick. The prison guard force from the 1 Armoured Division Signals Regiment returned to its base in Germany in November.

Mr. Barnes: If peace in Northern Ireland is signed, sealed and delivered, is it envisaged that any British troops will remain in Northern Ireland? Has the Secretary of State had discussions with the Northern Ireland Office about the potential of the peace dividend that will come out of those developments?

Mr. Rifkind: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is undoubtedly yes. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom; therefore, it should go without saying that the armed forces of the United Kingdom will continue to be based there, just as they are in England, Scotland or Wales. What we are anxious to achieve, when the security situation requires and justifies it, is a withdrawal of armed forces from the streets of our cities in Northern Ireland so that Northern Ireland can share the situation that exists elsewhere in Great Britain. However, the Royal Irish Regiment has its home base in Northern Ireland, so I am sure that it and other forces will have a presence in the Province, as they do elsewhere.

Mr. Churchill: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the progressive reduction in the number of battalions deployed in Northern Ireland over the coming months, assuming that the peace holds there, will not be used as an excuse to cut the infantry battalions of the British Army?

Mr. Rifkind: In answer to an earlier question I said explicitly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have said on other occasions—that there is no possibility of any reduction in the size of our armed forces as a result of progress in Northern Ireland. Therefore, any progress that allows us to reduce the number of troops in Northern Ireland will be as good news for the armed forces as for the people of Ulster.

Menwith Hill Station

10. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for right hon. and hon. Members to visit Menwith Hill station in north Yorkshire. [14635]

Mr. Soames: No, I shall not, for the very good operational and security reasons given by my predecessor in the House on 25 March 1994.

Mr. Madden: Is it not disgraceful that Ministers refuse to allow Members of Parliament, who are elected public representatives, and all of whom take an oath of allegiance, to visit that American spy base in north Yorkshire? Is not that disgrace equalled only by the gagging order recently issued by the Secretary of State for Defence, stopping the courts and the public from hearing that the National Security Agency of America, which controls the base, is engaged in industrial and commercial espionage to the disadvantage of the United Kingdom, and that GCHQ staff also based there are illegally tapping telephones?

Mr. Soames: I must invite the hon. Gentleman to contain his entirely pathetic paranoia and to understand that the function of that important site is regarded by Her Majesty's Government as being of the highest importance to the United Kingdom's defence strategy. The work carried out there is extremely sensitive and valuable.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my hon. Friend disregard the outburst by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and recognise that the great majority of people in north Yorkshire welcome the presence of Menwith Hill, and also of RAF Fylingdales in my constituency, and that they appreciate the important part that those two installations play in upholding peace throughout the world?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for underlining so well the great importance of those sites to the strategic security of the United Kingdom and to our allies. I know that they are valued by all who live near them and I am grateful, as those who work in them will be, for my hon. Friend's clarion support.

Royal Arsenal Site, Woolwich

11. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Woolwich to discuss the future of the royal arsenal site. [14636]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has no such plans, although my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence visited the royal arsenal site on 1 November last year.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I am sure that the Minister agrees that that site, containing 75 acres of derelict industrial land, is probably one of the largest such areas in a town centre in the United Kingdom and that its development is crucial not only to the regeneration of the locality but to the Thames gateway strategy. What progress has there been on the redevelopment, and does his Department now accept responsibility for the restoration of the 15 listed buildings on the site? What liability does the Department accept for land contamination in the area?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; as a constituency Member, he has rightly taken a close interest in the matter. As he knows, there are two sites at Woolwich, the east and the west. The west site covers the considerable area of 76 acres, and negotiations have commenced to transfer it to English Partnerships. I hope that they will be completed shortly, and that a development plan can be finalised in consultation with the borough of Greenwich. The smaller east site does not contain listed buildings, but it is possible that the ground is contaminated. The site will be sold on the open market, and a detailed investigation of the contamination has been commissioned.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Ministry of Defence accepts liability for site and building contamination where that is significant and has to be remedied up to the standard required by the development plan. We shall agree funding with English Partnerships, and I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman with regard to the listed buildings.

Mr. Devlin: Would not this site have been entirely redeveloped by now if the quality assurance unit at Woolwich had not so tenaciously resisted being relocated to the Preston Farm industrial estate in Stockton-on-Tees? Since the facility was disbanded by the Ministry of Defence, has not the site in Stockton-on-Tees been extensively redeveloped by Teesside development corporation, bringing more jobs than if the quality assurance unit had gone there in the first place?

Mr. Soames: I was not aware of that particular background, but, as my hon. Friend knows, an ugly queue is forming to stampede Stockton-on-Tees. Many people wish to relocate in such an excellent place, with such an admirable Member of Parliament.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

12. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department next expects to be able to make a contribution to nuclear arms reductions in furtherance of the Government's obligations under article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. [14637]

Mr. Rifkind: We shall consider what further contribution we might be able to make to nuclear arms reductions in the light of changing international circumstances.

Dr. Jones: This afternoon, the Secretary of State cited the withdrawal of weapons that were already reaching their retirement age as examples of the Government's contribution towards disarmament and he also gave misleading information on Trident, when he knew full well that Trident can destroy far more targets than can Polaris. Is it not clear that the Government are simply paying lip service to their obligations under article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, thus undermining its renegotiation? Why have the Government not set criteria for entering Trident in future strategic arms reduction negotiations? When will the Government stop clinging to their multi-million-pound nuclear—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's questions are far too long. If she wishes to apply for an

Adjournment debate some time, I shall look at her application sympathetically. We are in Question Time and I urge all hon. Members to put their questions briskly.

Mr. Rifkind: The questions may have been too long, but they enabled the House to hear the true voice of the Labour party. It is perfectly clear that the Opposition Front-Bench team has been acutely embarrassed by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament sentiments which have been expressed right across the Opposition Back Benches this afternoon. I am sure that the country, as well as the House, will note that and draw the appropriate conclusion.

Mr. Streeter: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, had he been a member of parliamentary CND, he would have been at a great disadvantage in any negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation? Does he share my concern that not only the shadow Secretary of State for Defence but the Labour leader was a member of parliamentary CND? Does that not undermine their credibility over our nuclear deterrent?

Mr. Rifkind: It is certainly the case that if we want expert advice on nuclear disarmament, we have the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Secretary of State for Defence and, I think, half the shadow Cabinet who have been, and in some cases still are, active members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Dr. Reid: This one has not been a member of CND, but he still has a damn sight more concern for getting rid of nuclear weapons than that bunch sitting on the Government Front Bench. Why is the message always negative? Why did the Government refuse a moratorium on nuclear weapons? Why did they refuse to limit the number of warheads deployed on Trident? Why did they refuse to announce the number of warheads on Trident? Why do they refuse even to ratify the chemical weapons convention? Why, for once, can they not send a positive signal to encourage a successful outcome of the renegotiation of the non-proliferation treaty?

Mr. Rifkind: I entirely accept that the hon. Gentleman is one of the few who were not members of CND. *[Interruption.]* But why in this exchange did we get the organ grinder—*[Interruption.]* Why did we not get the organ grinder and have to make do with the monkey instead? The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the reduction of nuclear weapons in a nuclear world should be treated with the greatest care and caution. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the most prominent ex-member of CND, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), has now arrived.

Defence Industry

13. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department takes to monitor the changing size and shape of the British defence industry. [14638]

Mr. Freeman: As one of the defence industry's major customers, my Department naturally takes a keen interest in developments that affect the size and structure of our supplier base. We therefore have regular contact with representatives of United Kingdom defence companies at all levels.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Minister not share my concern about the plight of the highly skilled engineers and technicians who work in the defence industry? The Government's apathetic approach shows them no future other than to transfer skills out of Britain or to go on to the scrap heap. Why does the Minister not immediately create a defence diversification agency so that we can have short-term and long-term planned transfers into other work and keep those highly skilled personnel here in this country after the work that they have done for the defence industry?

Mr. Freeman: We recognise the important skill that is in our defence industrial base. Defence Ministers have a responsibility for that. However, to create a defence diversification agency, which the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett)—said in our last debate on the Navy would merely seek to effect a culture change in industry, without the commitment of substantial—

Dr. Reid *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head; that clearly shows that what he suggests is dogma and a waste of taxpayers' money.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14655]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Barnes: Will the Prime Minister tell us how education authorities such as Derbyshire can have millions cut off their education budgets in real terms and be expected to manage? Will he tell them how they can do that without sacking teachers, destroying education or increasing class sizes in the area? Many angry parents, teachers and governors in Derbyshire would like to know the answer to that. It is time now for the oracle to speak.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first one to acknowledge that the amount spent per pupil has risen over and above inflation by 50 per cent. since the hon. Gentleman's party was last in government and looking after education. I think that he would also concede that if local authorities were prepared to make education more of a priority than they do at present and if they were determined to make teachers a priority within their education budget rather than other matters, they would be able to meet the obligations that they were required to meet.

Mr. Walden: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the interest shown by Manchester grammar school in returning to the state sector? Will he give imaginative thought to the way in which such moves could be financed, bearing in mind that building bridges across our two-nation education system is a national priority?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend about the question of bridges across the education system. I certainly agree with him about the need for quality in education. I must say that I am not so enthusiastic about the Manchester proposal as my hon. Friend.

Mr. Blair: When Sir Bob Reid, who, after all, is a supporter of rail privatisation, says that the Government's plans are intensely bureaucratic and inordinately expensive—in short, a nightmare—should that not make any sensible Government who consider the public interest think again?

The Prime Minister: Sir Bob has expressed these views on previous occasions.

Mr. Meacher: Is he right?

The Prime Minister: I shall come in a second to whether he is right. Sir Bob has always argued for a monolithic, vertically integrated railway, but he was unable to persuade us that that was the right way to proceed. As the right hon. Gentleman presumably does not know, a number of other countries that have privatised their railways have adopted precisely the same model that we have adopted, and not the model proposed by Sir Bob.

Mr. Blair: Should not Sir Bob's words carry compelling argument with the Government as he is a supporter of privatisation? Is this not just another item on the bill for Tory dogma? With prescription and water charges up at the weekend, taxes up next week and now the fiasco of rail privatisation, is it any wonder that the British people believe, and know, that they are worse off under the Tories?

The Prime Minister: The soundbite came earlier this afternoon. The right hon. Gentleman refers to dogma. The Labour party has tried to smear every privatisation we have had, just as it is trying to smear this one. As it has been wrong on every occasion in the past, it is wrong again. The reality is that the Labour party is philosophically opposed to private ownership and, while Labour remains in the pockets of the railway unions, it will continue to put the unions first and the passengers last.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that local authorities, far from complaining about what they call cuts in education, would do far better thinking carefully about the money that they have failed to raise from the rates, the community charge and the council tax? Councils such as Lambeth have arrears running at over £100 million which they have failed to collect. Are not such councils punishing pupils as a result of their incompetence?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The Leader of the Opposition referred a few days ago to truancy. What the right hon. Gentleman neglected to say was that the highest level of truancy occurs in education authorities run by the Labour party, and that the only reason we know the truancy figures is because of the performance tables which we introduced and to which the Opposition objected.

Mr. Ashdown: In the light of the Prime Minister's previous answers, will he nevertheless confirm that he has heard of the widespread concerns of parents about their children from governors who have been forced to sack teachers because of education cuts? Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that, in the face of cuts in the Government's allocation for education amounting to £50 per primary school pupil and £200 per secondary school pupil, he simply cannot dump the whole blame on to councils? Does he not realise that the country wants him to think again? Will he do so?

The Prime Minister: Of course I understand the concerns of parents that education is properly funded, and that is why I made the point to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) about the increase in resources under the Government in recent years. The right hon. Gentleman cannot deny the Government's achievements in benefiting parents, pupils and teachers by changing the curriculum. Equally, he cannot deny that local authorities could do far more than they have done to seek savings without turning directly to the teacher in the classroom. What the right hon. Gentleman should be saying to people—not least his own education authority—is, "What other savings have you sought before you have gone directly to the teacher in the classroom?"

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Would my right hon. Friend allow any member of his Front-Bench team to visit convicted IRA terrorists in English prisons and to campaign to have them returned to Northern Ireland? Would he consider such action to be tough on crime, and on the causes of crime?

The Prime Minister: The direct answer to my hon. and learned Friend is no, I would not. He makes his case clearly.

Q2. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14656]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Hodge: Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that it is the first duty of a free media to report the truth irrespective of Government bullying? *[Interruption.]* Clearly, Conservative Members do not agree. Is it not time that the Prime Minister and his colleagues took heed of the advice of the *Daily Mail* and Sir Bernard Ingham and stopped whingeing?

The Prime Minister: I wonder whether the hon. Lady would like to tell us on how many occasions Mr. Alastair Campbell has complained to the BBC in the past few weeks. As to her substantive question, of course I welcome truthful reporting. I always welcome it and I like seeing it.

Q3. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14657]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate Maldon district council, which yesterday received nearly £22 million following the transfer of its housing stock to the Plume housing association? Is he aware that that will enable the council to improve services and to continue to set the lowest council tax in Essex? Does that not demonstrate once again that Conservative councils deliver better services at a lower cost to the council tax payer?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend refers to Maldon, but he could equally well have referred to a very large number of Conservative authorities, which, on balance, provide a council tax that is far lower than that of authorities run by the Labour or Liberal parties. Equally, I congratulate Maldon on taking advantage of the policies to bring in private finance and to provide better services generally to its council tax payers. I believe that runs right the way across the gamut of local authority services. For those people who talk about the homeless, I note the very large number of empty properties in Labour-controlled authorities in inner London and in the middle of many of our great cities.

Q4. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14658]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bayley: When will the Prime Minister unequivocally back Canada in its stand against unfair and ecologically disastrous Spanish fishing practices?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be making a statement immediately after Question Time.

Q5. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14659]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Townsend: During my right hon. Friend's recent and successful visit to the middle east, did he have time to talk to Prime Minister Rabin about his country's unwillingness to declare that it is now a nuclear power and to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? Recalling my right hon. Friend's excellent work in getting the United Nations Security Council to approve resolution 687, which called for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the middle east, how will that be achieved if Israel cannot be persuaded to change its mind?

The Prime Minister: We did discuss that and a range of other matters, and I made it clear in my meetings that we believe that the future of the non-proliferation treaty is extremely important and we hope that everyone possible will ensure that it can be extended indefinitely. The indefinite and unconditional extension of that treaty at the conference in April and May would be in the best interests of everyone, not only in the middle east but in other parts of the world where there is equal difficulty in persuading participants to sign up to the treaty.

Q6. **Ms Church:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14660]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Church: Would the Prime Minister like to take this public opportunity to confirm that the position of the chairman of his party is unassailable?

The Prime Minister: I have told my right hon. Friend to take no notice whatever of the current hubbub and that it goes with the job, as do silly questions like that.

Mr. Alexander: As we are marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war this year, will my right hon. Friend look sympathetically at the amendment that was recently passed to the Pensions Bill in another place and restore to war widows the right to a war widows pension, even though they have been widowed or divorced from a second husband?

The Prime Minister: We are considering the amendment that was passed in another place the other day and a second amendment that was also passed there and will make our decisions known when the matter returns to the House.

Q7. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March. [14661]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Prime Minister assure the House that when he and his Ministers decide, in the next few days, about the future of Guy's hospital, they will take account of current circumstances, which are that a building that has just cost £154 million to build, Philip Harris house, is waiting to be used for the benefit of the health service? Will they decide to use that building and not to close an accident and emergency unit in less than four years' time, because the circumstances that justify its continuing existence may be just the same then as they are now?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me advance notice of the question that he proposed to ask this afternoon. As he said, there has been a consultation about the future of services at Guy's and St. Thomas's, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to make her decisions known shortly. I know that she will take into account the views of everyone concerned and what the hon. Gentleman said, including his remarks about Philip Harris house.

Fishing Rights (Dispute)

3.30 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East) (*by private notice*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the fisheries dispute between the European Union and Canada.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): Our policy is to use our unique position as a member both of the European Union and the Commonwealth to help broker a resolution of this dispute. Canada is right to say that much more effective enforcement is necessary in the disputed fishery, but this will be achieved only through negotiation, and not through unilateral action on the high seas. We must also settle fair catch shares. The need for a settlement is urgent. Both sides should show restraint in order to give the talks a chance of success.

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that the fundamental and paramount need is to conserve fish stocks and prevent over-fishing? Will he acknowledge that fish recognise neither national frontiers nor 200-mile fishing limits? Does he also accept that international agreement and international law are the only way to meet conservation objectives?

As the disagreement between the European Union and Canada on turbot quotas is a major factor, will the Minister confirm that the European Union is prepared to continue to talk to Canada to settle that disagreement? Does he accept that equally important is the question of the small-mesh net? If the small-mesh net which Canada has put on display in New York is Spanish, can he tell us whether that net is illegal, and whether the Canadians were justified in taking action?

Given that the European Union is in dispute with Canada, not the UK, may I finally ask three short questions? Is the Minister still in full agreement with the EU position? Is he completely satisfied that it is not legally defective and that the EU account of events is true? In view of the concern expressed last time the Minister of State made a statement to the House on this issue, does he recognise that a substantial number of hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed concern about Spanish fishing practice? Will he report back to the House immediately if the truth is not being fully told and if the EU position is not legally foolproof?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has not got it quite right, although some elements are nearly right.

The dispute is not now about the amount of fish that should be caught. That was agreed in September, when the new total allowable catch was set at 27,000 tonnes. The Spanish asked for a higher quota, but, as far as I know, the Canadians did not say that it should be lower. They are happy with the agreement. The dispute is not about the amount of fish that should be caught, but about who should catch the fish. Negotiations have broken down on that matter.

The North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation—NAFO—agreed a share-out which seemed to be unfair to the EU. Under the procedures, the EU was allowed to set a unilateral quota for this year and to go on arguing. That sort of thing happens in fisheries around the world, and it should be settled at the negotiating table.

The real argument is about enforcement. As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), we have a great deal of sympathy for the Canadians. The House and other nations know that there are questions about Spanish obedience to the rules in many fisheries. The way to settle that is by establishing a proper regime, which is properly enforced.

We have no difficulty with some of the views that the Canadians are putting forward about that, but cutting the nets off a big trawler is dangerous and illegal. The Canadians are in danger of ruining a good case by that kind of action. I do not think anyone in the House, let alone anyone who represents a fisheries constituency, would want to encourage that kind of action on the high seas.

The argument is about how to enforce a proper regime. We must get people back to the table, and we must get an agreement. Both sides—I say this advisedly—would do well to cool the political rhetoric and get back to talking. If the hon. Gentleman is serious, as many are in the House, about the conservation of fish and reaching a proper agreement in the north Atlantic, what we need is a proper agreement that is properly enforced. That means reaching a legal agreement first.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to put the emphasis on enforcement. In that regard, what role have our inspectors played, in conjunction with the EU? Is it correct that they inspected the Spanish vessel that was initially involved in the dispute and, if so, what was the outcome of that inspection?

While our sympathies are entirely with the Canadians on the question of enforcement and the need for proper protection, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Canadians have wrong-footed themselves by arresting that trawler in the first place and cutting nets? Does my right hon. Friend also agree, however, that the European Commissioner has gone completely over the top in her reaction to the situation? We must now direct all our efforts to getting the parties around the table to start talking, so that the problem is settled in accordance with the rule of law.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend speaks for common sense and with a real understanding of the situation on behalf of everyone in the House. He is quite right. He knows far more about the details than I do, but I believe—[HON. MEMBERS: "So do we."] There are Opposition Members who know about them, too. I believe that cutting the wires of a big trawler could have capsized the boat or killed someone. In that case, the entire moral advantage that the Canadians have established would have been lost in one go.

I agree with my hon. Friend that some of the language used by the European Commissioner is intemperate and unwise. It would be advisable for her, and perhaps advisable for some of the Canadian spokesmen, to cool their language.

On my hon. Friend's specific point about British fisheries inspectors, the situation has not been quite correctly reported. A British official working for the Commission was sent by it to inspect the Estai when she returned from the north Atlantic fishery. He was not a British fisheries inspector as such. I believe that he made certain reports to the Commissioner, but we have not seen those in detail.

I advise the House to be a little careful about endorsing any such reports until we have seen them in detail. It is quite a long way across the Atlantic.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister must know that British fishermen have for some time been complaining about Spanish malpractice such as false holds and small-mesh nets. Does he accept that the reason that the Canadians enjoy so much support from the fishing industry is that they have shown a bit more vigour in enforcement than we have witnessed from the European Union? Using those incidents, what steps is he taking in the EU to tighten up the enforcement regime? Does he accept that, if illegal fishing is going on, irrespective of the flag of the vessel that carries it out, the international community should back proper enforcement of fisheries conservation rules?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is right. We should back tougher enforcement of proper rules. However, by definition, as soon as one succumbs to the tempting argument in favour of taking unilateral action and, formally, illegal action, all that work is lost. I believe that, from that dispute, we can obtain a tougher enforcement regime in that fishery, which will be a precedent for tougher enforcement in fisheries nearer home, and that is a prize that we should go for.

If we end up weakening international law as a result of all that, our fishermen will be at least as vulnerable as anyone else. Hon. Members should remember the tuna fishery incident last year when there was illegal cutting of our nets by Spaniards. If we were to start endorsing that type of action, we would not do our fishermen any good.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Bearing in mind the fact that Canada is a country that has never let Britain down when we have been in trouble, is the Minister aware that there is some disappointment and a great deal of anger in Canada and Britain that the Government have been presented as having little sympathy with the Canadians, who are in danger of having their fishing eradicated? Will the Minister make it abundantly clear that we are well aware that Spanish fishermen have illegally destroyed fishing grounds in many other regions, and will he stand 100 per cent. behind Canada in trying to solve what is a real problem, from which we cannot run away?

Mr. Waldegrave: No one in the House needs to be reminded of their sympathy for Canada. Newfoundland was discovered from my constituency. *[Interruption.]* I have to apologise to the hon. Member—it was. The Canadian fisheries protection vessel that cut the lines was named after a relation of mine. There is plenty of sympathy on both sides of the House with the Canadians.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that, if he reads the wise words of some of the Canadian fishermen, he will discover that they know very well that they largely destroyed their own cod stocks. They are now serious about conservation. They are right to ask the rest of us to join in being more serious about conservation, but the way to do that is to agree total allowable catches and enforce them, not to do things unilaterally. They have made their argument. We should continue the negotiations. We should obtain a regime that can be enforced and that will benefit not only those fisheries but other fisheries.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): In view of the real danger of an armed clash between Canadian and Spanish warships in the north Atlantic, will the Minister make it plain where Britain stands in the dispute about the fisheries between Canada and the European Union? Specifically, will he make it plain that he dissociates himself entirely from the decision made by the European Union to suspend negotiations—a decision that was announced as recently as today? Will he make further urgent representations to the Spanish Government to withdraw their warships from the area?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that the discussions continue; they certainly should. We stand for returning two close allies of ours, both members of NATO, to sensible negotiations round the table. They are both big countries. Canada is the seventh biggest economy in the world; Spain is the eighth. That type of dispute should be solved by proper negotiation by serious countries of that type. We stand for telling both to cool the rhetoric. We wish the Spaniards to pull back from the fishing grounds to give the talks a chance and the Canadians not to pursue unilateral action on the high seas.

There is obviously a negotiating position in play between both sides. The type of rhetoric that is being displayed, to some extent in Canada, and in the House from time to time, is not especially helpful in obtaining the type of long-term agreement that will be brokered, I believe, if only people will return to the table.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key to the issue is enforcement? If he does agree, does he not accept that a useful first step would be to make a comparison between the British Register of Shipping, held by the Marine Safety Agency, and Lloyd's Register of Shipping, which demonstrates a wide use of hidden holds, larger engine sizes and all the rest? It is perfectly clear that the French, the Spanish and some other nationalities in the European Union have been cheating consistently for a long time. We have the opportunity to do something about that. Will he agree to do so?

Mr. Waldegrave: I, too, read the interesting story in *The Sunday Telegraph* about the comparison between the Lloyd's register engine sizes and the declared engine sizes of the Spanish shipping fleet. There is something to follow through there—it is a useful piece of work.

My hon. Friend is right to say, as I said before, that out of the episode we can obtain a greater worldwide commitment to the enforcement of proper regimes—I believe that our fishermen will gain from that. It will not benefit us to appear to endorse unilateral action on the high seas. What will the House say if the Spanish unilaterally extend out into the tuna waters and say that they have decided to enforce their own regime over tuna on the international high seas and exclude our fishermen? What sort of moral position would the people who are making easy comments today find themselves in then?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In the eyes of the international community, the Icelandic Government did not lose the moral case when their coastguard vessels chopped the gear away from British trawlers. I know the industry, and I believe that the

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

Canadians will win the moral case. I know of no Scottish fisherman with sympathy for the Minister's position or, especially, the Spanish position.

Surely, in order to deal with international fisheries disputes, we need an international police force, perhaps under the United Nations blue flag. Will the Minister honour the promise that he made to me about Spanish vessels and ensure that United Kingdom waters are policed as toughly as the Canadians and Norwegians police theirs?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that it would be practical for an international police force to operate under the United Nations, as that would take until Doomsday to organise. We have an opportunity to set up an enforcement operation under the NAFO, with observers on the boats. The Canadians have made that proposal, which we support and which can be negotiated.

The hon. Gentleman knows a great deal about the industry. I do not know what he thinks my position is on the Canadians' moral position. I made it clear earlier that I thought that the Canadians were in danger of ruining their strong moral position by taking action that no fisherman on the high seas would support—the hon. Gentleman's constituents no more than anyone else.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Given that emotions on the issue are running high in my part of the world, and given our long and important traditional links with Canada, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Canadian high commissioner has expressed his thanks to the United Kingdom for the way in which we have conducted ourselves throughout the matter?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is true—and I am grateful for it—that the Canadian high commissioner today expressed his gratitude to the British Government for the efforts that we have been making towards a negotiated outcome that will stick.

To return to the previous question, the conservation of the stocks on the Grand Banks clearly needs co-ordinated management. No one would argue about that, but how should it be done? I beg the House to remember that we are not talking about the amount of fish caught, which has already been agreed.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): In recognising that recent events have focused clearly on the practices of the Spanish fishing fleet, does the Minister also accept the need to look at the accession agreements pertaining to Spain and Portugal? It seems that, if the accession agreements are not changed, we could have a free-for-all in western waters by 1 January 1996. That matter must be addressed seriously.

In that context, what representations is the Minister making to the Commission to ensure that agreement can be reached before the June Council? Is he looking at the text of the framework regulations that will be discussed? It is important that we sort the matter out before the Spanish take over the presidency on 1 July.

Mr. Waldegrave: An April meeting of the Fisheries Council will seek to reach agreement on those matters in a timely fashion. The hon. Lady knows that the accession agreements were fundamentally settled 10 years ago. There will not be a free-for-all, because we negotiated additional protection—although not as much as I would have liked—in our western waters which will prevent that from occurring.

The fundamental point remains the enforcement of whatever agreements may be made. That is where there is a prize to be won from this dispute: I believe that the lessons to be learned about enforcement will prove very useful to us in providing a precedent which we can apply elsewhere in the world.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I remind my right hon. Friend that the Table at which he stands is a gift from Canada. Will he ensure that the multiplicity of agreements, negotiated both bilaterally and through the Economic Community, that exist in every ocean of the world are enforced properly? Will he and his Department always react first in support of those people who are trying to enforce those very difficult agreements?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is not quite correct: the Dispatch Box at which I stand was the gift of New Zealand. [HON. MEMBERS: "He said the Table."] The Table—I am happy to acknowledge the fundamental support from Canada underneath the Dispatch Box.

My hon. Friend is correct, but the Canadians want—and we all need—a legally enforceable agreement to conserve stocks in that fishery and to enforce catch sizes within the allowable limits agreed by the scientists. The Canadians have raised those issues very effectively, but now they are in danger of diminishing respect for the law itself. It is not in their own long-term interests to seek to improve the law unilaterally. We need better laws which are better enforced; we do not want to return to the old days of unilateral action.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Does the Minister agree that the use of small-mesh nets is bad fishing practice as well as bad ecology? Will he inform the House how else the Canadian Government could throw the world spotlight on that unacceptable Spanish fishing practice if they did not seize those nets and show them to the world? When will the Government support Canada in its ecologically based fight to preserve fishing stocks in the north Atlantic?

Mr. Waldegrave: A proper enforcement regime in the north Atlantic fishery, which enables an observer to bring a ship to the nearest port for inspection if there is a serious allegation such as fishing with illegal nets, is the way forward. That is the kind of suggestion that is on the table for negotiation. As I have said several times today, the Canadians have been effective in bringing the issue into the world spotlight, but they should not blow their achievement by doing things which are not only illegal but dangerous.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend please save himself a great deal of political embarrassment, and save Her Majesty's Government needless political obloquy, by recommending to his right hon. Friends that the Government should withdraw from the common fisheries policy, under which we find ourselves needlessly embroiled in a dispute which has nothing to do with us? We should concentrate on protecting our fishing communities at home, conserving the fish stocks in our own waters and encouraging our good Canadian friends to do the same.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is paradoxical to suggest that a simple solution to international disputes would be to return to unilateral national competition. The Canadians are not asking for what my hon. Friend is arguing: they require an enforceable international regime in that fishery, which would cover the Poles, Cubans, Russians, Bulgarians and others. That is the way forward, and it will not be achieved by countries attempting to police their own zones without international co-operation.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is it not a fact that these fish wars are likely to continue as long as so many fishermen seem to be short-sighted, blinkered and selfish, and prepared to carry on destroying fish stocks and, ultimately, their own jobs and the industry as well? European Union ships are fishing illegally off the west coast of Africa. Will the Minister also remind Mr. Tobin, the Canadian Minister, that, having destroyed the cod stocks in Newfoundland, it is ridiculous and unacceptable to talk about a seal cull, because to blame seals for the ridiculous behaviour of fishermen really is the last straw?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is ingenious in widening the scope to one of his other great concerns—animal welfare. His fundamental point, however, is right. I do not blame the individual fishermen, but technology has now given such power to the fishermen of the world, and will continue to give even greater power, so that, unless there are proper agreements that are properly policed and a proper share-out, we will see a classic case of what economists call the tragedy of the commons written on a global scale. That is why it must be done by agreement.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the present dispute between Canada and Spain shows clearly the cavalier attitude of the Spanish towards fish stocks, be they in the high seas or elsewhere? Does he further agree that the way forward is not only to ensure enforcement of common fishing policies but to ensure that we have efficient sanctions against those who do not abide by the rules, in the form of a reduction in quota year by year until those transgressors are not allowed to fish at all?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is on the right track: on how first to prove the offences, where offences have been committed, and then to have serious penalties to ensure that the policies are properly enforced. The Spanish have created problems in other fisheries in the world. They are not the only ones who break fisheries rules—let us be honest about that—but they do have a huge modern fleet. They are tough fishermen, and they have broken rules in different places in the past. A Spanish-owned, British-flagged ship was fined a considerable sum just a couple of weeks ago in the British courts.

Points of Order

3.57 pm

Several hon. Members: On a point of order.

Madam Speaker: Let me see how many hon. Members want to raise points of order, then I shall know where to go first. All those who were not called at Question Time, is that right?

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): On a serious point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and in view of the recent decision by the BBC to broadcast four hours of debate from the Labour party conference on clause IV, just before the district council elections, have you received any notification from the BBC that, to balance the situation, it intends to broadcast four hours of Conservative speeches; or do you intend to launch an inquiry into this very serious issue?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Last Thursday, Madam Speaker, you curtailed debate on l'affaire Cantona, under the sub judice rule. Will you look into the sub judice rule, because, since last Thursday and, indeed, before, throughout the case, there were breaches of that rule by the press and the sound media? In fact, over the weekend, journalists have been suggesting what might happen in the Appeal Court on Friday. Surely what is good for the House should be good for the people out there, who I believe have influenced the case more than they should have done.

Madam Speaker: The House has no authority in what the press may report in terms of the sub judice rule. We have our own sub judice rules, which have been imposed on me by the House, and I have to carry out those rules.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): You may well know that the gallant British fishing fleet, out of support for the Canadians, who are seeking to conserve fish stocks on behalf of all of us, has decided to fly on its boats the maple leaf. Would it be in order for the House, in support of the British fishermen, to fly the maple leaf from the Victoria Tower?

Madam Speaker: That question should perhaps be referred to the Administration Committee.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have seen reports of yet another national health service scandal as a woman giving birth to premature twins had to travel 84 miles to find intensive care incubators. What exactly are the Secretary of State for Health's responsibilities, and does she intend to explain to the House the daily crises in the NHS?

Madam Speaker: To the best of my knowledge, there has been no indication from the Government that they are prepared to make a statement on these matters. The hon. Lady may, of course, try her luck at catching my eye during Health questions and raise those matters in that way.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have noticed that a number of Conservative Members have been criticising the BBC for the way in which individual

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

journalists have been asking questions of Ministers on radio and television. I suggest that they are raising what is an issue of concern to many of us, which is that the BBC has clearly noted that parliamentary replies are such in these times that Parliament itself is being denied information in parliamentary answers, and that we, as Members of Parliament, have become increasingly reliant on journalists to ask questions and secure answers in the national media which we cannot get in Parliament.

In light of that fact, and following the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), who mentioned an inquiry, may I ask you, while recognising that your powers are limited in respect of answers given by Ministers, to consider the whole issue, given that two of my hon. Friends have now made a complaint—

Madam Speaker: Order. The point of order is whether I am willing to consider the answers given by Ministers to parliamentary questions. It is for Back Benchers to continue to probe and question Ministers to get the answers that they require. It is not a matter for me, as Speaker, as I have no control or authority over the answers given by Ministers. It is part of the cut and thrust of the House and the challenge for hon. Members to pursue matters with Ministers if they feel that they are not receiving satisfactory replies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On that same matter—

Madam Speaker: No. There can be no further point of order on that matter.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter reported in *The Guardian* today. I was shocked to learn from a reply from the Financial Secretary that £136 million of taxpayers' money has been used to advertise privatisation share sales. At no point in any of the debates on the various privatisations was it apparent that sums of that magnitude were to be expended. I seek your guidance as to how I can pursue this matter, as there is legitimate public interest in it.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Lady may like to consider asking parliamentary questions, or to pursue the matter through an Adjournment debate, and use the Order Paper in that way.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. How far along is the procedure regarding the early release of documents on which ministerial statements are made? Are you satisfied that the negotiations are gaining ground? Too often, statements are made before the documents to which the statements refer are released from the Vote Office. I do not expect the statement itself to be released, but it would be helpful if the documents were released a couple of hours before the statement was made.

Madam Speaker: Arrangements have been in hand for some time to provide that the documents—not, as the hon. Gentleman understands, the statements themselves—are available in the Vote Office an hour or an hour and a half before a statement is made. It is usually up to the Minister involved to lay down the time when he will put the documents in the Vote Office, but they are there in advance. If the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind, he should let me know about it. I shall take it up, and see if I can improve matters.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any representations from the Secretary of State for the Environment about making a statement on the report in *The Guardian* today about the threat to marine life in the Irish sea? The dumping of 25,000 tonnes of toxic waste and chemical weapons, including nerve gas, arsenic bombs and toxic seed coverings, has rightly been described as an "environmental time bomb". Does not the House have a right to a statement about the extent of the threat and the environmental impact?

Madam Speaker: The Government have not informed me that they wish to make a statement today on that matter. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that all hon. Members know of statements ahead of time by means of the annunciators? We all know by 1 o'clock if statements will be made.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to a parliamentary answer that was sneaked out last Wednesday? It said that, for the first time, through Government Departments, the intelligence and security services and the nuclear industry would have direct access to the police national computer. That has enormous implications for civil liberties and for an independent and non-centralised police force. Surely that information should not have been sneaked out in a parliamentary answer in that way.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman objects to that, he should take it up with the Ministers concerned. That is not a point of order for me. No breach of our procedures or Standing Orders has occurred. The hon. Gentleman may table parliamentary questions, raise the matter in an Adjournment debate, or use an early-day motion to bring the matter to Ministers' attention.

Insolvency Commission

4.5 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to improve the regulation of insolvency practitioners.

The Bill sets up an insolvency commission. It is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It has two purposes. First, it aims to ensure that the insolvency system protects not only creditors but jobs, and, where possible, that insolvent companies are able to continue trading. Secondly, it restores confidence in the insolvency practitioners industry and outlaws people who, sadly, are found to be either inefficient or unprofessional.

The first I heard of the problems in some parts of the insolvency industry was from a Mr. Carpenter in my constituency. Although he put his company into voluntary liquidation, he found that, on assets realised of £180,000, the insolvency practitioners charged him no less than £50,000 to wind it up. He is still making a complaint through the machinery of the insolvency practitioner industry. That case has been delayed some three years.

I am not saying that that case is necessarily typical, but such anecdotal evidence shows that, in a minority of cases, the constructive approach that Kenneth Cork wanted for our insolvency legislation in 1986 is not necessarily being followed through. He said:

"The purpose of bankruptcy is not to punish the debtor, but on the contrary, to protect him from his creditors".

Administrative receivership was introduced to do that and to save jobs and companies. The reason is that legislation is heavily weighted towards the practitioner and away from the company and people who are made insolvent. For instance, insolvency practitioners have a duty of care not to stakeholders but to the creditors for whom they are asked to bring in a petition. They have a statutory monopoly.

In the main, all but 150 of the 1,961 insolvency practitioners have no obligation to be audited in public, as is the case with most companies. When a company goes into liquidation, directors lose the right to have information on what is happening, and thereby the opportunity to comment on the efficiency or otherwise of insolvency practitioners. A recent survey showed that no fewer than 62 per cent. of company directors did not even know that a petition had been brought to wind up the company until the petition had reached the court.

Under section 27 of the Insolvency Act 1986, the powers of creditor committees are more formal than real. The 1990 Charnley-Davies case said that there is no jurisdiction over insolvency practitioners' negligence. The Bankruptcy Association has told me that, when one is made bankrupt during insolvency, one is in a highly emotional state. One often loses one's home. As a result, one is not in a position to ask insolvency practitioners the questions that one might wish to ask.

In the main, the vast majority of companies involved in the insolvency profession do a sensible and proper job, but the actions of a small minority are unacceptable. In 1993, the Select Committee on Social Security commented in relation to the winding up of the Maxwell company that £50 million was paid in fees to insolvency practitioners. As a result, the Committee called for a review of procedures for monitoring the progress of insolvencies.

Various studies have been made of the failings of the present system. In particular, there is criticism of the practice of banks appointing reporting accountants who subsequently re-emerge as administrators of the company. The dual role means that those accountants' original reports may not have been as objective as they should have been. In other words, people go by the rule but not by the spirit of the code of professional ethics. It is significant that, when the Royal Bank of Scotland decided that nobody would be allowed to act in two capacities, the number of administrations for which it was responsible fell by 60 per cent.

The level of fees, too, is often rightly criticised. In one case, £2.5 million-worth of assets cost £850,000 in fees. Another insolvency practitioner apparently charged £2,500 for six hours' work. In 1992, the *Financial Times* carried a report about the insolvency service showing that half of all insolvency practitioners failed fairly seriously to meet the statutory requirements. Yet, sadly, that failure has not been met with any great disciplinary action within the industry, which is self-regulating. In the eight years between 1986 and 1994, only five insolvency practitioners were struck off.

In my view, one of the reasons for all that is the inadequacy of the system of self-regulation within the industry. The system is diffuse—there are seven associations responsible for the monitoring and validation of qualifications in the industry—and there is a complicated complaints procedure, which is unwieldy and takes far too long. Although, last year, the joint industry monitoring unit was set up, only the chartered accountants and the Law Society belong to it. The certified accountants refused to join.

The Institute of Insolvency Practitioners has said that the unit has

"no power whatsoever for independent action on any problems it may find during inspection".

So everything goes back to the self-regulating individual bodies that have proved too reluctant to take action against inadequate practice in the past. That is plainly unsatisfactory, and it is disappointing that, in their response to the Social Security Select Committee, the Government said:

"We do not consider it necessary or appropriate to undertake a wider-ranging review of this particular area".

I do consider it necessary to undertake such a review, which would achieve two aims. First, it would improve and promote good practice within the profession. Secondly—to be fair, this is equally important—a review would diminish the credibility gap that too often affects the proper, hard-working, efficient and skilled practitioners who make up the vast majority of those in the profession today.

I suggest setting up an independent insolvency commission. It would be paid for by the profession, so it would not be a charge on the taxpayer, and it would have lay members and a lay chairman. The commission would take over the handling of complaints and set up an insolvency ombudsman, as was suggested by the Cork and the Justice committees. It would also carry out inspections, take over the powers of the joint industry monitoring unit and ensure that inspections were consistent, and validate qualifications within the profession—although much progress has been made already in that regard.

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

The commission could also carry out disciplinary action, removing that task from the individual associations that now, where necessary, validate insolvency practitioners. That, I hope, would mean a far more rigorous disciplinary regime than exists at present.

Whatever the fate of my Bill, those proposals should be seriously considered when the Government next review company law—as, indeed, was suggested to me by hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. David Shaw, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Keith Mans, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Tim Smith, Sir Fergus Montgomery, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. John Maxton and Mr. Peter Butler.

INSOLVENCY COMMISSION

Mr. Anthony Coombs accordingly presented a Bill to improve the regulation of insolvency practitioners: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 90.]

Orders of the Day

Disability Discrimination Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

New clause 9

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

' .—(1) It is unlawful for a provider of information to discriminate against a disabled person—

(a) in refusing to provide, or deliberately not providing, to the disabled person any information which he provides, or is prepared to provide, to members of the public;

(b) in failing to comply with any duty imposed on him by section 15 in circumstances in which the effect of that failure is to make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for the disabled person to make use of any such information;

(c) in the standard of information which he provides to the disabled person or the manner in which he provides it to him; or

(d) in the terms on which he provides information to the disabled person.

(2) For the purposes of this Part a person is a provider of information if he is concerned with the provision, whether directly or indirectly, to the public or a sector of the public, of information necessary to the purchase, maintenance and use of services.'.—*[Mr. Wigley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.14 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendment No. 77.

No. 33, in clause 15, page 11, line 6, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 34, in page 11, line 8, after 'service', insert 'or of information'.

No. 35, in page 11, line 39, after 'service', insert 'or of information'.

No. 44, in page 11, line 40, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 36, in page 11, line 42, after 'service', insert 'or such information'.

No. 37, in page 11, line 43, after 'service', insert 'or the provider'.

No. 38, in page 11, line 48, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 39, in page 12, line 2, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 40, in page 12, line 8, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 41, in page 12, line 11, after 'services', insert

'or a provider of information'.

No. 42, in page 12, line 19, at end insert—

'(cc) information of a prescribed description'.

No. 43, in page 12, line 23, after 'services', insert

'or one provider of information'.

Mr. Wigley: I am glad of the opportunity to move new clause 9 in the early part of today's debate. I hope that we shall make some progress and that the Government will be responsive to the points made. Several aspects of the matters covered by the new clause were problematic in Committee and at earlier stages.

The new clause deals with the avoidance of discrimination in the provision of services, with particular regard to information that a disabled person needs concerning those services. It is absolutely fundamental, to be able to benefit from a service, that a disabled person knows that the service exists and how and where to get it. Without the availability of that information, the disabled person cannot take advantage of services or the provision of goods. Discrimination in services, therefore, may not arise because it is secondary. Clearly, if a service cannot be used, the discrimination has already occurred. To deny disabled people knowledge and information of what is available is the most fundamental discrimination.

The Bill is concerned with discrimination in a number of areas, many of which we discussed yesterday, such as education, shop services, transport, leisure and employment. How can, for example, a deaf person have access to educational information transmitted by the spoken word, such as on the radio or the television, without text to go with it? How can he have access to information by telephone? Many services are now provided over the telephone. How can a blind person or a person with a visual impairment catch a train if he or she cannot read the timetable? How can such people avoid electrocuting themselves with machinery if they cannot read the instructions? How can they apply for a job if they cannot read the advertisements? The purpose of the new clause is to cover such areas and to secure an effective right of access to information for disabled people, especially those with a sensory impairment, such as sight or hearing loss.

The matter clearly concerns the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Indeed, I am obliged to it for much of the background information for this debate and I am especially grateful to Alun Thomas, its parliamentary officer, whom I think a number of my hon. Friends have met. Alun is known to me because he worked for us as a researcher in Parliament before taking his present job. I know that, with his own visual impairment, people could easily have assumed that he was not capable of the sort of detailed reading and background work of a parliamentary researcher.

Given the right lighting, the right-sized print and the computer services available these days, Alun did an excellent job. His ability to do so could have been denied—not only by ourselves but by others who might have been considering employing him—because of discrimination based on a perceived disability. It is an example of people seeing the disability rather than seeing the ability, which is what this Bill is all about.

According to research undertaken by the RNIB, at least 500,000 people in the United Kingdom cannot read ordinary-sized print. In practice, that means a denial of access to information, such as mail, dosage advice on medical items or use-by labels on food, which fully sighted people take for granted. For many people with visual impairment, access to such information is a problem. Of the 1 million blind and partially sighted people in the UK, almost half live alone and 90 per cent. are over the age of 65. Many visually impaired people are often isolated in their homes, seldom receiving visitors, with a diminishing number of friends and finding it difficult to get out and about on their own. People in those circumstances should not, and often cannot, rely on a friendly neighbour to read their bank statement, council tax bill or other confidential information.

The Bill introduces two new rights that we hope will lead to more freedom of choice for disabled people. The first hurdle for blind and partially sighted people in exercising their rights under the Bill is the difficulty in obtaining information in a usable form. For example, finding a job is made immensely difficult for visually impaired people by lack of information that they can readily access. One person told the RNIB:

> "I'm looking to change my career at the moment but it's really difficult because the information I need is only in print."

That brings home the fact that access to work is made that much more difficult. Discrimination takes place before the question of applying for a job has even arisen because visually impaired people are unable to obtain information about jobs.

A deaf-blind person reliant on braille as a means of communication told the RNIB that while he had persuaded his local council to provide his council tax bill in braille, any information unrelated to the council getting money, including information about council services, was sent in print. In practice, that meant that the person had to overcome a hurdle before deciding which swimming pool to use or finding out the opening hours of the local library.

Why is the new clause necessary? The success or failure of the Bill will hinge on whether it can help to deal with the instances of direct and indirect discrimination faced by disabled people in their daily lives. For wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties, discrimination is often most acute in the context of access to buildings and vehicles. For visually impaired people, discrimination is often caused in the first instance by the lack of accessible information.

Will the Bill mean that visually impaired people such as a shareholder in Northern Electric will receive information about that company on tape without having to expose the company's reluctance to do so in the media? Will it mean that a visually impaired person will receive assistance from the local supermarket to identify items on shelves so that he can shop at a time of convenience to him and find the bargains of the week? Will it mean that no one will receive a renewal application form from his council for his blind person's travel pass in print and not in braille?

I have described some of the practical difficulties faced by people who have visual impairments. Research proves the case for new clause 9. Research conducted by the RNIB and published in the document entitled "Seeing it our way" discovered how access to information had changed the lives of visually impaired people. One person said:

> "I get the Radio Times in braille, which I would be totally lost without. Now I don't need to ask anyone what is happening on 'Neighbours'".

[Mr. Wigley]

That is a day-to-day practical example of something that is meaningful to people in their everyday lives.

Research also revealed how the lack of accessible information hampered the daily lives of blind and partially sighted people. One of them said:

> "The Council said that if I wanted to be rehoused because of my sight problem I'd have to fill in an application form. But the form is so tiny I can't read it!"

Goodness knows, many of us who do not consider ourselves to have a massive visual impairment find difficulty with many of the forms that are put before us. One suspects that the size of the print is used as a deterrent to stop people following things through.

Other research undertaken by the RNIB, published in February in the report entitled "Second class citizen", revealed how difficult it was for visually impaired people to obtain access to information. More than half of councils in London are unable to provide council tax bills in formats other than small print. That most certainly should not be so.

Although there are pockets of good practice such as in the Department of Social Security and its agencies, the performance of Government Departments is very poor. There is a distinct lack of a co-ordinated approach to serving the needs of visually impaired people in many Government Departments.

A report in 1993 launching the RNIB campaign for accessible information entitled "See it right" also revealed many examples of good and bad practice in the provision of information. Examples of good practice included the availability of the Boots pharmaceutical catalogue in braille, the introduction of a bank's braille facility and British Telecom's braille bills. I am told that British Telecom co-operated well after learning of the difficulties of reading invoices, which are now sent out in large-print versions where necessary. Those good examples are to be praised.

There are bad examples, one of which was brought to my attention by the RNIB concerning a gentleman from London. He said:

> "I recently received my Green Employment card from the Department of Employment, this proves that I am blind for employment purposes. The renewal letter is in print . . . the Department know that I am a braillist because I have a braille machine on loan from them, which I also get a print renewal for."

In other words, information is given in print form to a person who is known to the Department not to be able to use print. That must have resulted from a breakdown in the provision of services. The Bill should address that breakdown, and new clause 9 attempts to do so.

Another example of bad practice was given by a man from Kent, who said:

> "Many of the forms I receive are unreadable, for example, an income tax form could not be completed without some assistance. If such forms could be in large print together with the literature that accompany them, much of the difficulty might be overcome."

No one is saying that every form for every person—whether he has a visual handicap or not—needs to be in such formats, but we must ensure that there is a facility that can meet the needs of visually challenged people when necessary, particularly with regard to mail shots, which are now overwhelmingly sent out from a database. New clause 9 is the most effective way of ensuring that the needs of visually impaired people are identified and properly addressed.

The Government could claim that the new clause is unnecessary since access to information is already referred to elsewhere in the Bill. In a letter to the RNIB, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People confirmed that, under that right, service providers will be required to provide communication aids where reasonable and necessary to enable disabled people to use the service in question. He emphasised that where facilities for the communication and the provision of information are provided as services in themselves, they must also be made accessible where reasonable. Unfortunately, the spirit of that letter is not reflected in the wording of the Bill, although Government amendment No. 77 may help. I shall come to that in a moment.

An unequivocal statement is needed in the Bill to counter the current ignorance of the needs of visually impaired people among information providers. The new clause would make it clear that the provision of information is a service in itself, and would recognise that gaining access to information is a prerequisite to allowing visually impaired people to exercise a meaningful choice about facilities, goods and services. It is not a matter of an auxiliary service—it is a matter of principle.

Another objection may be that the new clause would require all information to be produced in braille, which would impose onerous obligations on service providers. In reality, the new clause would not oblige a company to produce all its internal memos in braille, large print or in parallel. The new clause clearly relates to part III of the Bill, and is subject to the test of reasonableness and the justifications for less favourable treatment for disabled people in clauses 13 and 14.

The attitude that those objections reflect is often based on a number of misconceptions about visual impairment. Braille is a vital means of communication, but only for its 19,000 readers out of a total visually impaired population of 1 million people. The majority of visually impaired people can read print that is distinct and fairly large. Adhering to good practice in print standards would help a service provider to communicate its message much more effectively to fully sighted people. New technology has made it simpler and more cost-effective to produce braille in-house, and there are also a growing number of external transcribers. It is wrong to overstate the difficulties in providing braille for the relatively small number of people who need it.

Another objection may be that the new clause proposes the provision of information directly or indirectly, which will mean that manufacturers that are not service providers will come under the terms of the Bill. In reality, the purpose of the inclusion of indirect providers is to acknowledge that some companies are better placed to supply acceptable information about their products, even though they are not regarded as service providers as they make their products available through a retailer.

British Telecom, for example, will be considered a service provider under the terms of the Bill, since it sells telephones directly to the public, and will be expected to provide braille instructions for its answerphones, if requested to do so by a visually impaired customer. As the Bill stands, however, Creda would not be obliged to provide taped information about its cookers on request since its products are available only through high street retailers. We would thus have the bizarre situation that has been suggested to the RNIB—responsibility for explaining how a cooker worked would fall on Mr. Jones, the high street shopkeeper, since he would be the service provider. Clearly, such anomalies must be sorted out.

4.30 pm

The rights established under the Bill must be clear for disabled person and service provider alike. As the Bill stands, the service provider is likely to be completely unaware of his or her new responsibilities to visually impaired customers. For blind and partially sighted people, the reference to information is so nebulous that there is no guarantee that they would succeed in progressing cases under the Bill. The problem of enforceability is exacerbated by the fact that the Government believe that most cases will be settled out of court under this part of the Bill.

The new clause does not state that all information must at all times and in all places be produced in parallel in print, braille and spoken tapes. That would not be feasible, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Laughter.*] I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. How could I make such a mistake? It would not be feasible to provide all information in all modes in every circumstance, but we need to ensure that the various modes are available as appropriate.

Under the terms of the new clause, refusing to provide information if requested to do so would be illegal. In other words, thought must be given to how vital information, which is needed to avoid discrimination, can be at hand in an understandable form for those who need it. The new clause should lead people to think in advance how information can be made available for blind, visually handicapped or deaf people.

The first part of Government amendment No. 77, which is linked with my new clause, refers to

"access to and use of means of communication",

which is certainly a step in the right direction; it would help deaf and deaf and blind people in particular. The second part of it, however, refers to

"access to and use of information services",

which is far too restrictive. We are concerned about information on services, not merely information services. We need to ensure that we do not include only the services that consist exclusively of provision of information, which is what the second half of the amendment seems to suggest. We should be concerned about information on goods and services generally.

I should be grateful if the Minister could clarify the intention behind the second half of the amendment. Perhaps the Government are trying to do what we want to achieve under the new clause, but the wording does not achieve that. What about circumstances in which the provision of information is peripheral to the main service being provided—for example, information on a credit card statement? Does Government amendment No. 77 provide that that information should be in a usable form for those who are visually impaired, as the main service is the provision of credit and not of credit card statements? The information on a railway timetable is another example—British Rail runs a rail service, not an information service.

Those examples must be clarified. Clearly, that area needs to be tightened considerably if the Bill is to deliver the support that is needed by many hundreds of thousands of disabled people, especially those who are visually challenged, and if they are to avoid continuing discrimination against them in the provision of goods and services. The Government clearly understand the need to strengthen the Bill because they tabled an amendment, but it does not go far enough, which is why I tabled new clause 9.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): I have a great deal of sympathy with many of the points made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), although if I had to explain what had happened in the last episode of "Neighbours" I, too, would have to ask someone.

I understand fully why the hon. Gentleman has moved new clause 9 and the associated amendments. I agree that it is essential that disabled people, particularly those with visual or hearing impairments, have access to information about facilities and services.

In constructing the right of access to goods and services in the Bill, our aim was to develop a statutory right of non-discrimination that is universal, all-embracing and applies to all providers of goods, facilities and services to the public.

The basic structure of that right is set out in clause 12, which provides that it is unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person by not providing goods, facilities and services that he provides for members of the public. I am happy to make it clear now, as I did in Committee, that the provision of information is one such service and is definitely covered by the Bill.

Clause 15 sets out the duty on service providers to make adjustments to practices, policies and procedures to enable disabled people to access the service being provided. Subsection (5) already makes it clear that that includes providing information in accessible formats, such as on tape or via an interpreter, where that would be an auxiliary aid or service enabling a disabled person to make use of the service. The Bill thus covers the provision of information services either as a service in itself or as an adjunct to other services.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon mentioned several examples of what he meant. May I give a few examples? Timetables that help people to use the service of a transport network; leaflets that help people use the service of welfare benefits; menus that help people with restaurants; recorded information about theatres; statements about banking; directional signs about car parking; verbally communicated information in a butcher's shop; guide books in art galleries; and subtitles or voice-overs in broadcasting are all intended to fall within the scope of the Bill. I agree, however, that we may need to make that clearer and, as the hon. Gentleman noted, to achieve that we propose Government amendment No.77.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the distinction between those examples and placing a duty on retailers or manufacturers to produce operating instructions in accessible formats. We are entering an extremely difficult area. If, for instance, we were to place a burden on manufacturers it would, first, be difficult to tie down what was meant by "instructions". For example, would the operating instructions for a CD player include the labels and knobs on the machine itself? If so, the implications for designing and bringing new products to market could be enormous.

[Mr. William Hague]

Secondly, foreign-made products would present difficulties. Foreign manufacturers would be outside the scope of the Bill, so those which make many products for which operating instructions are most required, particularly electrical equipment, would not have to comply with a requirement to change their format.

Thirdly, the liability on retailers would also be extremely onerous. I am not sure that we could expect supermarkets to provide information in alternative formats on all the goods that they sell.

Those are difficult areas which even those responsible for drafting the Americans with Disabilities Act did not attempt to solve. The ADA makes no provision for accessible instructions. I am clear, however, that the Bill should cover information services, information about a service and access to and use of means of communication.

We debated the issue at some length in Committee and I have received a number of representations, to which the hon. Member for Caernarfon referred, about including a specific reference to the provision of information in accessible formats in the Bill. I am happy that the Bill, as drafted, already makes provision for that, but I am prepared to take on board the concerns of disabled people with physical and sensory impairments, who will be most affected by the provision.

That is why I tabled Government amendment No.77, which makes it absolutely clear that

"access to and use of means of communication"

and

"access to and use of information services"

are included in the right of access. That requirement adds to the requirement to provide information about a service, which is already contained in the Bill. I therefore believe that the amendment clarifies the position beyond doubt in a practical and sensible way, and does so within the framework of the Bill.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying how far the Government are prepared to go, but I want to ensure that we understand him properly. The Minister has said that it will be a statutory requirement to provide information services and information about services when the Bill becomes law, but that information about goods will not be subject to a similar requirement. How will a visually challenged person, who may use some electrical equipment purchased from a shop, avoid being electrocuted if the necessary information about how that piece of equipment should be used is not provided? That visually challenged person may be capable of using such machinery or equipment if he or she is provided with the relevant information. If it is not possible to provide a parallel braille or enlarged instruction set, surely some provision should be made for a fallback so that those individuals can get that information. That responsibility must lie, if not with Mr. Jones, the shopkeeper, with someone else. If we do not tackle that problem, the Bill will have a big hole in it.

Mr. Hague: I certainly understand that problem. It would be good practice for manufacturers and retailers to ensure that information was available. One may place a legal duty on manufacturers and retailers to make information available in every case about operating instructions and directions for use. It would be difficult, however, to differentiate between different types of goods. The problem with that legal duty is that it is extremely difficult for manufacturers to define that information and, as I have already said, many manufacturers are outside the United Kingdom and would not be subject to the law in any case. The United States Congress was unable to solve that problem when it framed the Americans with Disabilities Act. I cannot find a satisfactory way of solving it in the Bill.

I hope that the hon. Member for Caernarfon will at least be able to welcome the clarification that I have given about the purpose of the Bill. I believe that it will cover the provision of information and the means of communication. Government amendment No. 77 provides additional clarification by making it clear that information should be provided in an accessible format, whether that information is a service in itself or information about a service. That will be incorporated within the framework of the Bill if we use Government amendment No. 77 for that purpose. I hope that it will command—

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I will give way, although I am on my final sentence.

Mr. Barnes: I thought that I should get in before that last sentence.

To what extent are a specific category of disabled people—those with learning difficulties—covered by the Bill? Certain organisations, such as People First, make considerable efforts to spread information. People First has produced a version of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in a good, readily available form. Although the terms of the new clause and the amendments are general, they may apply to the visually impaired in particular and I believe that they should also refer to those with learning difficulties. Would the Minister's analysis apply to those people?

Mr. Hague: Most of the debate has focused on people with physical or sensory impairments, but the duty would be to provide auxiliary aids and other formats where it is reasonable to do so. It does not exclude providing information on the lines suggested by the hon. Gentleman, but a judgment must be made about where it is reasonable to do that.

I hope that I have clarified the Government's position. We will improve the Bill if Government amendment No. 77 is accepted and I hope that it will command the support of the House.

4.45 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): We welcome Government amendment No. 77, although we regret that the Minister resisted a similar amendment when we tried to move one in Committee. Nevertheless, that amendment has now been tabled.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) made the case exactly. The debate is another example of taking a minimalist approach. Let me give the Minister one or two examples.

When one buys any electrical goods, it is rare for them not to include a guarantee, shaped like a concertina, that is translated into four or even six languages, not all of them European. Many of those products are made in Japan or the far east, and those guarantees are obviously designed for the markets in which the products are sold. If such information can be provided, why cannot the Minister at least open discussions with some of the main importers of those goods to try to encourage them to make information available, on request, to people with disabilities who need it to overcome the safety problem raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon?

Manufacturers had better wake up to the fact that, as in the provision of services, unless they provide such information, they will increasingly be at commercial disadvantage. There is something in it for them as well.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman has put it the right way, because there is certainly scope for future discussions about that. There is a great commercial incentive for manufacturers and retailers to think about supplying operating instructions. That is beyond the Bill, but I, as Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, and the National Disability Council would want to pursue it. It is another step to say that we should incorporate in legislation an attempt to regulate manufacturers that may be based in Japan, Germany or the United States.

Mr. Corbett: I understand that, but I am glad that the Minister has taken my point, and that his Department or the National Disability Council, or both, will pursue it. I understand his reluctance to lay duties upon British manufacturers which it is not possible to lay upon foreign manufacturers, but there is nothing to stop him opening discussions with major British manufacturers.

We are talking about providing information when it is requested, be it in braille, tape form, large print or text, as People First has done in its excellent presentation of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, the better Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Birmingham city council is not alone among local authorities in translating its main documents—not just those about the council tax and extracting money from citizens—and issuing either a summary or a complete translation of them in the main languages used by the ethnic groups which make up a quarter of the population of the city of Birmingham. I might add that the council is extremely good at making such documents accessible to people with disabilities.

I believe that it is a small step from people accepting the sense of respecting the different languages used throughout a community, particularly those in big cities, to making sure that such documents are available to everyone. It re-emphasises the argument that has run through our debates, because, unless the Bill starts the process of ensuring that every person with disabilities becomes, in time, a person with equal rights and equal status in our society, it will not succeed.

I ask for a number of small things to be done, and I hope that the Minister will try to do something about them between now and when the Bill is considered in another place.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I support the new clause and amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I also welcome Government amendment No. 77, which provides for

"access to and use of means of communication"

and information services.

Access to information for blind and partially sighted and deaf people and those with learning difficulties is crucial. Misconceptions about the difficulty of providing access must not deter providers of services from giving basic information to disabled people.

It is an all too common assumption that doing so can be expensive, but it does not mean providing everything in braille, as the hon. Member for Caernafon said. The offer to read something out on the telephone or to use better print standards is often enough. The cost of audio tapes is pretty minimal these days. For deaf people, visual information indicators, which we are used to seeing on railway stations, would be helpful in hospitals and other public service waiting areas.

Advances in technology have opened new doors for handicapped people seeking information, so it is important that providers of information are aware of all the possibilities open to them in passing information to their customers. I believe that the Government have recognised that with their amendment, and it considerably strengthens the Bill.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful for the support that has been given from the Opposition Front Bench and by the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) to the new clause that I have tabled.

I listened carefully to the Minister's comments. There is no doubt that he has moved from the original position he adopted, as we interpreted things, on Second Reading and in Committee, but I am unhappy that there remains an aspect that he has not tackled rigorously enough. I am not sure whether he is satisfied, if he is honest with himself, with regard to the issue of information in circumstances where goods are provided.

I noted what the Minister said about overseas manufacturers not being required to provide such information. However, if overseas manufacturers sell goods for sale in the United Kingdom, they must abide by the consumer laws and the other laws that exist in the UK. In the structures of the European Community, there is already a move to obtain standardisation of the provision of information for disabled people.

I was informed by an old friend of ours, a former researcher of the all-party disablement group, Diana Sutton, who is working out there now, that there is a move among Members of the European Parliament to achieve standardisation in that respect. I do not think, therefore, that the Minister's argument is entirely valid.

Sense—the National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association—drew to my attention an example of a young deaf-blind man who recently bought a £900 washing machine from a leading high street store. I ask the Minister to bear that example very much in mind, because it goes to the heart of the problem. That young man was informed that, first, if he wanted the manufacturer's instructions in braille, it would cost him additional money and, secondly, it would be about seven months before he would receive those instructions. That is obviously unacceptable. From what the Minister has said, nothing in the Bill will avoid that happening in future.

The Minister cannot be happy about that. I suggest to him that there is room for the Government to reconsider that aspect. There may well need to be an amendment at

[Mr. Wigley]

a later stage that enables a scheme to be introduced to cover circumstances so that disabled people may obtain information in a format that they can use.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): In looking again at this matter, would my hon. Friend agree that the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) about People First is also one that we should all take very carefully into account? Would it not be a good idea for there to be consultation between the Minister and his Department and People First?

Mr. Wigley: Yes. I had intended to refer to the comments by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), and I think that that is a helpful and constructive suggestion. I do not think that the Minister's mind is totally closed on that matter. I think that, if the Minister were able to find a way of doing that in practical terms, he would like to do it, because he would not like to think that a Bill that outlaws discrimination could lead to examples such as that of the deaf-blind person trying to buy a washing machine and being left in the circumstances in which he was left.

Obviously there is a weakness. We have not yet discovered, according to what the Minister says, a practical means and a form of legislation to overcome the problem. I believe that a system of schemes for sectors—especially electrical and electronic gadgetry and so on—might be devised, provided that there is a handlebar in the legislation to allow orders or whatever to develop that in industries and in terms that the trade would accept. Obviously, the Minister would need to discuss the matter with manufacturers' associations and retailers before he could go all the way on that.

I ask the Minister, as the Bill moves on to another place, as he has come as far as he has with regard to the provision of information services and information about services, whether the third leg of the stool—information about goods—might be reconsidered at that later stage to discover whether there is any way in which we can close that gap. I think that the Minister is sympathetic towards it. May I entice him to respond to say that he is prepared at least to consider that in the later stages?

Mr. Hague: It would be wrong of me to raise the hopes of the hon. Gentleman that we could include provision about operating instructions in the Bill. There are fundamental problems of the type that I have described—fundamental problems that have defeated the drafters of legislation in other countries, including the drafters of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as I said.

I certainly, however, believe that there is scope for the Government and the National Disability Council to work with manufacturers and retailers after the Bill is on the statute book, or even before, to ensure that it becomes increasingly common, and that it becomes accepted good practice, to tackle the aspect about which the hon. Gentleman is worried.

I think that we are now providing for information in the vast majority of circumstances to be covered by the Bill. We have made that absolutely clear. I think that that is as far as we can realistically go in legislation at the moment.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention. It clarifies where the Government stand, and I perceive that the Government would like, in the discussions that they hope to have at a later stage with those representative organisations, to close what they accept is a perceived gap and a weakness in the present provision.

I therefore suggest, in bringing the short debate to a close, that the Government actively consider introducing in the Lords a facility to make an order, if a Minister deems it practical and appropriate in the fulness of time after those discussions have taken place, whereby one might underpin a system by legislative strength to avoid discrimination in that area. Without doing so, we shall have a loophole allowing discrimination to continue, so that good companies may have acceptable practices but many companies may not. People will encounter difficulties of the type that I have outlined.

We have made progress on those issues. On the basis that the Government continue to consider the matter actively, and in my hope that they will persuade themselves to give a facility by way of order by amendment in another place, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 11

ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

'(1) The Secretary of State shall amend the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and such other regulations governing other forms of public transport to provide for prescribed standards of accessibility for disabled people in all new public transport systems.

(2) Regulations may prescribe different standards for different classes of vehicle and may prescribe dates for different clsses of vehicle by which the standards must be met.

(3) In preparing or revising the standards referred to in this section the Secretary of State shall consult the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee established under section 125 of the Transport Act 1985.'—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir John Hannam: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: New clause 13—*Door-to-door transport*—

'The Secretary of State may issue regulations requiring Local Authorities to make provision for door-to-door transport services for disabled people unable or not reasonably able to use other forms of public transport.'.

New clause 18—*Design of means of public transport (No. 2)*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall, by regulations, set standards of accessibility for disabled persons for means of public transport designed to be brought into use after the dates set in those regulations.

(2) Means of public transport include, but are not limited to—

(a) buses and coaches,

(b) taxis,

(c) trains, including light-rail,

(d) trams, trolley-buses and underground trains, and

(e) ships.

(3) Regulations under subsection (1) may set different degrees of accessibility for different means of public transport and different degrees of accessibility to be achieved by different dates.

(4) In this section, "public transport" means any means of transport provided in return for payment, or, where no payment is required, on request.'.

Amendment No. 2, in clause 12, page 9, line 4, at end insert—

'(aa) any service so far as it consists of the use of any means of transport, subject to the provisions of section *(Design of means of public transport)*;.'.

Amendment No. 3, in page 9, leave out lines 26 and 27.

Amendment No. 24, in schedule 6, page 36, line 40, at end insert—

'8A. In section *(Design of means of public transport)* for "Secretary of State" substitute "Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland)".'.

Sir John Hannam: I wish to speak in support of the inclusion of transport in the Bill, and specifically to new clauses 11 and 13, in my name and those of hon. Friends and colleagues.

Having fought hard to persuade the Government to adopt anti-discrimination legislation last year, I was extremely disappointed about the exclusion of transport vehicles from its provisions, because I believe that it is no use talking about making it possible for disabled people to obtain employment or to have access to places of entertainment or education if they are not able physically to get there.

As a member of the Government's Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, I was anxious to find a way of amending the Bill to ensure that transport is included and that regulations are updated to provide standards of accessibility for disabled people in all new public transport systems.

The extent of a disabled person's mobility will affect his independence, employment and integrated life. Lack of access to transport means a continual restriction in someone's ability to go outside his front door independently. The more severe the disability, the greater the restrictions. Buses and coaches are, in general, inaccessible to wheelchair users, and those with walking or mobility difficulties often find it difficult to wait around for long periods for transport to become available.

Recently, on television, a camera crew followed two young men in wheelchairs who came from the midlands and who decided to apply for job interviews in London. What, for any of us, would have been an hour and a half or a couple of hours on a train, with a transfer to a tube and a taxi, turned out for them to be a nightmare six-hour series of frustrations as they tried to find station staff with ramps, local trains or buses that were accessible to them and taxis that were suitable for wheelchairs.

5 pm

Certain inter-city trains now have only one designated space available, which means that two wheelchair users cannot travel together on the same train. Recent reports in the press show that Eurotunnel has accepted that it is wrong, and has agreed to provide extra space. That is a worthwhile move, and I am pleased to hear about it, but, generally, train travellers have to book 24 hours in advance of travelling in the hope that arrangements can be made for them. As we all know from our constituency cases, those arrangements often fall down on the day. All those problems increase the sense of isolation and separation from the rest of us felt by disabled people.

A further problem is the lack of accessible toilets, which are available only on certain trains and stations. Disabled people have to become experts in bladder control. As the Bill is currently drafted, if discrimination occurs on a transport vehicle, that will not be covered by the right to non-discrimination. But if the same offence occurs at a station, it will be. Surely the act of discrimination should be covered, not just the location.

Everyone welcomes the Department of Transport's review of taxis, but taxis cannot be considered as a substitute for generally accessible public transport. It is time that we made public transport—certainly all new forms of public transport—accessible to all the public. A low-floor bus, with easily operated ramp access and no steps inside the vehicle, allows all passengers to get on and off much faster. By "all passengers", I mean not just disabled people, but elderly people and mothers with children. More than 3,000 low-floor, accessible buses are in service in Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Greece has plans for 1,600 such buses to be put into service.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Does my hon. Friend agree that, quite apart from the obvious rightness of introducing as rapidly as possible accessible vehicles and public transport systems, such adaptations have important advantages for the whole of society and the economy? Traffic moves more quickly because of improved accessibility, not only for disabled people but for others, and the environment benefits, because there is less pollution as a result.

Sir John Hannam: That is absolutely right. My hon. Friend consistently points out the cost benefits of such actions, and he has just given us another example.

We have some small pockets of provision in this country, but they are not widespread. The Government have announced that all new buses will be of low-floor construction, but that is no reason to exclude transport vehicles from the right of access to goods, facilities and services. The 1986 survey of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys showed that 1.1 million people did not use buses because of their disabilities. Our new clauses do not seek to achieve the impossible but, if accepted, would put us on the right path. More importantly, they would give reassurance to disabled people who are worried about the gap in the legislation.

New clause 13 is a probing measure related to local authority schemes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will be able to give reassurance on that.

I have tabled the new clause in the hope that the Government will see that transport should be included in the anti-discrimination legislation.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I am sure that we all welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) has introduced an important subject. I find it difficult to understand why the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People is not rushing to accept the practical measures contained in the new clause. Perhaps the Minister has even more rabbits to pull out of the hat—his demeanour does not seem to suggest that today.

The new clause is interesting and helpful, as one would expect from the hon. Member for Exeter, given his contribution to the all-party disablement group. The new clause invites the House to consider the subject of transport. Many people have said to me that, in some ways, the subject is the forgotten, yet essential and pivotal issue, in relation to disability.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

I shall concentrate my remarks on new clause 18, but I do not intend that to reflect on the excellent contribution of the hon. Member for Exeter or the advice from many sources that the Government have received, including the famous red book. If my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) has a chance to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that he will use that book and add yet more glowing information to our consideration of the issues.

Once again, we are considering a gateway of opportunity for disabled people to play their full part in society. Once again, the Government have intentionally and specifically obstructed that gateway by excluding transport vehicles from the Bill. For many disabled people, mobility issues are the most important aspects in their everyday lives. Their first request of Parliament is to provide the means to tackle those problems to achieve their mobility. That is a perfectly reasonable request, and I have heard no arguments against it. Even in Committee, the Government did not advance an argument against it, but merely said that if we waited long enough, the aim might be achieved. The Bill avoids those important matters.

I commend to the House the publication by Scope last year of a document entitled, "Disabled in Britain: A World Apart". I would find it difficult to believe that anyone reading that document would say that the hon. Member for Exeter was asking for too much. He is not a parliamentary Oliver Twist; he is ahead of the Government, but not ahead of our times. Some might even say that the hon. Gentleman asks for too little. If the new clauses are passed, we shall have made some progress.

The interesting document "Disabled in Britain: A World Apart" contains many insights into the ordinary lives of people struggling to overcome extraordinary difficulties. One comment is particularly revealing about what disability brings in its wake. The document states:

> "One day you might lose your passport to everyday society. You will have no visa to travel in certain places."

Those are restrictions that millions of our fellow citizens experience day after day as part of their ordinary daily lives. They include restricting the right of disabled people to come to today's debate or participate in other, more interesting and compelling activities.

There is no reason why, given the opportunity and parliamentary time, if not in this Bill—although I find it extraordinary that the Government are not grasping at the opportunity—in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), we should not reach conclusions on one of the most serious problems that disabled people tell us they face.

I think that the descriptions in the document issued by Scope present an incredible image. We see that people in this country are trapped because of their disability and are unable to play a full part in the everyday life of our society. I have spoken to many disabled fellow citizens who have confirmed that image.

Last night, I mentioned my recent experiences in Leicester and Birmingham, and I am pretty sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House could give similar examples from elsewhere. Disabled people are barred from entering British life not by border controls but by the fact that the means of mobility do not exist. They are trapped behind their own front doors.

One might think that the Government would jump at the chance to improve access for our fellow citizens who are trapped in that way, and would view it as a challenge to which they could respond in a practical manner. I hope that the Minister is thinking along those lines today. The hon. Member for Exeter, the House and I wait patiently to hear whether the Minister will respond positively, if at all, to those transport questions.

That is one of the disabilities that the Bill should seek to tackle—not the physical disability of lack of mobility, but the social disability and immobility that comes from inadequate transport provision for disabled people which has been identified clearly in the speeches in this and in earlier debates and in all the responses to the Government's document, including those in the famous red book.

It is up to the House—if hon. Members have the will—to provide a visa to enable disabled people to travel in British society and to give them a passport to areas of life from which they would otherwise be excluded by disability. Many people—not just hon. Members who are in the Chamber or those members of the public who are observing the proceedings from the Gallery—must be asking why the Government do not appear to have the will to do that. We must remove the exemption of transport vehicles from the terms of the Bill.

It has been said many times in debate on the legislation—but it is worth saying again for the benefit of any hon. Members who may have missed the point—that one of the most ludicrous aspects of the Bill is that it obliges railway and bus operators to make reasonable adjustments in order to achieve equal access for disabled people to train and bus stations, but it avoids imposing any such duty in the cases of individual buses and trains.

Under the legislation, disabled people gain the right to access the station, but not the right to catch a train. That situation is patently absurd and unacceptable. We pleaded with the Government time after time in Committee to respond to that problem and to offer us some hope of a practical approach which has been missing from our deliberations so far.

For many people—disabled or otherwise—the car is the best answer to mobility needs. However, for disabled people, the cost of buying, adapting and running a private car often exceeds the support provided by mobility allowances—and, as we know, even they are under attack. Two in three households in Britain have access to a car. However, for disabled people, the equivalent figure is only two in five. Therefore, we must address the specific mobility problems that disabled people face.

Taxis and private hire cars can be the next best thing to having access to a household vehicle. Encouraging progress has been made towards the target involving wheelchair access to taxis in London. I said in Committee, and it is fair that I should repeat it now, that, despite the views of the Cabinet and the right-wing approach adopted by the Secretary of State for Employment, the practical measures that we propose are confirmed by history.

5.15 pm

As a junior Transport Minister—before the dogmatists got hold of him—the Employment Secretary introduced into London transport a measure whose aim was to adapt all taxis for people with disabilities by 2000. In 1995, he has achieved nearly 50 per cent. of that objective. The Secretary of State for Employment—a former junior Transport Minister—should be proud of that achievement. I am surprised that he is not in the Chamber listening to the debate and encouraging the Minister—whom many consider to be up and coming, as the Secretary of State for Employment once was—to do something practical and achievable in the transport field, not in order to advance his career but in order to be helpful.

We want to extend that London objective to Edinburgh, Belfast and other cities. We want all taxis to be wheelchair accessible by the end of the century or before. That is a welcome, perfectly reasonable and helpful objective, which could be achieved. I welcome the assurances given in Committee by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People that steps will be taken to improve wheelchair access to taxis throughout the country. I am rather disappointed that he has not brought forward the promised new clauses in that regard at this stage. I look forward to seeing in the next few minutes whether there is a hat under the Front Bench with many rabbits in it.

I take the opportunity to encourage Ministers to have regard to the different taxi transport requirements of people with varying mobility problems. Despite some excellent progress, the London hackney cab is not invariably the best vehicle for disabled people to use. I welcome Ministers' assurances that there will not be a blanket requirement for a single type of vehicle throughout the country. Ministerial indications that the necessary work will be done on vehicle design are helpful to disabled people and to taxi operators alike.

I do not wish to diminish the significance of what the Government have said. The important thing is that action has been promised and that the principle of making taxis accessible to disabled people has been established. That sends out a very clear signal that, once the principle has been agreed, it cannot be reversed and should be applied elsewhere. But it brings us sharply to the question: if that principle can be made to work for taxis, surely it can be established for other vehicles as well.

Let us not refuse our disabled fellow citizens a permit to travel. Let us instead extend permission to enter society through the gateway of public transport. Let us establish the principle of freedom of movement, and let us plan how disabled access to the means of travel can be achieved. As a means of so doing, I commend new clause 18 to the House.

Mr. Hague: I know that a number of hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, but as the new clauses have been introduced I think that it would be unfair to allow hon. Members to speak in ignorance of the Government's response.

At all stages in the preparation and progress of the Disability Discrimination Bill, we have made clear our commitment to achieving fully accessible transport. We have also made it clear that we believe that progress towards accessible public transport is best achieved by technical legislation or by regulations, codes of practice and so on—in other words, by targeted action rather than by blanket legislation. In the past few weeks I have listened carefully to the arguments advanced by organisations such as the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and the Royal National Institute for the Blind as well as those put to me on many occasions by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and the points that were raised in Committee. I have been considering, with my colleagues at the Department of Transport, how best we can meet the requirements for soundly based technical standards within the framework of the Bill.

The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter take a similar approach. New clauses 18 and 11 propose a requirement through regulations for the introduction of access standards for new public transport vehicles and systems. New clause 18 would require regulations to be introduced setting minimum access standards. New clause 11 seeks a similar result by amending existing regulations. Both new clauses are flexible in that they allow different time scales and access solutions for different modes of transport. That flexibility recognises the Government's concerns that the operation of the various modes of transport will require different access solutions to ensure that the approach adopted provides, as far as practicable, effective and sustainable transport for all passengers, including those with disabilities.

We would have no difficulty, as new clause 11 suggests, with charging the Secretary of State with a specific duty of consulting the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee on the detail of regulations. As it is the statutory adviser to the Department of Transport, the Secretary of State would as a matter of course consult on an issue of such major importance for disabled people, as indeed he does regularly on a wide range of issues.

On the specific examples of the transport modes that would be covered by new clause 18, for the most part we have no difficulty with them. On shipping, however, and equally on aviation, although the latter is not cited in the new clause but could be interpreted as being covered by it, we do not consider that it is right to introduce domestic regulations. In both cases, the international dimension of those transport operations would mean that domestic legislation would be of limited value, not least to disabled people, who would not have the assurance of access throughout the journey. In addition, United Kingdom operators would be commercially disadvantaged if they were subject to additional regulatory control in advance of similar measures in other countries.

On aviation, international guidelines on the accessibility of aircraft to disabled people are already well advanced.

On shipping, a new group has been set up under the International Maritime Organisation to draw up guidelines for the design of new vessels. We believe that those forums represent the best approach to tackling the access issue for aviation and shipping, and we would not therefore favour including those transport modes in the Bill.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Many Scots living on our numerous islands have no access to public transport other than the Caledonian MacBrayne ferries. The Minister's refusal to deal with passenger ferry services will cause them great

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

dismay. I ask the Minister, where mainland-to-island and island-to-island passenger ferry services are concerned, please think again.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman raises a point to which the disadvantage of international travel, to which I have referred, does not apply. I will bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Transport. I would merely say for the moment that the IMO discussions that I have mentioned, if they are brought to fruition, would apply to our domestic ferries as well as to ferries for international travel.

We have no general difficulty of principle with the other transport modes listed, although in some cases the practical constraints on improving access to existing systems are considerable.

In relation to taxis, to which the hon. Member for Monklands, West referred, as we announced in Committee, we intend to table more detailed amendments. I had hoped to do so on Report, but the preparation has taken longer, so we shall do so in another place.

On other modes of transport, as the House will have realised by now, the Government certainly support the spirit of the new clauses tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter and by the hon. Member for Monklands, West. There are, however, technical and legal difficulties with the clauses as drafted. We would, for example, have to be clear in our definition of public transport. The new clauses as drafted are not precise enough in that area. The issue is not tackled in either of the new clauses. Indeed, we would wish to go wider than new clause 11 envisages by specifically including rail as well as road-based vehicles.

Neither do the new clauses recognise to any significant extent the existing legislative framework for each mode of transport. The House will be aware that transport operates against a complex web of legislation—domestic and, in some cases, European—and regulations. In considering amendments in that area, we would need to ensure that any new transport clauses in the Bill did not cut across existing provisions.

Amendments have also been tabled to remove the general exclusion of transport vehicles and to add them to the specific list of services to which the general right of access would apply. Clause 12(5) already provides for the transport vehicle exemption to be modified. We believe that the most appropriate way to proceed is by separate regulations. Indeed, the new clauses aim to introduce regulations in that area.

We cannot accept the amendments as drafted, for the same reasons that we cannot accept amendment No. 24, which is consequential and applies to Northern Ireland. Therefore, on balance, while we accept the spirit of the amendments, we are not able to accept them as currently drafted. Government policy is already directed at ensuring a fully accessible transport system in the future. In the light of the representations that have been made and the arguments that have been advanced, the Government are preparing to introduce provisions at a later stage in the discussion of the Bill, to amend existing legislation or, where necessary, to introduce new powers covering buses, trains, coaches, trams, taxis, and underground systems—even trolley buses, if such systems are reintroduced in future. Before the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asks, as he surely will, we will of course ensure that the necessary amendments are tabled to bring appropriate provision to all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister is right and what he said is important. He said that the Government will introduce measures. Can he make it clear whether they will be in this Bill and, if so, in what form?

Mr. Hague: I cannot precisely specify the form, because the legal work on drafting such amendments is at an early stage. But I can say that provisions will be in the Bill, and to a large extent will probably modify existing legislation, to introduce new powers where necessary to ensure that the Secretary of State for Transport is able to set minimum access standards, with a timetable and with further provisions as necessary covering the areas that I have mentioned—buses, trains, coaches, trams, taxis, underground systems and so on—satisfying the hon. Gentleman on every point except shipping, over which we had the particular problem to which I referred earlier.

Hon. Members will appreciate the crucial importance of ensuring that such legislation is drafted with the full knowledge and agreement of the transport industries. It is in no one's interest, least of all that of disabled people, to introduce measures that would jeopardise the viability of transport operators. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London will be particularly concerned to ensure that time scales for the introduction of accessibility requirements reflect the particular circumstances of individual modes of transport. For systems such as London Underground, for example, we are certainly talking long term. Nevertheless, I hope that the House will agree that the embodiment of those powers in legislation will represent another major step in demonstrating that the Government's policies for tackling discrimination are comprehensive and will allow us to meet in their entirety the points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, and almost in their entirety the points made by the hon. Member for Monklands, West.

New clause 13 deals with the provision of door-to-door transport services. Its effect would be for the Secretary of State to require local authorities to provide such schemes for disabled people. In fact, local authorities already have powers to provide excellent schemes such as these which do so much to improve independent mobility for disabled people. We believe that local authorities are best placed to assess their priorities in the light of their available resources and their knowledge of local need. The Department of Transport works closely with local authorities and offers advice and guidance on the effective operation of such schemes. I assure my hon. Friends that it will continue to do so, but it is not desirable for the Government to impose regulations on local authorities in this respect. We would, therefore, resist any move to impose requirements on local authorities.

In this context, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that the increasing introduction of accessible mainstream public transport, to which I have made it clear that we are firmly committed, will over time change the role of door-to-door services. For many disabled people, they have up to now been a substitute for other forms of transport which were inaccessible. In future, they will increasingly become a complement to public transport—for example, by providing local links to accessible main line services.

I hope that all hon. Members will welcome my statement and that, as a consequence, they will not wish to press the new clauses.

5.30 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome the Minister's statement, but I wish that we had heard it earlier. He could have made it in Committee, when we repeatedly debated transport but were told that he was not to be moved. Nevertheless, I congratulate him because he has clearly won the day with some of his colleagues. I am sure that he fought his corner to ensure that transport was dealt with.

It always seemed crazy that bus and train stations had to be accessible but buses and trains did not. Such a state of affairs could be welcomed only by a disabled person who was a train spotting enthusiast as he or she would not be able to get on a train. I am glad that accessibility is to be more widely spread to include those who wish to travel. It is the only way forward. I am glad that the Government have at last decided that all the disabled people and their organisations who have been lobbying for months and all the Opposition Members who have been talking about making transport accessible have been proved right and that the Minister has seen the sense of their arguments.

Disabled peopled have had so many problems with travelling. Only yesterday I issued a report on those problems, which include the fact that only one wheelchair is allowed per train. There will be difficulties with the InterCity 125 trains because the doors are not wide enough for an electronic buggy to get through. There are still some horrendous problems to deal with. We must ensure that they are dealt with quickly and that the Government outline some exact proposals.

The Minister said that he agreed with the spirit of the new clauses, but we need some flesh on that statement. We need to know exactly what he is proposing. Further Government amendments will no doubt be tabled in the other place so we shall see whether the Government are going as far as we want and as far as disabled people want. There are more than 6 million disabled people in this country who will be pleased if the Government go as far as they have been asking or, indeed, demanding. They will not be pleased if, despite today's announcement, they suddenly find that the Government are not going to follow through.

Sixty-two per cent. of disabled people have no access to a car, so it is even more important that they have access to trains and buses. I am glad that the Minister has agreed to move on that point. My report said that it would be halfway through the next century before buses and trains were accessible. If the Minister feels like intervening, I shall be grateful to hear what time scale he has in mind for making buses and trains accessible to disabled people: does he envisage it being halfway through the next century, or will it be sooner? I should like him to make a commitment. It is all very fine to talk about making transport accessible, but what is the time scale?

Mr. Hague: I cannot expand further on the announcement that I have already made. Indeed, the new clause is designed to give the Government regulation-making powers to deal with such matters. We shall take the hon. Lady's point on board. Neither those who tabled the new clauses nor anyone else could give a timetable for such things off the cuff. An enormous amount of discussion is needed, but the hon. Lady can be assured that the Government's intentions are absolutely sincere.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful to the Minister. I was not expecting him to say that all buses and trains would be accessible next week or even in the next five years; I was seeking merely to get a rough idea of his estimated time scale.

Some vehicles are easy to adapt quickly and some will take longer, but comprehensive legislation is needed. If the Minister's proposals are comprehensive, the House and the organisations representing disabled people will welcome them.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I, too, warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's announcement and congratulate him on it. He knows that when disabled people are asked what is their highest priority in practical terms as to how we should release them from discrimination, many unhesitatingly cite transport first and foremost because it is the key to their having access to a range of other opportunities in life. My hon. Friend the Minister has been aware of that, and I know how happy disabled people will be that he has been able to introduce this transport dimension fairly and squarely into the Bill. We look forward very much to the specific amendments that the Government will table in another place.

The Minister talked about modifications to a complex area of law and envisaged future adjustment to regulation. However, I hope that when he frames this new element in the Bill he will range as widely and be as declaratory as possible. It is an important principle that the unacceptability and illegality of unjustifiable discrimination in transport should be clearly set out.

The Minister talked about the Secretary of State having the power to do certain things. I hope that it will be possible for the Government to agree that the Secretary of State should have a duty in so far as may be reasonable, because that would put the matter in a more positive light, which is important in itself. The Government need not be especially nervous about the implications of reasonableness. For example, if it became standard that new public transport vehicles should be designed to be accessible, the output volume would be large and unit costs would accordingly come right down. If one sets the fairly minimal costs against the benefits to the economy and to society of increasing access—benefits which are hard to estimate or compute with precision, but which are undoubtedly very large—it is clear that we do not have to fear the cost implications, which a number of people have used as an argument for not proceeding very far, or very fast, in this respect.

I again congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I welcome the Minister's statement that, at some stage, the Bill will include provisions on the means of transport. I hope that, in the same spirit in which I welcome that inclusion and applaud that statement, the Minister will recognise that, for a considerable period, a number of hon. Members and many people outside have been arguing for precisely such provision. If I am generous enough in spirit to welcome

[Mr. Roger Berry]

the Minister's statement, I hope that he will be generous enough in spirit to acknowledge that many people have been arguing for such provision for a significant period.

It may be—we must obviously wait for the details of the Minister's proposals—that, in practical terms, the Minister's suggestion will not be a million miles away from provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which provoked the Government into making transport cost estimates which, frankly, were mind boggling. I shall be generous and acknowledge that the Government have made progress. I hope that they will include transport provision and that they will be generous enough to apologise and to say that a mistake was made a mere 12 months ago. We must wait for the details.

I am acutely aware of the fact that, if more powers are contracted out to different Departments, provisions may be introduced in the Bill that will mean that someone else will take care of enforcement, which will lead to more difficulty in enforcing the measure. I want to return to enforcement on a future occasion. Notwithstanding the remarks about the inclusion of transport provision in the Bill, I am genuinely worried that the Government do not yet have the means to enforce a proper equal rights approach.

In yesterday's debate on the disability rights commission, to which many hon. Members are totally committed, an hon. Member—he is not here, so I shall not mention his name—referred to the problem of regulation. We heard the argument, which one comes across frequently, that we should not have too much more regulation, and that the terrible thing about having a commission to ensure equal rights for disabled people was that too much regulation would result. I repeat the point that I made yesterday in a brief intervention. We can consider regulation in different ways. We can consider it as a purely ideological matter—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must consider that matter specifically in relation to transport.

Mr. Berry: Indeed. In relation to transport, I made the point yesterday that, often, public transport access is denied to disabled people. That is the regulation that matters—the excessive and intolerable regulation. Disabled people's lives are regulated by inadequate access to transport. The point which I was trying to make—I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I was not making it well—is that the regulations that limit what disabled people can do are the regulations about which many of us are concerned.

It may be the case, and indeed the Government admit this—it is part of the Bill—that the Government must regulate more so that disabled people's lives are regulated less. That point is no more important in relation to transport than it is in relation to other issues. We must ensure that the Government have a clear policy on Government regulation in public transport so that disabled people's lives may be deregulated.

I support new clause 13. I hope that the hon. Members for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) did not table it merely as a probing measure. The new clause contains an excellent idea. Only a fortnight ago, I picked up a leaflet in an underground station. It said:

> "If you or someone you know can't use Metrobus, Metrorail or other regular public transit because of a disability, MetroAccess is the answer . . . MetroAccess provides curb-to-curb services for persons with disabilities who cannot use regular public transportation."

It is with regret that I have to inform the House that, as hon. Members have probably guessed, that document was found in the United States of America and not in the United Kingdom. Whatever the future of new clause 13 this afternoon, the hon. Members for Exeter and for Stratford-on-Avon were correct in saying that local authorities or a public transport authority—whatever organisation we choose—should be required to provide reasonable door-to-door transport services for disabled people. However much we improve the rail service, buses and taxis, those people may not be able to have access to a decent transport system. Like other hon. Members, I look forward to the Minister giving details of his new transport provision. I welcome the fact that the Government now recognise that transport needs to be dealt with in their Bill. I wish that they had recognised that 12 months ago.

5.45 pm

Mr. Wigley: I greatly welcome the Government's conversion. We look forward to finding out the detail. In July or whenever, when the House of Lords considers the Bill on Report, an opportunity will exist for us to probe those details more than is possible today. We reserve our position.

Unfortunately, the one matter on which I wanted to concentrate in this short debate was shipping and ferry services—the one aspect that does not fall within the Minister's remit. I wanted to bring his attention to the difficulties facing disabled people using such services. I have been approached by a travel consultant. The Travel Freedom organisation operates in Wales. It is run by Mr. Mike Weston Ashford. He collects advice for disabled people on holidays in the United Kingdom and overseas, and on transport and hotel needs. He wrote to me in the context of the legislation and his letter is worth quoting:

> "One glaring problem is the lack of facilities available within Britain and the need for legislation to enhance the right of disabled people . . . in respect of travel, accommodation and places of interest.
>
> Attached please find a photocopy of just one example. Here, in response to my communication enquiring of Eurolink, who intend to operate a new ferry service between Sheerness and Vlissingen in respect of facilities for disabled persons, is their response."

I shall quote the response, which is especially pertinent to our debate. Eurolink stated:

> "We must advise you that, unfortunately, the two vessels which will shortly go into service for the Sheerness to Vlissingen route are not really suitable for disabled travellers.
>
> Whilst we do not wish to turn disabled travellers away, the facilities on board do not fully cater for disabled persons, ie there are no lifts on board nor are there any cabins specially adapted for wheelchair users.
>
> We are aware of the needs of the disabled and will be looking into this aspect of our service so that, at some time in the future, we will be able to offer all travellers the same access to all our facilities and service."

There we have it. That is the sort of problem that is facing disabled people who want to travel by ferry. I remind the Minister that not only is there a ferry service between the islands in Scotland but an internal United Kingdom ferry link exists between Northern Ireland and the British mainland.

A commonality of service is being developed in Europe. Whatever the general international perspective, standards in Europe should enable disabled people to use ferries and other modes of transport. The Minister has gone a long way in relation to the other modes of transport. I welcome that warmly and look forward to reading the detail. I accept that discussion continues on ferry services, but is it possible in another place to build in regulations to cover ferries? Those regulations could have different starting dates. They could come into effect as and when current international discussions have reached fruition. There could be two parts to those regulations, with some on internal ferries coming on stream immediately. Otherwise the position described in the letter that I quoted will continue and people providing a service, even a new service starting now, will feel at liberty to say, "Sorry, disabled people cannot use this facility." In the spirit of what the Minister has already said about transport, perhaps he would care to consider the possibility of doing something about that later in another place.

Dr. Godman: I thank the Minister for his response to the transport needs of disabled people, and also for the way in which he replied to my intervention about passenger ferry services, especially the Scottish ones, which form an essential link between the islands and the mainland and between different islands.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to think seriously again about the need to provide equality of access for disabled islanders and tourists, and for every other disabled person who travels in the islands, both between islands and between the islands and the mainland. I speak as a former shipwright, and when I next inspect the Isle of Lewis, a passenger ferry ship being built at Ferguson's in Port Glasgow, in my constituency, I shall look closely to ensure that she offers access for disabled people.

That vessel, which will be launched by Princess Alexandra on 18 April, will form an essential link between Stornaway and Ullapool. Islanders have no means of travel apart from either the ferry service or the air service to Inverness and Glasgow; so for disabled people there is little or no choice anyway.

The Minister said that he would bring my remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State for Transport, and I should be grateful if he would also alert the Secretary of State for Scotland, who, as the Minister will readily acknowledge, has responsibility for piers, jetties and quays in Scotland.

In his speech, the Minister said that his aim was to achieve a fully accessible public transport system for all. That is a laudable and honourable objective, and we all share it, but with Scotland's train and bus services there is a long way to go before we attain it. ScotRail has a disgraceful record on disabled people, and I hope that new clause 18, or even the Government's amendments, will persuade Dr. Paul Prescott and other directors of Railtrack in Scotland to get their skates on and improve services.

Here is an example for the Minister. If an American tourist arrived at Glasgow airport seeking to catch a train from the nearest railway station—Paisley Gilmour Street—he or she would have enormous difficulty in reaching the platform, and even then would have huge problems in boarding a train.

The same is true of all the stations in Inverclyde. At Greenock central station, Port Glasgow station and elsewhere, boarding a train or disembarking from one requires a degree of agility beyond disabled people. That is a disgrace, and I hope that the Bill as amended by the Government will encourage ScotRail, Railtrack and the Strathclyde passenger transport executive to move things along. Hitherto their record has been disgraceful.

That means that for many of my constituents who are disabled and live on low incomes a trip to Glasgow is out of the question, unless they have a friend or relative who can provide a car. At Greenock central station someone who wants to get on a train has to lift himself up about 18 in, which is too far for disabled people.

We must always remember that, because they are denied access to an impervious labour market, many disabled people have to live on low social security incomes. They are therefore confined to public transport systems, and the system in the west of Scotland is an utter scandal at present. I hope that, in the interests of disabled people throughout Scotland, it will be improved within the next three or four years.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I welcome the fact that the Government have changed their mind and seen the absurdity of their original position that there should be equal access to bus and train stations but not to buses or trains. I realise that the Minister cannot go into much detail now, but I want to press him a little further on what he has in mind for trains. I raise that subject not only because of the chaos of rail privatisation that the Government are trying to impose on us but because a constituent asked me to raise the matter.

On Sunday I was asked to visit a woman in a wheelchair who has multiple sclerosis. She told me how she and a friend who also has MS had tried to travel from Edinburgh to Grantown-on-Spey, where there is a holiday establishment for disabled people. British Rail had told her that if they wished to go by train they would have to travel in the guard's van. Fortunately, she and her friend had a contact who could take them there in a motor vehicle with disabled access.

My constituent was upset to be told that she would have to travel in the guard's van. However, like me, she already knew that that might happen, because she had several friends who had had the same problem. She told me how three other people had had to pay £100 each to make the journey in a handicab, and how another friend had travelled all the way from Edinburgh to Dorset in the cage of a guard's van. Rightly, she said that was a demeaning experience and that it could also be dangerous if, as was the case, the person concerned was in a manual wheelchair whose brakes were not absolutely foolproof. Furthermore, the doors of toilets on trains are not wide enough for wheelchairs.

Can the Minister give us any guidance on what he intends to do about such matters? I know that the provision in the Bill will be general, but I should like to have something to say to my constituent about how the Minister imagines the problem being resolved. It does not seem to me that it would be inordinately expensive to do something about it. I believe that there is already usually one place on a train where a wheelchair can be clamped.

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

Surely other places could easily be converted for that purpose without great expense. I hope that the Minister will be able to give me some reassurance to convey to my constituent.

Mr. Hague: As I explained to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), I cannot expand on the announcement that I have already made. But I have given a commitment about taking a power through the Bill to make regulations covering trains and other modes of transport and, of course, the points made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) are among those that the Government and others, including rail operators, will want to take into account in the discussions about future regulations.

Mr. Barnes: I have two things to say. The first is about the importance of what we are discussing, and the other is about the Minister's statement, which is also important. A while ago, I tabled an amendment to a social security measure dealing with providing mobility allowance for double amputees. At the time the allowance was not paid automatically, and once a person had lost both legs and had artificial limbs there was a test to see whether he or she was entitled to mobility allowance. I remember that the leader of Plaid Cymru, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), was in the House and joined the discussion.

I was concerned about my constituent, the late Melvin Wall, who was a double amputee and found difficulty getting out and moving around. He needed his mobility allowance so that he could get around. He liked to be picked up in a taxi on a fine day and taken to the nearby Rother valley, where he would be placed at the edge of an artificial lake. Throughout the day he liked to move around that artificial lake from bench to bench, resting as he went and, when the day was over, to be taken back. The quality of his life was vastly improved by that mobility allowance. Such a facility is equally important in the new clauses.

6 pm

The amendment was not adopted on the occasion to which I referred because it was withdrawn. The Minister's predecessor promised to introduce the mobility allowance later in regulations, and indeed he did so. Unfortunately, Melvin Wall benefited from it for a short time only, because he died soon afterwards. His case is a clear example of the need for people to be able to get around, move about, improve the nature of their lives by so doing and thereby be dealt with as full citizens in society.

I am a little more sceptical about the Minister's statement than some hon. Members—perhaps that is my nature. We are rather in limbo. I am not quite sure whether the bottle is half full or half empty. Such a speech should have been presented as a statement in the House, after which we could have asked questions. Instead, hon. Members have asked questions and the Minister has jumped back in response. The Minister has not been able to say anything else, but he has offered some response to the points put forward. It is as if we have used the House's time on Report for statement purposes, which seems procedurally odd.

After Report is Third Reading, and on Third Reading we should be reasonably clear about the proposed legislation. Even though various changes may be made in the Lords and even if the Bill gets into trouble there, we should have the authority to say that the Bill should be passed as it was on Third Reading, a year after its First Reading. It is beholden on Ministers to try to get us to a stage where we know, as clearly as possible, where we are, apart from a little tidying up which may occur in the other place.

The Bill has not progressed in such a way. Two major statements about changes to the Bill concerning education and transport have been made. I am pleased about those changes, but I think that they are as a result of important pressure, which has been exerted by people outside the House and by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in the cupboard. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is locked away in the cupboard and will not be released into Committee to progress properly. If we are dissatisfied with what occurs in another place, not only will we have the opportunity to discuss the Lords amendments and whether we think that they are good enough, but we will have an alternative. That alternative should be given the opportunity to see the light of day—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a Third Reading speech and I urge him to stick precisely to the new clauses.

Mr. Barnes: I would especially like to stress the transport provisions in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, some of which are included in the new clauses and amendments.

Mr. Berry: Does my hon. Friend find it somewhat ironical that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was criticised for being too vague about transport and that was why the Government were unhappy, yet here we are this afternoon, as he says, welcoming even more vague proposals?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, it is ironic and there are strong political reasons for it. It is entirely justifiable to say that the other Bill is helping, together with other action that people are taking, to nudge such provisions forward. The Government's Bill has been improved by some of the Minister's statements, such as the statement on transport. It is difficult to judge, however, by how much it has been improved, whether the statements and promises make it an acceptable Bill and how it measures up to the alternative Bill. The alternative must be present for as long as possible to push the Government's Bill further. In the end, when it comes to transport and other aspects, the provisions of the alternative should be fully operated.

As has been mentioned, the intentions outlined by the Minister could work rather well if a disability rights commission were set up to pick them up, run with them and do a great deal of the work and we could make suggestions and recommendations.

Sir John Hannam: The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) spoke of the Minister pulling a rabbit out of a hidden hat. He has certainly done that, and a whopping Easter bunny it is, too. Yesterday we brought education into the Bill and today my hon. Friend has achieved our other main objective of bringing transport into the Bill. I pay tribute to all hon. Members from all parties who have consistently pressed the case for transport to be brought into the Bill. In view of the assurances given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, who, together with our hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London, deserves our thanks, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am assuming that the new clause which I moved is still before the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The technical position is that if the hon. Gentleman wishes to move new clause 18 formally, he may do so, at which point I shall have to put the Question. Does he wish to move new clause 18 formally?

Mr. Clarke: I had hoped that the rules of the House would entitle me to ask the Minister a few more questions and then to decide whether to move the motion on this important new clause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House some while and he must know that new clause 18 was grouped with new clause 11. Once the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) had begged to ask leave to withdraw the motion, I had put the Question and there were no objections, the motion was withdrawn. The only procedure that is now available to hon. Members is to move the new clause formally, in which case I have to put the Question. Formally means just that—not a speech.

Mr. Clarke: Further to my point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not my intention to move the new clause formally, but I hope that on Third Reading I can respond to the Minister's comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that, on Third Reading, he is restricted to addressing what is in the Bill. Within that, he has plenty of scope.

Clause 1

MEANING OF "DISABILITY" AND "DISABLED PERSON"

Mr. Alan Howarth: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 1, line 10, after 'activities', insert

'or has a history of having had such an impairment'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 15, in page 1, line 10, after 'activities', insert ', or

(b) a history of having had such an impairment.'.

No. 17, in page 1, line 10, after 'activities', insert ', or

(b) a condition which is likely to cause him to have such an impairment in the future.'.

Government amendments Nos. 98 to 100 and 128 to 131.

No. 21, in schedule 1, page 29, line 11, at end insert—

'History of having had an impairment—

4A.—(1) A person shall be treated as having a history of having had an impairment if there is evidence in medical records that he has, in the past, had an impairment which falls within the scope of any other of the provisions of this Schedule.

(2) Regulations may prescribe other forms of evidence, apart from medical records, which may be taken to demonstrate that a person has a history of having had an impairment under sub-paragraph (1) above.'.

Government amendment No. 132.

No. 13, in page 30, leave out lines 9 to 13 and insert—

'(2) Where a medical test reveals a genetic predisposition in a person to a progressive condition, sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph shall apply to that person as if he were suffering from that condition.'.

Government amendment No. 133.

No. 18, in clause 2, page 1, line 16, after 'effect', insert ', or

(c) whether a person is to be treated as having a history of having had an impairment.'.

Government amendment No. 127.

Mr. Howarth: The purpose of amendment No. 13 is to remove an item in the Bill which seems to be misconceived and which would have deeply unhappy and damaging consequences for people who are destined to suffer particularly terrible disabilities.

Schedule 1(7), which deals with progressive conditions in the Bill as it is drafted specifies that

"Where a person—

(a) suffers from a progressive condition . . . but

(b) does not have an impairment which has a substantial adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities,

he shall be taken to have such an impairment".

Schedule 1(7)(2) proceeds specifically to provide that where

"it is likely that the person concerned will suffer from a progressive condition at some time in the future (for example, where a person has a genetic or other predisposition to a progressive condition)"

he shall not have the protection of the legislation.

I believe that the latter provision is unfortunate in its consequence. I cannot believe that the Government intended the consequences that would follow from it. Therefore, I have tabled amendment No. 13 so that

"Where a medical test reveals a genetic predisposition in a person to a progressive condition"

he will after all enjoy the protection of the Bill against discrimination.

My particular interest in genetically transmitted diseases goes back for some years during a period in which I have been the national chair of the Huntington's Disease Association. Huntington's disease is one of the most terrible conditions from which anyone can suffer. The association is one of some 130 organisations which are members of the Genetic Interest Group. I have developed and tabled the amendment in consultation with the group.

I believe that it is wrong to provide that those with a genetic predisposition to a late-onset disease, but who are not yet in the symptomatic phase, should be excluded from the protection that we give to disabled people from discrimination. Unless we so protect them, they will be liable to suffer discrimination in employment, when they seek insurance and in terms of credit ratings. A mass of practical difficulties could well be laid upon them. For heaven's sake, their lives are hard enough. They have to live with the knowledge of the near certainty that they will develop a disease. They surely deserve our particular consideration and support.

Scientific advance in genetics is rapid. The human genome project is one of the largest research projects which is taking place today. The range of conditions that can be predicted and the accuracy with which they can be predicted is increasing by leaps and bounds. In the case

[Mr. Howarth]

of Huntington's disease, prediction is now 99 per cent. accurate and can be made many years before the symptoms manifest themselves. It is now established that certain forms of breast cancer and bowel cancer and certain types of heart disease and diabetes are the consequence of genetic factors. As the House knows, some forms of Alzheimer's disease are also known to be caused by genetic factors.

Unlike new clause 5, my amendment would not secure protection from discrimination for people who were in the pre-symptomatic phase of HIV unless perhaps it could be demonstrated that the condition was genetic in its origin. I am not scientist enough to be able to offer an opinion on that. I regard it as wrong to exclude from protection against discrimination people who are HIV positive but pre-symptomatic. Whereas new clause 5 dealt with that, amendment No. 13 does not. I believe that there were other difficulties with new clause 5.

I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that the Bill as it is drafted encourages discrimination. It provides a positive incentive to those who may be minded to discriminate to do so early because, whereas it would be illegal for them to discriminate against someone once he evinced the symptoms, it would not be illegal for them to discriminate against someone who had not yet manifested the symptoms.

6.15 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): How does my hon. Friend square his comments with the suggestion made to members of the Science and Technology Select Committee that literally everyone is predisposed to some late-onset disease or another and that that is not in fact a disability? How does he draw the distinction between discrimination against the disabled, which is the subject of the Bill, and discrimination in the more general sense, on which of course we are all with him?

Mr. Howarth: I am in favour of protecting everyone from discrimination. The act of discrimination is what we find offensive. The particular point that I make to my hon. Friend beyond what I have already said is that we should make it illegal for people to be discriminated against because they are liable to develop a particular medical condition when they have not yet developed that condition. That seems simply offensive.

Mr. Batiste: The Bill is about discrimination in the context of disability. It is wrong in principle and dangerous in practice, as I shall perhaps be able to demonstrate later, to treat predisposition as a disability.

Mr. Howarth: I should like to deal with that point in a few moments.

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): The point that my hon. Friend may not have understood is that we are apparently all likely to have a genetic abnormality within us. The point is that we do not know what that genetic abnormality means. We may have a genetic abnormality of which we know the significance, but we may not know whether that abnormality will develop. I do not see how we can speculate on the genetic information that we have at present and write it into anti-discrimination legislation.

Mr. Howarth: My amendment specifies that we are dealing with cases in which a medical test reveals genetic predisposition. We are dealing with specific, objectively ascertained circumstances.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howarth: May I develop my argument a little further? My hon. Friends, who I know have thought carefully about the issue on the Science and Technology Select Committee, will perhaps be able to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Unfortunately, the Bill has built into it a provision in schedule 1(7) which in effect provides a positive incentive to those minded to discriminate to do so early—to get their retaliation in first, so to speak. That is perverse and contrary to the spirit that animates the Bill. It is surely an outcome that my hon. Friend the Minister cannot have intended.

Let me illustrate what might happen in circumstances fairly close to home or at least to the office of my hon. Friend the Minister. The civil service employs many women. Some of the women whom the civil service employs will have a genetic predisposition to breast cancer. It would surely not be right for the civil service as an employer to require them to provide details of their medical condition, even positively to seek out evidence of such a predisposition and then to exclude some women from employment. Common sense and common decency tells us that that would be wrong.

The decision to take a predictive test is a major one, and it is a difficult and painful decision in the lives of individuals and their families. It may lead to much benefit. It may lead—if the test is negative—to relief from care and from the fear of having the condition. But if the test is positive and it is predicted that the person will develop the condition, he must live with the distress of knowing that, and he will then be faced with some desperately difficult decisions in his personal life. For example, he must decide whether to have children or whether to undergo medical treatment which may be traumatic.

The effect of the Bill as worded would be to add to that person's dilemmas, because he could face discrimination in a range of areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said, the Bill is about people who are disabled, and he was perfectly right to say that people in the pre-symptomatic phase are not disabled. But I maintain that it is perverse that it should be legal to discriminate earlier where it would not be legal to discriminate later when the symptoms had manifested themselves. That cannot be sensible or right.

Dr. Godman: I hastily observe that I am not an expert in this field. Would the hon. Gentleman's amendment, which concerns the history of impairment, give protection to someone who has suffered a severe mental illness but has experienced what used to be called a spontaneous remission, and is able to retake his place in everyday life? Would such a person, having experienced that recovery, be protected by the amendment?

Mr. Howarth: Those are not circumstances which I had in mind during the formulation of the amendment, and I doubt if a person in such circumstances would be protected. That would need careful interpretation.

The amendment will rescue from discrimination people who will develop certain diseases late on, and it will also rescue the Government from the embarrassment which they will surely be in if the perverse consequences which I have described occur. I propose that we proceed by determining that anti-discrimination provision applies to people in the pre-symptomatic phase as if they were disabled. I acknowledge, as has been said, that people who are in the pre-symptomatic phase are not disabled, but I propose that—for the purposes of providing practical protection for them—we should treat them as if they were disabled.

The amendment proceeds differently from new clause 5, which defines people in the pre-symptomatic phase as disabled. That would be regrettable, because people who are not yet disabled do not—naturally enough—wish to be regarded or defined as such.

The amendment would be equitable, and it certainly would be of enormous benefit to individuals who are at risk. I shall illustrate how it would be fair, proper and right to introduce the amendment. I am informed by the Genetic Interest Group of a case of a town planner with sickle cell disease who was employed by one London borough and then moved to a new job in another borough. He was a member of the local government pension fund, but the transfer of his pension with his new employment was initially vetoed by the fund when it was approached by his new employers, who were aware of his condition. In the end, it turned out all right, but confusion reigned for some months and he experienced enormous anxiety. If that issue had not been resolved, he would not have been able to go back to his old job, which had gone. The trustees of the pension fund would have been free under the law as it is—and under the law as my hon. Friend the Minister proposes—to refuse to allow that transfer.

The amendment would be fair to employers and providers, and it would certainly entail them incurring no costs beyond those which they will incur as a result of the existing provisions proposed by the Government. The amendment merely requires them not to treat an individual unfairly when he is healthy. I do not see how my hon. Friend the Minister can reasonably object to that.

The amendment ought to satisfy the Government, as I was careful not to extend the definition of disability beyond the commonsense terms which I know my hon. Friend is most anxious to retain. If the Government do not accept the amendment, they and the taxpayer will suffer. They will suffer because of an increase in the cost to the public purse as a result of individuals who have been excluded from employment and denied the opportunity to make private provision for themselves becoming more dependent on benefits and on publicly funded services.

Just as the Government have made it clear that they are anxious to ensure that victimisation is not within the law, the same principle applies here. We are preventing people from being victimised because of a future condition which they will develop, and from being victimised by having the discrimination shifted forward in time.

The change to the Bill would provide a positive inducement to employers, financial services organisations and other groups to develop codes of good practice and to make their procedures transparent, logical and fair.

My hon. Friend the Minister may argue, as was argued in Committee by the Government, that the amendment is unnecessary because employment protection legislation deals with the matter. I have no doubt that that legislation does provide protection for people who have been employed for more than a certain number of years. But if they have not been employed for that number of years, they are not protected. There is also no protection for those seeking work, or for those who are looking to move to a new job and, with the flexible labour markets in which my right hon. and hon. Friends glory, that is becoming a particularly important consideration.

In the same way, existing insurance policies might well remain valid, but new ones will be increasingly difficult for people in this predicament to obtain.

I am advised by my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet that the Select Committee has heard the case put by distinguished geneticists that the right way to protect people in the pre-symptomatic phase and before the late onset of a genetically transmitted condition is through confidentiality. I do not think that that is sufficient protection. Secrets are not kept, and it would be most unreasonable if people who have such a diagnosis were required to live a furtive life in that regard. It would be unfair to them, and often it would be unfair to employers and others who might have a just entitlement to know. In any case, it is the act of discrimination itself that is offensive, and we ought to deal with that.

I am not arguing that justified and reasonable discrimination should be made illegal. For example, insurers who have sound actuarial reasons for discriminating against a person so diagnosed would not be prevented by the amendment from doing so. I do not think that trying to screen out or bury the problem through relying upon confidentiality is the answer, although that argument has been put seriously in the face of other difficulties.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: One of the issues that was put to us by the insurance companies was whether they have the right to demand the genetic screening of a person. If so, do they have the right to load the premiums? If so, do they have the right to let other members of the person's family know of the genetic problem? There are wide complications in this matter. We have heard that a person who discovers that he has a genetic abnormality may not know the implications of that. If he does know, it can cause immense psychological and social difficulties of the type that my hon. Friend described.

Mr. Howarth: In his characteristically sensitive way, my hon. Friend raises an important issue, which I acknowledge.

My amendment deals with a limited range of circumstances. It specifies a situation in which a medical test reveals a genetic predisposition in the person to a progressive condition. I am not trying to provide answers to the range of large, difficult, practical and ethical questions that arise from the advance of genetic science

[Mr. Howarth]

and understanding. We could not do so in this context. It would be a colossal task for the House as a whole and no doubt it is one with which we shall increasingly have to grapple. That should not be used as an argument for waiting to deal with a clearly identified evil that would be an accidental consequence of the legislation as it stands.

6.30 pm

In truth, we will never end that discussion about all the ethical and practical issues that flow from genetics, but if we try to provide some all-embracing, grandiose solution, we shall almost certainly fail and in the meantime we will leave a clearly identified evil to become established. The best is so often liable to be the enemy of the good and it would be so in this case. Equally, we should not embark on a large discussion on privacy and confidentiality.

We are talking about cases for which we already have evidence. We should not confuse this issue with the other issues with which my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People and other hon. Friends who have been actively involved with the Bill are concerned. This is a distinct issue and we can consider reputation apart from this amendment. We are talking about matters of established fact or ascertainable likelihood and not about reputation in the more general sense.

I apologise for having detained the House so long on this issue, but it is one that matters very much. We have the remedy before us in the amendment and I hope that the House will be willing to accept it.

Mr. Corbett: This is a difficult area with wide scientific implications. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) demonstrated, it is something with which the Bill ought properly to be concerned. Through the Bill, we want to avoid discrimination against people with disabilities. I do not know whether this will help hon. Members who questioned the hon. Gentleman, but we are focusing on those people who have been diagnosed, as a result of a medical test, as having a specific and progressive condition. That is the best way that I can put it in layman's language.

We are concerned with three broad areas—genetic predisposition, those diagnosed as having HIV or AIDS and known to be carrying the HIV virus, and a third group of people who are known to have sensory disabilities. As far as is possible, we want to leave none of those groups behind.

Mr. Batiste: By categorising what are defined as specific groups, the hon. Gentleman identified people with a genetic predisposition, but in a relatively short space of time everyone will be diagnosed as having some genetic predisposition or another. The hon. Gentleman is effectively saying that, because everyone will die one day, one should not be discriminated against simply on that ground because one has a better idea of the route by which it will happen.

Mr. Corbett: As I told the hon. Gentleman, I want to focus on those people with a diagnosed progressive condition. I take his point—we are all born to die, but we might as well pack up and go home on the basis of that argument.

We are talking about people who, on the basis of medical tests, are identifiable. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, much misunderstanding, prejudice and false information is being spread about people who have been diagnosed as having HIV or AIDS and those carrying the HIV virus. Companies such as Texaco, British Airways and Harrods make an HIV test a condition of employment. Happily, other firms in similar industries do not test the people they take on and have non-discrimination policies. They include Esso, Virgin Atlantic Airways, Sainsbury and Kingfisher.

The Terrence Higgins Trust, of which I am pleased to be a patron, gives examples—with which I will not weary the House—of people in work who have been found to be HIV positive as a result of rumour or hearsay and have been dismissed from their jobs. That does happen and it is no good saying that there is a legal remedy if they have worked for a company for more than two years, as very few people will risk the attendant publicity of taking a case of that type to an industrial tribunal on the ground of wrongful dismissal under present legislation or would do so even if their cases were included in the provisions of this Bill.

In an earlier debate, we heard examples of the 17 in every 100 people who suffer from some form of hearing loss. To deny them the cover of the Bill—if that is what the Bill does and there are some doubts about that—is to deny the deaf and hard of hearing their true identity as a distinct group with different needs. All hon. Members who have met people who are deaf or hard of hearing know exactly what that means.

This may be an misunderstanding that the Minister can clear up, but my reading of the Bill gives me the impression that it encourages the employer who suspects that someone has a progressive condition to get in with discrimination early because the person is not covered until he or she exhibits the symptoms of that disability. I find that offensive. If we say that we will not take seriously discrimination against disabled people until the way in which they present themselves shrieks disability at us, we are heading in the wrong direction.

We are talking about people who have been diagnosed after a medical test, who are in the pre-symptomatic state and whom we know will suffer the sad consequences of the conditions over a period of time, which will vary with the individual and the conditions. We want to ensure that, as far as possible, the Bill can offer them some help and protection.

Mr. Batiste: I have enormous respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who tabled the amendment, and a great deal of sympathy for what he is trying to do. I believe that his approach is wrong, however, and will explain why.

I should preface my comments by saying that I am a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which is examining the ethical, regulatory and commercial implications of human genetic research. It is probably the most interesting study with which I have been involved, and it is one of the most impressive antidotes to the short-termism of parliamentary life, in that we are discussing something that will be of the most dramatic importance to everyone during the next century.

We have taken a huge amount of evidence on a matter that will be so important and, because of its importance, will embrace uniquely complex moral and practical issues. I have no doubt that the House will be called upon to legislate on some of the issues—probably in the not so distant future.

It is wrong and dangerous to enshrine now, in primary legislation, ad hoc judgments outside the context of a comprehensive and considered framework, especially as the judgment that we are being invited to make today is flawed.

The Bill is about disability and discrimination, and the amendment seeks to treat genetic predisposition as a disability.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It does not treat it as a disability; it treats it as if a person with that condition were disabled, to ensure that the offence of discrimination does not occur. I ask my hon. Friend to focus on the moral aspect of the matter, and to address himself to the rights and wrongs of discrimination in a circumstance where someone may think that somebody else is disabled.

Mr. Batiste: I have no difference with my hon. Friend in seeking to prevent discrimination in the sort of cases that he describes. I simply believe that what he has expressed, coloured as it is by the fact that his experience relates to information that he has received from his connection with the Huntington's Disease Association and genetics interest groups, does not reflect the broader picture. I ask him, in turn, to focus on the fact that to try to bracket genetic predisposition with disability is the worst possible signal to give at this point in the development of the science, for reasons that I shall describe in a moment.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The hon. Gentleman has failed to read the entire schedule. Clear reference is made in this amendment, the subsequent Government amendment and an amendment tabled by Opposition Members to terminology that overcomes his difficulty. The text before us refers to people who suffer from progressive conditions, and defines the kind of ballpark we are in.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is really suggesting that Huntington's disease is not a condition which is almost certain to lead to discrimination. The amendment of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) refers not to obscure matters like the colour of one's eyes but to serious progressive conditions.

Mr. Batiste: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, who is also a member of the Science and Technology Select Committee, he is missing the point. While the amendment has been proposed in the context of Huntington's disease and other serious defects, the reality is that genetic testing of predisposition will, in a relatively short time, cover the whole spectrum from Huntington's disease to predisposition to a variety of cancers, respiratory disease and a range of other diseases. The tests in each case will be differently balanced.

For example, if someone with a genetic predisposition to Huntington's disease lives long enough, he or she will almost certainly contract Huntington's disease. But the predisposition itself and the discovery of the gene for that predisposition make it more likely that a cure will be found for that disease within the person's lifetime.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: I do not wish to argue about details, but Huntington's chorea can occur quite early in life. The age of onset can be progressively younger and run through some parts of a family. So we cannot say that a person will not develop that condition for a great number of years, as he may develop it quite soon. Moreover, we know that the person is properly diagnosed.

Mr. Batiste: Indeed he may. I have drawn a picture of one end of the spectrum. The other end is that people will be diagnosed for all kinds of serious diseases with a percentage possibility that they may or may not contract them at some time in their lifetime, but we have no way of predicting when they are likely to do so.

To say that the amendment is confined to a small group of people is wrong, because, within a short time, it will apply to an ever-growing number of people and, ultimately, to everybody. If hon. Members would listen to me for a moment more, they would understand that I am not trying to advocate discrimination, but saying that we should deal with this matter through different routes that would not have the serious side effects which clinical geneticists already advise us this will have if we try to treat the predisposition as a disability.

6.45 pm

It is wrong to believe that there is one healthy genetic norm. That is a deterministic judgment which has nothing to do with this science. In reality, every person is unique and predisposed to some serious disease or another. Predisposition to one disease may provide protection against another serious disease.

The whole process of genetic prediction of predisposition is a step towards understanding the nature of a disease and a cure for it, and hence the defeat of the original prediction. It is wrong to label any human genome as containing and constituting a disability when there is no current physical or mental symptom.

That is not to countenance discrimination, but to say that the solutions to genetic discrimination are far more complex than envisaged in the amendment, and are outside the Bill's scope. The worst case of genetic discrimination that has occurred so far is that of sickle-cell anaemia carriers in the US, where massive discrimination took place because of a well-intentioned attempt to define sickle-cell anaemia as a disability, which caused havoc to large numbers of people who were never likely to contract the disease in the first place.

We had an opportunity in the Select Committee as recently as last week to take evidence from one of the most eminent clinical geneticists in this country, Professor Modell. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) asked him:

> "If you discovered, as it were, that you had been screened and you had got this predisposition, should it be illegal to discriminate against you on the grounds that you had this predisposition . . . ?"

The response from Professor Modell was clear and unambiguous. He said:

> "It seems to me the suggestion that people should have this protection on the grounds of a predisposition could be quite debilitating and damaging to the individual. In my own area, forgive me for . . . returning to thalassaemia, but we have adult patients and one of the most active arguments between them at international meetings is over exactly this issue, because there are some countries in which, by virtue of their diagnosis, they are entitled to a certain amount of pension, free cars, going to university, and they feel that this actually undermines their self-esteem as adult individuals. And I can see this, it actually causes a great deal of social harm, to give people protection on the basis of a diagnosis. They would not mind the protection if they were handicapped"—

but not on the basis of diagnosis.

[Mr. Batiste]

I went on to suggest:

> "I think what you are suggesting is that the protection should actually come through proper codes of secrecy and privacy, in relation to genetic screening information, rather than by defining fairly artificially the predisposition as being a disability".

Professor Modell replied:

> "Absolutely, yes."

The House will have to make many difficult decisions as genetic science increases in its knowledge and its impact on a range of issues. Those include life assurance; mass screening; informed consent; privacy of information; financing of health care; and employment. The solutions to those problems are not always the most obvious.

The best bioethics framework document that I have seen so far is a draft convention by the Council of Europe. It deals with predictive testing and its implications, and refers to predictive testing for serious late-onset diseases, which is at the heart of this amendment, but does so in a wider and more appropriate context than the Bill. The right course for us is to ratify that convention and establish a national bioethics commission to operate within it and make considered recommendations for legislation in this country. It is not to make piecemeal judgments and enshrine them in primary legislation, however well meaning.

Ms Lynne: I shall be brief, as many hon. Members wish to speak in this debate.

Definition is one of the most important aspects of the Bill. It means that people will either be assisted by the legislation or excluded from it, depending on the definition of "disability". I tabled an amendment in Committee about definition for that very reason. I felt that it was one of the most important parts of the Bill, and I am pleased to discuss it today.

Many illnesses and disabilities are not covered by the current definition of disability in clause 1, but they should be. Transient illnesses, such as mental illness or epilepsy, are not properly covered by the definition, nor are intermittent illnesses such as myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME. People will not be covered by the definition before the onset of the symptoms of a degenerative illness such as multiple sclerosis. The same applies to people with dormant conditions such as HIV.

People will be discriminated against because of their past or future illnesses, because the definition in clause 1 may exclude depression or someone with a history of mental illness. We raised that in Committee, but we received no satisfactory answers from Ministers. We must be given a satisfactory reply today, because that definition is not wide enough.

Genetic disorders have already been mentioned by several hon. Members, who have spoken about the advances that have been made. That we get the Bill right is therefore a serious matter. A genetic test can now be conducted to see if someone is predisposed to Alzheimer's disease. Some 634,000 people in this country have dementia, and of those, 70 per cent. will get Alzheimer's disease. If that test is positive, the person tested could be discriminated against by employers, who might refuse to take him on because he may get Alzheimer's disease in another few years.

People will be subject to actual discrimination because of a test they took to find out whether they are predisposed to a particular disease. Such people could be debarred from insurance and employment, so they need to be included in the definition in clause 1. People suffering from asymptomatic HIV are another example, because those who have been diagnosed with the HIV virus are already discriminated against, even though no one has provided us with the time scale for the onset of the symptoms of that disease.

Sense—the National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association—has done extremely good work in advising hon. Members about the problems of the definition in clause 1 and other problems connected with the Bill. It is extremely worried that people with Usher syndrome will be excluded from the definition.

Someone with that syndrome may have a slight hearing loss or may be born with a hearing impairment. He may get employment, but if an employer knows that that person could also lose his sight in his late 20s, he could be debarred from even getting that employment. I cannot think of anything more devastating than dual sensory loss. Those suffering from Usher syndrome must be included in the definition.

Future conditions are not included in the definition, yet it should be inclusive, not exclusive. That is what discrimination is all about. We need a clear, comprehensive and, above all, workable definition.

The current definition in clause 1 is far too narrow, and it will create confusion and uncertainty. It will lead to lengthy disputes, especially when we consider how the Bill deals with clinically well-recognised illnesses. Someone who has been sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983 might not be covered by the definition. It seems absolutely incredible that a person could be judged not to have a mental impairment, but could be locked up against his will, and still not come within the remit of this Bill.

That definition must be amended to include not just present disabilities, but a history of illness and a reputation for having an illness or disability. Without that change, the definition is too tight. I sincerely hope that hon. Members will vote for amendment No. 12.

Sir John Hannam: My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) has spoken about amendment No. 13 on genetic predisposition. Organisations such as the Alzheimer's Disease Society, of which I am a vice-president, have expressed concern that the Bill as it stands fails to afford protection from unfair discrimination to those people who can be identified by predictive genetic testing as being at risk of becoming disabled due to genetic causes. They fear that information gathered from genetic testing could be used to restrict an individual's access to the life opportunities mentioned by other hon. Members.

I share some of the apprehension that certain hon. Friends have expressed about the correct time to legislate, given that so much research is being conducted into genetics. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer that point.

Amendment No. 12 relates to the history of an impairment. I hope that we can make some progress on that, because I know from constituency experiences of individuals, particularly people working in the civil service, who have suffered discrimination as a result of previously having suffered depression, a nervous breakdown or other illnesses. It was a long time before some of those people became aware that that medical evidence had affected their careers.

The amendment would extend the definition of a disabled person given in clause 1. I support it because the existing definition is unnecessarily restrictive, as it excludes many people who suffer from the most severe and unjustified discrimination.

The current definition concentrates entirely on an individual's ability

"to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

The Government argue that that definition represents common sense. At first glance, it may seem fair that people who are not really disabled should not be covered by the Bill, but on closer examination, problems become clear. As I have explained, people who have been treated for depression often find that employers are prejudiced against them. As the Bill stands, they will be entitled to protection only if they can show that their depression is likely to recur in the future. That is not common sense, nor is it equitable.

I have cited one group of people who should be included within the definition, but many others will be ignored despite the fact that they are already discriminated against on the basis of disability. They may exclude people with epilepsy, diabetes or ME. People with visual, hearing or other impairments may also be excluded because their disabilities are not severe enough.

To claim the right to fair and equal treatment, a person will first have to convince an employer or a court how incapable he is. That contradicts the real message of the Bill, which should be to promote an understanding of the abilities of disabled people. It is also at odds with the dignity and respect that disabled people have the right to expect from a law aimed at ending discrimination against them.

Concern has been expressed about extending the definition too widely, so that it could cover the whole population. A similar problem has not arisen with other equality laws that have been drafted precisely to include everyone. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes discrimination against men or women on the basis of gender illegal; similarly, the Race Relations Act 1976 protects anyone, black or white, from racial prejudice. It makes sense for protection against discrimination on the basis of disability to be equally broadly drawn.

The right to fair treatment should not be rationed. I therefore hope that the Minister will heed those arguments when considering amendment No. 12.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Like the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), I am a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, but I believe that the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) is an appropriate interim measure to anticipate the much wider legislation which will be needed in the near future. I agree with the hon. Member for Elmet about that. The Select Committee is in the process of exploring such legislation.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, the present draft of the schedule has a positive bias against those with a genetic predisposition. That is plainly wrong. If it were neutral, that would be a different matter. If the Bill creates a positive incentive for an employer or anyone else to discriminate against a person who has a genetic predisposition—it will be possible to discriminate against him only before it becomes a progressive condition—that is wrong.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if employers or insurance companies are allowed to discriminate against people with genetic predispositions, the effect may be to give people a disincentive not to have genetic tests and that, in many cases, such as that of a familial tendency to breast cancer or raised cholesterol, that may be deleterious to that person's health? Therefore, it is extremely important to pass the amendment in terms of discrimination.

7 pm

Dr. Bray: My hon. Friend raises several important issues that need to be regarded in a wider context.

There is a range of considerations. First, the circumstances differ widely for different genetic predispositions. Sometimes there is a high probability that an illness or malcondition will occur; at other times, there is a low probability. In some cases, it is long postponed; in other cases, it occurs at a very early age. In some cases, there is rapid progress in research and there is the prospect that some treatment may be found during the lifetime of the person affected. In other cases, it is a hugely difficult issue whereby, according to the present state of knowledge, there is not much optimism of a therapy being found in the foreseeable future.

Against that background, we are dealing with public attitudes and parliamentary attitudes that are inappropriate to consideration of those issues. A public who expect one to insure against risks of a million to one—against the extreme improbability of people incurring cancer as a result of a tiny radiation leak, requiring huge investment at a nuclear power station or something like that to avoid that risk—are plainly not a public who are able to cope with 1 per cent., 10 per cent. or 30 per cent. probabilities of their having a child with a certain predisposition, which they will need to come to terms with in their personal lives.

In Parliament, it has been money for old jam to take up some cause about which the public can be panicked and to build that up into a great campaign, producing wild biases in the allocation of resources, in the direction of research and so on, which do not lead to a sensible set of personal attitudes. The most important aspect of legislation is the type of demonstration it gives people as to how they should react in certain circumstances.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is exactly the problem that so much may be expected of genetic screening and so many unwise decisions might be taken in the light of genetic screening that makes it essential to avoid a mass hysteria resulting from people supposing that we shall all be able to have genetic screening, and that we shall all be found to have Alzheimer's disease? Hence the disservice that would be done, in my humble estimation, if the amendment were made, because it would arouse expectations that should not be aroused, and would make such persons even more vulnerable than they may feel now.

Dr. Bray: The hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, well understands the complexities. My judgment would be that, on the whole, given the present set of public and

[Dr. Bray]

parliamentary attitudes, given the splendid progress that the Committee is making under his enlightened chairmanship, and given the likelihood that the Government will accept the recommendations that we make in that report, it is a sensible measure, in response to the alert identification of the bias in the Bill by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), to tackle the practical position that it creates by the amendment that he has tabled.

I repeat that it can be only a temporary disposition, and the House must return to those matters.

Mr. Wigley: I approach the issue from the viewpoint of disability, although I should have very much liked to have been on the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which is inquiring into those matters.

I suppose that I should declare an interest immediately, because I lost two boys because of a genetic condition, and therefore I am a carrier. That may put me in a different position from other Members of the House. On the other hand, it may not, because all of us have on average half a dozen genetic abnormalities, and it is very often a matter of luck whether those abnormalities lead to one's offspring having genetic problems.

That being so, the problem is not an individual one but a general one, because, as hon. Members have said, we shall confront massive problems over those issues in the next few years, and very shortly. I have discussed some of the implications with Professor Peter Harper and others.

There are two distinct aspects. One is the aspect that impinges immediately on discrimination in the context of the Bill, such as in the place of work. It is unacceptable that we should say that it is legitimate for there to be discrimination against a person because that person has a potential of having a disability at some time—that is, to discriminate against a perfectly healthy person at the moment because something may or may not happen in future.

To make it worse, because many of the rarer conditions are not well understood, a potential employer may read in all types of difficulties in a few years' time that may not be there, because the rate of progress of many conditions varies enormously.

One thinks of people with some of those conditions who have made enormous successes in their lives. One thinks of Sir Charles Evans, who was principal of the University College of North Wales, Bangor, who very nearly reached the summit of Everest in 1953, yet who, for his latter years, was in a wheelchair with MS. If he had been discriminated against because of the condition that he potentially had, it would have been outrageous, and no one was to know the speed at which that condition developed.

Therefore, in the context of employment, it is untenable to hold the opinion that has been held by some Conservative Members in resisting the amendment. I think that that goes along with a whole load of other aspects of the Bill regarding services and other facilities needed by disabled people, but especially employment.

Hon. Members have mentioned another matter—insurance. There, I suspect, we have it, because I am very much aware of a strong lobby in the insurance world that is of the viewpoint that it has the right to use all and any information available in calculating insurance premiums and liabilities, and that to restrict that lobby from having that information is to cut across the whole profession.

The argument that I would make about that—I would base it on a different premise from the argument that I made regarding employment—is that insurance should be regarded as a spreading out of risk, and if we are approaching a position where the genetic mapping of every individual is potentially known, all those calculations can be made and the whole industry will be turned upside-down. I would prefer that we resist that at the moment, that we take it that there must be an average loading of premium, and that the more difficult, expensive cases must be carried by the rest of us who are lucky enough not to have those problems.

Mr. Batiste: I do not necessarily disagree with what the hon. Gentleman says about insurance, but my understanding of the amendment is that it will not have that effect. If the insurance companies can show that there is an actuarial base for the premiums that they wish to charge, it will simply enable them to identify higher-risk groups and load the premiums even more on to those groups.

The way in which one should approach the matter is to consider whether the documentation should be supplied in the first place, in view of the overwhelming need to get as many people screened as possible in the categories required.

Mr. Wigley: Yes, but the clause and the Bill have nothing to do with the provision of the documentation. We are talking about discrimination—discrimination against people on the basis of their potential disability. I believe that that is an unacceptable way of going about things.

There may need to be some amendment in another place to fine-tune the implications in insurance, although I do not believe that that is necessary. I believe that the approach that must be taken is a broad-based approach by the society in general—by which I mean the society of people who are insuring, accepting the overall swings and roundabouts of risk. However, if there is another approach whereby some safeguards for insurance work need to be built in in another place, so be it.

However, it would be wrong to allow discrimination to be acceptable in the context of employment and all the other contexts that we have examined in the Bill because of those problems. The Government should accept the amendment. If there needs to be some fine tuning after that, so be it. I accept that there will be much more legislation on other aspects of the subject that have far-reaching implications.

Mr. Miller: I shall not repeat the issues with which the Select Committee on Science and Technology is dealing—my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) covered the subject extremely well.

The key issue is whether we should take a neutral view on issues relating to genetic predisposition, a negative view—as clause 1 does—or follow the lead of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and take a positive view. To my mind, there is only one choice.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon referred to people minded to discriminate, which is what we must focus on. As the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) said, it is clear that each of us has a genetic predisposition to something: the problem is that we do not know what it is. The only certainty in life is death. We all have a genetic predisposition to some condition or another, and our knowledge will grow, but that is not what the clause is about.

The clause is clearly about the circumstances in which people discover that they have a genetic predisposition that may result in a shortening of their life or a serious late-onset disease that causes them to be discriminated against. Clearly, such people should not be the subject of discrimination, and I think that the Government would agree with that.

The question is one of definition. A number of clauses refer to issues such as progressive conditions and histories of impairment. They could all be used to incorporate the spirit of what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon is saying, but they do not get to the nub of the matter in the way that he does.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) made an extremely important point about insurance-related issues. If all Conservative Members joined BUPA and one of them wanted to jump the queue, the only way he could do so would be by creating a super BUPA. The Government might regard that as a sensible market, but if we extend the logic of the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon by 10, 15 or 20 years and if the insurance industry operates in the way postulated by the hon. Member for Elmet, there will be no insurance industry. People will have to be grouped and risks will have to be spread, otherwise there will be no insurance industry.

The key reason why we need to ensure that nobody is discriminated against is simply that if there is potential for discrimination much of the research being undertaken within family groups will be restricted. If one member of a family group in which a particular condition is prevalent makes himself available for a test that shows that he has a predisposition that may or may not express itself in years to come, that could, in itself, result in discrimination. If we do not encourage people to participate in family group studies, our knowledge of disease and tragic conditions will be restricted. A positive way to encourage development would be to incorporate the philosophy of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon within the framework of the Bill.

7.15 pm

Mr. Hague: We have had an interesting and wide-ranging debate in the middle of our proceedings this evening.

I am concerned that some hon. Members view the Bill as the solution for all discrimination. It is not a general anti-discrimination Bill; it is not even a general health discrimination Bill. Our intention in proposing the Bill is simply to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, the Bill aims to avoid discrimination against people with disabilities. In meeting that aim, we must carry with us employers, business and the general public. Vagueness and uncertainty will not do. Employers, businesses and individuals need to know who has rights, who can complain to the courts and tribunals and to whom those employers or businesses have duties.

The Government have had a clear policy—that the people we intend to cover are those with a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Those are people who are disabled in commonsense terms. There is no question about whether people with sensory impairments are included. The hon. Member for Erdington raised that subject in his speech and we have been over it in Committee. The phrasing of the Bill, and our proceedings in Committee and in the House, show, without doubt, that people with sensory impairments are included in the word "physical" when we use the definition "physical or mental impairment".

We have also ensured that people with progressive conditions are covered from the first point at which they have an effect on day-to-day activities, however slight. We have also ensured that people are covered who have impairments where the effects fluctuate or recur. We have ensured that people with severe disfigurements are covered. All those are people who are commonly accepted as having a disability.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The Minister spoke of those he must try to carry with him on the issue. He did not talk about the organisations of or for disabled people. They are concerned to see changes in the definition that he proposes. I asked him at an earlier stage in the Bill's proceedings if he would meet the Genetic Interest Group. I suggested that it would be rewarding for him as well as highly satisfactory for the group. Is he prepared to meet that group?

Mr. Hague: I met the Genetic Interest Group last week. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) brought its director to see me and we had a valuable discussion. I shall come to the points that hon. Members have made about genetic predisposition in a moment.

Although we are extending protection to a wide range of people, a line has to be drawn about whom the Bill is for. That is not an easy task, as today's debate has clearly shown. The American experience shows that tremendous problems can be caused by involving groups with marginal connections to disability. Such problems include large backlogs of complaints, great employer uncertainty and groups rightly intended to be excluded from the legislation managing to complain by claiming that they have a reputation of having a disability.

We recognise, however, that there is serious concern, which has been voiced this evening by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), about discrimination against people who have had a disability, but who have recovered. MIND—the National Association for Mental Health—has put the case for people who have recovered from mental illness. Other groups and individuals have made their strong views clear, including my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter. After careful consideration, the Government have accepted that the Bill should confer protection against discrimination on people who have had a disability that meets the Bill's definition.

We cannot, however, accept the amendments because we must consider the implications of the change, not just for the definition but for the Bill as a whole. We will table appropriate amendments in another place and I hope that, on that basis, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon will feel able to withdraw the relevant amendment concerning history of disability.

[Mr. Hague]

Amendments Nos. 13 and 17 would bring people with latent conditions and genetic predispositions within the scope of the Bill. I have given the matter a great deal of thought and I had a very useful meeting with the director of the Genetic Interest Group last week. I accept that some serious ethical issues arise from the advances in genetic screening techniques and that there is potential for discrimination—which I strongly oppose—against people with certain genetic predispositions. However, to include people with latent conditions or genetic predispositions in the Bill would open up the legislation to vast numbers of people who are not, and may never be, disabled.

I am advised that the human cell has an estimated 100,000 genes. As we are able to identify, isolate and test for more of those genes—the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste)—it has been estimated that we will all be found to carry a complement of potentially lethal mutations, which is a sobering thought even for this place. In about 10 years' time, the Bill, which is designed to provide protection for disabled people, could cover the entire population of the country.

I understand that the effects of those potentially harmful genes do not always manifest themselves and that many individuals who carry a particular trait will never show any effects of it. I am also advised that the predictive power of genetic testing is, with few exceptions, likely to remain uncertain. No screening test will be 100 per cent. reliable. For example, the well-publicised cystic fibrosis test cannot detect all the mutations; at best, it can be only 80 per cent. reliable and both false positive and false negative results can be expected.

In other words, except in a few well-publicised cases, genetic tests are not as yet a useful indicator of future actual disability. Their inclusion would open up the Bill to large numbers of people who are clearly not, and may never become, disabled.

Dr. Bray: If what the Minister says is correct—and his remarks have great force—would it not be reasonable for the Government to say that, in certain named conditions where the likelihood is more than about 10 per cent., it would be wrong to discriminate? That suggestion is clearly not made in the amendment, but the Minister could say that he will examine the possibility of such a proposal before the Bill goes to another place.

Mr. Hague: With that suggestion, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) takes us into a whole new area of creating an arbitrary distinction about which there would be further room for debate. I understand the points that he and other hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, have expressed in that area. However, we cannot wander into a situation whereby, for some reason or another, potentially the entire population could claim protection under the Bill.

I do not believe that the Bill is the right place to address those concerns—which go much wider than issues relating to discrimination, as I think my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) said in interventions. The House will now be aware of the inquiry by the Select Committee on Science and Technology into human genetics. I understand that the Committee is currently addressing a number of the concerns raised by hon. Members and that it will report later this year. The Government will want to look very carefully at the Select Committee's findings and recommendations before deciding whether specific action is called for. That will provide a valuable opportunity to consider the issue in the round, including the points that have been raised in the debate.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon that the Government do not intend to ignore those issues. The Government's door will be open for further discussions not only about the specific issue that he has raised tonight, but about the wider issues that have been raised as a result of what we know about those matters to date. I think that is the sensible way for the Government and the House to proceed.

To accept all the amendments that have been proposed would change the Bill from a disability Bill into a general health Bill, which would dilute its effect in protecting people who are commonly understood to be disabled. I hope that the whole House will welcome the statement that I have made about including people with a history of a disability in the Bill.

I turn briefly to the Government amendments that are grouped with the amendment which was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon. As hon. Members know, the Bill is designed to eliminate discrimination against people with a disability that has a substantial long-term adverse effect on normal day-to-day activity. We have always intended that the Bill should cover people who are terminally ill and who may not have 12 months to live. However, it became clear in Committee that that might not be the effect. Therefore, in order to avoid any doubt or confusion, I have tabled amendments Nos. 98 and 99, which clearly cover people who have fewer than 12 months to live.

Many of the other amendments are drafting changes, but I particularly draw attention to amendment No. 129, which introduces the term "concentrate" into the list of normal day-to-day activities. It is a very important amendment which ensures that people with certain conditions, such as schizophrenic disorders, will be covered by the Bill.

In addition, we are aware that there is potential for confusion because the Mental Health Act 1983 also uses the term "mental impairment". The Mental Health Act definition is too narrow: it does not cover learning disabilities unless they constitute an impairment associated with abnormally aggressive or seriously irresponsible conduct; it does not cover mental impairments arising from injuries later in life; and it has no long-term element. As the purposes of the two Acts are quite different, we believe that it will be helpful to make the difference in the definitions apparent. That is why we have tabled amendment No. 127.

The final Government amendment to which I shall refer is amendment No. 132, which makes it clear what is meant by "progressive condition". As I said in Committee, the Bill is about people who have the symptoms and signs of a disability—and it will now be about those who have had them in the past. However, as symptoms are rather subjective, we have decided to adopt the same approach that we used to define a disability and refer to effects on normal day-to-day activities.

This is a very difficult area. We have to draw the line somewhere in the definition and I think that we have drawn it in a sensible place, although the Government are prepared to move the line for people with a history of an actual impairment which meets the terms in which impairment is defined in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon has expressed legitimate fears. I hope that he will be encouraged by my assurance that the Government's door is open to discuss these matters in the round. We certainly look forward to the report of the Select Committee later this year, which will draw attention to many more of those issues.

Mr. Alan Howarth: With the leave of the House, I shall make some quick observations.

I am grateful to hon. Members who, in some considerable number, have taken part in the debate, which has proved extremely helpful and valuable. I am particularly grateful to the hon. Members who supported me on amendment No. 13—notably, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), whom I like to think of as my old sparring partner rather than my opponent across the Dispatch Box, and the hon. Members for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who made very constructive and helpful speeches.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir. G. Shaw) that there is no question of raising unreal hopes and fears of the kind and on the scale that he anticipated. I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), who have given careful thought to the issues. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet that predisposition to a disorder is not of itself a disability, but we are dealing with the attitudes of those who think that it is. He is worried that the clause might apply to a large number of people; I do not mind that in the least. Legislation dealing with discrimination on the grounds of race or gender quite rightly protects the whole population and, equally, all people should be protected from discrimination on the basis that they are perceived to be disabled.

The evil against which we seek to act is discrimination by ignorant and prejudiced people. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet cited Professor Modell and was worried that the amendment might entail positive discrimination, but it would not. It would not entail the conferring of particular privileges on a particular section of the population—that is not what I am arguing for.

7.30 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet was worried that we might be making a piecemeal judgment, acting somewhat impetuously to deal with one small part of a much larger complex of problems. I acknowledge that, but we have a clearly defined evil that is made more likely—unintentionally, of course—by the Bill, and my amendment proposes a remedy for that.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for enabling me to meet him and Mr. Alastair Kent, the director of the Genetic Interest Group. I welcome the commitment that he was able to make about including in the protection of the Bill those who have a history of disability. That is a most constructive and important advance, and I am sure that the whole House appreciates it. I am sorry, however, that he was not able to offer a more positive response to my amendment on the particular issue that it addresses, because he has recognised—for which I am grateful—that there are serious ethical issues and that we risk exposing people who suffer from latent conditions and genetic predispositions to unacceptable discrimination.

My hon. Friend the Minister said how strongly he would oppose such discrimination. He is worried, however, that my amendment would open up the situation too widely. I have indicated why that is not an anxiety for me, but I recognise that, if it is a problem for the Government, it is worth looking again at drafting an amendment that might remove that unfortunate effect from the Bill. I will, along the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South and with the Genetic Interest Group, look to see whether it would be possible to narrow the compass and the effect of the amendment to an extent. My hon. Friend the Minister suggested that that might not be a suitable approach, but it would be analogous to the approach that the Government have adopted in the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act, where specified medical conditions exempt people from having to undergo the medical test. We are therefore not in entirely uncharted territory, for all the differences between the two situations.

I still maintain that there is a problem and that it is important to address it within the proposed legislation. I welcome the constructive willingness of my hon. Friend the Minister to look seriously at these issues, but I do not think that it will be satisfactory to leave it to subsequent legislation. I hope therefore that it will be possible for all concerned to look again at the drafting of an amendment that might meet my hon. Friend's genuine concerns, and that a new amendment will be tabled in another place. I hope that the Government will be able to favour it.

With the leave of the House, I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 13.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): We are dealing with amendment No. 12, so there is no need to seek to withdraw amendment No. 13, because it has not, technically, been moved.

Mr. Howarth: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1

PROVISIONS SUPPLEMENTING SECTION 1

Amendments made: No. 98, in page 28, line 16, leave out 'or'.

No. 99, in page 28, line 18, after 'months', insert '; or

(c) it can reasonably be expected to last for the rest of the life of the person affected'.

No. 100, in line 35, leave out from 'having' to end of line 36 and insert 'that effect'.

No. 128, in line 40, after 'affect' insert

'the ability of the person concerned to carry out'.

No. 129, in page 29, line 3, after 'to' insert 'concentrate,'.

No. 130, in line 7, after 'affect' insert

'the ability of the person concerned to carry out'.

No. 131, in line 10, after 'affect' insert

'the ability of the person concerned to carry out'.

[Mr. Howarth]

No. 132, in page 30, line 2, leave out from 'Where' to end of line 13 and insert '—

(a) a person has a progressive condition (such as cancer, multiple sclerosis or muscular dystrophy),

(b) as a result of that condition, he has an impairment which has (or had) an effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, but

(c) that effect is not (or was not) a substantial adverse effect,

he shall be taken to have an impairment which has such a substantial adverse effect if the condition is expected to result in his having such an impairment.'.

No. 133, in line 14, leave out 'Act' and insert 'paragraph'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 5

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH LESS FAVOURABLE TREATMENT IS JUSTIFIED

Amendments made: No. 71, in page 3, line 30, leave out 'be' and insert 'have been'.

No. 72, in line 31, after 'believe' insert

', at the time of the treatment in question,'.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Clause 6

DUTY OF EMPLOYER TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

Amendments made: No. 120, in page 4, line 14, at end insert—

'( ) The following are examples of steps which an employer may have to take in relation to a disabled person in order to comply with section (1)—

(a) making adjustments to premises;

(b) allocating some of the disabled person's duties to another person;

(c) transferring him to fill an existing vacancy;

(d) altering his working hours;

(e) assigning him to a different place of work;

(f) allowing him to be absent during working hours for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment;

(g) giving him, or arranging for him to be given, training;

(h) acquiring or modifying equipment;

(i) modifying instructions or reference manuals;

(j) modifying procedures for testing or assessment;

(k) providing a reader or interpreter;

(l) providing supervision.'.

No. 121, leave out lines 29 to 35.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Clause 7

EXEMPTION FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Amendment made: No. 122, in page 5, line 13, leave out from 'substituting' to end of line 14 and insert

'a different number (not greater than 20) for the number for the time being specified there.'.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You are going through the amendments at a rate of knots, but I expected the Government to explain some of them. Some of them are purely technical, but amendment No. 120 is substantial and has gone through on the nod without any explanation. That is an unsatisfactory way of dealing with business.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is, of course, open to any hon. Member to speak, provided the amendment does not fall under the category of amendments that are called formally, which means that it will already have been put with others.

Clause 8

ENFORCEMENT, REMEDIES AND PROCEDURE

Amendment made: No. 123, in page 5, line 36, leave out

'in the case of damages'

and insert

'to the calculation of damages in claims in tort or (in Scotland) in reparation'.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Clause 10

CHARITIES AND SUPPORT FOR PARTICULAR GROUPS OF PERSONS

Amendment made: No. 73, in page 7, line 26, leave out 'any' and insert 'such'.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Clause 11

ADVERTISEMENTS SUGGESTING THAT EMPLOYERS WILL DISCRIMINATE AGAINST DISABLED PERSONS

Amendment made: No. 74, in page 8, line 7, leave out from 'employer' to 'and' in line 8 and insert

'has advertised the employment (whether before or after the disabled person applied for it)'.—*[Mr. Paice.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) sure that he does not wish to speak to amendment No. 74?

Mr. Wigley: No, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Clause 12

DISCRIMINATION IN RELATION TO GOODS, FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Amendment made: No. 75, in page 8, line 40, leave out 'Part' and insert

'section and sections 13, 14 and 15'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I register my dissatisfaction at the fact that an important group of amendments on the needs of carers has been dropped at this stage? Many hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee have been extensively lobbied on the subject and would have liked an opportunity to debate the subject.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I share my hon. Friend's frustration, but it is fair to point out that these amendments were tabled before the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), was given a Second Reading.

Amendments made: No. 76 in page 9, line 2, leave out 'Part applies' and insert

'section and sections 13, 14 and 15 apply'.

No. 77, in page 9, line 4, at end insert—

'( ) access to and use of means of communication;

( ) access to and use of information services;'.

No. 78, in line 18, leave out 'Part does' and insert

'section and sections 13, 14 and 15 do'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 13

MEANING OF "DISCRIMINATION"

Amendments made: No. 79, in page 9, line 42, leave out 'this Part' and insert 'section 12'.

No. 80, in page 10, line 6, leave out from 'services' to 'under' and insert

'has failed to comply with any duty imposed on him by or'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 14

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH LESS FAVOURABLE TREATMENT IS JUSTIFIED

Amendment proposed: No. 81, in page 10, leave out lines 35 to 37 and insert—

'(ii) the disabled person is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement, or of giving an informed consent, and for that reason the treatment is reasonable in that case;'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 85.

Mr. Wigley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should be grateful if the Minister would explain the precise implications of amendment No. 81.

Mr. Hague: I agreed in Committee to consider paragraph (ii) in the light of the Law Commission's recent report on incapacity and to reconsider the situation. The amendment will mean that a service provider will still be allowed to discriminate justifiably against someone if it is not able to contract, but only if it is reasonable to do so within the circumstances of the case.

Let me illustrate that further. There are some circumstances in which a service provider is very unlikely reasonably to think that a person does not have the ability to contract and does not understand the principles behind a particular transaction—for example, when someone is buying a newspaper or a Mars bar from a corner shop. The circumstances are different when someone enters a car showroom and attempts to buy an expensive luxury car. In such a case, when there is a major purchase or credit sale involved, if the service provider has justifiable reasons to think that the disabled customer is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement or giving an informed consent, he will be entitled not to provide the goods or services. We debated this matter in Committee and I made the case for it in general terms.

The situation, therefore, turns on the individual facts of each case. The amendment deals with that point and would remove the possibility of unscrupulous service providers exploiting this paragraph of the clause as a loophole. A provider will not be able to say that because someone could not enter into an enforceable agreement to buy an expensive car he will not sell that person a newspaper either. It will depend on the particular circumstances. I hope that the amendment will be warmly welcomed.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 82, in page 11, line 2, leave out 'this Part' and insert 'section 13'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 15

DUTY OF PROVIDERS OF SERVICES TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

Amendment made: No. 83, in page 12, line 2, at end insert—

'( ) as to what is to be included within the meaning of "practice, policy or procedure";

( ) as to what is not to be included within the meaning of that expression;'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 17

EXEMPTION FOR SMALL DWELLINGS

Amendment made: No. 84, in page 13, leave out lines 41 to 44 and insert—

'(c) the shared accommodation is not storage accommodation or a means of access; and'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 19

CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH LESS FAVOURABLE TREATMENT IN RELATION TO PREMISES IS JUSTIFIED

Amendment made: No. 85, in page 15, leave out lines 1 to 3 and insert—

'(ii) the disabled person is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement, or of giving an informed consent, and for that reason the treatment is reasonable in that case;'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 21

VALIDITY AND REVISION OF CERTAIN AGREEMENTS

Amendment made: No. 86, in page 15, line 34, after 'of' insert 'goods, facilities or'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 24

CODES OF PRACTICE PREPARED BY THE COUNCIL

Amendment made: No. 87, in page 18, line 8, after 'section' insert 'and section 25'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 25

FURTHER PROVISION ABOUT CODES ISSUED UNDER SECTION 24

Amendments made: No. 88, in page 18, leave out lines 12 and 13.

No. 89, in page 18, leave out from line 42 to line 2 on page 19.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 26

CODES OF PRACTICE PREPARED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendment made: No. 90, in page 19, line 42, after 'section' insert 'and section 27'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 27

FURTHER PROVISION ABOUT CODES ISSUED UNDER SECTION 26

Amendment made: No. 91, in page 20, leave out lines 22 and 23.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 29

HELP FOR PERSONS SUFFERING DISCRIMINATION

Amendments made: No. 92, in page 21, line 28, leave out 'the proceedings' and insert

'any proceedings under Part II'.

No. 93, in page 21, line 29, after 'tribunal' insert 'in any such proceedings'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

[Mr. Hague]

Clause 32

STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND NATIONAL SECURITY ETC.

Amendments made: No. 94, in page 22, line 37, leave out 'under' and insert 'in pursuance of'.

No. 95, in page 22, line 38, leave out first 'under' and insert 'in pursuance of'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 35

APPLICATION TO CROWN ETC.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): I beg to move amendment No. 124, in page 24, line 33, after '(2)' insert 'Subject to subsection (4A)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 125 and 126.

Mr. Paice: Hon. Members will recall that in the White Paper published in January, which was entitled "Ending Discrimination Against Disabled People", we said that we would consider narrowly defined exceptions for positions with unusually demanding all-round requirements for fitness and stamina. Hon. Members will see from the amendments that they cover the armed forces, firefighters, prison officers and Ministry of Defence police, but they may wonder why there is no mention of ordinary police officers. The answer is that they clearly fall outside the Bill's provisions in any case, and mentioning them would simply cause confusion. They are not covered by part II of the Bill because they do not have contracts of service and, as they are not Crown servants, nor are they caught by the special provisions of clause 35.

In common with civilian police forces, members of the MOD police are sworn and attested police officers. All applicants must be able to meet prescribed medical standards relative to police duties including, of course, the carriage of arms. In addition to normal police duties within MOD establishments, MOD police officers undertake specialist duties such as personnel protection, escorting nuclear convoys and acting as marine escorts to Royal Navy submarines in naval ports. Of course, I accept that some disabled people—for example, those with severe disfigurement whom we have included within the definition—may be perfectly capable of doing these jobs. Such candidates will still be able to enter these occupations.

7.45 pm

The point, however, is that mental and physical capacity is a critical aspect of the recruitment process, and many people are rejected on the grounds of lack of fitness. Indeed, a senior Army officer is recently reported to have criticised the low level of fitness of many applicants. To be unfit is not the same thing as being disabled under our definition, but it must be clear that all judgments about the physical and mental capacity of recruits are for the recruiting authorities to make.

Mr. Wigley: How would the Minister distinguish between the work done by the armed services, firefighters and prison officers and that done by private companies such as Securicor? Will he allow Securicor to have the same derogation from the Bill, or will the provision apply only to people working in the public sector?

Mr. Paice: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall deal with that point but, basically, the answer is that he need have no real fears—assuming that he is taking the stance that I believe him to be taking.

It would not be right for tribunals to be involved in assessing such matters where public protection is involved because that would mean that they would effectively be second-guessing and, indeed, in some cases, perhaps overruling the recruitment officers in respect of the determination whether or not someone was fit. Of course, I recognise that it is a hard decision but I believe that the groups listed should be exempted, and I feel confident that employers in other spheres will not feel that they are unreasonable exemptions.

I also have to point out to the House that, although we publicised our intention to make exemptions in our White Paper, I am not aware of any representations from disability organisations questioning that intention.

Hon. Members may ask why we do not simply use the power in the Bill as drafted which allows regulations to be made to prescribe the meaning of employment. First—I hope this answers the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—it is right that we should make our intentions absolutely clear and place these specific occupations in the Bill. Secondly, I am advised by our legal advisers that the power afforded in clause 38 would not allow us to exempt further whole categories of occupations so the House need have no fear of this being the thin edge of the wedge. It would, however, allow us to be more specific about certain forms of employment, which may well be useful for the purpose of clarity.

During yesterday's debate on small firms, the hon. Member for Caernarfon, among others, raised the question of seasonal workers. It may well be that the power in clause 38 will allow us to deal with that issue. Since the publication of the White Paper, we have clearly considered carefully the matter of exemptions, and the group of amendments is the outcome. I hope that it is clear to the House that it is a carefully thought out and justifiable but restricted list of narrowly drawn categories which, I hope, will meet with the House's approval. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) spoke for many Opposition Members and others when he expressed his worries. This is a serious matter and it is a considerable departure from the spirit of the debate so far. Some people might say that I am introducing contention for the sake of it, but I do so because there is a need for it.

The Government had not tabled these amendments until the end of our sittings last week. They claim that their approach to every aspect of this topic is based on consultation and on the response of the individuals involved, but there can be very little ground for suggesting that these amendments come into that category. The House has been rushed without explanation. The Minister, even in the few words that he has spoken on the amendments, has inadequately approached serious matters affecting firefighters, people in the Prison Service, and those in the armed services. The July consultation document contained nothing about the fire, prison or armed services. The Government are inviting hon.

Members to agree to the blanket exclusion of those categories, and we are clearly entitled to much more explanation than we have received.

Having heard the Minister, I still do not know why those issues were not mentioned in the consultation document, the White Paper or the Bill, and why they were not mentioned in Committee. Out of the blue, as we rush through the final hours of this important measure, the House is simply asked without explanation to agree to the amendments. That runs counter to the approach of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I share the frustration of the hon. Member for Caernarfon that many of the issues have not been fully debated. That applies in relation to amendment No. 124.

We know that 37 operational firefighters were ruled as being unfit because they were insulin-dependent diabetics. We must ask whether the amendment means that those firefighters would not be covered. They rightly and successfully challenged their employers, saying that they were unreasonable, and the courts ruled in their favour. Are we being told that new legislation would mean that such people would be excluded, despite all the information that we have, all the examination of their cases, and all the experience of those men? Their cases have been shown to be acceptable to the courts, but apparently they are not acceptable to the Government. The Minister is asking us to accept his view in the absence of views from people who represent the firefighters, and indeed the firefighters themselves. That is not acceptable to the Opposition.

We believe that serving prison officers, firefighters and service men and women will not have the right to equal treatment, which we have embraced elsewhere, and which they seek in terms of re-employment after sustaining injuries in the course of their duties. For example, a building worker who damages his spine by falling off a ladder will rightly be entitled to equal treatment in seeking transfer to another post, but a firefighter with similar experience will not be entitled to that.

In prisons, a distinction exists—the Minister dealt with this by sleight of hand—between the private and public sectors. He is seeking to introduce a charter for Group 4. That is not the way to do it. I worry about what will happen if that principle is extended and introduced in another place. The Government have had to face the embarrassment over Crown immunity and awards to pregnant women officers. The matter should be dealt with more formally than has happened tonight.

The Bill's employment provisions are weak enough without the Government demanding even more rights for themselves. There is no say in what might happen in another place. No consultation has taken place. We do not know the views of the people concerned. For those reasons, among others, I am not in favour of the Government amendments and I invite the House to reject them.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): The amendment refers to members of the fire service. Until the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) brought it up last evening, I did not realise that I was disabled, or that I would be if I were a firefighter. Were I to contract insulin-dependent diabetes, I would be instantly removed from active service as a firefighter. At best, I would be found work in an office; at worst, I would become unemployed.

I have no idea whether being an insulin-dependent diabetic affects prison officers or members of the Ministry of Defence police. I doubt it. I recognise the Minister's difficulty in trying not to extend the Bill's provisions to cover every health problem in the universe, but the key point is that he did not refer specifically to diabetes in defining the areas to be included in the disability provision.

Diabetes is a curious condition. It does not disable, but it is counted by the fire service and by licensing authorities as though it does. It can lead to disability, but, for the most part, diabetics who are well balanced in their diabetes have a better diet. They drink and eat better things. They eat and drink less. They are generally fitter and their blood, heart and eyes are regularly checked. They are more likely to be capable of serving the public as firefighters—or whatever the service might be—than someone who does not undergo such checks and who is careless of his health patterns.

It disturbs me intensely that we have not cleared up that matter in the Bill. I hope that it will be reconsidered. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon did us a service yesterday by opening up the issue, which we never even considered in Committee.

Mr. Paice: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to say that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) suggested that the Government had somehow been unjust in tabling the amendments late. I apologise to him that we tabled them late, but I felt it was right that the House should have a chance to debate them. I shall be open with the hon. Gentleman. We were planning to introduce the amendments in the other place, but we decided that it would be wrong to do so. Our decision was made after careful deliberation, as I said in my opening remarks. That is why we felt that it was right and proper, even at this late stage, to table the amendments. If changes occur in the House of Lords—I am not prejudging the issue, but the hon. Gentleman said that he did not know what would happen there—the amendments will come back to this House for further debate. However, we believed that it was right to deal with the matter tonight.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we had not consulted on the subject. The statement in the White Paper is clear. It specifically said in paragraph 3.9 that the new right

> "will cover the public and private sectors, although the Government is considering certain narrowly-defined exceptions for positions with unusually demanding all-round requirements for fitness and stamina."

As I said in my opening remarks, I am not aware of any representations or questions in relation to who might be included—not that it would take a great deal of forethought to work out who might be included.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West referred to rushing through the final hours. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) also questioned the haste with which matters were proceeding. If he is concerned about the rush through the final stages of the Bill, the hon. Member for Monklands, West should discuss that with his hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie). We were trying to accommodate the wishes of the hon. Gentleman and his party. I apologise to the House for the late tabling of the amendments, but it was right that they

[Mr. Paice]

should be proposed at this stage, and that the House should have a chance to consider them. I hope that the House will approve them.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will need the leave of the House to speak again.

Mr. Clarke: I was about to ask for it, Madam Deputy Speaker. Your perspicacity never ceases to amaze me.

With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the Minister. His first speech was marginally better than his second—and his first speech was awful. He quoted some extremely vague comments from the White Paper and, intelligent though firefighters are, well informed though prison officers are, and well educated as the people in the other services are—Group 4 is especially well informed—I cannot help believing that it will have escaped their notice that he was talking about them.

8 pm

Mr. Paice *rose*—

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to the Minister, although I hope that he will not take too long.

Mr. Paice: I certainly shall not. If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned perhaps he will tell the House why since the White Paper was published he has not taken the opportunity to find out precisely which groups the Government were thinking of excluding.

Mr. Clarke: We spent weeks and weeks in Committee seeking precisely that information. If the Minister re-examines his speech he will find that he was distinctly unhelpful and did not encourage us to get down to the details.

I shall briefly give my reasons for asking the House to divide on the issue. First, the Government have been vague. Secondly, they have been sneaky. Thirdly, and most importantly, I do not believe that we should send to another place something that the Lords will think that the House of Commons has endorsed after full consideration. I do not believe that that would be the will of the House. It is right to make it clear to the other place that the Government rushed the matter through and we have not considered it in detail.

Those details have an overwhelming potential importance for those concerned, so for that reason and for the sake of the reputation of the House as well as in the interests of the firefighters and the people in the Prison Service and other services, I ask the House to support us in opposing the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 270.

Division No. 118] **[8.01 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*

Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew

McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. George Mudie and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 125, in page 25, line 2, at end insert—

'(4A) Part II does not apply to service—

(a) as a member of the Ministry of Defence Police; or

(b) as a prison officer.

(4B) Part II does not apply to service as a member of a fire brigade who is or may be required by his terms of service to engage in fire fighting.

(4C) It is hereby declared (for the avoidance of doubt) that Part II does not apply to service in any of the naval, military or air forces of the Crown.'.

No. 126, in line 7, at end insert—

' "fire brigade" means a fire brigade maintained in pursuance of the Fire Services Act 1947;

"Ministry of Defence Police" means the force established under section 1 of the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987;

"prison officer" means a person who is a prison officer within the meaning of section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, apart from those who are—

(a) custody officers within the meaning of Part I of the Act of 1994; or

(b) prisoner custody officers within the meaning of Part IV of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 or Chapter II or III of Part VIII of the Act of 1994;'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Clause 38

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 96, in page 26, line 3, leave out from 'means' to 'a person' in line 4.

No. 97, leave out lines 7 and 8.

No. 127, in line 16, at end insert—

' "mental impairment" does not have the same meaning as in the Mental Health Act 1983 but the fact that an impairment would be a mental impairment for the purposes of that Act does not prevent it from being a mental impairment for the purposes of this Act;'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Schedule 2

ENFORCEMENT AND PROCEDURE

Amendment made: No. 101, in page 31, line 45, leave out 'conciliation officer' and insert

'person appointed in connection with arrangements under section 22'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Schedule 4

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 134, in page 34, line 24, at end insert—

'. In section 136(1) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 (appeals to Employment Appeal Tribunal), at the end insert—

"(ff) the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.".'.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Schedule 6

MODIFICATIONS OF THIS ACT IN ITS APPLICATION TO NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendments made: No. 102, in page 36, line 1, after '2(5)', insert

'for "him" substitute "it" and'.

No. 103, in line 35, leave out '1989' and insert '1986'.

No. 104, in line 40, at end insert—

'. In section 16(4) and (6) omit "or (in Scotland) the subject of".'.

No. 105, in page 38, leave out lines 3 to 5.

No. 106, in page 40, leave out lines 1 to 3.

No. 107, in page 43, line 17, leave out 'and'.

No. 108, in line 18, at end insert

'and subsections (3) and (4) below'.

No. 109, in line 28, leave out 'Secretary' and insert 'the Secretary'.

No. 110, in page 44, line 25, at end insert

'and in paragraph 3(7) for "his" substitute "its".'.

No. 111, in page 45, line 10, at end insert—

'(c) in the definition of "relevant compromise contract" for "or Article" substitute "Article" and at the end insert "or section 9(2) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995".'.

No. 112, leave out line 31.

No. 113, leave out line 35.—*[Mr. Hague.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

8.18 pm

Mr. Hague: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

At this point we should pause for a second and raise our eyes from the level of detail that we have debated in Committee and on Report and remind ourselves of several things about the Disability Discrimination Bill. It is a landmark Bill. It is the only comprehensive Bill for disabled people ever introduced by a British Government. It will mark the United Kingdom out as one of the world leaders and the leader in Europe in the move towards comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people. It is a profound measure with significant implications for every part of the economy.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Before the Minister awards himself an Oscar, will he satisfy the House that he is referring to the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill?

Mr. Hague: I am satisfied, and the House will be satisfied, that I am referring to the Disability Discrimination Bill. It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman interrupted me at that point because I was about to be generous to many people on the Opposition Benches as well as to many of my hon. Friends. I acknowledge that the Bill embodies a goal for which many people have worked tirelessly over the years. They include hon. Members on both sides of the House, many of whom are present in the Chamber tonight, as well as campaigners outside the House and many disabled people.

We owe it to all the people who have campaigned for such legislation to get it right. That means producing legislation that wins the support and active co-operation of all employers and service providers who must deliver the benefits that we want to flow from it. I also pay tribute to the constructive approach that has been adopted by hon. Members on both sides of the House in Committee and on Report. I am convinced and I think that it is clear that the points that have divided the House have been of far less significance than some basic principles that now unite it.

I also pay tribute to the consideration of detail that has gone on behind the scenes. Organisations of and for disabled people and many other groups have helped us to improve the Bill. The improvements that we have seen effected, particularly on Report, are due in no small way to their labours as well as to the efforts of hon. Members.

It is all too easy for ambitious law to become ambiguous law. Many hon. Members said during our debates that they did not want the legislation to be a beanfeast for lawyers. I certainly agree with that. We must be particularly careful in matters of disability discrimination, in which there could easily be far more uncertainty than in the sex and race legislation dealt with in the past. Therefore, the Government's guiding principle has been to achieve certainty wherever possible so that employers and service providers know what is meant by disability and we do not have a vague concept that might cover all kinds of people who never have been or may never be disabled.

We want to achieve certainty so that employers and service providers know what they have to do to provide an accessible environment for disabled people. The Bill has the potential to affect the employers of many thousands of disabled employees in all manner of jobs and occupations. It has the potential to affect about 750,000 businesses, from broadcasting and banking to greengrocers and newsagents. That is why we have made sure that the legislation is sufficiently flexible to be applied right across the board and why we have had the good sense to allow that matters such as education and transport deserve to be treated in a different way. I am pleased that we have been able to make or plan to make in another place additional provisions on those matters.

We want to achieve certainty so that disabled people know how to obtain redress if employers and service providers fall short of the standards expected; hence, we want to have a national network of advice points, whether placing, assessment and counselling teams or citizens advice bureaux, so that disabled people have somewhere local and amenable to which they can turn when they need help. We have made statutory provision for codes of practice and guidance so that those who provide advice and support know what is reasonable in a given set of circumstances.

While we have ensured that the Bill abides by those principles, the Government have been prepared to listen and to make sensible adjustments. In our debates on amendment No. 12, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), earlier today, we accepted that we should widen the definition of disability to include those with a history of disability. We have accepted that the small employers' exemption should be reviewed for effectiveness and that we should remove the power to increase the number of employers exempted.

We have accepted that the Government's policy of requiring transport to be made accessible to disabled people on a replacement basis in the future should be, for the sake of certainty, written into the Bill. We have included measures against discrimination in the sale and letting of property. We have undertaken to look again at a variety of other matters. Our approach of flexibility founded on solid principles is reflected in the Bill. I believe that it is the right approach to this difficult and complicated subject and I commend it to the House.

8.25 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke: We have had some interesting debates in the past two days. I am sure that the Minister shares my view that the public awareness of the debates has been interesting. As we have sat here, I have received note after note inviting me to raise issues which I would love to raise, but which, alas, time does not allow me to do. I am sure that the Minister has had the same experience and that his electorate has followed our proceedings.

Only two minutes ago I was requested in neat writing, better than mine, to raise on Third Reading the issue of access to work and the possible impact of introducing reasonable accommodation. That was a specific reference which a member of the public attached to Government amendment No. 120. So I hope that in our democratic processes members of the public will not think that we have not taken their views on board. Alas, because of the limited time—we could have debated the matter for a

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

whole week, if not more, so perhaps we should have a party conference on disability—we could not take all the points on board.

I thank the Minister for his unfailing courtesy; I shall perhaps return to that later. It has been the ambition of many people inside and outside the House to make 1995 the year of disabled people's rights. The Bill is not adequate to justify that title, but we remain hopeful that progress can be made. The Government have been forced to tear up their "exemptions"—I use the word in the Bill—for education and transport vehicles. We count that as progress on two of the most objectionable features of the Government's original proposals.

The Government have promised to move new clauses in another place that will do something to improve the position of disabled pupils and students in education and will apply the right of access to public transport by road and rail. We shall wait to see the contents before we pass final judgment, but the fact that Ministers have abandoned the appalling exemptions—to use their words and the words in the Bill—is a major victory for disabled people. I congratulate disabled people and organisations of and for disabled people on those achievements.

Ministers have also conceded a little ground on the exemption of small firms by removing the option to extend that exemption to firms with 20 or more employees. However, what they have given with one hand they have taken away with the other by introducing at the very end of our proceedings today a new employment exemption for particular services, which we have only just discussed, and discussed inadequately. Ministers have given ground in a number of areas in response to the positive arguments that my hon. Friends and others have raised during the past 10 weeks. Their concessions do not do enough to transform the Bill into the kind of comprehensive measure which we would have liked to see, but they give us some encouragement that further improvements will be possible.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, we are pleased that the Government have now conceded part of what we sought in Committee in terms of access to information and to the means of communication. We do not regard the Government's concession as sufficient, and their explanation for failing to impose a requirement on manufacturers to provide information on goods in an accessible form is unconvincing.

The Government have fiddled a little with their definition of disability, but they have not addressed the central issue. The basis on which protection will be provided under the Bill remains—despite all our efforts—a narrow, medically based definition of disability, and we are therefore disappointed. The real issue is that discrimination arises from prejudice more often than from medical assessments. People need protection from prejudices against disability, whether those prejudices are based on an accurate assessment of a medical condition or on ignorance alone, as we have found so often in discussing the matter.

The Government have added some substance to the definition of what arrangements employers should make to support disabled employees. Those may be helpful to employers and to disabled people alike, although we would be anxious to ensure that the examples of appropriate steps are not interpreted as an exhaustive list—far from it.

The most important concessions have been achieved on transport and education, and we heard about those matters this afternoon. We have argued from the beginning that it made no sense to exclude disabled people from those gateways to opportunity in a measure intended to outlaw disability discrimination. We have argued for a programme to be introduced under which all public transport vehicles should be made accessible. Ministers have fought a long rearguard action against that, but they have finally conceded defeat today and we welcome that. Not only do we welcome the inclusion of road and rail transport, but we look forward to that principle being embraced by fishing and ferry services as well.

I do not underestimate the achievement of this House in producing the measure—why should I? It is a great credit to the democratic processes of our parliamentary representative government that we have squeezed those concessions at almost the 11th hour from the Government. We welcome the access to vehicles such as buses and trains, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) eloquently argued—we want the measure to apply to ferries and shipping services as well.

All this has not been achieved by sleight of hand. I welcome sincerely the presence in the Chamber of the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), for whom I have the highest regard. I believe that, within the ministerial restraints and constraints which exist, the right hon. Gentleman fought hard to achieve the measures which have been announced tonight. My only regret is that, as a distinguished parliamentarian, he was not able to speak on behalf of the Government today. Nevertheless, the right hon. Gentleman should be very proud of his achievements, and we recognise that.

I also pay tribute to the input of my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) who, in introducing their private Members' Bills, clearly provided a lever which compelled the Government to recognise public opinion and the opinions of the House.

I recognise that we in the Labour party have had support on the issues from hon. Members from other parties, including the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). The hon. Lady fought her corner superbly in Committee. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and hon. Members from all political opinions in Northern Ireland have been absolutely firm in their demands on the issue, and they have every reason to be proud of themselves.

It would be an absolute omission were I not to mention my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), whose name will always be associated with civil rights for disabled people. When some people were questioning at an early stage whether two Bills could be debated in one Session of Parliament, my right hon. Friend was steadfast, forthright and determined. As always, my right hon. Friend represents the very best in the all-party group which deals with disability.

The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) played a noble part today in inviting the Government to introduce their concessions, and he can associate himself with those achievements also.

The issue of transport remains important and, although we welcome the concessions, we will be watching what happens in another place where noble Friends such as Lord Ashley, Baroness Masham and others who have fought so often and so hard on the issues will be vigilant.

I wish briefly to refer to the issue of taxis, which we were not able to address on Report because of the procedures of the House. I realise that the Minister and the House are facing a difficult situation in which there are strong opinions on both sides. The achievements in London ought to be applauded, and they could represent a model for elsewhere. However, strong representations have been made on the issue, not least by some hon. Friends, including the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

The excellent Employers Forum on Disability, whose representatives I met the other week in the presence of Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union, advised us to look cautiously at the issue of taxis. There are two opinions on taxis, and I hope that we will have reached by the end of our deliberations the consensus which disability—outstanding among all other issues—seems to attract.

The House is at its best on disability issues, and today's debate has been no exception. I am sure that the debate on taxis will continue, and I would like to assure my hon. Friends and many others that we recognise that there are at least two separate views on the issue.

On education, the Government recognised the force of our arguments, and I look forward to the details of the new rights for disabled students which the Minister mentioned yesterday. I welcome also the obligation on individual schools and colleges to say what they will do to improve access. Having argued the point yesterday, I accept that there is a big responsibility on them to do so. We hope that suitable enforcement procedures will be introduced at the same time, so that those institutions that do not make adequate provision are placed under some obligation to improve matters within a reasonable time.

On education and transport, we will watch closely to see how clause 12 will be redrafted. We want the total exemption of those services to be replaced by a clear statement that they are subject to the law in the same way as other service providers. Of course, we accept that particular provision must be made for what must be done when, but it is essential that the new version of clause 12 clearly establishes the principle that those services are under a duty not to discriminate.

In spite of the Government's concessions on transport, education and so forth, they remain stubbornly opposed to the most important change that Opposition Members—with some support from Conservative Members—have suggested, which is to give adequate enforcement powers to the Government's proposed National Disability Council. Until they do so, no matter how much the Bill may be improved in its scope and coverage, it will not be adequate because it will not provide disabled people with the powerful backing required to eliminate discrimination.

Although Parliament has indeed been at its best, even given the fact that we did not achieve all that we wanted, sadly the same could not be said of the British media. *The Guardian* today made up for lost ground in a very interesting leader entitled, "Enabling the Disabled", which appealed to the Minister as much as it did to me. One or two of the profound comments in it are relevant to this debate. It said:

> "For 15 years they"—

the Government—

> "could see no discrimination, hear no discrimination, nor smell no discrimination against disabled people. Then, hey presto, they were faced with a private member's bill in the last parliamentary session which they were only able to stop by ordering backbench sycophants to torpedo it"—

Mr. Berry: Where are they now?

Mr. Clarke: As I was about to say, they are not much in evidence tonight. I have looked in vain for the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), but I think that she got the message last time around.

The Guardian concluded appropriately by saying:

> "What is needed—as the history of race and sex discrimination demonstrates—is an enforcement agency. Even Conservative supporters—see last week's Guardian Society—are insisting on this change. Peers take note. Without it, the whole edifice collapses."

I could not have put it better myself.

We have taken into account the views and pledges that the Government have expressed and we do not want to be churlish. I am confident that the Government will come under renewed pressure on the matter in another place. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) set his colleagues an example last night and today, which others may follow if this matter comes back from another place as a result of a successful amendment, or perhaps more than one.

Opposition Members will certainly continue to set a high priority on the means of enforcement and on turning good intentions into real progress. If we achieve that, whatever the other limitations of this legislation, we will have gone a long way towards making this the year of disabled people's rights. Unless and until we do, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East, will remain the best hope for progress and I say so proudly as one of his colleagues.

We shall not, however, oppose the Third Reading of this Bill, weak and inadequate though it remains, despite the concessions that I welcomed—I do not want to be churlish about them. However, we look forward to seeing it much improved before it is placed on the statute book. We hope that the House will have a further opportunity to consider some of those improvements.

We accept that the most important concessions achieved are those on transport and education, but we hope that, when the Bill goes to another place and in the intervening weeks or months, the Government will have the opportunity to reflect not simply on our debates but on the views of organisations of and for disabled persons—heavens, we all admire them. In that cold January day on the eve of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East, they stood in cold Westminster Hall, sending green cards to Members, some of whom responded—some did not. They did not even have access to loudspeaker equipment. I hope that the people there that day and the many other disabled people and carers who organised similar events and meetings throughout the country will feel that at the end of the day, despite their misgivings and their understandable scepticism, there is yet something to be said for representative parliamentary democracy. In that spirit, and as a tribute to them, we will not oppose the Third Reading, but will act with vigilance on the events that take place.

[Mr. Clarke]

8.45 pm

Sir John Hannam: In the same spirit as the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), I am pleased to follow what he said and I am pleased that the Third Reading will not be opposed. We have had two fruitful days of consideration of this important Bill and, although the Government were not able to concede on two of the early issues—the commission and the small firms exclusion figure—since then, thanks to the willingness of my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People to discuss and negotiate improvements with us, the Bill has been much improved and strengthened. The key areas of education and transport are now included and my hon. Friends the Ministers in both those Departments are to be thanked.

The provision of information, definitions of disability and the history of disability, leave of absence at work and other employment assistance are now included and other improvements, through Government amendments, have all combined to make this anti-discrimination legislation a truly historic step forward for disabled people.

Towards the end of today's debate, we found that we were unable to discuss two important areas—civic rights, on which I was hoping to move some amendments, and leave of absence provisions. I will touch on those so that my hon. Friend the Minister can deal with some of the issues that we would have raised.

The leave of absence provisions, on which the Government moved amendment No. 120, relate to responsibilities that employers must have for their disabled employees or those who may become disabled while working and who may need a period of leave for rehabilitation or retraining. We also recognise that a newly disabled person, even after rehabilitation, might not be able to continue in the same employment.

The provision of leave of absence as a part of reasonable adjustment is the motivation behind such options as disability leave, which was an initiative developed by the Royal National Institute for the Blind and was launched less than two years ago by the then Secretary of State for Employment, who is now Secretary of State for Education.

The pilot scheme has enjoyed widespread support from employers and organisations representing disabled people. The steering group includes the Midland bank, Barclays bank, the Employers Forum on Disability, the Trades Union Congress and the Department of Employment, in addition to the various disability organisations. It would have been incomprehensible not to have recognised the potential of that initiative by including in the Bill provisions to enable disability leave to be given. I welcomed, therefore, Government amendment No. 120, which we unfortunately did not have a chance to debate in any detail. I put that on the record because it is an important part of the changes to the Bill today.

Civic rights, as I term them, were the other important issue that we did not discuss because of pressure of business. The amendments on the Order Paper were aimed at providing disabled people with reasonable access to the process of politics and the justice system. One was designed as a probing measure, to ensure that adjustments are provided under part III of the Bill, if required by disabled persons, to enable them to serve as an elected or appointed member, for example as a Member of Parliament or a councillor, or if required by a disabled person wishing to make representations to an elected or appointed person. For example the law debars a deaf and dumb person from standing as a parliamentary candidate. There is only one elected deaf councillor, despite the wonderful example in this place of the co-chairman of the all-party disablement group, the noble Lord Ashley.

Another area which we could not discuss today was access to the justice system. It is vital for disabled people to gain full access to the judicial system and legal proceedings. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the Bill covered the judicial system and legal proceedings and that the design of new Crown and county courts should enable disabled people to have independent access into and within those buildings. While "The Court Standard and Design Guide" states that all new court rooms and those undergoing significant alterations must comply with part M of the building regulations, that does not deal with the problem of access to existing court rooms. The building regulations do not cover many of the adaptations and facilities that would be required by disabled people in court, nor do they specify monitoring and maintenance—many of the sound enhancement schemes for hard of hearing people installed under part M do not work. A survey carried out by the Lord Chancellor's Department in 1993 showed that 44 per cent. of Crown and county courts had inaccessible main entrances; 59 per cent. had no disabled toilets; and only 6 per cent. had facilities for deaf and hard of hearing people.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would have wished to comment on those points, had he had an opportunity to do so, and I hope that he will accept the concerns felt by disabled people about problems of access to courts, justice and juries.

A year ago, I and my colleagues on the all-party disablement group were desperately trying to persuade the Government to adopt positive anti-discrimination legislation. As the hon. Member for Monklands, West described, it took a long, hot summer of campaigning and applying pressure, with lobbies of Parliament, marches, demonstrations and debates in the House. But following the personal intervention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, together with the previous Minister responsible for disabled people, who was in the Chamber a few moments ago, we began to see some progress. A somewhat inadequate consultation document first appeared on the scene. That changed for the better into a nearly satisfactory Bill and White Paper. Now, having filled the gaps during Report, we have reached the point where a good measure is heading for the other place, where a number of further changes will no doubt be implemented by members of the all-party group, which is more than adequately represented there.

Many hon. Members are still committed to the private Member's Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which will also continue its progress through the House. As one of those supporters, I believe in the old adage that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. This Bill has now become a nice plump bird and is on its way to the statute book before the summer is out. I therefore congratulate all those who have worked so hard, both within Parliament and in all those organisations outside. I hope that they regard their efforts as well rewarded.

I therefore hope that the House will give this landmark Bill an unopposed Third Reading.

8.53 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I was deeply moved, as others on both sides of the House must have been, by the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). He has shown a shining sincerity in arguing the claims of disabled and other needful people from the day that he entered the House. He is worthy of the highest admiration, and his Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), is also entitled to our deepest respect. He has brought enormous skill, humanity and commitment to his new sphere of responsibility, and I thank him most warmly for all that he has contributed to our debates on the Bill.

The Bill was heralded as an historic advance for disabled people. In fact it marks only the end of an historic retreat from contemporary standards of protecting disabled people across the developed world. We used to lead the world in legislating on new help for disabled people; for example, in legislating on access to the built environment, the first country ever to do so, 25 years ago. We pioneered as well, also in the 1970s, such entirely new benefits as the mobility allowance, the disabled housewife's allowance and the invalid care allowance.

The Government's measure is, of course, their latest attempt to assuage the public outrage provoked by the wholly scandalous tactics used to obstruct the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill ever since I drafted and first presented it to the House in 1991. There were no less than three personal statements of unreserved apology for misleading the Speaker and this House in debates on the Bill. They were three of only four such statements that I have witnessed in 31 years as a Member of Parliament.

There are those who ask today why, now that the Government have been dragged kicking and screaming to accept the necessity of legislation, we do not just welcome them as repentant sinners and work further to amend and improve their, by common consent, pallid alternative to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. That is not my description; it is how disabled people themselves have described the Government's Bill as compared with our Bill.

A woman who is well disposed to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill wrote to me recently to say:

> "Now that you have won and the Government at long last are having to legislate, why don't you simply claim victory and amend their Bill to your liking?"

Nothing would have been more agreeable to me than to have been able further to amend, at will, the Government's proposals and thus to end the parliamentary battle I began in 1979 when I appointed the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People under the chairmanship of Sir Peter Large. But changes to their Bill on the scale required to make it acceptable to disabled people have proved impossible. Even had they not been, why, having invented the wheel, should we have had to waste time trying to adapt the Government's unacceptable imitation of one?

As well as attempting to make the Government's Bill more acceptable, are we not right to go on trying to enact our own? Another question posed is why, even if we are unable further to improve the Government's Bill, can we not accept what is on offer as a major step forward after 13 years of systematic obstruction and then, in the years ahead, build on what their Bill achieves? But in the view of disabled people and those who work to help them, parts of the Government's Bill will actually increase discrimination against disabled people.

They cite first the Government's proposal to end the 3 per cent. jobs quota, which they argue will undoubtedly make matters worse. The Rights Now campaign, whose affiliates include the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, cites as well the Government's pointlessly complicated and over-restrictive definition of discrimination. It attacks what it calls

> "The Government's complete failure to understand how disability discrimination works."

It also states:

> "The Government's Bill contains a host of defences and potential justifications for discriminatory treatment which are not present in the legislation on sex and race. The accumulated effect of these loopholes will render it almost impossible for a disabled person to challenge discrimination."

Such pointed criticism leaves scant room for any doubt about what Britain's 6.5 million disabled people think of the assumption that the Government's Bill will solve most of their problems.

The measure we have been debating today is but piecemeal reform. It attempts to divide the indivisible. Look at the employment problems of disabled people, not least those of the blind, of whom the Royal National Institute for the Blind says only 17 per cent. are in work. That figure is a shocking comment on the avoidable hardship inflicted on them.

The employment prospects of blind and other severely disabled people will only be improved if, while removing discrimination against them, we recognise also the importance to disabled people of improving their access to better training opportunities, among other essential requirements which must be met if more and more of them are to end their dependence on social security and enjoy the dignity of becoming taxpayers. Yet this is not what the Bill achieves.

That is why Members in all parts of the House will go on insisting on stronger and more enforceable protection for Britain's 6.5 million disabled people. That is also why our campaign will go on for as long as it takes to secure full civil rights and equal citizenship for them. Without the rights that everyone else can take for granted, disabled people are doubly disabled. The handicapping effects of their disabilities are made even harder to bear by preventable social handicaps for which there is no moral justification.

Why on earth should disabled people any longer have to put up with rights inferior to those of everyone else and inferior as well to those enjoyed by disabled people all across the developed world? I refer, among other countries, to New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, France and Sweden. Why should the Government here have assumed for so long that employers in all those countries are more capable than British employers of contributing to the achievement of social progress for disabled people? It is because our disabled fellow citizens should no longer have to put up with inferior rights that the campaign for the social fairness they crave must go on; and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, go on it will.

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

9.2 pm

Ms Lynne: I am delighted that the Government have changed their minds on several aspects of the Bill, particularly on education and transport. I am also pleased by their decision to extend the definition in clause 1 to cover people with a history of illness or disability. That is a step in the right direction. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that they have not moved a lot on other parts of the Bill. In fact, the Government have failed to respond to the majority of the amendments that we tabled in Committee and on Report.

I cannot count the number of amendments that other hon. Members and I tabled in Committee. Ministers remained immovable on all of them. They did not accept any amendments to do with education and transport, but I am pleased that they accepted certain changes on Report. The Government have bowed to pressure from all the disabled people's organisations that have lobbied them and those hon. Members who have worked over the months to ensure that improvements relating to transport and education were included in the Bill.

Those changes are a triumph of democracy over dogma, but the Government have not changed their mind on much. They gave way slightly on small businesses, but they have not moved on the call to establish a commission. It was extremely important that we should have had an organisation with teeth, rather than the mere advisory council that the Government proposed. I am grateful, however, that the Government agreed to extend the definition in clause 1 to cover someone with a history of mental illness.

I continue to believe that disabled people will feel extremely let down by the Bill, as will carers. In Committee we discussed the problems that carers had, and I was disappointed tonight that we did not get round to debating in the House the amendments especially relating to carers. I was sorry that those amendments were withdrawn without debate. I hope that they will be retabled and debated in the Lords, because an immense number of carers have lobbied hon. Members, and they have some very serious problems of discrimination relating to their caring duties.

I know that the Government will prevent the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill from obtaining its passage through the House, and I am sorry about that. I am sad, because that is the Bill that we should pass into law in future. The Disability Discrimination Bill is welcome as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. However much we debate the Bill and however much it is amended in the Lords, disabled people will continue to be denied their basic human rights, whatever the Government say.

The way in which Ministers and the Government have moved on certain amendments is a step in the right direction, but they were forced to take those steps, sometimes at the last minute; suddenly there was an announcement from Ministers. In the past two days—

Mr. Paice *indicated dissent.*

Ms Lynne: The Minister shakes his head, but we had an announcement about education yesterday and an announcement about transport today—a last-minute conversion. The Government did not move in Committee, so they were forced to move by all the pressure that they had from hon. Members and from disabled people throughout the country.

However, I continue to believe that the Government have not gone far enough, especially as regards the commission. There is no point in legislation unless it has teeth. I hope that the Government will not suppose that they have done enough. Disabled people will continue to fight because they want the same equality as everyone else. They do not want more; they do not want less; they want the same. I believe that they have a right to expect that and that they deserve no less.

Although I welcome some of the movement by the Government, I wish that they had gone further.

9.10 pm

Mr. Pickthall: Several of my hon. Friends want to speak, so I shall confine myself to revisiting the announcements that the Minister made yesterday about the education part of the Bill. Incidentally, I complain that, that important debate having been confined to one hour, more than half of that hour was taken by the Minister giving us some interesting and important new thoughts, which we did not have time properly to consider.

It is obvious, from column 746 of yesterday's *Hansard*, that the Minister considers that the existing Education Act 1993 and the code of practice do the business in respect of integration into mainstream schools. He complained that the new clauses that were tabled by hon. Members would cut across the provisions of the 1993 Act. However, in column 750, his proposals to amend the 1993 Act within the Disability Discrimination Bill in substantial ways were revealed, so that, in any case, the Minister's proposals cut across the 1993 Act. We shall in effect have two separate Acts controlling access to schools for disabled young people. It is important that that is carefully considered before it goes to the other place.

The Minister also said that the Government's measures have given an enormous boost to special education. That is fine; I accept that, but they have also presented councils with enormous resource problems and resources have not been forthcoming in sufficient quantities from the Government to enable local education authorities to put into practice what the 1993 Act expects.

The Minister did say—I agree with him entirely—that integration into mainstream education is not a simple issue of parental choice. Of course it is not; but does he not recognise that section 21 of the 1993 Act includes that phrase "efficient use of resources" as the universal caveat by which local authorities have a let-out from providing mainstream education for many disabled pupils? Many local authorities have been able to make progress only where such provision has been tied to statementing provision, with all its legal implications. They cannot even keep up with the legal requirements of statementing, never mind make further progress.

We must bear in mind the revenue consequences of integration. As long as mainstreaming is expected of local education authorities while resources continue to be cut and as long as the 1993 Act contains a caveat enabling LEAs to use the shortage of resources as a reason to refuse mainstream provision, many parents will have no choice and no system of redress. I do not blame local authorities for that in many instances. Nor do I blame the many schools that resist taking students with disabilities because they cannot accommodate them, in terms of either physical access or revenue.

There are frequent cases in which there is a conflict between the two parties, the parents and the school LEA, and both sides might well be right. There have been many cases, including that of Chloe McCollom from Lewisham, a Down's syndrome child who has not been provided with a place in mainstream education, Emma and Alison Gibbs from Suffolk, who also suffer from Down's syndrome and have not been given places in mainstream secondary education, Zahrah Manuel in Campden, Angharad Duffield in Avon and Nicky Crane in my constituency. Two more cases were discussed in today's edition of *The Guardian* involving Natalie Dance of East Sussex and Alan Dean—I think the name is an alias—in the west midlands. All those children are disabled in one way or another. Their parents are desperate to get them into mainstream education and are having to fight their battles with no back-up. There will still be no back-up for them once the Bill is passed if it remains as the Minister intends.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People seemed to assume yesterday that the new clauses proposed by hon. Members on both sides of the House were meant to abolish special schools, but that is not so. The Minister was right to say at column 746 of yesterday's *Hansard* that not all disabled children could be integrated into mainstream education and that some parents prefer special schools. However, if the Minister assumes that the improvement of the range of choice by legal back-up will mean that most or all parents of disabled children will opt for mainstream education, that should tell him something about what parents want for their children.

The Minister continued by saying that it was absurd or impossible for local authorities to spread their access provisions too thinly. He said:

> "Instead of several schools in an authority, each with excellent resources, being able to take many pupils with a wide range of special needs, we would end up with nearly all schools in that authority with a few ramps, no lifts and improved curriculum access for only a small minority of pupils . . . It is certainly not what the Government want".—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 747.]

I understand what the Minister is talking about in terms of shortage of resources, but he is also talking about the creation of ghetto schools, which have the resources to provide for children with disabilities and special needs. That would remove choice for thousands of parents and children. Parents will have to remove their children from education in their own communities and ship them across to another part of the local authority area to a school that has the necessary resources or they will not have a choice at all. Making full access the norm rather than the exception will take a long time. The Minister's statement yesterday seemed to suggest that it should not even start. As he said,

> "It is certainly not what the Government want".

When the Bill goes to the Lords, the Minister must confront the issue of increasing selection in our schools, particularly secondary schools. Only yesterday, Manchester grammar school said that it wanted to come back into the fold and be a state school, but only on the strict understanding that it would control its selection process. Up and down the country there is evidence, particularly in grant-maintained schools, that selection is taking place on all sorts of strange grounds, not just academic ability.

The Minister said that schools will have new responsibilities to report to parents—and presumably to local authorities and to the Secretary of State—about improvements in disabled access. That is a good move which we must welcome. However, in those circumstances, schools will merely have to ensure that they are not out of step with other schools. Schools that do not want to go to the trouble of admitting disabled students could ensure that the description of their facilities is not good or is even offputting. I believe that we need an enabling legal framework and back-up for parents who come up against those problems, which will continue to exist under the Bill as it is now constituted.

The Minister also made some interesting, and I think on the whole encouraging, announcements in response to the detailed concerns that were advanced by Labour Members in Committee about access to further and higher education. I do not have time to deal with them in detail but, as the Minister mentioned part-time access yesterday, I must ask about the chance of making the disabled students allowance available for part-time students. That is a major problem. Many students must study part time because the nature of their disability prevents them from studying and progressing at the same speed as non-disabled students.

The Minister said that he would require colleges to provide access to disabled students "as a condition of grant". That is a tremendous step forward. The Minister also mentioned the duty of the Further Education Funding Council to report to the Secretary of State, which I think will prove an interesting control mechanism.

The Minister's proposals for higher education are also fascinating. In the areas of both further and higher education, he seemed to suggest that students who are denied access to a college on the ground of disability will have the right to appeal to the Further Education Funding Council. Why does the Minister object to our idea of a commission if, in the area of education at least, he is proposing the FEFC as a kind of education commission?

There is a potential for ghettoisation in further education. The Minister said yesterday that we could not spread access too thinly across colleges. However, FE colleges, by their nature, are local and provide services for local people. As Skill observed, it is not acceptable to have to transport people 60 miles to the nearest accessible college. I hope that that problem will be addressed properly in another place.

The measures that the Minister has announced in relation to the education part of the Bill at least respond to the concerns expressed in the Committee and, to that extent, they are welcome. I hope that, before he sends those measures to another place, he will take into account the sorts of problems about which I have talked this evening and to which we referred at leisure and in more detail in Committee.

9.18 pm

Mr. Berry: Nine months is a short time in politics. Nine months ago, no one could have foreseen that today we would be debating the Third Reading of a Government Bill making it unlawful to discriminate against disabled

[Mr. Berry]

persons. After all, nine months ago the Government blocked a measure which enjoyed cross-party support and which would have achieved precisely that aim.

The Government told us that education and persuasion would work; they told us that they could not possibly legislate in this area. They then said that it was quite incompatible with the thrust of deregulation policy to legislate for civil rights for disabled people. They then said that it would cost £17 billion to outlaw discrimination against disabled persons.

I have welcomed the fact that the Government have moved ground over that nine-month period. I mean that genuinely, as, I am sure, does everyone else, but it would be welcome if they acknowledged that they were misleading people nine months ago when they said that it would cost £17 billion to legislate to outlaw discrimination. It was pointed out by the all-party group at the time and by every independent observer that that figure, which was repeatedly quoted on and off the record, was a gross distortion of the cost of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I am prepared to acknowledge the substantial movement in the Government's position on that issue, but they should acknowledge that they misled people last year and that disabled people's organisations in particular deserve an apology.

The outcome of the Government's consultation exercise in the summer was that, of those who offered a view on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, 98 per cent. wanted the Bill, which was originally introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), for whom I have the greatest respect, and which is currently being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

There are serious problems with the Government's Bill and they will not go away. The definition of disability is still too narrow. When I came here today, I thought that I would have to argue that the Government should include within their definition those who have a record or history of impairment and those who are regarded as having such an impairment. I immediately acknowledge with gratitude—perhaps gratitude is the wrong word—

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Just acknowledge.

Mr. Berry: I acknowledge the fact that the Minister now recognises that those who have a record of impairment should be protected by anti-discrimination legislation, but that still leaves those who are regarded as having such an impairment. In particular, it leaves those with a diagnosed but as yet asymptomatic condition: people with multiple sclerosis, a genetic illness, Alzheimer's disease, or HIV infection. Those people do not have a symptomatic condition that would qualify them for protection under the Bill, but surely they should be protected by it.

We debated the small firms exemption at some length. Equity demands that if our legislation to outlaw unfair discrimination on the grounds of gender and race does not provide a small firms opt-out, neither should legislation that is designed to protect disabled people.

The Bill offers us a blank piece of paper on transport. This time last year we were accused of being vague in our transport proposals in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which vagueness, we were told, made the Government uncomfortable. We have been asked today to accept from the Minister a blank piece of paper as the Government's clauses relating to transport in the Bill.

The omission of a commission is the crucial error. The more the Government have taken on board some of the points that we have made in recent years, the greater has become the need for a commission. I have paid my eight quid to the Bow Group to buy Jonathan Kaye's pamphlet. I did not read its summary in *The Guardian*—I sent off good money for it. Jonathan Kaye was arguing, as a Conservative, that it would be nonsense to claim that the Disability Discrimination Bill can effect true equal opportunities for disabled people if there is not a commission to investigate complaints and to enforce people's rights.

I urge the Government to take on board a whole range of omissions that we highlighted before Committee, during Committee and again on Report—above all, the fact that without a mechanism to enforce the law, without something akin to a disability rights commission, the Bill will not be effective. If the Government are serious about outlawing discrimination, they must will the means to do so. If they are prepared to make concessions in another place, disabled people will be far happier than they are at present. Disabled people feel that the Government have made a move in the right direction but that they have not moved far enough—much remains to be done.

9.24 pm

Mr. Wigley: I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who has played such an important part in bringing this subject to the fore through his Bill and his work with the all-party group.

A succession of hon. Members have taken up the baton. A parallel Bill is being promoted by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and I wish that many of its provisions were included in this final version. I say that this is the final version but, of course, it is not.

Nor, I suspect, is this the last time that we shall discuss the Bill, even though this is a Third Reading debate. We shall need a great deal of time in July to debate the Lords amendments, assuming that the new clauses promised by the Minister relating to education, transport and other issues are tabled in another place. We shall need time to apply ourselves to any further amendments when the Bill returns to the House in due course. This is adieu but not farewell, or whatever the appropriate saying is.

We should put on record the support that we have received from disability organisations and from disabled people themselves, who have campaigned vigorously for many years for progress to be made in the relevant legislation. The legislation that will reach the statute book will not be everything that they want but it is a step in the right direction. The Minister has succeeded in making more progress than appeared possible on Second Reading. Nevertheless, some important provisions still need to be tightened, not least that relating to the commission, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members.

It is not realistic to expect individual disabled people to go to court and fight on an ad hoc basis to get their rights. There must be a structured approach. If the Government have not seen the light during the passage of the Bill, I hope that this will be one of the first things taken up by an incoming Government after the general election.

I am still unhappy about a number of the Bill's provisions. I think especially of the problem of small companies. At the end of yesterday's debate on companies employing fewer than 20 people, the Minister said that it would be possible to have a "zero option"—or effectively a zero option—in the regulations. I hope that the Government will be prepared to review the situation not over five years but perhaps over a couple of years to ascertain how the small companies provision is working and will use the flexibility that they have given themselves with the order-making provision to include if not a zero option then an option relating to firms employing even one employee. That will effectively mean that the Bill will apply to every company.

As the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) said, we skipped over Government amendment No. 120, which gives examples of the adjustments that employers should be making for disabled people. It is not clear who will bear the cost of the provisions listed. Will any expenditure come from the public purse or will it land on the employer himself? It is an important matter that should have been dealt with earlier.

I am also worried about the position of carers. We did not have the opportunity to deal with this topic earlier because of the pressure of time. I am concerned that carers may be subject to discrimination when they are working on behalf of and are involved with disabled people. This could arise in the provision of goods and services—an amendment was tabled in this regard—and in the context of employment.

The work undertaken by carers is of immense benefit to disabled people. We are trying to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against because of their disability and I should hope that that spirit would extend to people who give their lives to disabled people by being carers.

The Bill will go through to the other place. We know that many Members in the other place have tremendous experience of many aspects of the work with which we are dealing. We know that the other place passed a civil rights Bill way before we got to this one. We can look forward to the other place positively amending the Bill to make it stronger.

I hope that, some day, the saga will be written of how the Government started off totally opposed to any anti-discrimination legislation, and of how, with a succession of movements, change took place. I do not want to score political points on that. I say hallelujah to the fact that change has taken place. I hope that change has not finished and that more progress will be made.

9.30 pm

Mr. Barnes: I remind the House of the position on Second Reading. A reasoned amendment was tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. On a three-line Whip, that was carried by 27 votes—

Mr. Hague: It was defeated.

Mr. Barnes: I am sorry—it was defeated. The vote for the Government was made up entirely of Conservative Members. The vote that lost was made up of hon. Members from all other parties. When the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill received its Second Reading, it was carried by 175 votes to nil, and it had support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Members on both sides of the House supported the measure in early-day motions and were among its sponsors. It is clear that the principle of civil rights for disabled persons has clear support in the House when it is presented fully and when it is considered in line with the Government's measure.

Where does the measure before us, which is leaving now for another place, stand in comparison with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? I have always thought that three areas should be considered. The first is the definition of whom the measure applies to. The second is the measure's scope, including exemptions, to which the definition obviously also applies. The third is the enforcement of the legislation.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill refers to 6.5 million people. There has never been any dispute about that. The Government have promised a further extension of the definition in another place. A "history of impairment" will be added to the definition, but not having a "reputation" for impairment. Many points in schedules considerably restrict and limit the definition.

The definition needs to apply to the discriminator. We should say that people cannot use the term "disabled" to discriminate anywhere in society. But that is not what the Government want. They want to try to define the people who, on technical grounds, will be considered to be disabled. They want employers and others to have the right to know whom that definition applies to. A massive distinction must be made between the two areas. The Government have never told us what the additional definitions that they have announced today will mean in terms of the 6.5 million figure.

There is the question of scope and exemption. Some of the exemptions have been removed by the Government or are in the process of being removed. Northern Ireland was exempted initially, but that was changed in Committee. Certain provisions in connection with property were exempted initially; they, too, were altered.

We have had statements on education and transport. Yesterday's statement is well worth considering in detail. We have already had some examination of it. What does it actually mean? I want the amendments in the other place to fulfil the objective. In interpreting the areas that are liable to be covered, one must be careful about the Minister's words. I am willing to bet that there will be a minimum interpretation of the words that have been given to us about education and transport. As has been pointed out, the employment adjustment is very minor. Perhaps the number 20 would not have been increased in any case, but now it is to be written on the face of the Bill. There are also extra exemptions, on which we have just voted.

Then there is enforcement, and the question of a disability rights commission. Last night I said that the biggest item on our agenda and the big vote before us would be the decision whether to have a disability rights commission. We lost that division by 13 votes, but such a body would have done more to transform the legislation than anything else. No adjustment that may occur here or in another place will have as great an effect, unless we can get a commission back on the agenda. As I have already argued, a commission would be a dynamic force not only in helping to implement measures but in extending the boundaries of what is covered.

Other issues covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill have not been touched at all by the Bill before us. For instance, there are the provisions covering

[Mr. Barnes]

polling stations. Those would have given us the opportunity to discuss civil rights and access to justice. Moreover, within them lies a most important principle: the building block of democracy is the ballot, and the ballot should be as open to disabled people as it is to everyone else.

Welcome as the changes and advances are, the Government's Bill is by no means good enough. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill should be let out of the cupboard and sent into Committee so that we can investigate it. As the Bill before us is likely to be passed and to become law, the original Bill will need altering because it will be able only to fill the gaps. We want the opportunity to begin to do that.

The movement supporting civil rights for disabled persons will now require legislation slightly different from the form in which it existed before. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will have to amend, alter and transform the Disability Discrimination Bill when it becomes law—and the sooner the House can get down to that process the better.

9.36 pm

Mr. Gerrard: I am glad to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate. I welcome the changes that the Government announced yesterday on education and today on history and transport. Obviously we shall have to wait and see exactly what the amendments are like when they appear in another place, and especially how education is to be included, but there has been a significant shift and we welcome that.

There are still several problem areas, however, and I shall briefly describe one or two of them. The most glaring problem is that of enforcement, which has already been mentioned many times—the absence of a commission independent of the Government, with its own staff, able to set its own agenda and to help people directly by representing them, if necessary, at industrial tribunals and in court.

We should have learnt from our experience in operating anti-discrimination legislation through the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 what happens when people try to take cases as individuals, as the Bill will require them to do. It is difficult to take discrimination cases to industrial tribunals. Yes, as the Minister said yesterday, tribunals are becoming more familiar with the processes, but discrimination cases are still different from the bulk of cases that they hear.

Such cases have a low success rate, and in general employers will not admit that they have discriminated; indeed, it is extremely rare for one to do so. One of the key factors behind people who are successful in discrimination cases brought before industrial tribunals these days is their having gone through the process of a formal questionnaire. Clearly, that process is much more likely to be successful with proper advice and assistance. Even if the Minister is not prepared to concede the need for a commission, which I would ideally like to see, I hope that he will look very carefully at the processes that he says that he will put in place to assist people to bring cases.

There is still a glaring weakness in the Bill in relation to advertisements. We still have the provision that, if a discriminatory job advertisement appears, someone who is disabled has to apply for the job, fail to get it and then be prepared to go to an industrial tribunal for action to be taken. That seems quite ludicrous. It ought purely and simply to be illegal for an advertisement which discriminates to be published. I trust that the Minister will look again at that because it is a clear, simple point and it ought to be possible to take it on board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) has already pointed out the logic of the argument that, in widening the scope of the Bill by including education and transport, the Minister is strengthening the case for a commission able to act on behalf of disabled people.

I welcome the fact that history of a person's health will now be included in the definition for the purposes of the Bill. I understand that the Minister does not want a definition which is too wide and that it must be understandable. He said earlier that vagueness and uncertainty will not do, but that means that one needs to think about the levels of knowledge and understanding among people who are not necessarily expert.

I particularly want to mention again the plight of people with HIV or AIDS. The Terrence Higgins Trust pointed out that it is hard to define precisely what is symptomatic HIV, but medical knowledge is developing fast. Although lists have been developed for incapacity benefit, they are about conditions which stop people working. This Bill should be about allowing people to continue to work. The definition used for incapacity simply will not do.

The Bill is wide ranging. Despite improvements, however, gaps still exist. We welcome the changes, but I hope that when we consider the Bill again when it returns with amendments from another place some of those loopholes will have been plugged.

9.41 pm

Dr. Godman: I have to be brief. I was not a member of the Committee which considered the Bill because I chose to be appointed to the Children (Scotland) Bill, which, in some instances, dealt with related matters.

I want to pick up on three issues. First, the omission of a commission is a grave error and seriously weakens the Bill. Secondly, with reference to observations made by the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) about the architectural faults to be found in many English magistrates and Crown courts, which present formidable problems for disabled people, may I tell him that the same holds for many of our courts in Scotland, which is deeply regrettable? I look forward to the day when, say, people with learning difficulties are treated, as are children, as vulnerable witnesses in our courts. If this Bill cannot deal with that objective in another place, perhaps the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 may be so amended.

Thirdly, the Minister said that we should raise our eyes from the details of the Bill. May I urge him and his colleagues to raise their eyes to Scotland, in particular to the passenger ferry services? In a Scottish context, to exclude ferry services from the transport provisions lately introduced to the Bill is an act of folly and insensitivity. People living on our islands catch CalMac ferries as others travel on trains and trams. The CalMac ferry timetable is a remarkable piece of delphic draftsmanship to many of us, but most islanders read it as if it were written by Catherine Cookson.

CalMac, which has its headquarters just down the road from me in Gourock, has a fairly good record of assisting people with disabilities. Nevertheless, I hope that the Minister will ensure that the deeply regrettable omission to which I have referred will be righted in the other place. The islanders who use the ferries on a daily basis, and particularly those who are disabled, deserve better than this. They may be few in number in terms of Scotland's population, but it is disgraceful that their essential travelling needs have been so grievously ignored by the Minister and his officials.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to rectify the omission. I know that there would be problems if we were talking about international ferry services and that negotiations would have to take place with the International Labour Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation, among other international organisations. However, the Bill could be appropriately amended to cover our domestic ferry services in Scotland, in the interests of disabled islanders. They deserve no less from the Bill.

9.45 pm

Mr. Corbett: I thank both Ministers for their patience and courtesy during all stages of the Bill. I thank my hon. Friends and the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and, indeed, the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and others for their contribution to the latest stages of the Bill.

I often regard Third Readings of Bills as rather like a great liner coming into port. In this case, I intend to be the noisy little tug at the back pushing it into the berth. I want to read something to the House.

> "We are convinced that persuasion and education alone will not bring about the changes that are needed; an attempt to change behaviour merely by changing attitudes is not a cost-effective option."

Those words were in a letter from Peter Large 13 years ago to the then Minister for the Disabled when he presented the report and recommendations of the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People established by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). In many senses, my right hon. Friend is the father, or perhaps the grandfather, of the Bill. He was aided by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who tried so valiantly to promote a Bill last year, and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who picked up that torch this year.

I do not know whether Ministers have read the report of the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People. If they have, they have not understood what it argued. Their approach is, "What is the least that we can do?" rather than "What needs to be done?" What needs to be done is to give people with disabilities the rights, status and opportunities that able-bodied citizens have.

While we welcome the removal of the ability of Ministers to extend the exemption for small firms to firms with more than 20 employees, it is regrettable that there will be no phasing out of that exemption over a number of years.

We have had last-minute announcements of all these great things that are going to happen in education. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said, we need to see them written down. What the Minister said yesterday, as reported in *Hansard*, and what has been said by the Department of Education today, are just promises. They deliver nothing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) said.

We will never get rid of discrimination against children with disabilities who need to have their special needs met, on the basis of an extra 10 million quid—if it is a new 10 million quid—when school bids against school and council bids against council. Many schools, colleges and universities have needs and there ought to be a phased programme, as promised by the Government, so that over a number of years the resources will be provided to enable them to meet those needs.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said, perhaps the greatest failing of the Bill is that the Government, in spite of the consensus view across the Chamber, have shied away from the critical element of enforcement—even enforcement of the modest steps in the Bill. The Government say that there should be enforcement on matters of race and gender, but that it is not needed when discrimination against people with different abilities is as rampant and persistent as it is in those two areas. I believe that that is a prize example of discrimination in a Bill which claims to tackle discrimination.

Yet again disabled people are to be treated as less than equal citizens. People with disabilities and their carers simply will not understand that second-class treatment. That is why they and their representative organisations much prefer and insist upon the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which is being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East.

All of us in the House have a duty now—we have had it for some time—to ask people with disabilities what they can do. We must provide them with the help to do it and treat them with respect for their different abilities and as equal citizens, rather than jumping to assumptions about what they cannot do. I do not believe that the Bill goes far enough to treat them as equal citizens. The Opposition know and believe that people with disabilities can do so much more than they are now allowed or are enabled to do. A new Labour Government will give them just those opportunities.

9.50 pm

Mr. Hague: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to the speeches made on Third Reading and try to deal with as many of the points raised as possible in the time remaining.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) responded to my opening speech by welcoming the fact that I announced changes during our proceedings with regard to the Government's intentions on the Bill. He said that it would be churlish not to welcome that, and it would be churlish of me not to welcome his lack of churlishness. Since the hon. Gentleman thanked all of those who have made the progress of the Bill possible, I must pay tribute to him and to his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). They have always put their case with clarity, and we have always been able to do business with them.

I join hon. Members in paying tribute to the work of my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scoot), who laid so many of the

[Mr. Hague]

foundations necessary to bring forward a measure of this kind. I can only add to the tributes listed by the hon. Member for Monklands, West my own thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), who has been an indispensable part of the team. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I also thank the noisy bunch of parliamentary private secretaries who sit behind my hon. Friend, and the officials at the Department, without whom none of this would have been possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) welcomed the changes which were announced on Report, and asked about some specific points which were skated over earlier in the evening because of the lack of time. He also asked whether the law in this country debars what used to be called a deaf and dumb person from serving as a Member of Parliament. If my hon. Friend would like to inform me of the specific Act of Parliament that debars people who can neither hear nor speak from serving as Members, I would be happy to look into that. I am not aware of that Act.

My hon. Friend also asked about amendment No. 120—which was carried by the House but was not debated—as did the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). In Committee and during the consultation process, we picked up a number of concerns about the concept of reasonable adjustments. We want the law to be clear and understandable in that regard, and most of the details of reasonable adjustments have been given during the debates.

There are two particular items which amendment No. 120 brings into the Bill to which I shall draw attention. First, we have recognised the strength of the argument that an existing worker who becomes disabled should not have to apply formally for an existing vacancy that he or she could fulfil with a reasonable adjustment. As a result, we also include in our list the need to consider transfer to an existing vacancy.

Secondly, we have dealt with leave, by including a reference to absence for rehabilitation assessment or treatment. The Government amendment demonstrates that, once again, we listened to the matter raised in Committee and responded positively.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon also asked about costs and where they would fall in this regard. Access to work provides considerable help to disabled people and to employers in overcoming barriers to work. We are committed to reviewing the programme after its first year of operation, which ends in June. We will look closely at the aims and the targeting of the programme and its funding arrangements. Many adjustments will cost little or nothing. I cannot commit the taxpayer to open-ended funding of reasonable adjustments that employers will be required to undertake because of the new right, but we will look to see how the available resources can be used as effectively as possible to help disabled people to get and keep jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter also asked about the civic rights and duties questions, which were passed over earlier because of the speed of our proceedings. I cannot do justice to the subject in the time available, but I will certainly write to him about that. The Government have already given a commitment in the consultation document to seek to increase the representation of disabled people on public bodies. We recognise the important role that the Government have in providing a strong lead.

On access to courts, I can confirm that the Bill imposes a duty on the legal system to make the services that it provides accessible to disabled people who are making or defending a claim. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has a continuing refurbishment programme, in which buildings are upgraded, as resources and physical constraints allow. That programme includes improved facilities for disabled people, such as ramps, better court lay-outs and infra-red hearing enhancement systems. For example, the Royal Courts of Justice have recently been upgraded and now include stair lifts, which were not previously available.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West said that he hoped that 1995 would be a year of securing the rights of disabled people. There is no question but that, when we look back on 1995 and on the Bill, we will be able to say that this was when we really got to grips with the matter and put in place the mechanisms that will bring to an end what we have come to know as discrimination against disabled people.

I ask the House to remember, however, that the passage of the Bill, after it has been through another place and we have discussed the amendments made there, will not be the end of the process of stopping discrimination against disabled people. The Government, the National Disability Council and all interested parties will still have much to do to codify the duties, to ensure that the duties that we are placing on people are clear and comprehensible and, above all, to communicate to employers and service providers what their duties are and why Parliament has imposed those duties on them.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that that is a task in which hon. Members of all political persuasions will be able to join. We will always face the task and we must never forget the scale of the challenge. Surveys on public attitudes about discrimination against disabled people show that the overwhelming majority of people are against such discrimination, but they also think that they do not do it and that it is nothing to do with them. Passing this legislation will make an enormous difference, but the task of education, persuasion and communication will continue. People will need a means of redress, which we discussed last night, but the overwhelming majority of employers and service providers will comply with the law straight away, if they know what it is.

This is a landmark Bill. It sets this country on a clear, workable and unambiguous course to ending discrimination against disabled people. It will make a genuine difference to the opportunities and lives of millions of our fellow citizens and I hope that it will command the support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Milk Marketing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Milk, that stable product to be found on doorsteps and in refrigerators around the nation, is not something which many people would immediately associate with black marketeering and bootlegging. However, the illegal trade in milk is now a growing problem for farmers, the dairy industry and its regulators.

The problem has arisen against a background of imposition on our dairy industry of a system of milk quotas in 1984, decided and enforced by the European Commission, which sought to limit the production of milk within the European Community to reduce over-capacity within the market and alleviate the need for subsidies.

I am on record in this House and elsewhere as having pointed out both the fallacy of the arguments that Britain contributes to the overall surplus of milk within the Community and the unfair way in which quotas were imposed on those same farmers whom we had encouraged for years to invest in new equipment and facilities to increase their output.

United Kingdom quota is below the level of our consumption. We are only 85 per cent. self-sufficient in milk and dairy products compared with Belgium, which is 111 per cent. self-sufficient; Denmark, which is 222 per cent. self-sufficient; the Netherlands, which are 225 per cent. self-sufficient; and Ireland, which is a massive 331 per cent. self-sufficient.

That is now milk under the bridge, as it were, as the United Kingdom dairy industry has come to terms with the quota system and the rather odd constraints that it imposes on British farmers. Surely it is time, however, that the quota system was brought more up to date and quotas were allocated more fairly than they were in 1984, as we are now in the single market, which implies the ability to transfer quota between member states. Will the Minister comment on that suggestion, which was supported at a recent meeting that I had with farmers in my constituency?

Rumours about the black market in milk began to surface in north-west England a few years ago and caused concern not only to the regulatory bodies but to other farmers and their representatives in the National Farmers Union. They have always taken the view that the law in that area should apply equally to all, and that any milk producer who suspects illegal practices should report those suspicions promptly to the appropriate authorities.

Following the abolition of the Milk Marketing Board, the number of reported movements of milk outside the quota system has increased. Higher milk prices have stimulated output of milk, and farmers have looked to lease quota from non-producers to expand their production. As a result, the demand for lease quota has risen dramatically, prices have become prohibitive and the temptation to sell illegally rather than pay super-levy has been seen, in some cases, as the only way out of the present dilemma.

The Intervention Board—the milk quota policeman—has received a significant number of calls on its fraud line reporting mysterious milk tankers arriving on farms at unusual times in the night. Following up many of those calls has revealed no sinister plot but has rather shown that, under the new marketing arrangements, a number of different milk tankers operated by a range of companies are on the road.

Many purchasers of bulk supplies of milk, both for industrial processing, for example in cheese making, and for retailing, both through shops and doorstep deliveries, are buying and collecting milk from neighbouring farms in unorthodox but legitimate vehicles.

I hasten to add that the majority of British farmers and the majority of those in the dairy and food retailing industry are acting responsibly and lawfully. Together, they continue to supply the best and highest-quality milk products in the world.

The Milk Marketing Board, as Milk Marque was known prior to recent changes in the industry's structure, as well as the NFU, have collaborated fully with the Intervention Board to provide whatever information, records or other evidence they can. The Minister will know, however, that there appears to be a small number of producers at the fringe of the industry who supply a part of their production illegally for the retail trade.

I believe that the Intervention Board and the Minister are aware of a number of "milk rings", where a tanker arrives to take milk direct from a farm. It is then sold, sometimes unpasteurised, and often through a chain that is unsupervised by the usual quality and hygiene control mechanisms, to retailers and caterers in other areas. Such farmers are able to increase their income through the sales of such "black" milk while also avoiding the penalties that might otherwise be imposed upon them for exceeding the production limits set by their milk quotas.

Three hundred milk producers recently attended a meeting at Stafford to register their concern and growing anger that little, if any, effective action appears to be being taken to tackle what is now a widely acknowledged problem in the industry. It is particularly affecting the cream of the nation's milk-producing dairy land in south Cheshire and north Staffordshire, from where, it is now believed, milk is being traded on the black market to Birmingham and elsewhere in the west midlands.

In November 1994, the Intervention Board said that it was about to take proceedings, and went so far as to tell Milk Marque that it should not take any action against its members who broke their contracts with it in case that might prejudice the board's chances of successful criminal prosecutions. Four months have now passed, and there is increasing concern among law-abiding Milk Marque and NFU members, and other producers, that no action has been taken to date, and that there is every prospect that little will be done in the future.

If the quota regime is not enforced fairly, the orderly marketing of milk will break down, great strains will be placed upon the industry, and our reputation in Brussels for the enforcement of regulations will be tarnished.

I also invite my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on the situation in other European countries, whose adherence to European regulations and their recognition of the need to enforce them effectively leaves much to be desired. We know that only too well from our recent debates on the fishing industry.

Perhaps the Minister can tell us precisely what action the Intervention Board intends to take, when it intends to take it, and what excuses it has to proffer for the unacceptable delays which law-abiding producers have already been forced to suffer.

[Mrs. Ann Winterton]

Let me remind the Minister that it is not just the dairy industry and the Government's reputation for enforcement that are at stake. Public health is also jeopardised by black marketeers, since their equipment and storage conditions cannot be properly monitored. They are operating entirely outside the normal hygiene and environmental health regulations.

The deregulation of the raw milk market, which took place just five months ago, has occurred at the same time as accelerating change in the retail market for liquid milk. As we know, doorstep delivery has sadly declined for many years. That decline has been hastened by continued price wars, including heavy discounting among major supermarkets. The dairy processing industry is going through a period of rationalisation because of over-capacity, and it has sought to blame the new marketing arrangements for milk for its present problems. Not all my farmers, I hasten to add, signed up with Milk Marque, which is itself not a monopoly as the old Milk Marketing Board was. In fact, there are now more than 40 players in the new free milk market, many of which are both customers and competitors of Milk Marque.

Dairy companies are buying about one third of the milk produced in England and Wales direct from farmers or sources other than Milk Marque. Deregulation was bound to bring change in its wake, and further change is to be expected once the GATT round commitments begin to be phased in from July 1995.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom has a natural climatic advantage in milk production, and a strong and innovative food and drink manufacturing industry. To benefit from those, we need to act decisively and immediately on the present black market in milk. The Government need to argue strongly for a more realistic and fairer milk quota allowance, a matter that is long overdue, and to explore options to ease up the quota system to enable quota to move to the most efficient production regions in the European Union, such as the United Kingdom.

I do not wish, and I suspect that other Members do not wish, British farmers and consumers to be placed at a disadvantage, and I urge the Minister to tackle those problems with vigour and immediacy.

10.10 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): I first place on record my sincere congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on winning the debate this evening and giving us an opportunity to review an important part of our agricultural activity—as she rightly says, at a time of considerable change in the dairy industry.

I am also grateful for the interest that has been shown in the debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), and it would be unfair of me to forget that we also have in our midst the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley).

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): That is very fair.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman says it is very fair. He may not entirely like one or two things that I might have to say in explanation to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, who rightly drew our attention at the beginning of her remarks to some of the fundamental problems that have led us to the current position. Many of those relate to the history of milk quotas, and she does the House a service in enabling me to place some of those matters on the record.

It is often forgotten that the United Kingdom has never been self-sufficient in milk. Before we joined the European Union, we relied heavily on imports of cheese, butter and other milk products from our friends in the Commonwealth, principally Canada, New Zealand and Australia. After we joined the Community, our ability to produce milk was not encouraged by the then Labour Government, who, in the mid to late 1970s, did not adjust the green pound in a way that would have given the then support price mechanism the ability to encourage our dairy farmers to provide more milk.

Hence the fact that, once the constraint was removed, production leaped by about 10 per cent. between 1980 and 1983. However, when the Community introduced milk quotas to try to control the then rapidly increasing expenditure on intervention in milk products and the quota system came in, the base that was chosen was 1981. Sadly, although production had started to respond to the changes that the then Conservative Government had made, it was too late.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: My hon. Friend knows that that base was established, and we had to accept it, in 1984. However, it is 1995 now, and the position has changed dramatically. Much has changed in Europe. We are in the single market. It is ridiculous that in this day and age we should be only 85 per cent. self-sufficient and be disadvantaged and hampered by the base rate that was fixed way back in 1984. What efforts have the Minister or the Government made to change those matters in Brussels, and is it not about time that our farmers received a fair deal?

Mr. Jack: I have responsibility for the north Mercia region of the Ministry, in which my hon. Friend's constituency is located. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to go to a meeting of farmers in her area and announce the ending of milk quotas. The message coming loud and clear from our farmers is that they want to be able to use their efficiency and expertise to produce as much milk as the market allows.

My hon. Friend rightly asked earlier, and now presses me to say from the Dispatch Box, what we are doing. The answer is that my right hon. Friend the Minister is actively pursuing in Europe at present the concept of transferability. It does not seem likely that we shall see an immediate end to milk quotas in Europe, sad though that may be for the United Kingdom. We seek to maximise the opportunities for our farmers, and my right hon. Friend is pursuing the aim of getting quota leased across the boundaries of the single market, which would be to the United Kingdom's advantage.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jack: I should like to make a little progress, if my hon. Friend will be patient a little longer.

We want to make progress, but other countries are not as reform-minded as we are. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton asked how others were doing. She will know that one of the problems has been trying to persuade other people to implement milk quotas properly. That is why countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy, the worst offender, now face about £2.5 billion worth of disallowance because they have not played by the rules and implemented milk quotas properly. We have the most developed market in terms of lease and sale in the Community, and we maximise the opportunity for the United Kingdom.

Wherever we can obtain even just a little extra quota, we have. In 1993, as part of the SLOM 3 settlement, we were able to deal with that matter and increase quotas for other producers by half of 1 per cent—another 70,000 tonnes. In a world where every little helps, we have managed to increase quota. Our continual pressure in Europe has led to a fall in the price of intervention butter. Other intervention prices have been reduced, and we have staved off further reductions in quotas. Equally, our robust stance on milk quotas in Italy has prevented further reductions.

We all understood the sense of injustice felt by our dairy industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister will continue to campaign robustly in Europe to try to assist with transferability of quota across Europe.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is giving the House a frank and honest assessment of the overall position, but I want to tempt him further. It is becoming ever more clear that the efficiency of the United Kingdom's dairy farmers is also being penalised under the present arrangements. The butter fat content—the quality of the milk produced—is likely to trigger the super-levy this year. I am confident that, if the people of this country understood that we are not likely to exceed our quota in terms of volume, but in terms of the quality of milk produced, there would be even greater calls for some reform of the arrangements.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend reflects the frustration felt by some farmers because of the variations in the measurement of the butter fat content that were made towards the end of last year. There were some exceptional circumstances—there was a particularly mild run into the winter, and two different sorts of tests were used by different organisations. We have checked out those matters, and both scientific tests—the Gerber and the Rose Gottleib—are approved and accurate tests. We are considering and monitoring the results of those tests. It will not make a huge difference in terms of the super-levy.

The position relates far more to a surge in production associated with the change in the marketing regime, an increase in the price of milk, and a particularly good period for milk production at the end of the year. Those factors have affected our exceeding the quota more than the question of testing. I will give way to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, and then I would like to make some progress.

Mr. Morley: The dairy industry in this country faces considerable problems because of the lack of application on the part of the Italians. I am not sure whether the Italians lease or sell quota in the same way as we do in the United Kingdom. If they do, the price of quota would reflect whether the Italians were applying the quota restrictions properly—if there is a very low price, clearly they are not applying the restrictions. Has the Ministry examined that situation, because it would indicate what is going on?

Mr. Jack: The fact that, until now, Italy has not implemented quotas properly makes it very difficult to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. Clearly, if milk quotas are not implemented properly—that was the subject of disallowance—there cannot be the same types of leased market arrangements that are in place in the United Kingdom. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Commission is pressing Italy for a clear statement by the end of the month as to what progress it has made.

I turn to the issue at the centre of my hon. Friend's speech: the question of black milk. We must bear it in mind that milk quotas lie at the heart of the matter—if there were no quotas, by definition there could not be production above quota or black milk. It is worth putting that fact on the record.

This year, the temptation to break the rules has been perhaps greater than ever before. The factors to which I referred a moment ago in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale—the rise in price, the change in marketing arrangements and the very good conditions for milk production at the end of last year—were too much of a temptation for some people who saw an opportunity to exploit the situation. For some farmers, conscious of the fact that they were facing the prospect of a big super-levy bill, the temptation to become involved in some of the practices to which my hon. Friend the Minister for Congleton alluded in her remarks was too great.

We took very seriously the reports which came to us about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton referred to the Intervention Board, which is now responsible for the administration of milk quotas. It set up the so-called fraud freephone to try to encourage an unencumbered stream of good-quality intelligence information, and it received up to 140 calls.

We have carefully examined all that intelligence and other information which farmers have imparted to people in the Ministry. Occasionally, it has been difficult to sift out the hoax or malicious calls, but all the calls that appeared to be genuine have been investigated thoroughly and properly. Those investigations are in the hands of a specialist team which has been created from members of the Intervention Board's anti-fraud unit and the Ministry's investigation branch.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: I should like to give my hon. Friend the benefit of a full reply to her points. If there is time, I will give way to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) later.

The group of investigators comprises members of the Intervention Board's anti-fraud unit and the Ministry's investigation branch. They are experienced officers, who

[Mr. Jack]

have a long track record in investigating fraud and collecting the evidence needed to pursue criminal proceedings.

I understand what my hon. Friend said about the frustration felt because nothing appears to be happening. I visited the Intervention Board in order to investigate the matters personally, to meet some of the people who are involved in those exercises and to see whether meticulous investigations were being conducted. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept my assurance that I was satisfied with the efforts being made.

We must realise that, although there is a lot of rumour and discussion about fraudulent practices, we must work at securing solid, cast-iron evidence in order to bring criminal proceedings. As I said a moment ago, all leads are being followed. Tip-offs are very useful, but occasionally the people who have made allegations on television have been reluctant to come forward and provide information when pressed to do so.

It is a painstaking process to compile that sort of detail and I appeal, via my hon. Friend, to anyone who believes that he or she has information to come forward. We will certainly examine it. I have looked at some of the investigation and can assure my hon. Friend that it is very complex indeed. But complexity is not a barrier to progress, and we are fully aware of the importance of bringing cases to court as soon as possible.

I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that it is very important indeed that, when those prosecutions take place, they must be successful, because I believe that there is an element of deterrent in the success that we hope will come in that area. We do not want to have cases dismissed on the grounds of either technicality or lack of evidence.

The chief executive of the Intervention Board has assured me that good progress is being made on a number of cases. Investigation teams have selected target areas, and I can tell my hon. Friend that reports will be going to lawyers early in April for possible prosecutions to be considered. I hope that she will understand if I cannot at this stage go further about some of the areas on which she touched in her remarks, but I would not wish in any way to prejudice the investigations that have been made.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I have just two small points that I would like to put to my hon. Friend. First and foremost, because of the quota system, it is an absolutely ghastly situation that farmer is having to inform on neighbour. We deplore the black market in milk, but we equally deplore the conditions that have made that situation arise. Secondly, will he accept as a point of principle that it is vital that a successful case is brought, because, unless there is confidence in the system of quotas that we currently have, and orderly marketing, the whole system will break down completely, which is not in the short term to anybody's advantage?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend's remarks correspond entirely with the comments that I have heard from farmers with whom I have had conversations about this subject. A very high proportion—I was about to say the totality—of farmers want to see these rules adhered to. They do not particularly like them, for the commercial reasons that we discussed earlier, but they do not want to see others getting away with breaking them.

I give my hon. Friend an assurance that we take these matters very seriously indeed. I have seen for myself the meticulous work that is being undertaken, and there is a clear understanding that good-quality prosecutions must be brought to make the point that it is something that we will not tolerate, but we want to see success when it comes to prosecution.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is not nice when people in an industry have, if one likes, to tell other people what is going on, but sometimes peer group pressure can be effective in dissuading people from breaking the rules that she mentioned.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I wonder whether the Minister could ask his officials to carry out a mini-inquiry into the lease price, and what I call the freehold price, of quota in each of the deficit milk economies that form part of the European Union, because from that price we may learn much about what is happening in each of those markets.

Mr. Jack: I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously. We have looked at our own market and at some of the more salacious stories that are circulating about all kinds of things, including football clubs buying up quota and rigging markets. I have genuinely found no evidence whatever as far as that is concerned.

As I said to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, in certain European Union countries that do not have a properly implemented quota system, it would be an extremely difficult task to undertake the kind of exercise that the hon. Member for Workington suggests. France has a highly centralised market that is different from ours. I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, but in terms of providing the answer he wants, in certain cases it would be extremely difficult to do.

I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that we take seriously the fight against black milk. As I have said, real progress is in prospect on the timing of the reports. I shall do my best as things progress to keep her and hon. Friends with an interest in the matter informed, but we must let the investigating bodies get on with their work.

My hon. Friend concluded her remarks with an interesting observation on the nature of what has happened in the marketing of milk. In many of the recent discussions that we have had, people have ignored the fact that, under the old end user pricing system, one effectively had four different uses for milk and four different prices for the same raw material.

Many farmers felt a sense of injustice about that. They realised that, within the dairy industry, there was surplus capacity. We now have an opportunity to see a modern, efficient dairy industry emerge as part of the changes in milk marketing, and to see a proper system of pricing develop for milk. But above all, we want to see greater flexibility in the quota arrangements, transferability in Europe and, ultimately, the removal of the quota.

That would be the great reward for our dairy farmers: the efficient United Kingdom industry could have its head, and we would not be here at half-past 10 in the evening debating over-quota production and black milk. That is something that we do not want to see as part of our agricultural scene.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 March 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Domestic Violence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In raising the issue of domestic violence, I want to highlight four areas of special concern. They are the effect of domestic violence on children; the operation of prosecution policy, as instanced by the under-prosecution of domestic violence because of the ease with which women can withdraw complaints; the need for a corporate approach by local authorities at the most senior level; and work to tackle the root causes of domestic violence, which is largely perpetrated by men.

Those who suffer domestic violence are not criminals. Whatever they may feel or be told, it is not their fault. Although 90 per cent. of victims are women, in my view it is not a women's issue, to be ghettoised by male policy makers or national or local elected representatives. However, it takes men to raise the issue, to force other men in senior positions to sit up and take notice of that crucial area of social policy.

I will not cite many statistics, but certainly domestic violence knows no social frontiers of class, wealth or ethnicity. During last autumn's long recess, I spent several hours with one domestic violence forum in Birmingham. It is based on one of the current police divisions, although that is to change, and co-ordinated by officers from the city council chief executive's department.

I spent four hours with that 20-strong group, all of whose members are women. They included representatives of the Crown Prosecution Service, Churches and the Salvation Army; solicitors, health visitors, staff from local authority housing departments and social services; and representatives of housing associations, the Children's Society and Relate. The police and probation service were represented, as were hostel staff.

During that session, which included one devastating role play of the effects of domestic violence on children, several issues were raised, but I cannot mention them all today. One was the lack of separate waiting rooms for victims and defendants in Birmingham courts. One can imagine what it must be like for a victim to take the matter that far and then find herself in the same room as the defendant.

That problem has largely been solved by the city's new Crown courts, and the magistrates courts are due to be revamped next year. I am particularly grateful for the interest shown in that aspect by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor).

Birmingham's city-wide inter-agency steering group on domestic violence—which includes citizens advice bureaux, benefits agencies and other players in the voluntary sector that I mentioned—defined domestic violence as follows:

> "The cycle of abuse affecting women which takes the form of habitual, repeated or random use of intimidating behaviour aimed at controlling and subjugating the individual. This can occur through physical, psychological, sexual, emotional and verbal means, which in turn causes responses such as fear, humiliation, shame and guilt, and changes in a woman's behaviour. That occurs across all sections of the community regardless of culture or social-economic status and within heterosexual or lesbian relationships. The most important point to take account of is that it can kill."

There are about half a million reported incidents of domestic violence a year in this country. In Birmingham in 1993, more than 5,000 domestic violence incidents were reported to the police, leading to almost 1,000 arrests. In north Birmingham's D police division, which includes most of my constituency, there were just over 1,200 reported incidents. Of seven murders in Birmingham in 1993, five were attributable to domestic violence. This year there have been more, and several serious attempts at murder, as women have attempted unsuccessfully to leave.

More and more women in recent years have been encouraged to use their rights as citizens. I shall never forget one lady who came to my surgery a couple of years ago, just after the last election, and who had been on the receiving end of violence. She belonged to a culture that does not exactly treat women equally. She said:

> "I have learned to speak up for myself so I can defend myself and my children, and I have found out that I can get help"

She had already sought help before coming to me, but I dealt with other aspects of the case.

Information is both a power and comfort to the victims. The police do take the issue much more seriously than they did a decade ago. Some firms of solicitors specialise in this area. I pay tribute to Tyndallwoods in Birmingham, which some years ago set up a women's 24-hour legal helpline to deal with domestic violence.

Nevertheless, there remain considerable hurdles for the victims. The need for access to quick legal aid; an end to different treatment of married and cohabiting women as compared with other cases where the violence is external to the household; owner-occupiers and tenants being treated differently; the attacker being a joint owner or tenant—all these factors lead to complex and different procedures, which can be daunting.

Indeed, the latest restrictions on legal aid mean that it is almost impossible for women to pursue civil or criminal proceedings using legal aid. Most women in work will not qualify; and worse still, others will be deemed to have income by virtue of the income of their violent partners. That places the victims in an incredibly difficult position.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am following the hon. Gentleman's arguments with great interest, because I used to practise in the courts. I cannot quite see why there should be a difference between the

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

treatment of people in rented accommodation and of those who are owner-occupiers. I should be grateful for some elucidation.

Mr. Rooker: It is not possible in the time available to go down all the byways. It has to do with income and ownership. If a woman is in a hostel, there will be a difference in the rehousing of her children. It will depend on whether she has been the part owner of an owned house or a tenant of a private landlord or local authority. These factors will result in differences of treatment, which boil down to questions of future housing—and it can all be very bewildering.

Injunctions vary; if taken out under the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976, put through the House by our late friend Jo Richardson, then there is power of arrest. With civil injunctions, there is no power of arrest; and even getting an ouster order has to be done by means of the law on trespass.

I realise that the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, currently in another place, will deal with some of these anomalies, although some of the points that I want to raise are not dealt with in it. That is one reason for my speech this morning.

An injunction with power of arrest presents problems for the police, which are too easily resolved by not making an arrest. This is because the arresting officer has to be the person going to court with the defendant. My constituents believe that any police officer should be able to go to the court with the defendant armed with a statement from the arresting officer. More importantly, the power of arrest where there is evidence should cease to be discretionary.

It has been put to me that a major concern is the number of women sufferers of domestic violence who later withdraw their complaints.That is done for a variety of reasons. Anyone can make a mistake. But the facility to withdraw a complaint is openly abused by defendants. Intimidation from both the defendant and members of his family is frequent. The police know that, in many cases in which a complaint is withdrawn, the victim later informs the domestic violence liaison officers that she was coerced into submitting the retraction statement.

Action should therefore be taken to make it more difficult to issue a retraction statement—particularly when the offence has involved arson or the use of caustic substances; a section 18 wounding; or threats to kill where a weapon was involved. Following any offence of violence where a child was a witness, a retraction statement should not be taken from the victim.

Also, once a victim has withdrawn a complaint against a defendant—if that is allowed—no further retraction statements should ever be taken from that victim if a further complaint is made in the future. Of course, that might put people off complaining, but I shall cover that point later.

The Crown Prosecution Service should publish its policy guidelines on the prosecution of such offences; those guidelines should ensure that such cases are not withdrawn too easily. Perhaps research into this aspect should be undertaken.

Bail conditions need attention, too. Too often, those conditions are not specific enough, and the perpetrators will stand around in public places, where it is difficult to move them on. They may wait in the street, or outside a college, shops or factory. They may stand outside the homes of the victim's relatives, where the victim has to go, to harass, frighten and intimidate. Hence the need for more specific bail conditions.

Local authorities have a major role to play. I know that they come in for criticism in this House, but the fact is that they are the bodies that can perform a genuine co-ordinating role, linking their own services, the police, health authorities and GPs. This does, however, require action at the very top of local authorities, at chief officer level. This is not a matter for delegation.

Some local authorities, such as Northampton, have regular meetings of chief officers to look at the issues. Responsibility is not delegated to less senior people, and work is done in partnership with external agencies such as the Women's Aid Federation. They look on domestic violence as a crime with victims and perpetrators, not as a women's issue. That attitude is crucial.

It requires men at the top to spell out to councillors the fact that policy in this important area is not a side issue or a ghetto issue. The hostel and refuge provision in the public sector needs some attention. From what I have heard and seen, local authority hostels tend to be used as a last resort, unlike those in the voluntary sector. This, in the main, is because they are not geared up for the needs of children. That can be a nightmare.

It is estimated that some 750,000 children may be suffering long-term trauma due to exposure to domestic violence. The children are our future, and it is here where work has to undertaken in the schools to change attitudes. Children witness domestic violence, but they will still cry to their mothers that "Daddy has been taken away", and ask why he is not with them in the hostel.

The pressures upon a woman victim forced to leave home with children to seek sanctuary can be immense, especially if the children are unhappy, bewildered, away from their friends, and sent to new schools, with all the fear that that brings to young children.

The pressures of coping with several different agencies, dealing with finance, housing, education, the police, solicitors, and trying to take and collect the kids to and from school and get back into a hostel before it closes are all too much for some victims. Some take the easy way out and head back home, usually to a welcoming beating.

There are no easy answers—no one claims there are. Twenty years ago, a Select Committee on domestic violence recommended more refuge bed space: one per 10,000 population. We currently have only about 10 per cent. of that number.

I have touched very briefly upon narrow aspects where progress needs to be made. Attitudes—mainly men's attitudes—need changing to end this unacceptable behaviour. I have concentrated on the 90 per cent. of victims who are women. By definition, the other 10 per cent. are men. It is easier to change the attitudes of men if the victims are given help, and if it is known by all concerned that top people will move quickly to help victims.

As a constituency Member, I know the difficulties of getting help quickly to some of these people. As a result, some women put up with intolerable situations for too long, and murder can result.

It might be useful to hear from the Minister about the Home Office-sponsored research by Dobash et al of Cardiff university. I have been familiar with that research only for the past couple of weeks, but I understand that its publication has been put back. It would be useful for people to see it, so that we can make a judgment whether any recommendations are positive. There may be resource implications to be looked at.

Men must be confronted and not let off the hook, and many local schemes are attempting to do that. In Birmingham, "Freshstart"—I do not know why that name was chosen, because that name has been used for another purpose—makes contact with the women partners. It pulls in the men so that they can talk, and they are confronted with what they have done. At the same time, their partners are contacted to ensure their safety, while the menfolk go through the process of chatting about what they have been up to, over an eight to 10-week period.

So far, it has proved highly successful, and does not cost a great deal. Nevertheless, it is something that has to be driven from the top. It requires chief officers to tell local authorities that such schemes are worth while, and that they want senior people involved in them. It is not a matter that should be pushed away to junior staff.

Encouragement must be given to work in the schools with young boys, particularly those who display aggressive behaviour in the playground. Some of them will role-play in the playground the domestic violence that they have seen at home. That is understandable, but it must be nipped in the bud at an early stage. They think that it is normal and acceptable behaviour. The education sector has a key role to play in changing attitudes.

In summary—I do not wish to detain the House, as these brief debates have proved extremely useful and I am keen to allow as many hon. Members as possible to speak—we need better, more accessible information for women—for example, on child benefit and social security allowance documents. There should be more access to freephone 24-hour help lines, which are an extremely valuable resource. It is a comfort to know that they are available, believe me.

There should be more and better safe places in refuges, and they should be more in tune with the fact that, by and large, the woman victim will have young children. We have to think about the effect on the children in the hostels. They have to be there in certain circumstances, but it must not be a trauma for them. The trauma should be reduced to the absolute minimum, and that requires changes in the quality of hostel provision.

There should be better legal remedies. I know that a forthcoming Bill will insist on improving legal remedies. I make no complaint about that. There should be more work with children in school; more training for solicitors, health workers and the police; and a co-ordinated operation from city councils and local authorities. It is important that that is resourced over a long period.

I thank those in my constituency who help my constituents who are involved in domestic violence: health visitors, the police, the Children's Society, which makes a valuable contribution from the small base it has, and Women's Aid and the Salvation Army, whose hostels in parts of north Birmingham provide a model that the city could well follow.

I thank the volunteers who staff some of the help lines out of their own pocket, without any public resource. They give comfort and aid to women. I thank Birmingham social services department, which some years ago set up an organisation known as PAROSA, which has a 24-hour help line for Asian women and Asian families. It has qualified staff on the other end of the telephone, where language is not a barrier and help can be provided. The victims should have the comfort of knowing that information and help is available in these circumstances.

Domestic violence is not something that they have to put up with in the quiet of their own home, suffering a battering day in day out, week in and week out, worrying about the affect that it will have on the children and making excuses for the damage, perhaps to their faces and arms. It is wholly unacceptable behaviour in our society at this part of the century. Frankly, we have to do more about it. I hope that we can send some signals this morning to those who work in the area, that the House of Commons is at least aware of the situation.

10.24 am

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I give a warm welcome to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for a most important debate. I totally endorse his definition of domestic violence. He said that domestic is a crime, not a women's issue. I regard domestic violence as a serious issue. A mugging at home is no more acceptable than a mugging in the street. The tragedy is that, for many years, domestic violence was not given the due attention it deserved, and we all know that it is no myth.

I congratulate the Government on their many initiatives in bringing help and support to a very beleaguered section of our society. Such violence is growing every year. Disturbingly, some 40 per cent. of the women murdered in 1993 were killed by their spouses or partners. But even with the many thousands of cases recorded by the police, there is evidence that it is only the tip of the iceberg. The truth is that many women are fearful of reporting their partners or spouses to the police.

Indeed, I can recall very well going out on a police patrol in Bethnal Green, during which we received an urgent call from a young teenager, to visit a home in a tenement building. He said, "Come quickly, my father is beating my mother very badly. Hurry!" The sense of urgency was quite acute. His call had a calming effect on the father, who, when we arrived, was striding around the flat, still excited, but insisting that everything was "perfectly all right".

It did not seem so to me. His wife was huddled in the kitchen, her face bloodied, black and blue. It was a terrible sight. But she did not say a word against her husband. She did not dare, for fear of reprisals. There was nothing we could do. We had to leave, and the tragedy is that she did not press charges, then or later.

I very much hope that the Government's excellent domestic awareness campaign, launched last October with a clear message, "Domestic Violence is a Crime—Don't Stand for it", will have some effect. We want to encourage them to come forward. There is no excuse for perpetrators to escape unscathed, and this campaign a complemented by a leaflet, produced in a number of languages and targeted specifically at women who may be reluctant to report domestic violence because of their immigration status. Its message is clear: nobody, whatever their nationality or immigration status, should have to fear violence or abuse of any kind.

I welcome the Home Affairs Select Committee's report on domestic violence, in which it recommended that every police division in London set up a domestic violence unit.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

So far, 28 police forces have special units, and I am proud to say that one of them is run by the Epsom and Sutton division, which covers my constituency. We have two full-time domestic violence officers working flat out, but it would be a mistake to believe that they act alone. Every officer in the division is involved—all 360 of them. It is a team effort, in which they all have an input.

We also have our own very active victim support scheme—one of 375 victim support schemes across the country, which altogether are funded to the tune of more than £7 million a year. It is a valued service.

One imaginative scheme that deserves wider attention is a pilot programme in the Central region of Scotland, where panic buttons, of the sort used by thousands of elderly people, are handed out to women at risk. The scheme is only three months old and, according to the last report, only two of the nine women equipped with panic buttons have not had to press them. As soon as they do, the phone rings in the region's emergency care control unit and case details appear on the computer screen with a message to call the police immediately.

So far, it takes, on average, three minutes for the police to be at the door complete with details on whether there is a restraint order in force against the man, and the ages of the children. I am delighted to report that the scheme has been welcomed by Sutton police, who regard it as effective because women can get an immediate response. As a result, the police are beginning to install the first alarm in the home of a person who is considered to be particularly at risk.

There is pressure on the Government to fund more women's refuge centres, and that is an attractive and tempting idea. However, I am not sure from conversations that we have had with Sutton's housing department that that is the main issue. Many people apply to social services and, in turn, to the housing department for help. But the great majority—500 in our case—were given sufficient emotional support and counselling to enable them to return home with their problems resolved.

The housing department helps when it is needed. For a variety of domestic reasons, 66 households were rehoused. But of that number, only 28 families were rehoused because of breakdown resulting from a violent relationship.

The social services department gave me a word of caution. It says that some applications by women are rather dubious, in that they claim excessive domestic violence, which the department feels is somewhat exaggerated in the telling, as a means of getting greater benefits or access to alternative accommodation.

I do not want in any way to use that illustration to denigrate a serious issue. The department has noticed that the numbers of people crying out for help are increasing. It is hard to assess exactly why that is so. More relationships end in blows, and, over the last 20 years, Britain's partnerships are ending in divorce and break-ups are growing at an epidemic rate. Perhaps that has led to increased bitterness.

The hon. Member for Perry Bar rightly said that children are the real victims of domestic violence. I congratulate the Department of Health on taking a lead in co-ordinating the work of the interdepartmental group on child abuse. This is an extremely important area. Esther Rantzen's Childline has some chilling examples of horrifying abuse. Children can be damaged for life by their experiences. As the hon. Member for Perry Barr said, based on reported domestic violence, some 750,000 children across the nation may be growing up in an atmosphere of fear and violence. We ignore their plight at our peril.

I agree that local authorities should co-ordinate services, and that it should be done from the top. Chief executives should have an overview, and local authorities should look carefully at their budgets and their consciences. They should cut extraneous spending in cosmetic and political areas and concentrate on the real priority of social services and particularly on children who are the victims of domestic violence. They could focus resources to give a positive benefit.

For example, they could provide skilled counselling for children, which can be very helpful. A play therapist can help a child work through what has happened so that it can face the future. Schools play an essential role in helping to identify children at risk, and that means that teachers will need training for that important task.

There is a demand for such services. A survey by NCH Action for Children, based on a poll of 108 mothers with 246 children who had all suffered domestic violence, is telling. Three out of four women questioned said that their children had seen violent incidents, and almost two thirds of the children had seen their mothers beaten. One in 10 women reported having been raped in front of her children.

All claimed that their children were aware of violence, and almost three in 10 mothers said that their violent partner had also beaten their children. As a result, the children developed serious anxiety symptoms, starting with bed-wetting. They have difficulty concentrating on school work and become poor achievers. One in three youngsters became violent and aggressive. That was mentioned by the hon. Member for Perry Barr.

That becomes a self-perpetuating syndrome because as those children grow up they inflict the same punishment on the next generation. Many develop serious sleeping problems. They become anxious and withdrawn and find it difficult to trust anybody, let alone develop an ability to form close relationships. The survey shows that children witness violence over long periods. On average, the relationships that were described as violent lasted about seven years. That is dreadfully oppressing for children.

I trust that time and resources will be made available to continue to study the effect on children and the help that we can give them. They are innocent victims, and I shudder at the thought of the helpless cry of a child going unanswered. They are our highest priority. It is essential to make sure that we continue to tackle domestic violence with the vigour that we have shown so far. It must be treated as a crime, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

10.35 am

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I have taken a special interest in this subject because of Edinburgh's pioneering role in the "zero tolerance" campaign. I pay tribute to Franki Raffles, the brilliant designer of that campaign, who, tragically, died a few months ago. She is sorely missed, but the work that she started goes on. Many local authorities in Scotland and, I think, in England as well have adopted the zero tolerance campaign or a variant of it. Local authorities in Scotland have come together to carry the campaign forward, and are commissioning new material to extend it into a new phase.

The problem with the campaigns by local authorities is that not every part of Scotland will be covered. As hon. Members would expect, I propose to concentrate on Scotland. Highland region will not take part in the campaign. People in Edinburgh and elsewhere have been demanding for a long time that the Scottish Office take the initiative and organise and co-ordinate that campaign.

It would be churlish to deny that the Scottish Office has taken some action. There has been an advertising campaign in Scotland, and that part of it on television has not been too bad. However, the poster campaign has not been handled in the best possible way. One reason for that is that the main poster in Scotland reinforced the stereotype of domestic violence, depicting it as a working-class problem. For the benefit of hon. Members who are not from Scotland, I should say that the poster featured two fists with tattoos stating "Love" and "Hate" and a caption which read, "Which one will she get tonight?" The tattoos have class implications.

One of the important aims of the Edinburgh campaign is to establish that the problem pervades all classes in society. That was a flaw in the Scottish Office poster campaign. Regrettably, the advertising campaign has now ended, and, as far as I know, the Scottish Office does not intend to take it further.

We need not a campaign but a strategy, and that which is being formed by the local authorities is based, first, on prevention; secondly, on provision; and, thirdly, on protection. As other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, I shall be brief in describing each of those.

Prevention has been pioneered by the zero tolerance campaign in Edinburgh, which is based on raising the issue and trying to tackle the attitudes that lead to domestic violence. The campaign was based on the fundamental assumption that domestic violence was part of a continuum of violence against women and children, which is why sexual abuse and rape were included. That continuum expands to lesser forms of violence such as slapping, but they are also serious.

The zero tolerance campaign grasped the fundamental issue that domestic violence is rooted in male power and control over women. The underlying background to domestic violence is the historic belief that men have the right to have that power and control. The campaign has been willing to grasp that nettle. It must be grasped, which means challenging men.

Great unevenness of provision exists Scotland. There are whole areas where no refuge provision exists. That issue must be grasped at Scottish Office level. There is not enough provision, even in local authorities that have it. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has issued guidelines on how many refuges each local authority should have, but not one local authority in Scotland meets those guidelines. That is a funding issue for the Scottish Office.

The protection of women has various aspects. First, men must be properly sentenced once they have been convicted. Secondly, proper help must be given to women who want to get injunctions. The diminution of legal aid makes it more difficult for women to get injunctions to protect themselves against men who are threatening them. Thirdly, there is retaliation, which is not such a frequent issue, but which arises in quite a few cases in relation to the protection of women.

When the matter was last debated nearly two years ago, I referred to the "Brookside" programme. The plot that I mentioned then is still running, as some hon. Members will know. That programme will cover the issue of what happens to a woman who understandably retaliates when the position becomes impossible. The character in that programme will be tried for murder. It will be a topical issue, which must be dealt with.

This morning, I was pleased to read in *The Scotsman* that a 60-year-old woman who drew a knife on her husband when she was being attacked was just admonished in court yesterday. Perhaps things are changing, but I also read in this morning's Edinburgh *Evening News* a depressing story about a victim of rape who had £3,000 of the £4,000 that she had received in compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board taken away because she had committed various minor breach of the peace offences. It is a shocking indictment of society that a rape victim could be considered worthy of only £1,000 in compensation.

The protection of women victims involves many issues. I hope, and the campaign that local authorities are co-ordinating in Scotland is demanding, that a working party should be formed to consider the protection of women and the treatment of domestic violence by the criminal justice system.

Other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall draw may remarks to a close. I hope that the Government will consider the issue with the seriousness that it deserves. I concede that the Scottish Office has done something, but I hope that it will do much more.

10.42 am

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on bringing this important subject to the Floor of the House. Domestic violence has a low public profile, but it is disturbingly widespread. As we have heard, it is the second most common form of violence reported to the police, and it makes up a quarter of all recorded crime.

Of course, of all crimes, it is perhaps the hardest for the Government to tackle. We can put more police on the streets, try to make houses burglar-proof, and encourage neighbourhood watch schemes, but none of that will protect a woman or a child from domestic violence. What can we do? Today, we have heard some of the solutions that are being proposed, but, especially in a crisis, we need to make it as easy as possible for victims to leave their homes where they cannot live safely and, if they choose, to take action against their tormentors.

In combating domestic violence, the first priority is to tackle refuge overcrowding and funding problems. Money must be made available to local authorities so that they can provide one refuge place per 10,000 of the population as part of a national strategy for refuge provision. Voluntary groups, many of which provide refuges, suffer from a dreadful insecurity of funding, and therefore of long-term planning.

I agree that legal action is a difficult and sensitive issue. If a victim of violence does not wish the police to take action, should they go ahead, regardless of her wishes, so that society sends the message to perpetrators that such

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

behaviour will not go unpunished? It may be that the desire not to have the offender prosecuted arises from fear of repercussions, of being made homeless, or of not being able to provide for children. It may simply arise from not wanting to be alone. If so, we should be helping that person by offering her the choice through housing and financial and emotional support.

Fear of the legal process may be, and often is, a factor, but the major factor influencing victims of domestic violence is often a genuine desire to avoid prosecution because of their love for the perpetrator as a husband or father—which is often difficult to believe—because of the knowledge of the effect that the prosecution will have on other members of the family, especially young children, or, as we heard earlier, because of threats and coercion.

What we in Westminster see as the right thing to do is never an easy option. It is often difficult to decide whether to prosecute. We can ensure that the best possible counselling and advice is made available, and that all unnecessary fears are dealt with.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr mentioned the spread of departments and organisations involved at local level. That makes an inter-agency approach essential. The police and social services, health and education departments all have a part to play. There is an example of that teamwork in Dorset, where all those agencies are taking part in a domestic violence project in an attempt accurately to assess the scale of the problem and to consider the appropriate police response.

The purpose of that inter-agency forum is

> "to identify and monitor the incidence and nature of domestic and family violence . . . to reduce the risk of violence in the home or arising from those relationships termed as 'domestic and family violence', to emphasise the unacceptability of this behaviour, to reduce the risks to adults and children who are exposed to domestic and family violence, to respond to the needs of those affected."

The project began only a few weeks ago, on 1 March, but the project co-ordinator, Detective Sergeant Gill Donnell, says that, already, an increasing number of self-referrals are being made to the project by victims who would have been reticent in making contact directly with the police. That is an example of the sort of approach that the Government should be encouraging.

It is difficult to say that we will ever eliminate domestic violence. It has been, and certainly will be, with us for a long time, but, by publicising the fact that people who are suffering have someone to whom they can go, and by providing properly funded counselling and, as a last resort, refuges, we can limit the suffering.

10.49 am

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on his success in securing a debate on this important subject. It is important to women, important in terms of the law, important for children and the viability of family life, and certainly important to policy makers.

Two weeks ago, I presented a Bill on the subject of domestic violence. It called attention to three issues: the unacceptability of domestic violence, which is criminal behaviour; the provision of information about the legal remedies available to people who suffer domestic violence; and refuge provision for people fleeing domestic violence.

As hon. Members have said, domestic violence has a long history. We all know the phrase "rule of thumb", but not many of us know that it comes from the old idea that a man was allowed to beat his wife so long as he did not use a stick any thicker than his thumb. People routinely use the phrase, without realising its derivation. Mention has also been made of the fact that domestic violence is no respecter of social class, and is indeed an expression of male power over women, which the phrase "rule of thumb" adequately describes.

It is important to recognise the effect that domestic violence has on children and women. A friend of mine in her forties said that it was only when observing the married relationships of her friends that she realised that domestic violence was not the norm. Her father had beaten her mother, and her husband had beaten her. She thought that was what marriage was like—that is the view of a youngish to middle-aged woman today.

The effect of domestic violence on children sometimes has to be seen to be believed. A couple of years ago, I represented in court a woman who was applying to commit her husband to prison for breach of a domestic violence injunction. She had been getting injunctions against him for years. He had beaten her, assaulted her with a knife and thrown furniture at her. His behaviour was utterly outrageous, unacceptable and criminal, but, as it occurred in the private home, the remedies open to the woman were not the same as they would have been had he assaulted a total stranger. She came to court with her mother and children.

The behaviour of her four-year-old boy had to be seen to be believed. He had witnessed his father's violent behaviour day in and day out, and had clearly learned that might was right. He had no respect for his mother, because his father had no respect for her. He was clearly caught in a cycle of violence, which one suspects will be repeated down the generations. I was told that he was receiving behavioural therapy, but I wonder how successful it will be. He is likely to beat up any woman or women with whom he has a relationship.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who has spoken up in the House on this issue since he was elected at the same time as me. He referred to Edinburgh district council's zero tolerance campaign. Bristol city council is very impressed with the style of the campaign and the way in which information is being conveyed to the public, and is planning a similar campaign.

In 1993, the Select Committee on Home Affairs reported:

> "We recommend that the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department fund a campaign designed to raise awareness among the public, and in particular actual and potential perpetrators and victims, of the criminality of domestic violence, the opportunities for redress and the willingness of authorities to treat the matter seriously."

The Government's action on that recommendation has been found wanting.

Hon. Members have mentioned the law, and I am delighted that a Bill from another place will consolidate existing legislation, which is confused. The fact that we have any legislation at all is in very great measure due to the sterling work done by the former Member for Barking, Jo Richardson, who was a dear friend to many of us. She was behind the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage and the work that led to the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 and the Domestic Proceedings and Magistrates' Courts Act 1978.

One of those Acts covers only married people while the other covers unmarried people, and the injunctions available are different in the two jurisdictions. There is no protection for unmarried people who have to return to their parents' homes, and lawyers trying to advise women who suffer domestic violence have to pick their way through a minefield of legislation, which clearly needs consolidation. I hope that the House will take full advantage of the opportunity that is to be provided.

I recently met representatives from Bristol Women's Aid, who made several important points at their annual general meeting. One involved the effect on women of Government cuts in the legal aid budget. While local authorities are trying to disseminate information about the availability of remedies, it is becoming increasingly difficult for women to seek the protection of the courts, because of the unavailability of legal aid. The women referred to refuge provision and the fact that, in 1975, the Select Committee had recommended one place for every 10,000 of the population. We have not reached even a third of that figure.

The women also talked to me about the need for a co-ordinated approach at local level. We are lucky in Bristol, in that it is an innovative city. It was in Bristol that victim support, health centres and family mediation began, and for a long time we have had a domestic violence forum involving the police, the courts, the local authority, women's organisations and Women's Aid, which give information to protect women who are vulnerable because of their housing arrangements and those who are fleeing domestic violence.

It is most important that we say that women are not victims, which is the impression given when we deal with the problem by allowing people to flee a violent relationship and then offering them refuge—it is like firefighting. We need strategies that enable women to recognise their own strength, and the fact that they are suffering violence. We should be turning our attention to the aggressors and saying that their behaviour is unacceptable. The more men who say that, the better.

Women are often told to stay indoors because the streets can be very unsafe, yet a quarter of all recorded crime is in the home. Where are women safe? If they stay indoors, they might run the risk of being beaten up, but on the streets they are frightened of crime.

It is important to have a co-ordinated approach for women who suffer domestic violence. We must tell men when their behaviour is unacceptable, but, in the meantime, more refuges must be provided. We must support local initiatives that help women and children and educate male perpetrators of domestic violence. This should be at the forefront of public policy, to enable family life to be the example and experience that most of us would wish.

10.58 am

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on stimulating a debate that has brought into focus the cross-Chamber consensus about the importance of this issue. He made a carefully targeted speech, and gave notice of the serious issues that he intended to raise. I shall be brief, in order to give the Minister plenty of time to respond. Domestic violence is a wide topic, but I shall keep to the specific issues raised by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) highlighted a series of legal complexities. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Government will do all they can to simplify the law in this sphere. The legal system should benefit the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Victims feel that they are at sea in what is virtually a minefield of complexities, and we need to simplify the way in which we deal with such matters. I also agreed very much with my hon. Friend's strong point about the need to talk to men, and not only to women, about the issues which are the focus of this debate.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) referred to the Government publicity campaign, which, of course, was one of the recommendations by the Select Committee on Home Affairs. She was right to say that people need to be continually encouraged not to stand for domestic violence, but that message needs to be backed up.

People need to be confident that, if they choose not to stand for it, the necessary systems will support them and the police, local authorities and voluntary organisations will have the resources as well as the training, the understanding of the problem and the ability to provide help where it is needed. It is a prime example of how central Government need to reward as well as demand co-operation and a partnership approach at local level.

Since dealing with domestic violence is difficult and complex, time is needed to develop expertise and local strategies, which several hon. Members have said are vital if the problem is to be properly addressed. A fragmentation of responsibilities does not help. People who work in education, social services, housing, health, the police and voluntary organisations all feel under pressure, but they need some flexibility, so that they can spend time listening to the way in which problems arise for other agencies and fully understand how to implement effective strategies.

It is probably true to say, as I have found, that many hon. Members have been shocked by the experience of dealing with constituency cases of domestic violence. Two things stand out. One is the number of women who continue to suffer in the matrimonial home, long after the situation seems to have become totally unreasonable and unacceptable. They continue to try to maintain the structure of the marriage and the family long beyond what could be expected of them.

The other aspect is the number of women who leave home and fend for themselves after violence has reached breaking point. Instead of putting themselves at the mercy of different departments and expecting the local authorities or the police to sort out their problems, some women try to fend for themselves and thereby compromise their rights to housing. Following the split of a family, women may find themselves in unsatisfactory housing, being told that they are adequately housed. We need to shift priorities. It is difficult for housing authorities to deal with domestic violence, but in many ways it is a special case, and ways to deal with it should be found.

As hon. Members of all parties have said, the police take domestic violence much more seriously nowadays. However, on occasions it remains difficult to distinguish

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in practice between domestic disputes in which it may be six of one and half a dozen of the other, and those cases when one of the partners is a vulnerable and damaged victim. Such incidents are very difficult for officers to deal with, and it puts them under great pressure. Officers need training and background in the subject, and they should have the opportunity to give time to such incidents, so that they may understand properly what is happening.

There have been several references to the work of Women's Aid and the role of refuges. We need to ensure an adequate network of such facilities up and down the country, but we must also understand that we are not just considering temporary or crisis housing—an immediately available roof, important though that it is. Sympathy and support should be given through a traumatic period that may often go on for a considerable time following the short time in a refuge.

That is a specifically targeted activity, during which knowledge and experience—down-to-earth approaches—are needed. It is a good example of how the voluntary sector has the flexibility to respond often much better then statutory services are able. Support for the voluntary sector needs to be guaranteed and continued, so that services do not become fragmented.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr specifically referred to the way in which victims are treated in court. He was absolutely correct. Often, victims and public-spirited individuals who come forward as witnesses feel that the system damages and violates them a second time.

Efforts have been made to improve the situation, but victims are still marginal in our courts and criminal justice system, and there is no room for complacency. I hope that the Minister will be able to comment positively on that. If he is able to say that he will press further to make the court and criminal justice system generally more sympathetic to victims, he may be assured of a positive response from the Labour party.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) made a powerful reference to domestic violence as a problem which pervades all classes of society. We need to take that very much to heart. There is still a general impression that violence takes place in only one section of society. He is right to say that examples fall in all parts of society.

The zero tolerance campaign, to which my hon. Friend referred, is in many ways showing the way forward in raising public awareness, and I commend it. It is a co-ordinated and high-profile approach to informing public opinion. My hon. Friend was absolutely right, however, to go on to say that we need a strategic approach which starts by tackling attitudes in society as a whole, rather than simply saying that domestic violence is some sort of aberration which may be dealt with in isolation.

I hope that the Minister will also be able to tell us a little about how the Government and his Department intend to press forward with giving effect to the important recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee. One of the main recommendations was to upgrade the quality of national statistics on domestic violence. Indeed, the whole question of research is important. It is necessary to conduct research on what works, as well as the nature of the problem, to understand changes and to have the results of that research quickly available to practitioners.

The Select Committee also placed great stress on the importance of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in discussing questions of poor and good practice and good management with chief officers of police. That needs to be followed through year after year, and not be only a one-off.

The Committee also recommended learning from good practice; ensuring that domestic violence units are not marginalised in the police force; learning from local approaches such as the experimental domestic violence crisis intervention team that is being established in Islington, to which it specifically referred; and generally disseminating best practice. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that more progress will be made in following through those recommendations, and that inter-agency approaches will be generally encouraged and helped.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr also referred to prosecution. Several Select Committee recommendations referred to the responsibilities of the Crown Prosecution Service. The Committee thought that the CPS should make itself better informed about developments in the area of domestic violence. The Committee specifically recommended that the CPS look at the possibility of duress causing the victim of domestic violence to withdraw the complaint. That is a very important and sensitive area, which my hon. Friend was absolutely right to highlight.

I hope that the Minister will give an undertaking that the Government will take the initiative, linked with the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and agencies, to try to tease out the best way in which to ensure that the law can be changed for the better.

Intimidation is a problem. We should take great care that we do not go too far, and perhaps force people to pursue complaints that they genuinely wish to withdraw, but also that we shift the balance towards protecting victims and finding how to assemble evidence when intimidation has happened more than once. That is a delicate area that needs to be dealt with, and I hope that the Minister will say that he will take it seriously and develop it for the immediate future.

I believe that the co-ordinating role of local authorities at chief officer level is right, too. My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr referred specifically to Northampton. It is clear that, where chief officers have taken a specific interest, there has been a shift in attitude and policy within departments. Where councillors have taken a specific interest in the development of policy, that too has produced good results.

There is a need for independent advice and help. For instance, the Cardiff housing help centre was specifically established to be independent of the housing department, so that it could focus on the interests of the people who came forward.

I should have liked to develop one more crucial area—the central question of how children are dealt with. But as I said at the outset, I shall be brief, so as to allow the Minister plenty of time to respond. I hope that he will say that he and his departmental colleagues will consider the issue again, and will keep it under review across the Department, encouraging local approaches across organisations, departments and authorities, and assisting in the development of effective strategies at local level to reflect a proper sense of priorities at national level.

I hope, too, that the Minister will show a full appreciation of the important role that the voluntary sector can play, and of the need for that sector—Women's Aid, victim support and other local organisations—to have the continuity and capacity to bring their knowledge and experience to bear for the benefit of victims, and therefore for the benefit of society as a whole in the long term.

11.11 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on raising such an important subject for debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for allowing me more time to enable me to respond as fully as possible to the subjects raised in the debate.

Let the House be in no doubt that the Government are in no doubt at all about the seriousness of the problem. Few people realise that domestic violence accounts for a large part of the nation's violent crime. The best statistics I have, dating from 1993, show that there were about 197,000 examples of domestic violence within the statistics on violence in general.

I have listened carefully to the various points made, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to set out the measures that the Government are taking to tackle that especially appalling crime. As everyone has said, domestic violence should never be tolerated, either by those suffering the violence or by the wider community.

The effects of domestic violence can be especially devastating, as the suffering endured is often prolonged over many years, at the hands not of a stranger but of someone who is in a relationship with the victim. It is a crime that invariably occurs not out on the streets or in some public place but in the home, where we should all be able to feel safe and secure. The home is not a place where a woman, a child or any of us should feel a sense of danger or terror.

Clearly, domestic violence involves a combination of physical, emotional, sexual and psychological abuse within a relationship, and can damage both the woman and her children. Victims of domestic violence are usually women, but that is not always the case. In most cases, the perpetrator of the violence will be a spouse, a partner or a former boy friend or girl friend.

To say that is not, however, to deny the existence of other forms of inter-relationship violence by other family members—for example, fathers, brothers or sons—and, as we know, there are a number of elderly victims. Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, fear and depression are common. Domestic violence is not limited to any particular social group or class, but, as has already been said, occurs across the social spectrum.

The Government recognise that domestic violence not only causes damage to its immediate victims but may also affect children within the relationship. Children may be at risk of suffering long-term psychological and emotional damage as a result of witnessing the violence perpetrated against their mothers, or of experiencing the stresses and tensions involved in living in an environment where the likelihood of violence is ever present. They may also become victims of violence and abuse themselves. Witnessing domestic violence may also have the effect of teaching children that violence is a legitimate response to problems.

There have been some calls to amend the Children Act 1989 to create a new category of "children in need" to encompass children who live in situations of domestic violence. I understand, however, that it is not necessary to amend the Act in that way, as each local authority already has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in its area, and evidence of domestic violence may be an indication that a child is in need.

Schools may address issues of relevance to tackling domestic violence through the national curriculum, through their programmes of sex education, and, in the wider curriculum, through their programmes of personal, social and health education.

The Government believe that the response to domestic violence needs to involve action on several fronts, directed towards ensuring that the perpetrators are brought to justice, that victims receive the emotional and practical support they require, and that steps are taken, through education and community initiatives, towards prevention in the long term. We believe that effective action requires the commitment and involvement of all local agencies, working together to develop local preventive strategies, and to provide help and support to women suffering from domestic violence.

In order to co-ordinate an effective and concerted Government response to domestic violence, interdepartmental groups were set up at both official and ministerial level in 1993. The groups set about taking forward the Government's reply to the 1993 Home Affairs Select Committee report on domestic violence.

The official group has met four times to discuss the key areas of raising public awareness, improving the way in which agencies can respond to those suffering from domestic violence, and refuge provision. I shall talk more about some of those issues later.

Proposals for increasing public awareness and inter-agency co-operation were endorsed by the ministerial group on domestic violence. Both the official and ministerial groups are due to meet again to examine a range of issues, such as improving the collection of statistics on domestic violence, and the nature and extent of refuge provision. Because of the hidden nature of domestic violence, it is especially difficult to get an exact idea of how many cases exist.

Of course, to prevent crimes of violence within the home in this and future generations, there is a need to change attitudes and behaviour. It is also clear that effective action extends beyond the criminal justice system. Towards that end, the Government recently funded a domestic violence awareness publicity campaign made up of several strands of action to help those suffering abuse.

The campaign, which took place last autumn, used the slogan, "Domestic Violence—Don't Stand For It", and focused on the criminality of domestic violence and the right of all people to live their lives free of fear and abuse. The message communicated was that domestic violence is first and foremost a crime that should not and will not be tolerated. That message was directed at the victims of domestic violence as well as the perpetrators, to help them realise that they will be taken seriously and that they should seek the help and assistance that is available.

The campaign was a large one, consisting of 500,000 guidance leaflets and 100,000 indoor posters, which were distributed to voluntary and statutory agencies. A taped version of the guidance leaflet was also produced for the blind and visually handicapped. A short public information film called "Don't Stand For It" was shown

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across 350 cinemas for a period of six weeks, and is estimated to have reached an audience of 1 million viewers.

The materials used in the campaign all gave details of a telephone helpline. Briefing packs were also prepared for the media, to encourage them to run complementary articles and features. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for drawing attention to the effort that the Government put into that campaign.

To have an idea of the pay-off, we should have to ask Sir Paul Condon, for example, and he would confirm that, in every division in the Metropolitan police, there is a domestic violence unit, and there has been a large increase in the number of people coming forward to report violence. That is good in itself, but of course the downside is that Sir Paul's figures for violence in the metropolitan area will increase this year. However, we must understand clearly that the good side of those figures is the fact that women are coming forward to report violence that existed before but was not reported.

As well as getting victims to seek the help they need, we are also encouraging them to work with the criminal justice system to apprehend the perpetrators of these crimes. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to create an effective response to domestic violence, which will engender the confidence needed in victims to come forward.

Victims are often afraid to come forward in case they will be subjected to further threats and violence. If we are to succeed in combatting domestic violence, we must give victims the confidence to break their silence and help end their personal suffering.

Those who intimidate witnesses can currently be charged with the common law offence of attempting to pervert the course of justice. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 contains a new offence of intimidating a witness, juror or someone assisting the police. This is designed to deter would-be intimidators, and to make it easier to prosecute those who do intimidate.

The new offence, which came into force on 3 February this year, will remove the requirement of the existing offence to prove that the intimidation was intended to pervert the course of justice. Under the new offence, offenders could be convicted simply on the basis that they intimidated a person whom they knew to be a witness.

There are already a number of practical measures in place to protect witnesses from intimidation. For instance, witness addresses are removed as a matter of course from copies of statements passed to the defence. The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which reported in 1993, made a number of recommendations designed further to increase support and protection for witnesses.

Courts should make greater use of their existing powers, to enable statements of witnesses other than the defendant to be read out where the witness is afraid to give oral evidence. The recommendation has been drawn to the attention of all serving judges, and will be used in judicial training seminars. Witnesses who do not wish to have their addresses read out in court—as is the normal practice—should be allowed to hand them in to court or be able to use accommodation addresses, with the leave of the court. Courts have the discretion to allow the information to be withheld.

In cases where the victim fears for his or her personal safety because a defendant is about to be released on bail or following a successful appeal, particular care will be taken. Departments are considering what further steps can be taken on a multi-agency basis to assist victims and witnesses who fear for their personal safety or that of their families.

Police policy on domestic violence is important, and is based on the premise that assaults within private relationships are no less criminally serious than violence which takes place between strangers out in the street. In July 1990, guidance was issued to the police in England, Wales and Scotland to ensure a quick and effective response to domestic violence, taking into account the overriding needs of the victim. Similar guidance was issued in Northern Ireland in 1991.

All police forces now have a force policy on domestic violence. The policies emphasise the overriding duty to protect victims and children from further attack, the need to treat domestic violence as seriously as any other form of violence, the use and value of powers of arrest, the dangers of seeking reconciliation between assailant and victim, and the importance of keeping records to monitor the policy in practice.

Forces throughout the UK were also encouraged to set up dedicated domestic violence units or to appoint officers to deal specifically with domestic violence cases and to liaise with other agencies working in the field.

The Crown Prosecution Service treats cases of domestic violence seriously. It has also examined its procedures in order to ensure an effective response. In 1993, it updated and published its comprehensive guide issued to staff for dealing with domestic violence cases, and that procedure is again under review and will shortly be updated. The CPS recognises and endorses the principle that violence in a domestic background is not a factor which reduces the seriousness of the offending.

The CPS does not act directly on behalf of individual victims or represent them in court in the criminal proceedings, because it has to take decisions reflecting the overall public interest, rather than the particular interests of any one person. Nevertheless, Crown prosecutors always think very carefully about the interests of the victim, which are important, when deciding where the public interest lies.

A vital matter in ensuring that the victims of crime have the necessary confidence in the criminal justice system is the sentencing process. Effective penalties also act as a deterrent to potential offenders. The sentencing decisions of the courts have the capacity to inspire or dilute that confidence. For domestic violence to be seen to be tackled vigorously by the criminal justice system, it is essential that sentencing decisions are based on the premise that assaults within private relationships are no less serious than violence between strangers.

We are committed to ensuring that the courts have the powers to sentence offenders appropriately. As with other types of crime, custody is appropriate in the most serious cases. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 enables courts to impose a longer sentence upon a violent or sexual offender than is justified by the seriousness of the offence, if such a sentence is necessary to protect the public from harm.

The Government have also given their support to the increase of the maximum penalty for attempted rape to life imprisonment, and of that for indecent assault on a woman to 10 years. In 1991, the House of Lords confirmed an earlier ruling by the Court of Appeal that rape within marriage was unlawful. That ruling is particularly important in enabling the courts to deal with cases of domestic violence, where such cases occur, with the severity they deserve.

Every effort is being made to ensure that the best use is made of facilities available to accommodate the needs of victims who give evidence in court, particularly in cases of domestic violence where there has been violence or abuse which may have left the witness feeling intimidated or in a vulnerable state. The courts charter, published in November 1992, recognised the needs of potential witnesses who may be apprehensive about appearing in court. The Crown court witness service also plays an important role in supporting the victims of domestic violence. It provides information, advice and emotional support to witnesses attending the Crown court.

The civil law has a vital role to play in providing those suffering from domestic violence with an effective legal avenue of protection and redress. The Government have recently introduced the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, which is currently receiving detailed consideration by the Special Public Bills Committee in another place. The Bill replaces the piecemeal remedies available under the current statutory framework with a single, consistent set of remedies which will be available to all courts with family jurisdiction.

Two types of orders will be available—non-molestation orders prohibiting particular behaviour or molestation generally; and occupation orders with a variety of possible terms, either declaratory or regulatory. Those could, for example, define occupation rights in the home, including the exclusion of the respondent from it and, where appropriate, an area around it.

The orders will be available to a wide range of people within a loosely defined domestic or family relationship. At present, only current spouses and cohabitants can apply for remedies. Under the new Bill, that will be extended to cover former spouses, former cohabitants, certain relatives, others who live or have lived in the same household, parents of a child or in relation to any child, persons who have had parental responsibility for that child, and parties to the same family proceedings.

Where there has been violence or threatened violence, the court will be required to attach a power of arrest to an order unless the applicant or relevant child would be adequately protected without it. That will reinforce the ability of the police to assist in preventing the escalation of violence and the intimidation of the victim. The changes represent not only a clarification of the existing law, but also a strengthening of the civil remedies available for domestic violence.

As I stated earlier, truly effective action against domestic violence requires the commitment and involvement of local agencies working in concert to develop local preventative strategies and to provide help and support to the victims. The ministerial group on domestic violence has approved proposals for an inter-agency circular on domestic violence, which will be issued shortly to a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies. It will set out the Government's approach to the issue, and encourage all local agencies to co-ordinate their responses to domestic violence.

No one agency can meet the needs of those who experience domestic violence. Recent developments, involving co-operation between the police, local authorities and voluntary agencies, have highlighted the importance of inter-agency work as potentially a more effective way of addressing domestic violence.

In particular, the establishment of a local domestic violence forum—whereby representatives from a range of services in both the statutory and voluntary sectors come together at the local level to provide the necessary services and support of the local community—represents one model through which to focus inter-agency efforts to improve support and services for women experiencing domestic violence, and also for co-ordinating resources for men to stop using violence.

The Home Office programme development unit is currently funding several innovative projects, looking at the potential of treatment programmes for offenders. The aim of the experimental approaches being taken is to find out what approaches are the most effective in tackling domestic violence.

Research and evaluation are important. That evaluation is taking place in the court-ordered Change and Lothian treatment programmes—that is the Dobash report. The results of the evaluation are currently being considered, and will provide much-needed information on the efficacy of treatment programmes for men who are violent.

The range of measures being taken forward by the Government to tackle domestic violence, which I have outlined, reaffirms our commitment to effectively responding to this most distressing of crimes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We now move to the debate on the future of Guy's hospital.

Guy's Hospital

11.30 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Thirteen months ago, the Secretary of State for Health announced, in the context of the Tomlinson report, her strategic direction in respect of the future disposition of services on the two sites owned by the Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital trust. The trust subsequently made its proposals, which have been considered by the local health commission and the regional health authority and now sit on the Secretary of State's desk awaiting a decision. In making that decision, she will be advised by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, to whom I am grateful for attending this debate to listen to what I and others have to say before finalising his views.

Discussions on how services should be rationalised between the two hospitals predated the report of the Tomlinson inquiry, which considered the provision of medical services in London as a whole. Unfortunately, the administrative and clinical staff of the two hospitals had difficulties in reaching a consensus. I give credit to the Secretary of State for at least seeking to grasp the nettle in making a statement on 10 February 1994, in which she said:

> "We therefore intend to ask the trust to pursue proposals that, over time, will concentrate acute and specialist hospital services at the St. Thomas's site."—[*Official Report*, 10 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 460.]

She went on to propose that Guy's should be used almost exclusively for teaching and research.

The reaction to her announcement was immediate: from consultants, some of whom were my constituents; from people living in the vicinity of Guy's; and from patients and ex-patients of the hospital, some of whom were also my constituents. Following that, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), in whose constituency Guy's hospital lies, called together a group of interested people, formed the Save Guy's Hospital campaign, and invited the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and me to join him as co-chairmen.

The campaign management group consists of doctors, nurses, patients' representatives, a solicitor, trade unionists and others, of all political persuasions and of none, united in their concern about the hospital. May I record my respect for the work of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, who has, primus inter pares of the chairmen, conducted the affairs of a disparate group with considerable diligence and diplomacy, enabling its members to work well together?

The more I became involved with the group, the more I became convinced that the information on which the Secretary of State's decision was based was inaccurate and inadequate. My personal concerns—other hon. Members will no doubt express their worries—stemmed from three aspects.

First, the accident and emergency service at Guy's is currently much used by local people; other hon. Members will certainly wish to refer to that dimension. In addition, however, there is a commuter population of some 300,000 people who work each day in the City. Inevitably, among them accidents, emergencies and illnesses occur daily, not to mention the possibility of large-scale incidents such as the Cannon street rail crash or terrorist outrages, both of which the City has experienced in recent years. With the Barts service now closed, it is essential that the City has an easily accessible A and E department.

Secondly, Guy's has a number of important specialist services such as oncology, cardiac, renal, neurology, ophthalmology, and ear, nose and throat, to which thousands of patients throughout south-east London—indeed, south-east England as a whole—are referred by their GPs. For them, Guy's is extremely conveniently placed in terms of public transport, as it is literally on the doorstep of London Bridge station and the bus station. Ease of access is important for patients, but equally so for relatives who wish to visit. No other hospital—certainly not St. Thomas's—is as easily accessible.

Thirdly, earlier plans for developing Guy's included the construction of Philip Harris house, partly funded from charitable sources. It was planned, designed and built to house the specialist services to which I referred, equipped with the latest technology, and has just been completed at a cost of £154 million. It is incomprehensible that it should not be used for the purposes for which it was intended.

May I make it clear that, while the Save Guy's Hospital campaign's purpose has been and continues to be to retain Guy's as a viable hospital, it is in no sense antagonistic towards St. Thomas's? The issue is the most cost-effective allocation of resources between the sites and the distribution of services between the hospitals, which will provide the greatest benefit to patients.

The campaign group examined in detail the facts and figures pertaining to both hospitals and the implications of the Secretary of State's instruction. To assist in that analysis, it commissioned KPMG, which produced a thorough report incorporating alternative proposals, which were clinically coherent, carefully costed and involved less capital expenditure. The campaign group drew on that report in submitting its observations and alternative proposals to the hospital trust.

In due course, the hospital trust issued its proposals, which were to close Guy's A and E; to bring together most of the specialist clinical departments on the St. Thomas's site; to develop a centre at Guy's for day surgery and day treatment; and to bring together the medical and dental schools and King's college on the Guy's site. What the trust effectively proposed, therefore, was to close the A and E department at Guy's altogether and gradually transfer most specialties to St. Thomas's while producing at the Guy's site a centre for what was described as "planned surgery", which would be without any back-up facilities such as intensive care—a proposition that much clinical opinion believes to be unsafe. By implication, the trust rejected the KPMG plans and the campaign's variation on them, although it did not argue them in detail.

Those proposals then went to the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health commission, which clearly considered the objections that had been made to it. It effectively decided that the proposals should be implemented, but over a period of five to seven years rather than four. Its recommendation was that the A and E department should be kept open until 31 December 1998 and should not be closed until the expansion plans for the King's, Lewisham and St. Thomas's hospital site were in place, until the London ambulance service was meeting acceptable standards and until the programme to improve primary and community care services in Bermondsey, Rotherhithe and north Southwark had been implemented.

It recommended that plans to bring together most of the services currently on the two sites on to the St. Thomas's site should proceed, as should developing day surgery at Guy's, but that such implementation should be spread over a period of up to seven years and that the trust should be provided with additional funds to facilitate that.

When those recommendations were passed to the South Regional health authority, it did little more than endorse them. In a letter to some of my hon. Friends, the Minister says that it did so "after detailed consideration", but I question that assertion. The members of the authority were given only a brief summary of the consultation process and its outcome and, in his report to the authority, the regional director advised members that

"no credible alternative plans were put forward during consultation".

The KPMG plans may well be susceptible to criticism, but to dismiss them by implication as "incredible" was surely grossly irresponsible. It is worth pointing out that members of the authority were not given an opportunity to study them until the last minute.

The regional director said that the commission's proposal is

"responsive to the concerns raised and proposes a timescale which acknowledges local or public anxieties".

I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of State will similarly acknowledge those anxieties, which were reflected in the response to the consultation process.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Will my hon. Friend advise the House on one specific matter? Guy's has, to my knowledge, a reputation for being a centre of excellence, mainly because of its pioneering work in many fields—research, development and so on. Is such history and experience transferable from one hospital on the Guy's site to St. Thomas's, or is there likely to be any loss in the process?

Mr. Sims: I suppose that in theory anything is transferable, but surely there must be some loss of quality and of personnel if one starts shifting well-established centres from one site to another.

Sir John Gorst: Has that been considered?

Mr. Sims: It was certainly considered by the campaign group. I hope that it is being considered by the Minister and the Secretary of State.

I was referring to the consultation process. In the course of it, a petition raised by the campaign attracted many more than 1 million signatures and was presented to the House a few weeks ago; another, in similar terms, organised by Unison, bore 30,000 names. In addition, 350 individual letters were written objecting to the plans, compared with 23 in support, and 3,000 standard letters of objection were submitted.

Nowhere in the documents is reference made to the reaction from overseas, where there are many doctors who trained as students or postgraduates at Guy's. Earlier this week, I handed the Prime Minister a folder containing 184 letters from distinguished clinicians throughout the world expressing alarm and astonishment at the implication of the closure proposals.

I have not sought the debate to suggest to the Secretary of State or the Minister that the recommendations should be rejected in toto and that we return to square one, but I invite him to recognise their considerable implications and to modify them substantially.

Is it logical, having accepted that the A and E department at Guy's cannot be closed in the next year or two, to say that it is to be closed at the end of 1998? If it is unsafe to close it now, surely it is unwise to specify that it will close in less than four years' time. It is not difficult to visualise the blighting effect that that will have on A and E and on other services, which will begin to decline, will lose members from the expert clinical teams there and find recruitment of the best people impossible. Surely it would be sensible simply to say that the A and E department will remain open and work normally and that its future will be reviewed in a few years' time in the light of circumstances then prevailing—circumstances that cannot, at the moment, possibly be foreseen.

How can concentrating specialties on the St. Thomas's site, at an estimated cost for additional building of £54 million, be justified when Phillip Harris house, already completed at a cost of £154 million and incorporating the latest medical technology for renal, oncology, cardiac and neurology services, is not to be used to the full? Incidentally, if it is not so used, the future of the £25 million charity money donated for the building is, to put it no higher, uncertain.

The proposal is even more difficult to justify now that we know that the United medical and dental school and King's college London will not need all the space allocated to them at Guy's. Surely the space use needs to be re-assessed. What is needed is to devise a technically and clinically coherent and cost-effective solution that would provide specialist services on both sites but with minimal duplication.

The status quo, to coin a phrase, is not an option. Change is inevitable—indeed, essential—but it must be realistic, it must be orderly and it must ensure that the best possible use is made of the two sites, of the existing buildings and of limited financial resources in the interests of those for whom the two hospitals, and indeed the national health service, primarily exist—patients.

I earnestly plead with my hon. Friend the Minister to consider most carefully all that I have said and the words of those who follow me before reaching any conclusions on these difficult and important issues. I thank him for the time and energy that I know he has already devoted to them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I make a plea for relatively short speeches.

11.45 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) for requesting, and securing, a debate.

I do not want the debate to sound like a mutual support society, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for all that he has done and for the clear way in which he made the case. Colleagues on the Opposition Benches have been equally clear and supportive in arguing not from rhetoric or from general propositions but about the case.

I know that, since the Minister took over his job, he has been diligent. He has visited the hospital; he kindly invited me to be with him. He has briefed himself about the position, and we are entirely happy that he is doing

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the proper job of listening before he takes his decision. I have no criticism of him and hope that we are able to help the process.

Indeed—unusually—the process is, in that respect, working properly, in the sense that the commission carried out the public consultation, it reported, it made some recommendations, which went to region, region considered them and added some riders in its covering letter and the matter is now being debated here before a decision is taken. The process is at least being democratised at its last round.

That is very important because, as the hon. Member for Chislehurst said, and as the Minister knows well, it is not a matter of interest only to those who live and work in the neighbourhood of Guy's hospital, whom I represent. It is not of interest only to those who have links with Guy's, either as staff or as former staff and patients; it is of much wider interest.

I am grateful to many colleagues who are in the House now and in the other place, and to some who are not here, who have expressed their anxiety and support and kept themselves interested and briefed. There is an army of people—parliamentarians present and past, including Health Ministers from both sides of the House—who have ensured that the case for retaining a viable hospital at Guy's is made. That is very important.

The public are also sure about that. One of the largest petitions ever presented to the House was delivered a few weeks ago, bearing more than 1 million signatures. Signatures are continuing to come in, so a supplementary presentation may have to be made to ensure that no one's signature is excluded; several hundred thousand signatures may be added by the time the Minister and the Secretary of State take a decision.

I want to discuss what appear to me to be the arguments around which the matter is now resolving. The recommendations made by the region gave five reasons for the need for change. In relation to four of them I, at least, do not dissent. It is clear that hospital doctors should work in larger teams and see more patients, that junior doctors' hours of work should be reduced and that safer care should be provided. That does not mean to say that we should move immediately to large teams of doctors working in a small number of huge hospitals.

One question is whether a very large consolidated accident and emergency department—whether it be situated on the Guy's or the St. Thomas's site—could cope not only with patient admissions but with on-going treatment once they are transferred. The Minister is aware of evidence that suggests that existing accident and emergency units—including that at Tommy's—already have difficulty coping with the number of patients who are treated there. If the department were to be doubled in size, it is at least questionable whether it would be able to cope with the demand.

There is no theoretical accuracy about the correct size for a hospital. There are trends and movements in particular directions, but the advice changes from decade to decade. We thought that cottage hospitals should be abolished 20 years ago, so we moved to more acute care-centred hospitals. We are now returning to the development of community care beds for small operations. We must not believe that medical science and its management is written in stone for generations to come.

We must, of course, take account of the fact that advances in medical treatment and technology are changing the way in which hospitals work. I underline the point that the hon. Member for Chislehurst made in that regard. It seems to most people, and certainly to the individuals and charities who donated the money, nonsense to develop a state-of-the-art building in the national health service in a wonderfully accessible location and then either not use it, or not use most of it, for the purpose for which it was specifically built.

As I was going through my papers last night, I came across the leaflet that I was given when I attended the topping-out ceremony at Philip Harris house in July 1981, which features various photographs with quotes underneath. Under a photograph of the Prime Minister, it says:

> "I am delighted to have the opportunity to congratulate all those involved in this exciting venture at Guy's Hospital. Philip Harris House will be a significant addition to the already high standard of services available at Guy's and in the National Health Service generally.
>
> I send my best wishes to Guy's Hospital and especially to all those who will be treated and will work in Philip Harris House".

I say "amen" to that.

I hope that many people will be treated and will work at Philip Harris house. I know that most people think that the £154 million—£25 million of which was charitably raised, apart from the money from special trustees—was committed to that concept and to performing that task. Regardless of the other decisions involved, I ask the Minister and the Secretary of State to confirm that Philip Harris house will be a fixed point for both out-patient care—it is very close to London Bridge station—and the specialist care for which it was designed.

This is the logical place to make the further point to which the hon. Member for Chislehurst referred briefly and upon which I shall elaborate. One of the difficulties involved with the decision-making process—having followed the process from the beginning, I entirely understand that difficulty—is that the facts, figures and evidence keep changing. Whatever we think about the Tomlinson report and the way in which Tomlinson arrived at his findings, it is beyond dispute that more statistics and different facts have come to light since the compilation of that report. It is beyond dispute that the evidence in favour of retaining the accident and emergency department at Guy's hospital has changed too. It has been sufficiently persuasive to convince the commission that it would be impossible to go ahead with the original plan to run down the service from next year.

Two very significant further late changes have occurred which have not been the subject either of consultation or of detailed deliberation by the commission or the region in addition to all the evidence about accident and emergency patterns of referral. First, the balance of argument appears to be changing in the continuing debate about neuroscience and neurosurgery. I attended the regional health authority meeting, at which I detected that its members understood that circumstances were changing almost literally before their eyes.

Secondly, there is also a hugely important variation in the plans of King's college London and the medical and dental school. For those who have not followed all the debate, the whole exercise was concocted to try to work out a way of reconciling the academic and research interests of the United medical and dental school—which is in the process of amalgamating with the King's College medical and dental school if this gains assent—and consolidating various departments from King's college London. No one has opposed consolidating those departments, but I understand that King's college has now said that it does not need as much space as it originally thought.

New Guy's house, one of the new buildings, and Guy's tower, another of the new buildings, together with Philip Harris house, make up the triangle of post-war redevelopment of the site. When Philip Harris house opens this year, the older buildings—such as Hunt's house, which no one wants to occupy—can be demolished. If there is a different space requirement for the academic component, some people will have to decide how to use that space in an integrated way before we reach decisions about the rest of the space. The hon. Member for Chislehurst made the point, and I emphasise it, that it is no use arguing in favour of spending £54 million on new building works or on extensive rebuilding when space for the health service is now available because it is not needed for academic use.

I urge the Minister to conclude that, in relation to buildings and capital and plant investment, it is logical to use the newest building, Philip Harris house, and its linked buildings, Guy's tower and the new Guy's house, not just for out-patient care or for non-urgent admissions from the local community but as back-up, which will be needed if the provision of elective beds and specialist services is to be safe. Thereafter, Ministers must decide the difficult question of which specialties will be located on which site.

The Government must confirm the maximum amount of money that is available. The commission has asked for more money and it is absolutely clear that the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham area needs more funding for health care. The Government must agree whether the commission's requested parameters are appropriate and whether the budget total is correct. Having done that, Government should be able to allow the commission and the trust to work out the best disposition of services.

Ministers do not have to worry about the detail of the arrangements; that should not be a matter for central Government. It should be negotiated by the local trust, which was set up by the Government, and by the local commission. The Government should take the strategic decisions, and I think that there are only one or two key strategic questions which Ministers must resolve.

The first question is whether the accident and emergency unit should be approved for closure not before 31 December 1998; and, secondly, how to use the main buildings, including those that will become available. The right decision would ensure that the beds and specialties appropriate to Guy's could be consolidated on one site without duplication, while the others appropriate to St. Thomas's would be located there. That must be achieved in a cost-effective manner; I am not arguing that we should waste any money at all.

There is a critical point at which a hospital becomes viable or non-viable. The key to its success is the retention of a casualty department and of a significant number of beds for specialty treatment. There is a postscript to that: if a hospital is to be a major teaching and research centre, it is nonsense not to have people treated on the same site as the students and their teachers are located so that students can have the benefit of practical as well as theoretical teaching.

I conclude with two requests to the Minister and a short final point. I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Chislehurst, but I shall put it slightly differently. If the Government were to follow the recommendation of the commission and say that it is necessary to make the strategic decision now that the accident and emergency department at Guy's will close no earlier than 1999, that would be the worst of all possible worlds. Nobody believes that it is possible to close it now. Neither the commission nor the region has argued that it is possible.

It may be possible in some years to come, however, to have fewer accident and emergency departments in south-east London, in south London and in London as a whole. I accept that the trend may be in that direction, but if we are to look after people, treat them properly and prevent them from dying, it is absolutely vital that we do not risk their lives and treatment by closing the hospital too early or, equally bad, by announcing now that we can be certain that we will not need the hospital in four or five years' time.

Perhaps it is a little mischievous, but I hope it is an accurate parallel to say that, if the Prime Minister and his Ministers say that it is impossible to judge now whether we should join the common European currency in some years' time because the circumstances of the late 1990s or the next decade are not predictable, it is equally impossible to argue that we will or will not need an accident or emergency department at Guy's hospital in 1999 or the year 2000, because we do not have enough certain clues about what the demand or pattern of referral will be. We do not know what the implications of the closure of Bart's or what the pattern of referral around London will be. In any event, in recent years the number of people being referred has gone up, not down.

I ask the Government: please do not make a decision that will produce four, five or six years of blight when it might have to be further revised. Once such a decision has been made, we cannot expect staff morale or requirement to be sustained.

Secondly, it is important to achieve the best possible use of physical resources and consider whether there is a case for a second phase review—in 1998 or later. When the developments at King's, Tommy's, Lewisham and the Queen Elizabeth hospital, among others, have been completed, let us examine the position again. Of course health provision should always be under review, but we should also always ensure that the buildings used for in-patient care have the most clinically coherent patterns of use.

I am not an expert—there are plenty of experts in both hospitals and in other places. The present muddle is based on two simple historical facts. First, it is a difficult set of decisions to make and, secondly—the Minister knows this—the process from the beginning has not been managed in a way that has carried the confidence of those working on both sites. That is a prerequisite to the satisfactory delivery of a solution.

I believe that there is sufficient good will in the staff of Guy's and Thomas's, in the commission and in local communities to consolidate a sensible pattern of health care delivery over the next four or five years, developing primary care and transferring resources without putting people at risk.

The postscript is this: a paper presented to the commission made it clear that the current proposals actually risked making the health care of people in my part of the world worse. The House should not be asking

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or allowing the Minister to go ahead with any decision that makes the health care of any part of our community worse, even in the short or medium-term in terms of risk, access or availability.

We have here a golden opportunity for a brilliant development with the best buildings and treatment in the world. It is an opportunity for Ministers to make a bold decision. I hope they do not make a decision that closes down services that not only we may need for many years to come, but also which, once closed, can never be reopened.

12.4 pm

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): I shall speak briefly and with an eye on the clock as I know that a large number of hon. Members wish to speak. That does not mean that I do not regard the subject as extremely important. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on their contributions to the debate, and I appreciate the difficulties that face the Minister.

One of the things that I have noticed since I have been in Parliament is that British bureaucracy—certainly in our parliamentary procedures—collects together information, reaches decisions and policies and then, when the information changes, finds it almost impossible to change those policies. I suggest to the Minister that that is exactly what is happening over Guy's. Practically all the information on which the original decisions were made has now turned out to be either faulty or irrelevant. From the size of the petition and the tremendously effective campaign to save Guy's hospital, there is no doubt about the strength of the anxiety about what is happening.

I would like to put four points to the Minister. First, it seems that there has been no consideration of the international implications of what is happening to Guy's hospital. We have very few truly international hospitals in Britain and Guy's hospital is one of them. Its standing was certainly, until recently, equal to that of the Johns Hopkins in the United States. International status brings a large number of indirect rewards to Britain in terms of clinical excellence and exchanges of procedures and ideas. It is difficult to measure, but it is very real.

In that context, Guy's hospital is not only a London hospital; it is certainly not a community hospital. It is a national hospital as well as being international. We would be taking a very sad step in Britain and in Parliament if we were to discount those aspects of what has gone on at Guy's.

Sir John Gorst: Is my hon. Friend suggesting that, because it is an international hospital, perhaps it would be possible to fund the hospital partly by charging international patients making use of its facilities?

Sir Gerard Vaughan: I do not think that the Government have seriously considered that possibility. I raised the international aspect because I did not think that the Government had considered it.

Secondly, it has been mentioned that there has been huge investment in the hospital very recently and it would be scandalous to throw that away.

Thirdly, there is also the problem of transferring clinical teams. People who have not worked in a hospital environment probably do not understand—we have had a number of examples in other parts of London—that clinical teams are built up over many years. Not just the surgeon and the theatre nurses, but all the back-up staff have to be trained, including those in the radiology and pathology departments. We have had disastrous examples of trying to transfer specialist teams to other hospitals. It is not possible to pick them up like the pieces on the chessboard and shift them around without examining the chessboard and trying to retain it. My hon. Friend the Minister may not have taken that into consideration.

Reference has already been made to population. We have a huge development in the channel tunnel. As a result of that, the use of Waterloo station and the surrounding area—and therefore St. Thomas's hospital—is likely to change radically, but even more so, we know that the use of London Bridge and north Kent will change radically with the development of the London-north Kent links with the new channel rail. That has not been taken into consideration—and, indeed, as has been said, how can we forecast the population changes that may take place in the next few years?

Serious criticisms are being made about the trust. I am not in a position to know whether they are valid, but it worries me to hear that the trust is out of touch, complacent and not receptive to other points of view because it is so certain that it is right. I do not want to do the chief executive an injustice, but at a meeting that I attended the other day he did not seem to understand what modern patient care and clinical services were really about. Admittedly, he has many other issues to consider.

If my hon. Friend the Minister is informed of changes, he should have the courage—I know that he is a man of courage—to take them into account, and re-examine the proposals for one of our greatest international hospitals—indeed, I would suggest, the greatest.

12.10 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on securing an important debate at a critical stage, when the future of Guy's is being decided. I also pay tribute to the efforts of the Save Guy's campaign, a remarkably widespread campaign which has brought together representatives of the local community—through the SICK campaign—hospital trade unions, consultants and patients. As has already been pointed out, its cross-party co-chairing means that it is not a political organisation. It has brought together hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country, who signed one of the largest petitions ever received by Parliament and who are united in their appreciation of the history of Guy's and their determination to ensure its survival.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, recently visited the hospital, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and I did so last week. We were able to see the new developments at Philip Harris house at first hand, and to discuss the position with the Save Guy's campaign.

Since the original announcement on 10 February last year that Guy's was to be run down, the campaign to save it has progressed by small steps. I pay tribute to the diligence with which the health authority conducted its consultations: that demonstrated its determination to secure the views of local people and organisations. We in the Save Guy's campaign were not satisfied that its recommendations went far enough, but even the health commission—which had been given a job to do—had to be persuaded, at the many local meetings that it organised, by overwhelming evidence of the backing for the hospital. It was also persuaded by submissions that it received: I believe that only 23 out of many thousands supported the proposals to run down the hospital.

Let me stress—as other hon. Members have—just what saving Guy's means. It means lifting the date for the closure of the accident and emergency unit, and commissioning and putting into use state-of-the-art facilities that hon. Members have already described in detail at Philip Harris house. That should be done now, not immediately prior to closure. It also means maintaining the capacity of a district general hospital, available to serve whatever needs the local population may have. The hospital must have the necessary support to back up its accident and emergency unit and intensive care services. That is what it will take to ensure the survival of a thriving hospital.

As others have made clear, no one is suggesting that the future of Guy's, or indeed any other hospital, should be set in stone. Of course the provision of services must reflect changes in the local community and medical advance; apprehension about the proposals is caused by the fact that they are based on belief rather than proven fact about the effectiveness of the alternatives. The work load of the accident and emergency unit has been greatly increased as a result of the closure of the A and E unit at Bart's: fairly minor injuries have already had to be referred to Guy's because they were not within the scope of the minor injuries unit at Bart's.

Recent work by the King's Fund suggests that there is no evidence that investment in primary care in south-east London has begun to yield any measurable improvement—any reduction in the number of single-handed practices, and access to a wider range of professionals beyond general practitioners. We want alternatives to be put in place, and their effectiveness clearly established, before the future of Guy's is put at risk. That is a simple demand, but if the Minister responds to it we shall have proof that he has listened to the many recommendations made, not just in south-east London, but by hon. Members throughout the country.

12.18 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Like other hon. Members, I shall be brief. I congratulate both my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who spoke very sensibly about a sensitive issue.

I admit to being un undying fan of Guy's hospital, not least because my wife—who was extremely ill five years ago with two episodes of cancer—was so well treated in what is undoubtedly—as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) has said—a world centre of excellence. It would be a great shame if Guy's hospital died by a process of attrition and blight. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that the decision to close the hospital's accident and emergency department would be premature. although there may ultimately have to be a concentration of AED services in south-east London.

I have been involved in health service management since 1974, first as a member of Greenwich and Bexley area health authority, then as chairman of Bexley health authority. During the time that I served them, I bemoaned salami slicing by South-East Thames regional health authority, to concentrate resources on the three big inner-city hospitals—King's, St. Thomas's and Guy's. I argued with successive Secretaries of State and Ministers of State for rationalisation, if services in the outer-London ring and beyond were to develop in a way that was fair and proper to its population. I am grateful to Ministers for listening and for voting a £45 million redevelopment of services on the Medway hospital site in Gillingham.

That hospital currently has associate university status with St. Thomas's because there are not enough patients at the latter hospital with day-to-day, secondary care illnesses for medical students to gain experience. At any one time on the Medway site, some 40 medical students are gaining clinical experience and training, drawing on a substantial population 35 miles from central London.

The decision in February 1994 to concentrate clinical facilities on the St. Thomas's site staggered me. Some facilities at Guy's are dreadful. Its out-patients department must be one of the worst, but to abandon the facilities in New Guy's house, the tower and Philip Harris house—which I have yet to see—would be a crying shame and would call into question the judgment used. Hunt's house, which is dreadful and should be knocked down, could provide a site for additional clinical facilities. I have always wondered how one could concentrate all clinical facilities from the two hospitals on a congested site across the river at St. Thomas's, with the problems associated with listed buildings—I believe that they are referred to as the Nightingale blocks—and finding suitable space to develop new facilities to replace those at Guy's.

I congratulate again my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst on initiating this debate. I hope that the cry from outer London and from out of London—access to Guy's from Kent is vastly superior to access to the Waterloo station area—will be heard. There should be a complete review of the decision to run down Guy's in favour of concentrating clinical services at St. Thomas's.

12.23 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I join in the thanks expressed by other hon. Members to the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) for instigating this debate. I fully support the comments by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) spoke not only of the needs of his constituents, but of the treatment received at Guy's by a member of his family. I have had good experiences of treatment at Guy's—my three children were born there. The out-patient department may be in lousy buildings, but one receives first-class treatment, in which one can have complete confidence. The same is true of Guy's accident and emergency department.

A storm of anger and fear was created by the Secretary of State's proposals to close Guy's. The Save Guy's campaign has done a great job, but no campaign can go anywhere unless it strikes a chord with the public. There

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is huge public concern locally, regionally and nationally. In my constituency, people have queued in the rain in shopping centres to sign the petition to save Guy's because many of them—like me and the hon. Member for Gillingham—are grateful for the treatment that they received at the hospital, and want it to remain in existence. Also, the public are fearful of what will happen if its services are no longer available. My constituents feel anger at the Government's action in threatening that important hospital and fear the consequences if the Government blunder on in the way they have.

There are three large teaching hospitals in south-east London—King's, St. Thomas's and Guy's. That may seem a lot, but still people have to queue for beds for non-emergency in-patient treatment. Patients are still told, "We had not planned to discharge you until tomorrow but do you mind going now? In fact, right away—someone downstairs is waiting for your bed." Patients get the feeling that they are being discharged before doctors and nurses think that they are ready to leave, just because there is pressure on the availability of beds.

There are also queues in accident and emergency departments. I have referred to the health service ombudsman numerous cases of people who were left on trolleys waiting to be seen. Despite that pressure on facilities, the Government are saying that they want to close one of those three hospitals.

Guy's provides much-needed local services to my constituents, a high proportion of whom are unemployed, or on low pay or live in poverty. First-class, high-quality in-patient services are a way of redressing deprivation in inner-city areas. Nothing should be taken away that would multiply the disadvantages and deprivation that are concentrated there.

My constituents and I also recognise that Guy's has never been just a local facility but a regional and national centre of excellence. The public vote with their feet. If one asks a mum or dad sitting by a child's bed in Guy's where they come from, they may say Canterbury or Maidstone, but they might come from Brighton—referred by their local hospital because it wants to see whether more progress can be made by sending its patient to Guy's. To tell the public that they cannot receive the excellent specialised services available at Guy's is dramatically and wrongly to put the cart before the horse.

My constituents also value Guy's because they do not have to travel far if something is badly wrong with them. At present, access to regional services and national specialties are on their doorstep. We value the fact that these local, regional and national services are offered by Guy's hospital.

Teaching and research are also important. My constituents know, when they go to Guy's, that they are at the leading edge of the science of medicine. Even though they may be unemployed people or single parents from council estates, they know that they are getting internationally recognised first-rate services, and they value that enormously. They do not want the Government to mess it up or take it away.

Why are the Government doing this? There is no consensus that it is being done to improve services—the Government have not made the case for that. The amount of money that may be saved is also highly dubious. In 1991 I attended the topping-out ceremony at Philip Harris house. The champagne corks were popping; people said that I was guilty of sour grapes and asked why I was always so gloomy and negative. This was just at the time when the idea of the internal market was being developed. I suggested that the building might look more like an office block when all was said and done. The harbingers of the problems to do with the internal market were already present, even as people were celebrating the topping out of Philip Harris house. It is a scandalous waste of resources—the very opposite of good planning—that the house, with its intensive care unit, should not be used.

Ronald McDonald house has pioneered opportunities for families of children who are acutely ill to stay near them while they undergo long treatment. Anyone who has been to McDonald's for a hamburger and put money into the collection for Ronald McDonald house will be scandalised if the nearby hospital disappears. That is an abdication of all good planning principles.

Charitable money was also raised for Philip Harris house, and charities have often pitched in to help to build the infrastructure that is needed.

The case has not been made, either, for saying that there are too many beds in south-east London. The information to that effect put out by the Government never chimed with people's experience. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich on the Health Select Committee; she tabled a great many parliamentary questions, the answers to which revealed that it was not sound to allege that there were too many beds in London. People's personal experience of the shortage of beds is truer than the Government's inaccurate figures.

One argument says that, when the GP services become truly wonderful, there will be less use of accident and emergency services. I know from personal experience of the A and E department at Guy's and at King's that many people, had they had a first-rate GP service, would not have gone to the A and E unit. When their children are ill in the middle of the night, they know that someone from a deputising service for the group practice will come and tell them that he does not know what is wrong—"You had better go to hospital." Knowing that that will happen anyway, people go straight to the hospital. It is therefore to put the cart before the horse to start talking about closing A and E departments.

Certainly, GP services are being improved—I pay tribute to that fact—but they still have a long way to go. If people lack the necessary primary care services, they still need somewhere to go. We cannot just leave them to it, saying that "this use is inappropriate".

My metaphor about putting the cart before the horse also applies to community care services. Granted, there has been an effort to improve them, but it is quite wrong to suggest that we can dramatically reduce the number of beds because everything has been sorted out in primary and community care. People know that the facts are rather different.

Everyone is in favour of the sensible organisation of specialist services. We all know about scientific economies of scale—getting people together doing the same thing and seeing as many patients as possible, so that they become experts. No one is asking for the equivalent of a proliferation of cottage hospitals. We want these specialist services, and we accept that they must be organised as rationally as possible. No one wants services to be duplicated—but that is not what we suggest. We are talking about closures and cuts in bed numbers and A and E services.

I pay tribute to the staff who, over the years, have treated me and my children and helped us through child births and various childhood ailments. I also pay tribute to the staff for their work with my constituents—it is immensely valued by the people of Peckham. The staff's morale is still high; despite all the to-ings and fro-ings of the Government, they continue to keep their services going and to keep pushing ahead. It is extraordinary, given what the Government have been doing, that they can still recruit people and push back the frontiers of medicine.

I ask the Minister to tell the Secretary of State not to let down my constituents or the people who work in Guy's. He must not let down the people of Southwark, or the people in the region who use the hospital, or the people all over the country who need Guy's specialties. The Secretary of State must recognise that it has been a chronic and gross error to suggest the closure of Guy's. The Secretary of State has got it wrong and must think again.

12.35 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I offer a warm vote of thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and his colleagues in the Save Guy's campaign. I am especially grateful to him for allowing me a few moments to speak this morning. These debates are hard won, and many people want to speak about Guy's hospital.

I speak as a parent of a boy patient who has been at the plastic surgery unit since 1991. I brought Amar to the United Kingdom as a guest visitor, and he had 45 per cent. third degree burns. We ran a public appeal to raise money for him and to get surgery offered free or at low cost. Hospitals around the world came forward—in Scandinavia, the USA, Germany and all over the United Kingdom. Why did we choose Guy's hospital? Only Guy's was able to give me costs and budgets. I learned then that it was the flagship of the Government's most crucial and necessary health reforms.

Sir Philip Harris, chairman, who later gave so much money for the house named after him, explained to me what the hospital could and could not do. Most important of all, the plastic surgery team, comprising Tony Rowsell, John Clark and David Gateby, came forward. With proper costings and budgets, and with some money given by the British public, I used their services.

I became very familiar with the Rothschild children's ward—the long, weary hours watching dying babies, their parents, and the pain of so many people. I watched the mothers smoking all night, waiting and sleeping there. I saw the borrowing of beds and watched the play leaders and the nurses with their tender loving care. There is a classroom at the end of the ward, and visiting hours are critical. In some strange way, all roads and railway lines seem to lead to Guy's hospital. I became very conscious of the gratitude that all who use Guy's services feel—gratitude so profound that it is almost inexpressible.

I and other colleagues have also been involved with another case at the hospital. I refer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie), chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for Romanian children; to my fellow trustee, the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell); to my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward), a committee member; and to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher).

Guy's has been treating a boy called Adrian Vlad, who is doubly incontinent and has suffered from that impossible condition since birth. Twenty operations in Romania had significantly worsened his condition. The stench that he brought with him was unbearable. Surgeons at Guy's gave him a 10-hour operation, which was followed up by the home care of Tony Rowsell and his wife. The boy's life has been transformed.

Guy's is a specialist hospital, one that happens to be located in south London, and twinned—through its geography, I suggest—with St. Thomas's, under a single trust. Therein lies its misfortune, because Guy's specialism, as I perceive it, has naturally grown up alongside the provision of a substantial local medical service, the volume and excellence of which seem to have dominated the necessary and present arguments on the proper place of costs and benefits of the provision of primary health care to the local community.

Of course the Government are right to do all within their powers, which in this instance are not just considerable but near total, to persuade the population, not just in south London but throughout the United Kingdom, to transfer to GP surgeries their significant overuse of A and E facilities for minor medical matters that are really of the preventive and GP-curable kind. Indeed, in Exeter recently, during a bank holiday, I saw that more than half the cases in A and E could have been given to the GP the following morning. Perhaps we are dealing with an accident of patient judgment in self-assessment. "Can it wait until tomorrow? Can I see my own doctor?" That seems to be commonplace. Or perhaps in the United Kingdom we take our professional medical practitioner services too much for granted.

Be that as it may, the A and E figures throughout London are rising fast, and Guy's is no exception. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his decision to extend A and E provision for Guy's for a few more years while proper, modern GP health clinics can be constructed. That clears the air to show the real uniqueness of Guy's, which must not be destroyed if we wish Britain to be a world-class force and a leader in medical work.

The reputations that I have found Guy's to enjoy internationally, in any walk of professional life, take many generations to earn. It has taken decades of high-quality training and work to have achieved that high position, and Guy's specialists are renowned everywhere. It was both my parental and international experience of Guy's excellence that made me turn to the Minister with my evidence. I thank him most warmly for listening. It is clear that he already possesses the sagacity of Minerva.

I now call on him to display the wisdom of Solomon and cut the trust of Guy's and St. Thomas's hospital in half. He is not faced with one baby, one mother and one umbilical chord, but surely with Siamese twins, who are pulling apart and perhaps would work best separately. I believe that they are in drastic need of surgery by the Minister's own legislative hand. I call on him to make Guy's hospital an independent trust and to let it assume the excellence of specialism worldwide that it alone can provide.

12.42 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate,

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

because the future of Guy's is inexorably part of the future of the hospital system for the whole of London, and that is of great concern to my constituents.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look closely at the new evidence that is available, especially on A and E provision across London, where there are problems, and also at the quite strong argument for maintaining a future for Philip Harris house. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) will excuse me if I take a slightly different perspective from his, although I pay warm tribute to him for his work as part of the Save Guy's campaign. I listened carefully to his speech this morning. I have read the literature that he sent me and congratulate him on winning the ballot for the debate today.

I have no negative feelings about Guy's and I accept that strong arguments were made by the campaign group. The quality of care at Guy's is excellent and it has a tremendous history, but I do not necessarily accept two of the important premises—at least made by some—of the argument: first, that somehow the future of Guy's can be judged in isolation, that it is of merit in itself and whatever happens will not affect other hospitals and other health care in London.

That is not correct. It will do so, because resources are necessarily, and always will be, limited, and the patterns of demand elsewhere will be affected by what is available at Guy's. There is a desperate need for resources to be focused into local areas in London, particularly in outer London, where they are deficient, and I would not want to see that in any way prejudiced by decisions being made on the future of hospitals in London. Resources have been retained in the centre of the capital, when there should be a reallocation to the outer boroughs.

Secondly, I do not accept that Guy's necessarily has the best access. Of course transport facilities there are excellent, but many of my constituents find it just as easy, if not easier, to get to St. Thomas's. The link between Beckenham Junction, the main station in the centre of my constituency, and Victoria is considerably better than the link between stations in my constituency and London Bridge. People can get as quickly, if not more quickly, to St. Thomas's, and with equal ease.

It is important that that is considered in the argument. My constituents want—it is their greatest concern—better local facilities. They want to see a greater emphasis on primary care, particularly fundholding GP practices. The £210 million that will be made available in the current three-year period to expand primary care is an absolute priority. I pay tribute to the GPs in my constituency who have been able greatly to expand their provision, particularly Dr. Kenneth Scott, who is a leader in this area and who happens to be retiring this Friday.

My constituents also want a greater emphasis on local, diagnostic, small injuries and consultancy facilities, which can be done at local hospitals. They want to see more investment in a district general hospital, and better A and E facilities in the borough of Bromley, which is where they live and where the greatest demand is. Of course there is a role for centres of excellence and a need for proper A and E provision in the centre of London, where some of my constituents work, but the emphasis must be on reallocating priorities to where the population is principally resident, and that is in outer London.

No action is no option. There has been, and still is, an over-concentration on hospital facilities in central London. It is time to get the balance right. It is time to have better provision in outer London, and to an extent that means at the expense of inner London. I accept that. Unfortunately, it is not possible to please everybody all the time and some difficult decisions have to be made.

The worst of all options is to delay further. We have grappled with the problem long enough. We have seen enough uncertainty. We have seen too many suggestions put up only to be pulled down. We now need to see final decisions so that we can get on with the, perhaps difficult, period of adjustment to the new reality, and with providing the best standard of health care for all the people of London.

12.47 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) and, as so often in the past, to disagree mildly with him, and to add to the advice that has been given to the Minister.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), not just on securing today's debate but on achieving the tremendous feat of uniting the House behind the case that he is making. I pay tribute to him, to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) for their work on the Save Guy's campaign. As well as visiting Guy's hospital, I have met the campaign team in the House of Commons. I find its case overwhelmingly persuasive. I pay tribute to everybody who is involved in the campaign.

The hon. Member for Chislehurst set his remarks, rightly, in the context of the Tomlinson report, and said, as did many other hon. Members, not least my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich and for Peckham (Ms Harman), that it is flawed. The more we examine these matters, the more flawed it seems to be.

Tomlinson was based on the assumption that London is over-bedded. The recent work of Professor Brian Jarman, and the points teased out by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich through parliamentary questions, show that that is not the case.

It is claimed that London gets 20 per cent. of NHS funding for only 15 per cent. of the population. That again is a flawed assumption. The figures take into account London allowances, teaching facilities and national responsibilities rather than those that pertain specifically just to London.

It is argued that somehow the capital can perform as though it were an average English district. It cannot do that. For a variety of reasons, London is a special case. It has a large transient population, high levels of social deprivation and poverty, large ethnic minority communities, a higher than average prevalence of mental illness and lower than average provision for personal social services. All those factors require special consideration in their own contexts.

The Tomlinson report stated that increased primary care would reduce the demand for hospital services. That assumption is flawed. It is perfectly possible that increasing the provision of primary care will stimulate the demand for secondary services. That will happen as the need for new treatments are discovered by the primary carer. Tomlinson also thought, perhaps based on flawed research, that patients from outer London do not use inner-London facilities. Recent research by the King's Fund shows that that is also a flawed assumption, and that about 30 per cent. of patients currently using inner-London hospital facilities come from outside inner London.

Tomlinson thought that the location of casualty services was not important. That again is a flawed assumption. Clinicians speak about the golden hour during which it is important to get a person who needs intensive care to the facilities. Therefore, geography is important. I am sure that the hon. Member for Beckenham would agree with that. Although Tomlinson and the Government did not hold that view when discussing the capital in general, they seem to have taken it when discussing St. Thomas's hospital and its proximity to Whitehall. The Government should not try to have it both ways, because that does not do the debate a service.

Philip Harris house is an integral part of Guy's hospital and it is a modern, state of the art, national health service facility. As the hon. Member for Chislehurst said, it cost more than £150 million. Some of that money came from charitable sources. My right hon. Friends the Members for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and I have visited the site. I agree with the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) that it is interesting to see the facilities. The fact that they are not to be used for the purpose for which they were intended is mind-boggling. It is astonishing that provision for intensive care is to be ripped out and the building used for some other purpose.

I understand that, when the Minister's predecessor visited the site, he looked at the tower block and sent surveyors from the Department of Health to see whether it could be sold for development into flats. That is not a responsible way to treat NHS facilities. Such development would be an act of clinical and financial vandalism. It is inconceivable that any independent review would or could possibly endorse such a decision, and Labour is calling for an independent review. Moreover, that review must not be pre-empted by irreversible decisions to close facilities.

We ask the Minister to pause and think again. He has satirised Labour's call for a review of a review but it is better to stop and think again than to proceed in the wrong direction. The Minister should think about what is happening in London and about the special case that has been made for Guy's hospital, because Guy's is a special case. It is not a question of setting it against St. Thomas's but if, because of its proximity to Whitehall, St. Thomas's is to be made a special case, that is a national issue and it should be funded as a national consideration and not placed as a burden on local health care.

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I should not like the House to be under the illusion that the only case for St. Thomas's is that it is near Whitehall. As my hon. Friend knows, about 500,000 signatures were collected some two years ago when there was a huge campaign about the importance of St. Thomas's, not just as a national hospital but as one serving the local community. I am sure that my hon. Friend did not mean that its proximity to Whitehall was the only reason for St. Thomas's being considered as a national hospital, because that is incorrect.

Mr. Brown: I was not trying to make the point that that was the only case for St. Thomas's. However, when she was announcing her decisions, the Secretary of State for Health paid particular attention to St. Thomas's location. Of course there is a strong case for St. Thomas's, but there is also a strong case for Guy's and that case, which I endorse, has been made in the debate. I do not intend to set the debate in the adversarial context of Guy's versus St. Thomas's.

As I have said, the case for Guy's is overwhelmingly persuasive, and it rests not just on the superb facilities, the renowned history of the hospital and the major development programme that the Minister seems prepared to abandon. Its compact layout makes it an ideal modern hospital, and the building stock is good. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) about damage to the morale of staff and patients if the clinical teams are broken up and transferred elsewhere. For all those powerful reasons, I urge the Minister to think again.

12.55 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): My response to the debate will certainly have a compact layout. I welcome the debate and I have listened to as many contributions as possible. They have been extremely useful. I place even more congratulations on the shoulders of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims). My hon. Friend shakes his head. No doubt that is because he has had so many congratulations that he finds them overwhelming. They were offered not just on his success in the ballot but on the sensible and constructive way in which he produced his arguments and presented his case. I extend that compliment to the hon. Members for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and for Dulwich (Ms Jowell).

The arguments are in the public domain. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey rightly said, at this point in the consultation process, the matter is being debated in the House. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he and other Members sought. Of course Ministers will listen carefully to all views, including those expressed in the debate, and not just to those expressed during the consultation process.

I visited both Guy's and St. Thomas's before consultation commenced. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) in her place. When I visited St. Thomas's, she was also there. I have taken every care to ensure that the fullest possible attention has been given to all the matters that have been raised in the debate. I shall continue to do that, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will look carefully at what has been said in the debate before making final decisions.

I have a number of points about the overall aim of our health policies in London. Basically, they are to improve the quality of patient services and the health of Londoners. In particular, they aim to improve family doctor and other community health services so that Londoners may enjoy the access, level of provision and standards of excellence that are common elsewhere.

They will enable hospitals to respond to the changing demands of an aging and shifting population and to the rising expectation and medical advances that we all know. They also aim to preserve and enhance London's international reputation, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) spoke, for treatment teaching and research by concentrating facilities

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

into high quality centres. I assure the hon. Member for Dulwich that we shall ensure that changes to hospitals are paced alongside improvements in primary care, so that patients will continue to receive the services they need.

I welcome the fact that the process of public consultation has been soundly endorsed in the debate by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. I welcome the contributions that he and his colleagues in the Save Guy's campaign made to the process. Ministers are concerned that all views will be taken into account before any final decision is made.

As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the proposals. It would not be proper or appropriate for me to comment today, but I want to emphasise that the proper amount of time is being taken to deal with all the issues before any firm conclusion is reached. The decisions made will be in the best interests of all concerned. Those decisions are hard, difficult, complex and far reaching. Many interests are involved, but decisions must be made and they will not be fudged or shirked.

I welcome the debate as a further opportunity at a vital time to hear and to take note of the views of hon. Members and of all the people whom they represent. Those views will be laid before my right hon. Friend when she finally considers the proposals for change. I know that she will consider—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

West Coast Main Line

1 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): The west coast main line is Britain's busiest railway. It serves a population of 16 million, in 16 counties or regions. More than 2,000 trains a day pass over its tracks. It is therefore of immense social and economic importance, yet it has been grossly neglected in the past 15 years.

It was originally built in the 1830s and 1840s, and it was the first inter-city railway in the world. In the first half of the century, some parts of the line were widened to four tracks, and the line was electrified between 1955 and 1975, but we are now in 1995, and virtually nothing has changed in the past 20 years.

The rolling stock is not of a modern standard. For some years, we who travel on the west coast main line have thought enviously of the east coast main line. We especially think about that when we listen to the all too frequent announcements about the breakdown of the locomotive pulling the train in front of ours, and about the fact that overhead lines are down in the Rugby area. That gives us quite a few opportunities to think enviously of the east coast line.

Our hopes were raised a year or so ago, but, with the exercise of their remarkable logic, the Government decided that the west coast main line should be put into competition with the equally necessary Networker trains for the south-east. For reasons that we can only guess at, the south-east was declared the winner.

In November 1994, the then new Secretary of State for Transport published a glossy brochure called "Building Tomorrow's Transport Network", which mentioned the west coast main line. It said:

> "The intention is to launch a competition in early 1995 for the design and build, and to let a contract in mid-1995, for work to start as soon as possible after that".

In the summary published on 22 March, we at last had some firm recommendations, but, in the past four months, the time scale for starting any work has slipped at least a year. Page 55 talks about

> "the award of contracts for the implementation of the modernisation of the west coast main line in 1996."

We are being offered some, but by no means all, of what is needed. The recommendation is for what is called a core investment programme. That programme is essentially for an advanced train control and signalling system, combined with track renewal to maintain, or possibly to improve, its condition, and some enhancement of power supply, giving improved capacity, safety and reliability. It is therefore to be welcomed, but it is not sufficient. Further changes should be made. They have been identified, but they are to be regarded as optional add-ons, which may or may not happen.

The feasibility study includes the recommended core investment programme and a range of other things, which are displayed, as it were, in a shop window, to be picked up or not by franchisees. One is new advanced rolling stock—trains—which is crucial for passengers.

Another is the capacity to piggy-back freight containers—to take standard size road trailers and lift them on to modified wagons on the railway. That provides the opportunity for a truly integrated freight transport system, giving the advantages of the road when its use is essential, but allowing full use of the railway for the larger part of journeys, with the massive environmental gains and great benefit to road users that that brings.

The published feasibility study gives little weight to the economic impact of full-scale modernisation of the west coast main line. It devotes little more than a page to it. In contrast, local authorities such as my own in Lancashire are well seized of the line's economic importance both directly, in transport terms, and in terms of jobs generated in undertaking the work.

One of the major worries of all of us who want a thoroughly upgraded service involves the question, "Where will the money come from?" The Government appear to have washed their hands of real responsibility in the matter. Railtrack says that it can find the £1 billion needed for the core investment programme between 1996 and 2004. That is a long time scale. I appreciate the technical and logistical constraints, but will the Minister assure me that financial constraints will not be allowed to lengthen the work further, and that that is the shortest time scale that is technically possible? Is it already influenced by cash constraints?

One of the Government's initial papers on privatising the rail network, called "New Opportunities for the Railways", stated in paragraph 43 that the Government are

> "ready to provide direct support for investment in the railway, for schemes which, although not earning an adequate financial return, provide a satisfactory cost-benefit return when wider benefits are taken into account."

The channel tunnel main line project will benefit from capitalised payments of £1 billion in recognition of the benefits arising from its handling of Kent commuter traffic, so clearly the Government are putting some flesh on their promise in "New Opportunities for the Railways". That was a belated, but welcome, recognition on the Government's part that the public sector should contribute to the provision of either new or upgraded railways. Will the Minister, in the same spirit, please explain how he proposes to ensure that an appropriate contribution is made to the west coast main line?

Railtrack is implicitly treated as though it were already privatised. Further fragmentation will take place when the franchises come into being. The Government are effectively washing their hands of their financial responsibility. Talking of finance prompts me to hope that increased fares will not be extracted from passengers who are now paying high fares for what is often a substandard service.

In any case, however, complex arrangements must be made to give Railtrack extra resources via the franchisees, assuming that more revenue is generated not from higher charges but from increased usage. In the feasibility study, Railtrack points out that those resources must, somehow, be conveyed from the franchisees, who will be the immediate beneficiaries, to Railtrack, which will bear a great deal of the cost. The Government are fragmenting the railway system, and the fragments will have to find complicated ways to recombine, which serves merely to illustrate the fact that the railway service should be unified. We have all heard the comments made in the past few days by Sir Bob Reid, who can claim some expertise in these matters.

One of the problems is that the Government are not giving sufficient weight to the economic importance of the west coast main line or to the beneficial environmental impact of attracting more passengers and freight on to the railways. When those factors are taken into account and given due weight, it becomes clear that there needs to be public sector involvement. It is all very well to involve private sector finance—we are not in any way opposed to that—but if we depend on it entirely, we shall run into trouble and experience further delays.

Some of the leases on the current rolling stock do not finish until the year 2002. There is no guarantee that the new franchisees will be willing to accept the financial burden necessary to provide us with advanced trains. What is the Government's answer to these problems? So far, I have detected only a pretty deafening silence, which is not satisfactory. I hope that the Minister will answer my specific questions.

Are the Government committed to a piggy-back service to facilitate upgraded freight transport? If they are not, the Minister will have to explain to the nation why the Government are so careless of the environmental damage done to the planet as a whole, and to the roads in particular, by the excessive carriage of freight on the roads, especially when it could very conveniently be carried by rail if the west coast main line were improved.

What is the Minister going to do about injecting public sector finance into the railways as an acknowledgement of the important economic and environmental impact of a proper upgrading? What will he do to prevent the fragments from causing complete financial and technical chaos on the west coast main line? There are 16 million people in 16 regions along the line, which passes through many marginal seats, something that it is perhaps worth mentioning at this stage in the parliamentary cycle. What has the Minister to say to reassure all of us?

1.12 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I endorse the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) about this important project. I wish to register the Labour party's concern about the fact that the Government are dragging their feet on a vital investment project for the next century.

Let us set the west coast main line in context. No one should doubt that it is an essential part of the national rail network, but it is also critical for regional development. It is an arterial spine of the railway system, and it must be renewed and refurbished. The next century is only five years away, but the refurbishment has not yet been started.

The line is also a vital link to Europe. In Committee earlier today, some of us were discussing the interoperability of trains in Europe. It is hoped that improvement of the west coast main line will not only improve services in Britain but provide a vital link to London through the tunnel and into Europe.

The line is also important as a symbol of what needs to be done in this country. We need to invest, to make the economy a priority and to ensure that passenger services are as good as they can be. For those reasons, the Minister must show some urgency in replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston.

I fear that the west coast main line project faces real problems, two of which are the lack of a real and effective timetable and the lack of effective funding. Much has been said about the private sector—we want to encourage private finance in all sectors of the economy—but, to coin a phrase, "Where's the beef?" How long do we have to

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

wait before we see the colour of the money? How long before we have a timetable showing the start of this vital project?

In addition to those considerations, privatisation is creating uncertainty. It has been a shambles. Uncertainty has made the private sector sceptical and suspicious of a Government who have apparently taken leave of their senses and who appear to lack commitment and enthusiasm for such an important project. The dumping of privatisation would allow the nation to return to the key issues of investment, jobs and passenger services instead of focusing on the nonsense indulged in day after day.

As my hon. Friend asked, where is the cash to come from? Will the scheme mean a dramatic rise in fares for those who use the refurbished parts of the route under the jurisdiction of Railtrack? Have the technical problems been solved?

We want to spend £1 billion on a much-needed refurbishment project, but we also want to franchise the west coast main line at the same time, and Railtrack is dividing the zone covering the line into two. I can hardly think of words to describe that, apart from "crazy" or "mad". The net effect will be to delay the project even longer, to the disadvantage of the various constituencies that my hon. Friend mentioned. That cannot continue.

The nation needs to consider urgently the future of the rail network. Let the Minister say that he is pursuing the matter vigorously. I have little faith that Railtrack will deliver on this project. The chairman is far too involved in privatisation and flotation of Railtrack itself. How on earth can his mind be properly focused on the issues facing people using the west coast main line when there are so many distractions?

Railtrack has to exhibit the expertise and enthusiasm to get the project under way, but today we look to the Minister to reassure us that he shares our sense of urgency, and that he will tell Railtrack that now is the time to move the project on so that we can reap the benefits. Then, instead of regarding privatisation as the main issue, we can make investment in the future of Britain and the future of the west coast main line our priority.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I thank the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) for providing the House with an opportunity to discuss the west coast main line modernisation project, and congratulate her on her timing.

Last week, we saw what I regard as some exciting developments for the scheme, and I am glad to have an opportunity to review them before the whole House, as I did with the all-party group last week. The hon. Lady gave us the history of the line and, at one point, I thought that we might have had the same speech writer as our words were identical. In any event, I shall not repeat them.

The hon. Lady emphasised the importance of the route, which runs from London to Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow, with a further connection to Edinburgh, and the fact that it crosses 16 regions with some 16 million inhabitants. Its annual traffic is around 3 billion miles of passenger journeys, and 5.5 billion tonnes km of freight. Unfortunately, I have to use kilometres when dealing with statistics, contrary to my preferences.

The electrification of the line was completed 20 years ago, which is one reason that an upgrade is now timely, and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), the former Secretary of State for Transport, announced in December 1993 that the modernisation of the west coast main line would be a flagship project for the private finance initiative.

In March last year, after keen competition, Railtrack let the contract for the first phase of the project. The key tasks set for that stage of the scheme were to assess the technical options for the modernisation of the line and to make recommendations on the appropriate funding and contracting strategy for the main modernisation project.

The successful consortium was the West Coast Main Line development company, a diverse group of private sector companies. The feasibility study was completed on time.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): When the Minister originally announced the scheme, he said that it was to be funded by £600 million of private sector money. Will he tell us why that figure has become £1 billion, and whether it will be a mixture of private and public money?

Mr. Watts: Clearly, as the examination of the feasibility has progressed, the estimated costings have been more clearly defined and we have moved to a different cost base. There is scope for a mixture of public and private funding. The hon. Gentleman knows that we have secured the inclusion of this important project in the Christophersen group of projects of Community significance, which may be one of the sources of available funding.

As I was saying, the feasibility study was completed on time just before Christmas and delivered to the Government. The development company recommended a comprehensive modernisation of the infrastructure of the whole line, involving major work over a number of years on track, power supply and structures. The work which the consortium has carried out on the line's essential assets is important and thorough. However, the most inspirational element of its report, as well as that which will be the most complex and time-consuming to deliver, is the proposed new signalling and control system.

Railtrack and the consortium carried out a very careful assessment of existing signalling technologies, and reached the conclusion that none of them represented the way forward for the west coast main line. Instead, the consortium recommended the development of a new generation of transmission-based cab signalling and the construction of a single, integrated control centre.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): Will the Minister confirm that this cab control system, which he spoke about at the meeting of the all-party west coast main line group, to which he referred, has not been proven to work for passenger traffic? It has only been proven to work in north America, where trains are separated by anything up to three or four hours, and it has never been contemplated for use on a line so busy as the west coast main line.

Mr. Watts: I do not claim any great technical expertise, but my advice is that the equipment required is already in existence. What will be new is configuring it into a system to meet the needs of the west coast main line.

It is not entirely new territory. I am told that it is very similar to the control system used in the channel tunnel, for example, and it is also very much in line with the proposed technical standards for the European train control system, which is also being developed. While I would not pretend that the system is not breaking some new frontiers, I do not believe that it is beyond the ability of our industry to develop a suitable system, and it is not so ground-breaking that there are any serious doubts that it can be delivered.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is it not also important to recognise not only that the line has to be exclusively equipped for the new Intercity routes on the west coast main line, but that signalling will be made difficult because, on certain stretches, it will still have to be able to cope with local services?

Mr. Watts: In considering how it would be implemented, Railtrack is planning a period when there will be dual signalling techniques on the line, so that services crossing the line, which would not necessarily have the new technology, will continue to be able to operate safely. Clearly it is important that, during a major upgrade on a line which carries 2,000 trains, provisions must be made for the line to continue to operate. We cannot just close it down while work is carried out.

Indeed, one of the benefits of new technology signalling is that it is not a matter of ripping up cables and trackside signals and replacing them. The existing cables and signals can stay in place and continue operating while the cab-based system is implemented. The two will not interfere with each other.

I was very pleased last week to be able to announce that the Government have given their approval to Railtrack moving ahead as quickly as possible to award a contract to develop the system. The contract will be structured to transfer to the private sector real responsibilities associated with the delivery and performance of the technology and the financial risk associated with those responsibilities. I expect Railtrack to let that contract later this year.

With regard to timing, I would say to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that I certainly do not wish to see any dragging of feet, and nor do the Government. We look upon it as a very important project, for all the reasons that he and the hon. Member for Preston have mentioned. There is no incentive for Railtrack to go slow either, because it looks on the project as an important commercial opportunity, and it is very much in its own commercial interests to be able to offer a better service to its customers who operate passenger and freight trains on the line. There is every incentive for all the parties involved to make progress as rapidly as possible.

The key importance of the new technology is that it substantially reduces maintenance costs. From the savings which arise from ceasing to maintain an outdated technology, much of the funding for the core investment programme will be released.

As well as the core programme, the study produced by the development company also assessed a range of possible service enhancements. For passenger services, they include the possibility of higher speeds on the line, leading to substantial reductions in journey times. For freight services, the report assessed a range of enhancements, including the increased clearances which would be needed to allow piggy-back traffic. Those enhancements will be offered by Railtrack to its customers and prospective customers on a commercial basis. I am due to have a further meeting with Lord Berkeley of the piggy-back consortium in the next few weeks, so that he may update me on the development of its ideas.

On the passenger side, though, the director of passenger rail franchising will have a pivotal role in the discussions and negotiations between Railtrack and the train operating companies. The franchising director has kept very closely in touch with the progress of the study, and I know that, over recent months, he and his staff at Opraf have been consulting widely with both rolling stock manufacturers and potential franchisees.

The hon. Member for Preston asked what the funding mechanism will be. The means by which money feeds into the railway for passenger services is of course through the franchising director's budget and the agreements that he enters into with train operators. In turn, those funds feed through to Railtrack through access charges.

The mode will be that Railtrack will have the responsibility of raising money to fund capital investment. Its remuneration, as for all its activities, will be through the track access charges paid by train operators.

Mrs. Wise: Since the rail regulator some time ago announced that Railtrack access charges should be 8 per cent. lower this year than last year, and that they should fall by 2 per cent. in real terms in each of the subsequent years, how can we be sure that such a squeeze on access charges will not interfere with the funding arrangements that the Minister is now outlining, and make it impossible to get the money through to Railtrack?

Mr. Watts: In reaching his judgments on the appropriate level of access charges, the regulator will also have considered his responsibility to oversee Railtrack's investment programme to ensure that it continues to have the funds needed to invest in improvements, maintain the network and produce an adequate return. He has reached the conclusion that Railtrack has considerable scope for efficiency savings, and that some of those should be passed through to train operators rather than being merely for the benefit of the shareholders of Railtrack when it enters the private sector.

There is a mechanism in place for funding to flow through and provide support for the investment proposals. I think that the hon. Lady will understand that the project is different from the channel tunnel rail link, not because of the region that it serves but because that rail link is a totally private sector project with an initial capital contribution from the Government, partly in the form—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Climate Change

1.30 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am pleased to have the opportunity to open a debate on this subject. As the first conference of the parties to the Rio climate change convention begins its deliberations in Berlin, it has become clear that accelerating global warming, resulting from human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases, is a reality.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—IPCC—is convinced that its earlier predictions were accurate, and that, unless action is taken, mean global temperature will rise by about 3 deg by the year 2100. That calculation is based on the conservative assumption that fossil fuel burning will increase by 1 per cent. per annum over the next 50 years.

That will probably lead to a rise in sea level of about 45 cm, causing the inundation of large areas of land, including some entire island countries, with unpredictable effects on the weather and the spread of diseases, with possibly disastrous effects on agriculture and thus on the fate of entire populations, and with a catastrophic loss of species and of biodiversity.

Everyone knows that there have recently been attempts to rubbish the global warming theory, some emanating from powerful industrial vested interests. Bert Bolin, the IPCC chairman, acknowledges that there has been

"an increasing polarisation of public debate",

but insists that that

"is not a reflection of a similar change among experts".

It is important to emphasise that the IPCC's most recent report had 25 main authors from 11 countries, and drew on a draft text from 120 authors, whose work was reviewed by more than 230 other people from 31 countries. The global warming theory is no mere nine days' wonder.

There is another kind of sceptic too. The commentator Frances Cairncross, writing in yesterday's edition of *The Independent*, acknowledged that global warming might be happening but suggested that the costs of action to arrest it might be greater than the benefits, so, because of the uncertainty, it would be better to delay action until the countries of the world were richer and had the resources to ameliorate its effects.

Frances Cairncross quoted the American economist William Cline, who argues:

"the benefits of taking action do not overtake the costs until about 2150".

Mr. Cline is obviously into cost-benefit analysis, which is, to put it mildly, a highly suspect process that ascribes monetary values to just about everything, including human lives, in order to determine what action should or should not be taken in particular circumstances.

The IPCC itself has economists, some funded by United Kingdom public moneys, working on cost-benefit analysis in relation to global warming. In my view the work that they are doing should be profoundly questioned. Typically, they base their valuation of anything on its potential for economic production. By that methodology the Maldives, home to 177,000 people, are worth far less than, say, the City of London, and an extensive area of Bangladeshi agricultural land is worth less than a single American automobile factory.

Thus, typically, it is argued that the loss to American GDP caused by reducing automobile production to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would be greater than the gain in saving Bangladeshi farmland on which thousands of people depend for subsistence. In cost-benefit analysis, such conclusions are seriously defended.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Is it taken into account in cost-benefit analysis that, if most of Bangladesh is flooded, its population will presumably try to escape into neighbouring countries, and that under the pressure of that huge immigration, warfare and disruption are likely in those other countries?

Mr. Dafis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that out, and I doubt whether cost-benefit analysis has the sophistication to conduct such complex modelling that goes well beyond the immediate costs. However, I am trying to show that it is a basically flawed way of approaching the subject in the first place.

Worse than what I have already said is the fact that IPCC economists are now ascribing differential monetary values to human lives—a Bangladeshi life, for example, being worth about one tenth of an American or a western European life—and then feeding calculations based on such valuations into the consideration of whether particular actions are cost effective.

Such obscene ideas—I could even call them blasphemous—could become a serious impediment to progress in climate change negotiations. The Indian Minister responsible for the environment and forests wrote a letter to a number of Governments, including that of the United Kingdom. I know that the Minister has seen a copy of it, and I shall quote from it:

"In my judgment, the present impasse became inevitable when the alleged cost-effectiveness of Joint Implementation was sought to be based on absurd and discriminatory Global Cost/Benefit Analysis procedures propounded by economists in the work of IPCC Working Group III . . . We unequivocally reject the theory that the monetary value of people's lives around the world is different because the value imputed should be proportional to the disparate income levels of the potential victims concerned."

The Minister then moved on to a linked although distinct issue:

"To compound the problem, global damage assessments are being expressed in US dollar equivalent. Thus the monetary significance of damages to developing countries is substantially under-represented. Damage to human beings, whether in developed or in developing countries, must be treated as equal, and cannot be translated in terms of currency exchange rate systems."

Finally, and powerfully and importantly, the Minister says:

"Faced with this we feel that this level of misdirection must be purged from the negotiation process. The distributional issue of unequal-rights-by-income versus equal-rights-per capita must be resolved to enable fruitful discussions about possible protocols to the Convention, proportionality of commitments and financial mechanisms."

I certainly agree with that, and I am fairly confident that you do too, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am also confident that the Minister will give us an assurance that the United Kingdom delegation shares the view of the Indian Government and will act accordingly.

The economists may have a role. Let them help to identify the policies necessary to achieve environmental sustainability, and elaborate on the changed patterns of economic activity that sustainability would imply. Let them offer costings for such measures. That is the scope of their expertise, and they should stick to it.

Assuming that such nonsense is purged from the negotiation process, what should the outcome of the conference be for it to be regarded as a success? There must be targets for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions beyond the year 2000. The stabilisation of emissions is nowhere near sufficient to stabilise the concentrations in the atmosphere, and it is the concentrations that count.

The IPCC is standing by its 1990 claim that to stabilise carbon dioxide concentrations at current levels, humanity must cut global carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent. globally, and that has implications for greater reductions in the northern developed countries. Bearing that in mind, the Association of Small Island States—which comprises 36 countries—has demanded that a protocol be added to the convention which sets a target for carbon dioxide reductions of 20 per cent. for industrialised countries by the year 2005. As a first step, that seems to be modest indeed. That, of course, is the Toronto target, which has already been incorporated into the national plans of eight industrialised countries. AOSIS has the backing of the G77 group in Berlin.

Meanwhile, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries—driven by a short-term interpretation of its material self-interest—is opposing any reduction in the targets at all. That is why the rules and procedures adopted are so important. A requirement for unanimity in setting targets would be fatal, and I understand that the Government will be strongly supporting majority voting. I hope that the Minister can confirm that. The negotiations and the drafting process are continuing on the assumption that majority voting will apply, but a decision on the consensus process and the majority voting issue will have to be made at next Monday's plenary session.

At the very least, the minimum that should emerge from the conference is a negotiating process to establish emission reductions which will be finally agreed at the next conference. The poorer countries are naturally demanding that the industrial countries, which are responsible for the problem—America is responsible for 24 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions on its own—take the lead.

There is suspicion among the G77 countries concerning the idea of joint implementation, whereby twinned industrialised and underdeveloped countries would agree a joint reduction target and plan. It is important that that should not become a licence for high emissions from industrialised countries which inhibit the development of the underdeveloped countries and hold back their hopes of achieving an improvement in their quality of life. Will the UK delegation push for the IPCC secretariat to be required to verify and monitor any joint implementation schemes?

The Government have made much of their claimed success that they will be saving between 17 million and 25 million tonnes of carbon dioxide by the year 2000, which is going beyond the 10 million tonnes target necessary for stabilising emissions at 1990 levels. Their success is largely fortuitous, and it masks the Government's failure to achieve most of the specific objectives which they set themselves in 1992, including a significant expansion of combined heat and power. They have used excuses not to develop a truly sustainable energy policy and to establish more ambitious targets.

Achieving sustainability will involve far-reaching adjustments in the way we run our community and our economy. We and the rest of the industrial world—the Annex 1 countries—must now commit ourselves to a menu of undertakings under familiar and well-established headings. Those must include energy planning and efficiency in all sectors—including the expansion of CHP for fossil fuel burning—a major commitment to renewables which includes research and development in pioneering techniques like photovoltaics, and the transfer of technologies to third-world countries which would otherwise go in for a large consumption of fossil fuels and an increase in carbon dioxide emissions. We must enable those countries to achieve development without undergoing environmental degradation.

We need taxation and investment policies which encourage the conservation of energy while encouraging employment and emphasising social equity. We must employ the carrot, as well as the stick. We also need a continuing educational drive and public information initiative to influence consumer choice and life style. Those areas are crucial for our economic policy and for our environmental and social welfare generally, and not climate change alone. In fact, those matters would be relevant and valid even if we disproved the climate change theory. However, climate change is now the urgent issue and the catalyst for action.

It is essential that, following the Berlin conference, the Secretary of State makes an oral statement to the House or opens a full debate, as climate change is an issue of sufficient gravity to merit at least that parliamentary time. I look forward to getting the Minister's assurance on that matter.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Today's debate gives us an opportunity to come down to earth between the cataclysmic alarmists and the "it will never happen to me" brigade. I am certainly not getting my horse and cart out yet.

If we could come down to some practicalities, today is a good opportunity to debate the matter, particularly since this week sees the opening of the first meeting of the conference of parties to the climate change convention in Berlin.

The conference will be attended by Ministers from more than 120 countries, and that emphasises how seriously it is being taken. They will be considering the adequacy of existing commitments under the convention and the case for setting in hand arrangements to negotiate a protocol on further-reaching measures beyond the year 2000.

At the conference, the Secretary of State will be calling on all developed countries to agree to a tougher new long-term target to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by a figure between 5 and 10 per cent. below the 1990 levels by 2010. The UK has always been at the forefront of the international work under the convention. We are now leading the way in calling for a realistic and achievable reduction target for the year 2010.

Three main issues were raised by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). First, he mentioned the questioning of the science of climate change, and the seriousness of the threat. There are variations in attitude from those who say "it will never happen to me" through to those who would take us back to the horse and cart, and would have us living in tents. Secondly, he talked about the international response under the climate change convention and the leading international role that is being played by the UK. Thirdly,

[Sir Paul Beresford]

he raised the UK's contribution to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and the possible options for further reductions.

The climate change convention was signed by the Prime Minister at the 1992 Rio Earth summit. The convention recognises the need for a co-ordinated global response to tackle the threat of dangerous human interference with the climate system of our planet.

What was the scientific basis for international action? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change carried out a major assessment of climate change in 1990, with supplementary reports published in 1992 and 1994. The main scientific findings were that emissions from human activities were increasing the concentrations of greenhouse gases, and that global average temperatures were predicted to rise by between 0.2 deg C and 0.3 deg C per decade—not 3 deg C as the hon. Gentleman stated.

Mr. Dafis: I said that the prediction was that temperatures would rise by 3 deg C by the end of the next century, which is equivalent to 0.3 deg C per decade.

Sir Paul Beresford: I stand corrected.

Associated with the shift in temperature, there may be an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events, sea level rises and droughts in some areas, and yesterday's weather did not help. Uncertainties may remain, including the pattern of regional variations. So we do not have a full answer yet, and we are still looking for one.

The climate modelling work being carried out at the Hadley centre is now so developed that the models are able to account with some accuracy for climate variability over the past 100 years. This increases our confidence in the ability of the models to predict future climate change as our ability to use them increases.

We continue to be committed to guiding policy by sound science, which is the only practical and sensible way to proceed. The UK's national research effort places it at the forefront of climate change research. We currently spend about £100 million on data acquisition and archiving, which includes earth observation from satellites. We shall continue to provide a strong input to the international scientific work through the IPCC, with the UK chairing and providing technical and administrative support for the working group on climatological processes. UK scientists are also well represented in the EU research programme on climate change, currently amounting to some £20 million but increasing threefold in the next programme starting in 1995. I should have thought that the size of those sums shows the importance which this country attaches to the issue.

There are still some uncertainties about the timing, magnitude and pattern of climate change, but in view of the scale of the potential threat, it must be right to take precautionary action, particularly where low-cost action now may prevent the need for more expensive and more dramatic action later.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Minister mentioned the uncertainties ahead. Did he see "The Money Programme" at the weekend, in which insurance companies expressed concern because their job is to predict future events and the degree to which they will be called on to pay out sums? As this country makes a more-than-average contribution to the world insurance market, is it not particularly important to Britain's insurance market that we take effective action as soon as possible to combat global warming?

Sir Paul Beresford: I did not see the programme, although I am aware of the problem. Incidentally, the reason why I did not see the programme was because of other events rather than the fact that it was on the BBC. Hon. Members will agree that any action must be based on sound science. Action being taken now is moving towards changes and improvements, and it is being undertaken using sensible and economic means. It would be wrong to take draconian measures without understanding and knowing, on the sound base of science, which way we are going.

The first meeting of the conference of parties to the climate change convention is currently taking place in Berlin. This is reviewing the adequacy of existing commitments under the convention, and we hope that it will set in hand negotiations on possible future commitments.

The Government are convinced that developed countries have a lead responsibility in demonstrating what can be done, which is why the Secretary of State has already announced that he will call for all developed countries to agree to a figure for the reduction of total greenhouse gas emissions in the range between 5 and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. We believe that such a target would be a credible and achievable next step for those countries to take within the framework of the convention. It will encourage continued international commitment, including from the developing countries. It also marks a significant move to a longer-term target, signalling the need for further reductions, and it reflects the importance of looking at the total effects of all greenhouse gas emissions taken together.

Some people have argued that we should go further. The Association of Small Island States has tabled a proposal for a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2005. Having recently come from the south Pacific, I understand the fears and concerns, because a small shift in ocean level would have a dramatic effect on some of those islands. Nevertheless, we must take account of what can realistically be achieved at this stage, and of the scale of costs that can be justified as appropriate under a precautionary approach. We must also remember that we need to make further progress in the science.

It makes neither environmental nor economic sense for countries to set targets unilaterally. The UK is responsible for only some 3 per cent. of global greenhouse gas emissions. It is essential, therefore, that we maintain international commitment under the convention to ensure the development of an effective global response to the threat, which means that we must focus on proposals that are realistic and achievable under the convention, within the European Union and in our UK programme of measures.

In January 1994, we became the first country to present a national programme under the convention and the first in the world to publish a detailed programme demonstrating how we would fulfil our commitment of aiming to return emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000. The centrepiece of our programme is the set of measures to limit emissions of carbon dioxide—the main greenhouse gas. That was drawn up following extensive consultation, and it contains a balanced package of fiscal, educational and regulatory measures covering all sectors of the economy. It provides the framework that encourages the development of voluntary partnerships with Government, and we believe that it is important for everyone to play their part. It also encourages individuals and organisations to exploit the considerable scope for taking action that is cost-effective in its own right—so-called "no regrets" measures, which bring with them economic, social and other environmental benefits as well as reducing emissions.

To ensure that we met our commitment, the measures were designed to achieve savings equivalent to 10 million tonnes of carbon against projected emissions in 2000. The latest energy projections, published by the Department of Trade and Industry on 8 March this year, show that not only can we be confident of meeting our commitment, but that we now expect to exceed it, with emissions of carbon dioxide some 6 to 13 million tonnes of carbon below 1990 levels by 2000.

That considerable achievement reflects both the impact of the measures in our programme and our successful policy of privatisation and continuing deregulation of the electricity and gas industries. There has been a significant reduction in the carbon intensity of fuels used for electricity generation, through the increased investment in combined cycle gas turbines, the development of combined heat and power schemes, and the improved performance of nuclear generation. Interestingly, the community, local authorities and housing associations can play an important role in combined heat and power schemes. I was intrigued recently to open just such a scheme, in which engines originally designed for warfare tanks were turned into combined heat and power generators. The savings were considerable and the improvements in heat and power on the estates were dramatic.

Since its launch, our programme has, of course, evolved and some circumstances have changed. To give just a few examples, recent developments include the fact that road fuel duties rose last year by 8.6 per cent. in real terms—substantially more than our annual 5 per cent. commitment. Given the area from which he originates, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North will realise that that presents some difficulties for people who live in rural areas, and we must reflect on that.

Another development is that new campaigns run by my Department's energy efficiency office include the making of a corporate commitment campaign, which has over 1,800 signatories and is succeeding in changing board-level attitudes to energy efficiency. That campaign is aimed at persuading firms, in particular, to recognise the financial and economic efforts of taking an energy-efficient approach in addition to the benefits of cutting greenhouse gases. Furthermore, new building regulations are about to come into effect which should improve energy efficiency standards in new homes and buildings by an estimated 25 to 30 per cent. We aim to stimulate the development of new and renewable energy technologies.

The third renewables non-fossil fuel obligation order was announced last December. That is expected to double the capacity of electricity from renewable sources already operational under the first two rounds. It keeps the Government on course as we work towards 1,500 MW of new and renewable generating capacity in the UK by the year 2000.

Looking ahead beyond the year 2000, we shall implement further policies and measures to deliver any long-term savings agreed under the convention. In doing so, we shall take account of the costs of the various options, including the social and environmental values, which cannot readily be quantified.

The prompt and successful implementation of our existing commitments, and the continuing beneficial effects of the measures that we have already taken, will put the UK in an excellent position to meet the challenge that the Secretary of State will put to developed countries in Berlin.

As I said at the beginning, there is a balance.

Educational Property (Twickenham)

2 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I first thank you for the opportunity to raise the question of educational land at Craneford way, Twickenham? The House of Commons has always served as a forum for Members to raise the concerns of constituents. That is what I shall do today.

I shall ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education to direct his attention to the real anxieties of the residents of Heatham park, Twickenham and not merely to deal with the legal position at Craneford way, where the Education Assets Board has divided into two the ownership of an important piece of land. It has done so apparently without regard to the impact on the surroundings of people living nearby in Craneford way, Court way, Heathfield north, Heathfield south, Egerton road, Chudleigh road, Whitton road and beyond.

The people living in the district already suffer from aircraft noise from Heathrow, from heavy traffic along the A316 trunk road—the Great Chertsey road, which is the M3 motorway feeder—from the rugby football crowds on big match days at the Rugby Football Union grounds, Twickenham, only a few hundred yards away, from Richmond upon Thames borough council's big rubbish depot in Craneford way and from its rubbish lorries clanking noisily over road humps in Egerton road from 5 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the morning.

The Liberal-controlled Richmond upon Thames borough council even published a draft unitary development plan that showed a railway line from Kingston to Heathrow along a viaduct over the open green fields in question. That was shown in a letter from the chief executive of the council to me dated 9 November 1993. Not surprisingly, that plan attracted fierce opposition, and I urged that it should be dropped, which it was.

The environment of the residents is affected by Richmond upon Thames college at Egerton road as well. That is a highly successful tertiary college with about 3,000 students aged from 16 to 19, although some are older, many of them from my constituency. Others are from that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) or from outside the London borough of Richmond upon Thames, but well over 1,000 of the students are from Twickenham. The college is generally highly valued, except perhaps by some of its immediate neighbours. I have had to come to terms with some conflict of interest between the college and the residents.

The problem has arisen because, under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the college ceased to be funded by the local education authority, the Richmond upon Thames borough council, and began instead to be funded by the Further Education Funding Council for England.

I voted for the 1992 Act, as its aim was to ensure that colleges were free to respond to the demand from students and employers for an increase in the amount of high-quality further education. Now that such colleges have left local authority control, more money is being spent on further education, and the participation rate for 16 to 19-year-olds in education has increased significantly, even in those two years.

It all corresponds to the growth in higher education since 1979, as now about one young person in three in the age group from 18 upwards is receiving further or higher education and 15 years ago it was only about one in eight. The work of the tertiary colleges acts as a feeder for that, and in doing so gives opportunities to a larger number of young people who are in that age group.

However, as a result of that change in financial responsibility for the college, there was a dispute about the ownership of two fields to the south of Craneford way, to the south of the college and to the east of the council's rubbish depot. The council and the college both claimed both fields. It fell to the Education Assets Board to decide.

The Education Assets Board ruled that one field should go to the council—the field on the west side, which is marked blue on the map that is used to describe the situation—and that the field on the east side, marked red, should go to the college. Those two fields are divided by a public footpath. The field assigned to the college is more flat and is therefore said to be more suitable as a sports ground, but the residents would have preferred the allocation to be the other way around, because more of them live close to the flatter field and are fearful about the future effect on their environment.

The Education Assets Board, in reaching its decision, took representations from the borough council and from the college, which were deemed under the 1992 Act to be parties to the dispute in that each claimed ownership; but the board did not take evidence from residents, who feel that their environment and their facilities are threatened by the possible loss of access to either or both fields or by parking of large numbers of cars on big rugby union match days or even by building on the site in the future.

Typical of the feeling of such residents is a letter that I received only yesterday, and which I conveyed to my hon. Friend the Minister well on into the evening. It is from a resident of Heathfield south. He wrote on 25 March 1995, but the letter must have come in the second class post and did not arrive until 28 March:

> "I was incensed at the meeting held at the Tertiary College last night"—

I held a public meeting on Thursday night—

> "when during your introduction I discovered that the EAB had classified the local residents as a 'third party'. As a result . . . I now understand that"

the board

> "ignored correspondence sent to them in the good faith that it would consider alongside other relevant submissions.
>
> Surely, the EAB have a duty to consider or at the very least pass on the correspondence to the relevant parties in the dispute or otherwise to clearly"—

I repeat, "clearly"—

> "explain the reasons why they are unable to accept our submissions. I was simply informed by their 'legal adviser' that I 'may wish to ask the Borough Council to consider' my comments which quite frankly is totally misleading. It was not until your meeting that I discovered that they would only consider submissions that came directly from the parties in dispute."

It would of course have been open to the Richmond upon Thames borough council, as a party to the dispute, to represent all such views to the Education Assets Board, and in that way it would have been possible for the board to take environment into account. In this case, it appears that the board did not do so, because my constituent was not given anything like a full explanation of his rights by the Education Assets Board, which seems to have replied to him in a rather cavalier and vague fashion.

Furthermore, the council could have appealed to the Secretary of State for Education against the Education Assets Board's decision. However, the council decided not to do so. Instead of appealing, the council asked the Secretary of State to put two conditions on the transfer of the land. Those conditions were to keep the field unfenced and to make sure that the field was used only for the purpose of education and recreation and not for any commercial purposes. Those two conditions proposed by the council are set out in a letter to me from the chief executive of the council dated 21 March, which I have passed to my hon. Friend.

It is of course Government policy to promote more sports and games in schools—both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education have said so repeatedly. "Schools" usually means for children up to 16 years. Of course, if there were an increase in sports and games among children up to 16, then, in time, that would result in more demand for sports and games provision for the over-16s.

The college is adamant that it needs the playing fields for sport as it aims to be a sports centre for west London. It says that its current use of the sports field is inhibited by dog messes as people are allowed to walk their dogs in the field which is unfenced. The college says that, as a result, it has to hire sports fields elsewhere which are less convenient as they are further away, and which cost the college money.

I should like to stress to my hon. Friend that there is a credibility gap between the college and the residents. The residents say that the fields have hardly ever—I repeat, hardly ever—been used for sport. It has been reported to me that, when an inspector from the Education Assets Board came all the way from its offices in Leeds to look at the lie of the land, two sports matches were put on for his benefit, a car from the college met him at Twickenham station and he was then given lunch at the college. I must ask my hon. Friend to check the evidence as to the real extent of the historic usage of the field for sport, as otherwise it is entirely possible that the adjudication of the Education Assets Board was based on false premises, which already one of my constituents has asked me to refer to the ombudsman.

The college has lodged an appeal with the Secretary of State against the council's conditions. I understand that that is what my hon. Friend who is advising the Secretary of State has to deal with. I took up those conditions with my hon. Friend, but I was told that there was some doubt in his Department about the legality of imposing such conditions. Therefore, last Thursday—the day of the public meeting which I called—I sought legal advice from Mr. Stephen Mason, QC, Counsel to the Speaker. Mr. Mason examined the matter fully and he has since written to me as follows:

> "The question is whether, on the appeal, she"—

the Secretary of State—

> "could impose (for the first time) conditions or restrictions on the future use of the part of the land transferred to the College.
>
> My advice is that she has no power to do so; and nor has the Board."

He means the Education Assets Board. He continued:

> "The Board can only do what these statutory provisions require or authorise it to do. And the Secretary of State can only in law do what the Board can do. The statutory functions are restricted to the transfer of existing property, rights and liabilities. The only scope for the creation of new rights and liabilities is for the protection of one party to the transfer as against the other. It is clear that the interests of any other persons are not in law a proper part of any determination of the Board or of the Secretary of State. So if she created the new restrictions on use for the protection of the local residents her decision would make her liable to proceedings for judicial review of it."

That means that, if the Secretary of State does, or tries to do, what the Richmond upon Thames borough council has asked in imposing the two conditions, the college could take the Secretary of State to court and would win the case. If that is so, the Richmond upon Thames borough council has asked the Secretary of State to make a decision which she has no power to do. Yet the council seems to have relied upon the Secretary of State to impose the conditions while it decided not to appeal against the decision of the Education Assets Board to divide the land.

I understand that the solicitor employed by Richmond borough council was told by a lady in the office of the Education Assets Board that the Secretary of State might make conditions, which turns out not to be the case. Surely it is such an important matter for the residents that the Richmond upon Thames borough council should have taken a second legal opinion before deciding what or what not to do.

I come to the question of what can be done for the residents now, and I shall make eight quick points. First, the borough council should get a second legal opinion on what Mr. Mason wrote. But, to be realistic, that is not a very promising course as, even if the legal opinions differed, the Secretary of State would still have to face the risk of the college taking her to court if she attempted to decide in favour of the council's conditions. Secondly, in the light of Mr. Mason's advice, is it legal for the Secretary of State to extend the final date of the appeal against the adjudication by the EAB to give the council another chance to appeal?

Thirdly, towards the end of his letter, Mr. Mason wrote:

> "If, however, the land in question were subject to restrictions on its use (as by restrictive covenants, trust restrictions or perhaps planning permission) then the land would be transferred subject to these existing restrictions".

Could my hon. Friend look at those restrictions? Fourthly—perhaps this is the most promising idea—Mr. Mason wrote:

> "I cannot say whether planning permission would be required for a change of use from recreation to use as a car park. But I think it probable that it would be if the changed use was a regular feature".

Will my hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State for the Environment about that in order to give guidance to my constituents, a large number of whom are very concerned about the car park?

Fifthly, does the metropolitan open land designation under the unitary development plan help to protect people there from developments? Sixthly, can the college be encouraged to renounce any question of using the land as a car park? Perhaps the funding council could be asked to speak to the college about that. Seventh, there is concern about the safety of women and children using the footpath between the fields to which I referred. Can that issue be looked at?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the needs of children are paramount. If the eastern field became a playing field for older youths aged 16 to 19 years, it would be even more important to keep the western field available for young children. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in encouraging Richmond council to make certain that that takes place.

2.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) on securing this debate on a matter, which I know is of great concern to him and to his constituents.

I begin by making it clear that there are two aspects to the dispute about the Craneford way playing fields, and that only one of them comes within the remit of the Education Assets Board—about which I shall say more later—and of the Secretary of State for Education. That is the question of the entitlement under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 of the London borough of Richmond and Richmond upon Thames college to the playing fields. The aspect of the dispute in which neither the assets board nor the Secretary of State for Education has a role concerns the use made of the playing fields by their owners and by local residents under planning legislation. I think that it is that question which is of most direct concern to my hon. Friend.

I fully understand that concern, but I am afraid that it is not a matter for the Education Assets Board or for my Department. It is primarily a matter for the London borough of Richmond as the local planning authority. However, I shall ask a ministerial colleague at the Department of the Environment to write to my hon. Friend about the planning and land use questions that he has raised with me. I may be able to say something about them later in my remarks.

My Department's role is confined to the appeal lodged by the borough against the determination of the assets board regarding the college's entitlement to part of the Craneford way playing fields. I hope that my hon. Friend will not be too disappointed when I tell him that I am not in a position to anticipate how the Secretary of State might decide this particular case, nor can I respond in this debate to all the points that he has raised. We shall study the record and may write to him subsequently. I shall also arrange for officials to draw them to the attention of the borough and the college respectively, as the two protagonists in the dispute.

The dispute has arisen as a consequence of college independence. In 1993, we transferred responsibility for providing further education from local education authorities such as the London borough of Richmond, to colleges, including tertiary colleges, such as Richmond upon Thames college.

This transfer of responsibility was accompanied by the transfer to colleges of the property, including land, held or used by authorities for the purposes of those colleges. The transfer was necessary because it would clearly not have been sensible to give colleges responsibility for providing further education without giving them the means to do so.

I emphasise that the transfer of property has not privatised it. The property remains in public ownership; it has simply transferred from one public body to another. I also emphasise that the Craneford way playing fields could have been excluded from transfer and remained in the hands of the local authority. That could have been achieved by agreement between the college and the authority, provided that the Secretary of State approved their agreement.

Alternatively, in the absence of such an agreement, the college or authority could have applied to the Secretary of State for the transfer to be waived. In either case, the college could have been permitted to use the land, subject to appropriate conditions, but neither of those options was pursued and they are no longer available. However, it is still open to the two parties to reach an agreement on the disposition of the land and any conditions attaching thereto.

How has ownership of property transferred to colleges? Where possible, it is done by agreement between authorities and colleges under the oversight of the Education Assets Board, which is responsible for securing agreement with authorities about what properties should transfer to colleges. Where agreement has been reached in principle directly between an authority and a college, the board's role has been limited to ensuring that that agreement is documented, but where a college and authority have been unable to reach agreement, the assets board has a duty to try to negotiate one. Where such an agreement appears to the board to be unlikely, or has not been reached after negotiation, the board has power to give a direction which determines the dispute. That is what the board has had to do in the case of Craneford way playing fields.

The Education Assets Board is a small non-departmental public body based in Leeds. It has 10 part-time members, including a chairman, appointed by the Secretary of State for their experience of property management, education, local government and finance. It also has some 19 full-time equivalent officials, including a chief executive who is a further member of the board.

The assets board has so far completed the transfer of property from local authorities to 165 further education corporations, and is currently considering a further 319 such transfers, but the board's remit is not confined to further education. It also oversees the transfer of property from local authorities to other types of educational institution which have left their control, such as grant-maintained schools.

The board reaches its decisions by negotiation wherever possible, but it is clearly sometimes necessary to bring stalled negotiations about a property transfer to a conclusion. As I have mentioned, the board has power to break such a log-jam by giving a direction.

The board's power of direction is not unbounded. There are two constraints. First, the board must act reasonably, and its decisions must be capable of withstanding scrutiny.

Mr. Jessel: On the question of withstanding scrutiny, will my hon. Friend deal with my question about what remedy exists if the Education Assets Board has reached a decision based on wrong assumptions about the facts because the official from the board visiting the site was bamboozled as to the extent to which the field had been used for sport in the past?

Mr. Boswell: I shall respond to my hon. Friend rather briefly on that matter. As he knows, an appeal has been lodged and it is for the parties to that appeal to bring forward evidence for the Secretary of State's consideration in determining the appeal. I may wish to write to him further on the matter.

Secondly, the law prescribes how disputed property is to be treated by a local authority and college in any agreement between them. The assets board is bound by the same rules if an authority and college cannot agree and it has to determine the dispute. In particular, where an authority held or used property partly for the purposes of college and partly for other purposes, and where the nature of the property permits its division, the law requires the property to be divided between the college and authority as appropriate.

The board's approach to disputes is therefore primarily forensic. Was the property held or used wholly for the college or for other purposes of the authority? If it was held partly for each, can the property be divided between them? If so, what would be the appropriate division? If it cannot be divided, how should it be treated?

A determination by the board is not necessarily the last word in the dispute. Either the college or the authority may appeal against it to the Secretary of State, as the borough has done in the case of Craneford way, but the Secretary of State's consideration of an appeal is also constrained. She acts in a quasi-judicial role, so she is bound by the rules of natural justice. Like the assets board, she is bound by the law regarding transfers and may not deviate from it.

As a result, the Secretary of State may not consider the views of third parties, such as local residents, in an appeal against a determination by the assets board. It is open to them to put their views to their local authority, or the college. However, it must remain for the authority or college to decide how to present its appeal.

I realise that some in Twickenham question whether the London borough of Richmond has adequately represented their views. I am afraid that the issue is not a matter for the Secretary of State. Residents must take up their concerns with the borough.

I know that it is a sore point with local residents that they have not so far had sight of the submissions to the assets board made by the borough and the college in support of their case regarding the playing fields, despite having asked both the board and my Department to release the submissions.

Their request for disclosure of legal argument submitted to the Secretary of State by a third party has raised novel and difficult questions of openness versus confidentiality. We have not decided whether the information sought should be properly released. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall reach a decision and write to him as soon as possible.

It is a sore point that the law does not give third parties a statutory right to object to property transfers or the terms on which they take place.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Boswell: If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I must complete my speech for the record. I shall write to him about any further points.

That rule is the case both when the assets board is considering a dispute and when the Secretary of State is considering an appeal against a determination by the board.

There are two reasons for that exclusion. First, the disputes concern the entitlement of the local authority or of the college to ownership of the property in question. Third parties who have no claim to property do not normally have the right to involve themselves in a dispute about its ownership.

Secondly, the position of third parties in relation to property transferred by a college is not altered by the transfer. Any legally enforceable rights which they had in relation to the property before it transferred remain intact after the transfer and any covenants or other restrictions to which the property was subject while it was owned by the authority continue to bind the college.

Moreover, although residents do not have a statutory right of objection to the transfer of property to a college, they continue to have such a right regarding the college's development of that property, because colleges are bound by the same planning laws and regulations as other local bodies.

I hope that my hon. Friend and his constituents will be reassured to know that Richmond college would need planning permission to develop the playing fields, and that local residents could formally object if the college lodged a planning application. They have a further safeguard: the playing fields, both east and west, are classed as metropolitan open land. That is the urban equivalent of green-belt land, and there is a general presumption against inappropriate development within such land.

This is bound to have been a somewhat disappointing reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham. I am sorry about that, but the debate has been valuable in casting light on a rather obscure but important area of public administration and in recording the views of my hon. Friend and his constituents on a matter that is clearly of considerable importance to them. He has represented their views with characteristic force and diligence.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Intergovernmental Conference

1. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's objectives for the European Union intergovernmental conference in 1996. [14939]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The IGC will be an opportunity to consolidate the achievements of the European Union and prepare for enlargement to the east. Our goal will be a Union that is flexible, efficient and responsive to popular concerns.

Mr. Raynsford: The Foreign Secretary referred to consolidating achievements. Given the deteriorating position in Bosnia and the European Union's recorded failure in recent years to respond effectively to the tragedy in the former Yugoslavia, the right hon. Gentleman must be aware that the lack of co-ordinated action on security and foreign affairs is one of Europe's current weaknesses. Does he see the IGC as an opportunity to remedy that?

Mr. Hurd: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. We have worked closely with our European partners on Bosnia, and continue to do so. For example, 10 days ago we put together our policy again—particularly with the French and Germans, who are fellow members of the contact group. But, however well we co-ordinate our policy within the European Union—as we do—that in itself does not guarantee our ability to provide a solution to the conflict in Bosnia. The fighting in Bosnia will end when those who are doing the fighting decide to end it.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the greatest achievements, which should certainly be consolidated, is the creation of the single market? Will he consider giving more publicity to the results of that—for example, the greater success of our exporters in the Spanish market? Instead of an adverse trade balance of nearly £250 million, we now have a strong positive balance of well over £1 billion, which means many more jobs in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is right, and he speaks from his own experience. The achievement of the single market is one of the big benefits of our membership of the European Union. It is not yet complete, however, and during the next few years we shall seek to ensure that it is complete and that the remaining protectionist devices that impede it are swept away.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: On earlier occasions, the Foreign Secretary has confirmed that in drawing up the objectives for the IGC the Government will want to take account of the views of all political parties. What mechanisms does he propose for consultation—not least with former members of his party who have had access to the Home Secretary for such a discussion, have been denied access to the Chancellor for such a discussion and, presumably, are very keen to know whether the Foreign Secretary would be willing to meet them—and, if he did meet them, to what extent he would empathise with them?

Mr. Hurd: My door is always open to the hon. Gentleman—and, of course, to my hon. Friends.

Mr. Dykes: In the last few words of his original answer, my right hon. Friend referred to consulting the public properly. Does he agree that, if Ministers boldly tell the public more about the reasons for European Union combined policies, they will be both reassured and more enthusiastic? Will he assure us that from now on Ministers will do that?

Mr. Hurd: We do that all the time; whether the media report it is a different matter.

Ms Quin: Did the Foreign Secretary hear the chairman of ICL tell the "Britain in the World" conference this morning that negative and backward-looking views of Europe were undermining Britain's ability to be taken seriously in the world? How does he respond to the fact that the Conservative party is now the only party of its kind in the European Union that is not a full member of the European People's party? How will that isolation help the Tories to win allies in the 1996 process?

Mr. Hurd: I cannot think that the nature of the connections between our MEPs and the European People's party is central to the issue.

I heard Sir Peter's remarks. He made a very good speech to the conference that is in progress today, and I think that his basic point was entirely right. It is in the interests not only of the British business community but of Britain as a whole for the House and the country, in the coming months, to work out coherently an approach to the future of the European Union with which we, as a nation, can be at ease. The Government are now doing that. It is perfectly possible to arrive at conclusions and proposals that will have wide support in the House and in the country.

Anglo-Israeli Relations

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between Britain and Israel. [14940]

Mr. Hurd: They are excellent. During the recent visit to Israel of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he and Mr. Rabin agreed that our relations have never been better.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the success of the visit by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, on which he was accompanied by 30 leading industrialists? Does my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary agree that one issue affecting peace in the middle east is the continuing incarceration of Ron Arad, who has been a prisoner of the Iranians and their allies for eight and a half years?

Mr. Hurd: I agree. My right hon. Friend met Mrs. Arad, and we will continue to do anything that we sensibly can to improve the prospects of solving the problem and bringing about Mr. Arad's release. My hon. Friend is right to say that opportunities for British trade with Israel have greatly improved. British exports with Israel rose from £586 million in 1992 to £1,032 million last year, which is good progress.

Mr. Foulkes: Surely the Secretary of State is aware that the per capita income of the Palestine National Authority has decreased nearly 50 per cent. since it was established, and that only just over a quarter of the promised aid has been pledged. As the success of the middle east peace process depends on relieving people of economic distress, does not the Foreign Secretary need to match his fine words with a clear commitment to genuine assistance to the peace process?

Mr. Hurd: Oh, dear. The hon. Gentleman should study the facts before he poses such questions. Britain is among the countries giving the quickest and most substantial help to the Palestinians with what they are trying to do in Jericho and Gaza. While my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in Israel, he handed over 25 Land-Rovers and 25 minibuses for the civilian branch of the police, and we have helped to pay police salaries. My right hon. Friend also announced £7 million of new bilateral aid for the Palestinians, in addition to the assistance that we give through Europe. Britain is among the foremost in encouraging the Palestinians to make a success of their new responsibilities.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in conducting Britain's relations with Israel he is responsible to Parliament? Does he accept that all parts of the House admire his courtesy in operating an open-door policy for all hon. Members? Does he agree that where such courtesies are not extended, that is not only insulting to individual hon. Members but denies them the opportunity properly to represent their constituents?

Mr. Hurd: Over many years, I do not think that my hon. Friend has knocked on my door in vain.

Middle East Peace Process

3. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current progress of the middle east peace process. [14941]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The recent visit by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan emphasised Britain's firm support for the peace process, which continues to offer the best hope for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Janner: I much appreciated the recent visit by the Prime Minister and others to Israel. During the visit to Jordan, did Ministers form the impression that Jordan is playing an active, useful and important part in the peace process? If so, has not the time come to remit its debt to this country, which in any event is not likely to be paid?

Mr. Hogg: Jordan is playing an important and continuing part in the peace process. The hon. and learned Gentleman may know that £46 million of Overseas Development Administration debt was transferred into grant, so it has effectively been written off. He may know also that there has been substantial rescheduling of debt, supported by the British Government and the Paris Club. The United Kingdom has contributed more than $200 million so far. That rescheduling will expire in 1997, when we will be willing to consider prospects for further rescheduling.

Mr. Rathbone: Despite what has been said in answer to previous questions, does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate the horror at Israel's treatment of imprisoned Lebanese in southern Lebanon and of fishermen along the Lebanese coast, which has put thousands of Lebanese out of work, and at the continued aggression towards the country of Lebanon by Israeli forces and those under their control?

Mr. Hogg: We stand by resolution 425, which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, for the moment at least, the blockade of the fishing boats to which he referred has been discontinued, following strenuous representations by the British Government and others.

The imprisonment to which my hon. Friend refers is a serious matter. The British Government, and I in particular, have made representations to the Israeli Government on a number of occasions. We welcome the fact that quite recently the Israeli Government released at least 32 prisoners from Khiam prison. We also welcome the fact that it was recently decided to allow some families into the prison for visits. I agree with the broad thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks: there is much more to be done. People held without due process of trial should be released.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Does the Minister accept that one of the most pleasing aspects of the Prime Minister's recent visit to Gaza was the press conference that he gave at the conclusion of his meeting with President Arafat? Given the Prime Minister's statement that the European Union is to take a leading role in the elections, which are due to take place once the second stage of the interim agreement has been agreed, can the Minister tell the House that Britain intends to be the main co-ordinator of the elections? Will he further assure the House that the many Members of this House who have had experience of helping with other elections in emerging democracies—I think particularly of the useful help they gave in the South African elections—will be called upon to help the Palestinians in the forthcoming elections?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. I hope that there will be elections before the end of the year. They have taken much longer to be held than we would have wished; it is unlikely that negotiations on the electoral process will be concluded before 1 July, which suggests, I am afraid, that the elections will be held in October and not sooner.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, it was at the Prime Minister's initiative that the proposal for EU electoral observers was made. We are now in contact with our European partners to see how that can best be carried forward. I very much hope that British observers will be among those sent to watch the elections.

Cyprus

4. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Cyprus to discuss its accession to the EU. [14943]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): We are in regular contact with the Cypriot authorities to discuss Cyprus's application for EU membership. President Clerides visited London in January and met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Waterson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the British Government are lending their full support to the efforts of the French presidency to broker a settlement in Cyprus that will involve an agreement to a customs union with Turkey—and also, importantly, the accession of Cyprus to the EU?

Mr. Davis: I certainly agree with the view implicit in my hon. Friend's comments—that the conclusion of the Foreign Affairs Council on Cyprus's accession and the Turkish customs union is a good deal for all parties concerned. Accordingly, the United Kingdom gave strong support to the French presidency in its successful efforts to reach an agreement. That agreement was rightly welcomed by the Cypriot Government, and President Clerides singled out the United Kingdom among all the EU nations for its helpful contribution.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Minister will be aware that Cyprus is one of a long list of countries that aspire to membership of the European Union. The list, as he knows, includes many countries from central and eastern Europe which will, perhaps, be watching these exchanges carefully. Where does Cyprus come in the pecking order?

Mr. Davis: I do not think that there is a pecking order. The Corfu Council made it clear that Cyprus and Malta would be in the next stage of enlargement, as will the central European countries to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Minister agree that the Government could do much more to help in Cyprus, where there are still problems with missing people and refugees who, sadly and tragically, cannot return to their own homes? Is it not about time that the British Government did much more, in ministerial visits and using their good offices, especially as they are a guarantor power, to bring about a just and lasting solution?

Mr. Davis: The best answer to the hon. Lady would be President Clerides's comment, when he said what a good job we did in supporting the accession discussions. We have taken a strong interest in the missing persons problem. Our view is that if both communities helped more, we would make further progress.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that we owe it to the memory of the British service men who died on active service in Cyprus to ensure that Cyprus becomes the kind of community that we want within the European Union before it is given any kind of nod and wink that it is likely to join?

Mr. Davis: We look forward to Cyprus joining the Community. We would hope to see it join as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, and to join in such a way that all the people of Cyprus gain from accession.

Arms Sales, Burma

5. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has held on the embargo on sales of arms to Burma; and if he will make a statement. [14944]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): Our policy towards Burma, including the European Union arms embargo, is kept under review in our regular contacts with European Union partners.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful to the Minister for his response and for his earlier responses to written questions. Is he not concerned, however, that other Government Departments are being less unequivocal than he is in supporting the arms embargo against Burma? The Department of Trade and Industry, for example, refers in written answers to information being "commercially confidential". Given today's revelations about the Chief Secretary's supposed role in the sale of arms to other countries, does the Minister think that it is time that we had a full and open inquiry about the role of all Government Departments in the sale of arms to such regimes?

Mr. Goodlad: Exports of arms and ammunition to all destinations are subject to strict controls according to agreed international criteria. No licences have been granted for the export of military equipment from the United Kingdom to Burma since the imposition of the European Union arms embargo in 1991.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my hon. Friend look beyond the question of the arms embargo to Myanmar to the rich potential that that market offers British business men? In particular, can his Department build on the excellent British week that was recently held in Rangoon, continue the admirable role in export promotion and encourage British business men to take advantage of a market that is of increasing attraction to regional neighbours, such as Japan, Singapore and Taiwan? British business men should be benefiting too.

Mr. Goodlad: Trade between this country and Burma, with which we have historic links, is at a low level at the moment. Our exports last year amounted to no more than £13 million. Our industrial and trading reputation remains high. There is no obstacle to British firms exploring business that is not covered by the arms embargo. They must be in a position to take advantage of opportunities and to meet competition from rivals, but, of course, the Government offer them no financial support.

Sanctions, Iraq

6. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he now expects sanctions on Iraq to be eased or lifted. [14945]

Mr. Hurd: The UN Security Council will modify sanctions against Iraq only when it is satisfied that Iraq has complied fully with all the relevant UN resolutions. The Iraqi Government know what needs to be done to comply: we look to them to do it.

Mr. Cohen: If the Government are so dead set against lifting sanctions on Iraq, why did the Department of Trade and Industry grant communication licences to a British trade delegation visiting Baghdad last month? Instead of starving the dictator, are we not simply starving the people of Iraq? While few would object to the arms ban remaining, why not ease, for example, the oil embargo, so that humanitarian assistance can get through to the people?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows that there are already Security Council resolutions that enable Iraq, under certain conditions, to sell oil and buy food and medicine for its people. We are actually strengthening that. We are putting forward plans with the American and Argentine delegations in the Security Council to make that easier, to offer more supplies and less stringent monitoring. If the Iraqi Government turn down this new initiative it will be perfectly clear that it is they and not the international community who are imposing suffering on their own people.

Mr. Fabricant: Does not the unconfirmed report of the assassination attempt on the eldest son of Saddam Hussein clearly show that there is growing pressure on the evil Ba'athist regime in Iraq? Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the very time when we should not let up on sanctions? I urge him not to listen to the wishy-washy policies of the Labour party.

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have to be concerned about the suffering of the Iraqi people. That is why we are taking this new initiative in the Security Council. It is up to the Iraqi Government to respond to that initiative rather than to impose, of their own wish, fresh suffering on their own people.

Mr. Dalyell: At his convenience, could the Foreign Secretary undertake to give some personal reflection to the report that has been sent to him by Ryad Al Farid outlining the deaths of 400,000 or more Iraqi children in the past five years? There is no question, is there, of Her Majesty's Government endorsing military action against Baghdad?

Mr. Hurd: It depends on what Baghdad does. The hon. Gentleman is correct if what he is saying is that there has been a great deal of hardship and suffering throughout Iraq—in the north, in the central area because of sanctions and in the south. In that respect the sanctions are self-imposed. Security Council resolutions 706 and 712 have for a long time enabled Iraq to sell its oil under certain conditions, and to pay part of the proceeds in compensation to its victims, using the rest to relieve the needs of its own people. I hope that people such as the hon. Gentleman, who throughout has shown sympathy, which I understand, for the people of Iraq, will also take every opportunity to urge the Iraqi authorities to accept measures that are for the benefit of their own people.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of the consequences for the lives of those living in northern Iraq of the current military intervention by Turkey? What pressure is he bringing to bear upon Turkey, a fellow member of NATO, to discontinue that military action as soon as possible?

Mr. Hurd: The Prime Minister spoke about that today at the "Britain in the World" conference. I have sent a message to the new Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Inonu, stressing our concern and hoping that Turkey will bring this military operation to an end and withdraw its troops at the earliest opportunity.

Rwanda

7. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Rwandan Government to discuss the current situation in Rwanda; and if he will make a statement. [14946]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Prime Minister of Rwanda on 22 February during a visit to Britain. The Prime Minister of Rwanda made plain his thanks to Britain for the assistance that we have given in response to the tragic events in Rwanda. My noble Friend Baroness Chalker announced on Friday further aid commitments to Rwanda of £8.8 million, which brings our total aid to Rwanda since 1 January to £18 million.

Mr. Callaghan: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that, because of the rising tension and crisis in the area, the donor countries should make a long-term commitment to prevent further attempts at genocide there?

Mr. Baldry: We would all agree with that. The Rwandan Government have declared their intention to encourage refugees to return home. That is the highest priority. Of course, that Government clearly need help with reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation policies. We are giving that help. We are providing further sums of money for immediate food aid and humanitarian needs, and looking to the future with financial support for human rights monitors, the war crimes tribunal and the reconstruction of the Rwandan judicial system. We shall continue to press the European Union and other multilateral organisations to respond as quickly and as effectively.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: When my hon. Friend discusses the position in Rwanda, will he take time to discuss the position in the neighbouring country of Burundi, which is much smaller, and where the increasing genocide is causing great hardship to the indigenous population? Will he inquire about what can be done?

Mr. Baldry: We are clearly keeping the position in Burundi under close watch. The position in Rwanda and in Burundi makes clear the need to develop in Africa and elsewhere preventive diplomacy systems to try to identify and avert humanitarian tragedies before they occur.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister will know that I have just returned from Rwanda. May I assure him that the top priority is to provide a justice system, as Rwanda has been left with no police, no courts and few judges? I urge him, therefore, to respond positively to Rwanda's request for British help in the training of a civil police force. Will he inject some urgency into the proceedings of the war crimes tribunal? Would it not be a disgrace for the international community if the anniversary of genocide in Rwanda were reached without a single ringleader being charged before the tribunal?

Mr. Baldry: I am sure that, following his visit to Rwanda, the hon. Gentleman wishes to acknowledge that Britain has responded promptly and generously to Rwanda's need for humanitarian assistance. Of course, this is more than a humanitarian problem. Rehabilitation and reconstruction are needed. We must work for a better future for Rwanda. That is why we are seeking to deal with specific problems, why the United Kingdom was the first bilateral contributor to the fund that was set up to finance human rights monitors, why it co-sponsored the Security Council resolution to establish an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda, why it has pledged £200,000 to fund UK personnel for the prosecutor's office and why it is helping the judiciary.

We have recently provided £100,000 in assistance to the Ministry of Justice, which is attempting to reconstruct the Rwandan judicial system. We are responding in every regard to the urgency of the need to build a better future for Rwanda.

European Union Institutions

8. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to facilitate greater access for United Kingdom parliamentarians to European Union institutions. [14947]

Mr. David Davis: A number of improvements have recently been put into effect, in particular by the House. In addition, Government Departments and the United Kingdom permanent representation in Brussels regularly advise and make arrangements for UK parliamentarians who wish to make contact with representatives of the European Union institutions.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister is well aware that a great deal of ignorance exists about Europe, especially among Conservative Back Benchers. Is it not about time that parliamentarians had proper access and positive leadership, with programmes to introduce Members of Parliament to a thorough knowledge of the matter? Is it not about time that the Government stood up for the European principle and said in a positive manner to Conservative Back Benchers and people outside that the country's future lies in Europe?

Mr. Davis: A competition in ignorance is one of the few competitions that the hon. Gentleman might win. in the past six months, contact between Parliament and European Union institutions has increased dramatically. For example, the number of Select Committees that visit European Union institutions has increased significantly.

More generally, the hon. Gentleman gave no credit to the Government for taking a lead. Largely at the UK's instigation, the European Union's workings have been made more accessible. Votes are routinely published, and the public have access to Council documents. There are open sittings of the Council, and the outcome of each Council is reported to Parliament. The hon. Gentleman attended to none of those matters.

Sir Roger Moate: Would not the very best way to improve relations between hon. Members and the European Parliament be to revert to the old system whereby the House selected members of the European Parliament from among its own Members? That could be facilitated by the benign new Jopling regime under which we all enjoy life so much. Is not that form of subsidiarity—whereby we choose the method of appointing members of the European Parliament—so attractive that it should be on the 1996 agenda?

Mr. Davis: It is open to my hon. Friend to write to the reflection group, of which I am a member, to make that recommendation. However, I do not think that it will have much chance of success.

President of the United States

9. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the state of relations with the President of the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [14948]

Mr. Hurd: Relations with the United States Administration remain close and friendly at all levels. The Prime Minister will visit Washington next week for talks with President Clinton and senior members of the Administration and Congress.

Mr. MacShane: Is it not a fact that, since the Prime Minister sent a couple of central office flunkies to try to sabotage President Clinton's election and behaved like a petulant child over the taking of telephone calls so that President Clinton will now visit Paris, Moscow, Brussels and Bonn but not London, we are incapable of having an adult relationship with our oldest partner and ally under this Government, and that the policy of unsplendid isolation can end only when others are responsible for this country's foreign affairs?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the election and wrong about the American President's travel plans. The idea that our relationship with America depends on the timing of telephone calls between busy people is absurd and childish.

Dr. Twinn: When engaging in discussions with the American Administration, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that we in Europe expect the United States to put pressure on Turkey to ensure that it does not exercise a veto over the peace settlement in Cyprus or, indeed, the widening of the European Union?

Mr. Hurd: We are a guarantor power, with Turkey and Greece, of the Cyprus settlement. We work closely with the Americans and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to urge forward a settlement in Cyprus. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has just answered questions about the relationship between that and the accession of Cyprus to the European Union.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Secretary of State agree, and share my concern about the fact, that the President of the United States perhaps pays too much attention to guidance on golf greens to support the so-called Irish Americans, forgetting that 60 per cent. of them are Scots-Irish? Is it not time that there was a campaign to inform the United States of its indebtedness, not only to the Scots-Irish, but to this nation as a whole?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows that the British Government, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in particular, have been extremely energetic in presenting the truths about Northern Ireland to the American people. He and his colleagues have recently been playing a vigorous part in that, which I welcome.

There have been differences over Ireland with the United States Administration. In our view, it is important that substantial progress should be made on the decommissioning of weapons, and that any funds raised by Sinn Fein should not and could not be used to fund terrorism. These are matters that the Prime Minister will discuss with President Clinton. The responsibility for handling them rests with the Government who are responsible to the House, and that is accepted by President Clinton.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who go on about doom and gloom in respect of this so-called special relationship fail to take full account of opinion in the United States, not least that in Congress and the Senate? I hope that, like me, my right hon. Friend was heartened to note the other day that Senator Dole issued a press release in which, while urging the President to visit the United Kingdom for the VE day celebrations, he said that not only was Britain America's closest ally but that America owed a great debt to us for our position in the second world war and that the ties between the two countries are very close and very deep?

Mr. Hurd: Indeed, that is true. We cannot rest, though, simply on comradeship during a war 50 years ago, however important that was. That is why the particular ties which we have with the United States in defence, intelligence and other matters, remain strong and greatly in our interest. Of course the whole Anglo-American relationship does not just depend on relationships between Governments. Everybody—parliamentarians, members of all professions in this country—plays a part in that.

United Kingdom Diplomats

10. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the role of United Kingdom diplomats abroad. [14949]

Mr. Hurd: Their role is to protect and promote British interests: our prosperity, our security and our citizens abroad. The different elements of the work of the foreign service—political, economic and commercial—are intertwined, particularly at the level of ambassadors. Commercial work is already our largest single activity overseas and that emphasis is increasing further.

Mr. Bayley: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that, in the last year for which figures are available, Britain earned £8.9 billion from incoming tourism, which was more than twice as much as we earned exporting cars, three times as much as we earned exporting iron and steel and more than we earned from exporting fuel, including all the North sea oil? How much time will be spent by the 100 new commercial attachés, which he mentioned this morning, if I heard him correctly, on the "Today" programme, promoting tourism into Britain?

Mr. Hurd: A lot. If the hon. Gentleman visits any of the embassies abroad he will see the emphasis which is put, as foreigners come into British embassies, on tourism and the opportunities for it. I am delighted that, during the lifetime and under the arrangements of this Government, the city of York has made progress in this matter.

Mr. David Howell: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the very widespread view that our posts abroad and our diplomats do an excellent job, often in extremely challenging and personally dangerous conditions, on which they deserve to be congratulated? Does he also agree that an area of particularly good value for money in Foreign Office spending is the work of the British Council, which helps to promote the conditions in which British exports and services are exported, and includes tourism, which is extremely valuable? Does he agree that that is very much in line with the comments made by the Prince of Wales in an excellent speech earlier today?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I entirely agree with what he says about the work of the British Council in promoting, for example, the excellence of education in this country. I am not in favour of grandeur or over-representation and over-staffing overseas. We have cut our representation in the United States by—I think—19 per cent. and in France by 10 per cent. I am emphatically not in favour of shoddy and second-rate representation of this country.

Mr. Madden: Will the Foreign Secretary take this opportunity to urge British diplomats in India to intensify their activities and to persuade the Government of India that there is no prospect of securing lasting peace in Kashmir by mounting doomed elections, but that the Government must now recognise that urgent negotiations are necessary to secure a political settlement?

Mr. Hurd: I have made it clear to the Government of India when I have been there the way forward which we think offers the best hope for Kashmir. They need to discuss the matter with the Government of Pakistan, as they agreed in the Simla agreement. They need, I believe, to start a successful political process in Kashmir. I do not think that the hon. Member is right to dismiss that out of hand. If—I agree that it is an "if"—it were possible to hold valid elections in Kashmir, it would be a big step forward. The third element in the equation is that those outside should refrain from encouraging violence in Kashmir.

Canada

11. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Canada. [14950]

Mr. Hurd: Our relations with Canada are excellent.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the deep sense of loyalty that the British people feel to their kith and kin in Canada, who have never failed to come to our rescue when this country has been threatened by brigands and that the British people are dismayed that we are not taking a firmer line in supporting Canada now that its people are being themselves threatened by the Spanish fishing fleet?

Will my right hon. Friend please make it quite clear that this Government will have nothing to do with sanctions against Canada in this dilemma? Will he also please confirm that the intemperate language being used by Miss Emma Bonino has nothing to do with anything that the British Government would wish to express in this matter?

Mr. Hurd: Perhaps my hon. Friend will telephone Canada house, which will confirm to her that twice in recent days the Canadians have been in touch with me to thank us for the stand that we are taking in the matter. I agree with her that we must avoid and discourage intemperate language by anyone. This is not some sort of adversarial contest in which we simply have to decide which side to whoop on. We are talking about part of the north Atlantic that everybody concerned has over-fished.

There is agreement on what the total catch of Greenland halibut should be, but there is disagreement about how that catch should be shared—that needs to be ironed out.

There is also disagreement about the enforcement necessary. We believe that a high degree of enforcement is necessary, but while the matter is being discussed, and, we hope, agreed, in our British view it is essential that there should be restraint—restraint by the Spaniards, in not fishing in the especially sensitive areas of the nose and tail of the grand banks, and restraint by the Canadians in not taking the law into their own hands and cutting nets, which, as we know from our experience with the Spaniards, is a dangerous thing to do.

Mr. Galloway: The Government's posture over the past few days has shown the value of Britain's use of our special relationship with Canada and with Spain to try to bring about a peace process in the north Atlantic between those two fishing nations. Why can we not use our equally close and equally special relationship with India and with Pakistan to do the same thing over Kashmir?

Mr. Hurd: Fortunately, I have already answered that question.

Latin America

12. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to help promote Britain's trade relations with Latin America. [14951]

Mr. David Davis: Jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry, and in association with the Confederation of British Industry, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is organising a three year Latin American trade campaign—Link Into Latin America—to promote trade and investment. My right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade, launched the campaign at the conference of our heads of mission in Latin America at the CBI Centrepoint on 17 January. Conferences, seminars, inward and outward trade missions, roadshows and lectures are being organised as part of the campaign. We have also strengthened our commercial representation in Latin America.

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he think that Latin America is an appropriate area for British investment? What is the extent of our investment in that continent, and can it be used as a basis for furthering even more strongly our trade relations with countries in Latin America?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend makes a very perceptive point. Our investment base in Latin America and the Caribbean, measured in 1992—the most recent year for which we have figures—amounted to about £13.4 billion. Also in that year—again, it is the most recent for which we have figures—we invested £1.4 billion in Latin America. That is larger than our investment in north America, and it represents a major source of leverage for us in delivering trade, especially exports, into Latin America.

We try to use that as part of our strategy in dealing with Latin American Governments and in securing good conditions, such as double taxation arrangements, for British traders there, and also in encouraging large British companies to help smaller and medium-sized companies to go into that continent. That has been successful, and there has been an increase of 21 per cent. in exports to Latin America over the past year. I still think that the strategy could be made even more successful, and that is what we seek to do.

Mr. Tony Banks: What is the state of our trade with Cuba at present, and what pressure are the Government putting on the United States Administration to end their absurd and illegal trade embargo on that island?

Mr. Davis: Our trade with Cuba is perfectly reasonable. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy visited Cuba last year. The visit was successful and he met President Castro, who gave him a great deal of time. As for the relationship between America and Cuba, that is a matter solely for those countries.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Bearing in mind that the economic power of Latin America is greater than that of Africa, the middle east and southern Asia put together, and despite the fact that we have done exceptionally well there in the past few years, should not we redouble our efforts to work with the markets of Latin America which basically have a European trading tradition and look towards us with extreme good will?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is expert in that area and will know that the last decade has been something of a miracle decade for Latin America in terms of democracy, fiscal and monetary disciplines, stability and free trade. He is right to say that we should be putting more effort into that area, and the Government are doing just that. I know that my hon. Friend has attended at least one of the events with which we have been involved. He is quite right—21 per cent. growth in one year is not good enough.

Middle East Peace Process

13. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps he is planning to support the peace process in the middle east. [14953]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will continue to provide full political and economic support for the peace process, including through efficient and effective delivery of our aid package of £82 million over the three years 1994-97.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister reaffirm that it is of fundamental importance to the peace process that the people in the area—particularly the people of Gaza—see some immediate and tangible benefits resulting from that process, as estimates of unemployment in Gaza range from 43 per cent. to as much as 70 per cent? Will the Minister redouble his efforts with the international community to ensure that an economic package is produced which provides tangible assistance to the people of Gaza?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is quite right, and that is why one important element of the programme that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced, by way of new money when he visited Gaza, was directed to labour-intensive schemes and projects. That is also why my right hon. Friend took with him a number of United

Kingdom business men, some of whom are interested in developing commercial and manufacturing processes in Gaza. That is an important way forward.

Mr. Allason: While the presence of British police officers in the Gaza strip to train Palestine Liberation Organisation personnel has clearly been a success, does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that there is widespread concern about the size of the aid package which was recently announced? Can he assure the House that there will be close supervision of that money, to ensure that it is spent on precisely the aid projects for which it is intended?

Mr. Hogg: Yes. One of the great difficulties which we have faced is that the Palestinians have been slow in developing mechanisms for identifying worthwhile projects and for controlling expenditure. We welcome the progress that they have made in that area, but more work needs to be done. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the need for a careful auditing of expenditure.

UNAVEM III Forces

14. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the preparedness of UNAVEM III forces to keep the peace in Angola when called upon. [14955]

Mr. Hurd: Following the report of his special envoy and the undertakings given by the parties, the Secretary-General announced on 27 March that the UN would proceed with preparations to deploy the logistic and support elements for UNAVEM III in keeping with its resolution 876.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told the House on 23 February, we have agreed in principle to provide a 600-strong logistics battalion to help the initial deployment of infantry units provided by other member states.

Mr. Worthington: After many years, there is a fragile peace in Angola, but there is great apprehension that the UN will follow in Angola previous failures with its peacekeeping forces in Somalia and Rwanda, where it took many months to deploy forces. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that those UN peacekeeping forces will be deployed the moment they are called for?

Mr. Hurd: A guarantee is not really required from us, as we have declared our willingness and are preparing accordingly. The guarantee is required from the parties concerned. Despite what I just said, the deployment which is envisaged can be completed and fulfilled only if the parties on the ground fulfil their commitments.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend seen the problems that the Ministry of Defence now appears to have in recruiting people into the Army and the fact that we seem to be making soldiers redundant and have low numbers of people in the forces? Is he satisfied that, when we make commitments to the United Nations and other peacekeeping operations, we shall have the right number of troops in place and that the morale of those troops will be satisfactory? Will he take urgent steps to talk to the Ministry of Defence about the position in the Army, which my constituents find troubling?

Mr. Hurd: It is not really a matter for me, as my hon. Friend knows. My perception of it, however, is that, once decisions announced in "Front Line First" have been carried through, our armed forces will enter a period of stability—their force levels will remain and their equipment will improve. They can then look forward to a period of stability during which we can respond where we think it wise and necessary in our own interest to the kind of appeals that we are discussing.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

15. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the nuclear weapon state signatories to the non-proliferation treaty define their nuclear strike capacity in terms of explosive firepower. [14956]

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom and the United States have released information on the total explosive yield of their nuclear weapon stockpiles. In May 1994, President Mitterrand gave figures for the numbers of French operational nuclear warheads. Neither Russia nor China has, to our knowledge, made official statements on the size of their stockpiles by any measure.

Mr. Cook: Is it true that the British Government have always justified their retention of the nuclear deterrent, despite the fact that they are a signatory of the non-proliferation treaty, on the basis that they must retain a minimum nuclear deterrent? What is meant by "minimum"? Do we need to be able to obliterate a small country or to take out a medium-sized country? How much of the world do we need to be able to devastate in order to justify retention of such weapons?

Mr. Davis: It is interesting to see the resurrection of CND on the Labour Back Benches. Since 1990, we have reduced our nuclear weapons by some 25 per cent., to what we judge to be a minimal level. That has involved halving free-fall weapons, the complete non-deployment of surface maritime weapons, and a self-imposed restriction on the number of missile warheads used on Trident. That is a reduction of some 25 per cent. in explosive power, which is what we consider a minimum level of deterrence—*[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) does not believe in deterrence at all.

Mr. Gallie: Is it not true that the benefit of nuclear weapons is their deterrent effect not, as suggested by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), their take-out effect?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is right. The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to information being available that shows that our stance on cruise missiles and Trident, contrary to the Labour party's view throughout the 1980s, was one factor that led to the Soviet Union's collapse and the end of the cold war.

Bosnia

16. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of peace negotiations in Bosnia. [14957]

Mr. Hurd: With our Contact Group colleagues we are still working hard to secure a negotiated settlement. We have reached a critical stage, with the security situation on the ground deteriorating. The Contact Group met in

London this week and is urging all sides to respect the cessation of hostilities agreement, and calling on the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Contact Group plan as a starting point for negotiations. We are working hard for peace in Bosnia. Our forces and aid effort in Bosnia have won deserved praise from the Bosnian Government for their effectiveness and dedication. We want them to continue their work but, as we have often said before, our forces can remain only if they can carry out their tasks at an acceptable level of risk.

Ms Hodge: If and when we eventually reach a peace settlement to end the conflict, will the Secretary of State confirm that that will include guarantees on human rights? Will he, in particular, confirm that there will be guarantees that refugees and victims of ethnic cleansing can return to their homes without the danger of persecution and a guarantee that the international community will pursue those guilty of war crimes?

Mr. Hurd: Procedures about war crimes are in hand; that is established. It is relatively easy to negotiate paper guarantees but relatively difficult to put them into practice. We must find a way in which that war can be brought to an end. That will depend on acceptance by all the parties concerned—by all the combatants. We can buttress that from outside, but the essence is not the guarantees that we draft from outside but the will for peace inside that country.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Secretary will have seen the statement on Monday by the UN spokesman in Sarajevo that the UN will use air power and limited strikes if the Bosnian Serbs attack civilians in the safe havens. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, once that threat has been made, it must be carried out if civilians are attacked? Is not the lesson of Bosnia that every time that our bluff is called it weakens our authority? Will he take the opportunity to express his resolve that we will not back down this time?

Mr. Hurd: The principle is clear. It has been clear for a long time that NATO air strikes may be called in by the UN—that is perfectly true—and it has been used to good effect. However, it is no good generalising in the House as to when and where that should be done. The circumstances in which that can effectively be done must depend on the judgment of NATO and of the UN commanders on the ground, including our own General Smith.

Consular Service

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the consular service in recent years; and if he will make a statement. [14958]

Mr. Baldry: Consular work is a front-line activity for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Our strong commitment to providing a high quality service to British nationals in distress overseas remains consistent in the face of increasing demand.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that in many ways the consular personnel are the unsung heroes of the diplomatic service? Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the representatives of the travel industry are effectively telling British travellers what consular services are available to them when they travel abroad?

Mr. Baldry: Our consular service does first-class work throughout the world. Nearly 9 million British nationals live overseas and about 34 million Britons travel abroad each year. Each year, we help about 15,000 Britons in difficulties throughout the world. I am pleased to say that we work closely with the travel industry to ensure that, before going overseas, people can have objective and fair advice about the destinations to which they are travelling.

We are grateful for the help and co-operation that the travel industry, the Federation of Tour Operators and the Association of British Travel Agents are giving us in ensuring that all travellers overseas can have safe and happy holidays.

Mr. Flynn: Is it not symptomatic of the antiquated nature of our consular and diplomatic services that a constituent reports to me that in the audiovisual room in Tanzania the only two videos available are one of a royal wedding and one of country pursuits in Devon? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear."] Even after the cuts made in Paris, is it not ridiculous to pour millions of pounds into those prestigious consuls and embassies while in countries of great importance, such as the Baltic states, we have only one person in each country? When will the diplomatic service enter the present century?

Mr. Baldry: Practically every point that the hon. Gentleman made is wrong. He professes to be an expert on the Baltic states; we actually have three embassies in the Baltic states. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman seeks to visit a few more embassies and posts overseas. If he does so, he will witness the excellent work that is being carried out by our diplomatic staff and consuls and ambassadors throughout the world. It falls badly from the mouths of Opposition Members when so many of our diplomatic staff are working hard for Britain's interests, often in very difficult circumstances, throughout the world.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend emphasise to the British consuls and other diplomats in the Baltic states and in the other former state trading nations how valuable they are in guiding British business men through that labyrinth?

Mr. Baldry: Yes, I suspect that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of business men in the UK today who would give testament to the help and guidance that they have received from British embassies and high commissions throughout the world in winning further orders for Britain. As a nation, we export more per head than Japan and the United States. We are assisted in that work by our diplomatic effort throughout the world.

Ethiopia

19. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the human rights record in Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement. [14960]

Mr. Baldry: We are concerned about the human rights situation in Ethiopia and take every opportunity to stress to the transitional government the importance of making progress in this area.

Mr. Timms: Is the Minister aware that Amnesty International says that there is an emerging problem of disappearances among Government opponents in Ethiopia? Has he seen the statement issued in London on 15 March by the Ethiopian asylum support group expressing its concern that human rights violations are spreading from the political to the religious, social and cultural spheres? What representations will the British Government make to the transitional Government in Ethiopia about those matters?

Mr. Baldry: I am aware of Amnesty International's concerns and I have seen the report. I know that a large number of Ethiopians live in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Due to the Ethiopian civil war, we operated an exceptional leave policy from late 1980 to April 1993. We think that the situation in Ethiopia has now improved to the point where the policy of granting exceptional leave to remain can be discontinued.

Of course, the Home Office will deal with all applications on their individual merits, but it may assist the hon. Gentleman's constituents to know that no Ethiopians who have benefited already from the exceptional leave policy will be required to leave the country when their existing leave expires, unless there are particular reasons in individual cases for asking them to do so.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is reported in this morning's edition of *The Independent* that, before he became a Cabinet Minister, the right hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken)—to whom I have given notice of my intention to raise this matter—was director of a company which exported arms to Iran, contrary to the Government embargo. Has the right hon. Member offered to make a statement to the House to the effect that he observed due diligence at that time, and that he therefore broke no commands?

Madam Speaker: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no; I have not been informed that any hon. Member is seeking to make a personal statement.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Monday, I met the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) at Darlington station, and he told me that he had returned from Stockton-on-Tees where he had made a visit to the Stockton, North constituency. Yesterday, I read in the newspapers that he had in fact visited my constituency, without giving prior notice to me in accordance with the courtesies that you expect to be extended to fellow Members of Parliament. I have given the right hon. Gentleman notice of my intention to raise this matter as a point of order today. Will you reiterate your guidance to Members of Parliament about the matter?

Madam Speaker: The entire House knows the views I hold on the matter. I find myself having to repeat them several times a week, and that should be entirely unnecessary. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) should have informed the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) that he intended to attend a public engagement in the constituency of the hon. Member. It is to be regretted that the right hon. Member for Copeland apparently did not do so.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that you are keenly aware of your role as custodian of the integrity of our democratic system. In recent years, many of the powers of your office which your predecessors exercised have been usurped by other undemocratic, unelected bodies outside the Parliament. Yesterday, one of my constituents was removed from the organisation Health Promotion Wales, because he was a whistleblower and had exposed corruption within that body. Is it not time that you exercised your powers and took back from those unaccountable, unelected bodies the powers that should be yours and Parliament's?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman seems to be giving me powers which I do not possess. If the House wishes to invest me with those powers, I will be quite prepared to accept such responsibilities. Until that time, I shall carry out the powers that I already have in the House.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I have in my hand a statement completely exonerating my right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), but it would be out of order for me to read it.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. I have already dealt with the matter.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): As you will have noticed, Madam Speaker, at Question Time today I have been pursuing matters relating to the arms trade with Burma. My point of order for you is not about that, as the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), replied to my question courteously and in great detail.

My concern is that the Department of Trade and Industry replied to me in a very negative way, saying that it cannot provide us with information, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, but as you know, from time to time the Department of Trade and Industry is the first to release such information to the press. I know that you deprecate information being released in that way. Is there any mechanism by which we can get some information on this most important matter?

Madam Speaker: I am not totally clear to what the hon. Gentleman is alluding, but I am concerned to see that, when information is available, it is made available to the House through individual hon. Members. I should be grateful, therefore, if the hon. Gentleman would leave with my office all the information he has, so that I might examine it properly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Have you had any request from the Prime Minister to make a statement about what steps he plans to take in respect of the involvement of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in selling arms to Iran against the embargo? It is not a matter for him, but one for the Prime Minister as to whether he can remain in the Cabinet.

Madam Speaker: I remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that we have Prime Minister's Questions tomorrow, and if hon. Members are lucky enough to catch my eye, they may be able to put that question direct to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): You will remember that, not very long ago, we used to have 20 minutes set aside for questions on what was then the European Community and is now the European Union. The situation has changed, in that, as Delors said, the time will soon come when 80 per cent. of political issues are decided at the European level rather than—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Do be quiet. I want to hear the hon. Gentleman. Mr. Marlow, let me hear what you have to say.

Mr. Marlow: I do not often find difficulty making myself heard. That was the situation. Now Europe is a more significant political issue. I know there are many ways in which it could be discussed and debated, but it is very important that the Executive comes under cross-examination and questioning on this subject. I think today we have had one substantive question on Europe. It may be that that is the way Members want it, but there is a certain amount of chance as to whether these questions get brought forward.

If there were a separate time for asking questions on Europe, I am quite sure that right hon. and hon. Members would put down those questions, so that the matter could be properly considered. Would it be possible that we could consider bringing back the procedures we had several years ago, so that we can focus in Question Time more directly on the European issue?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I do not deal with the rota, but I noticed that there was only one substantive question today on Europe. The hon. Gentleman is sitting very close to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, and he might like to take the matter up with him.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): I was concerned to see on today's Order Paper my name appended to a number of dubious amendments to the Atomic Energy Authority Bill. I am sure that that was inadvertent, and I am equally sure it is just as embarrassing to the hon. Member for Coventry North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), with whom I get on very well. I am sure that he would be the first to say that, other than our surnames, we have very little in common. I wonder whether you would have a word with the relevant authorities, Madam Speaker, to ensure extra vigilance in future, so that this embarrassing faux pas cannot occur again.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) is serving on the Standing Committee, so obviously there has been some misunderstanding and some misprinting. The hon. Gentleman has cleared up today's matter, and I shall do what I can to ensure that it does not occur in future.

BILL PRESENTED

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (AMENDMENT)

Mr. John Austin-Walker, supported by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mr. Roger Sims, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Jimmy Hood and Rev. Martin Smyth presented a Bill to make provision in relation to persons disqualified, or subject to proceedings for disqualification, under section 46 of the National Health Service Act 1977; to make provision about the constitution of the tribunal under that section; to make corresponding provision for Scotland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 31 March, and to be printed. [Bill 91.]

Eradication of Mink

3.38 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to eradicate mink from the United Kingdom.

> "A brown little face with whiskers, a grave round face with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice. Small neat ears and thick silky hair. It was the Water Rat"—

and not a mink, as might be expected. Ratty in "The Wind in the Willows", as described in that quotation, was in fact a water vole: a vegetarian mammal much loved since Kenneth Grahame wrote his book, and once common throughout the country. But no longer.

Last summer, I canoed from Blaby to Westminster with my brother to raise money for a hospice in Leicestershire. We travelled 137 miles, mostly on the Grand Union canal; we did not see a single water vole. Having grown up not far from that canal and having been used to seeing water voles in abundance, I made some inquiries, and discovered that water voles were being wiped out by mink.

It is a fair bet that most hon. Members who are present, and most people in the country, have never seen a wild mink. They are not easy to spot, like pollution or visible damage to our countryside; but the fact that we do not see them does not mean that they are not causing serious harm to our wildlife.

They are rapidly destroying the water vole population, as well as having a significant effect on game and coarse fishing. They will kill water fowl, particularly moorhens, and any ground-nesting birds; they are also skilled at climbing trees. Indeed, it is alleged that they have destroyed significant numbers of kingfishers in their nests: kingfishers live near and beside water. As they reach offshore islands, we should recognise the impact that this alien introduction will have on the population of sea birds, including gannets and puffins. They also pose a growing threat to poultry farms, and have been seen attacking lambs.

The impact of the mink on our indigenous wildlife is not appreciated because it is not seen, but it is neverthess immensely serious. Of particular note is the excellent study of the distribution and changing status of the water vole, published in 1993 and carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust. The water vole is the optimum prey size for mink, and has developed no escape mechanism against the predator.

The authors noted that the link between mink and the decline in the number of water voles is "now incontrovertible", and pointed out that the mink had exterminated the muskrat from several sites in North America, and was thus quite capable of doing such damage here. They stated:

> "The effect of mink on the water vole is serious and may well provide the final straw causing extinction of the species in many areas".

Mink were brought to this country from North America for fur farming before the second world war. By 1962, there were some 700 fur farms, many of which were run from sheds in back yards. Inevitably, some mink escaped. Some small-scale fur farmers, giving up their businesses, released their stock—and there has been the equally astonishing sight of so-called animal welfare groups deliberately releasing the animal into the wild.

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

In 1957, the first breeding wild mink were positively identified in Devon; now, not 40 years later, there are reckoned to be 110,000 wild mink, which have spread throughout most of the country and have even succeeded in reaching the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides by swimming across the ocean from the mainland.

If we leave aside the possibility of pumas on Bodmin moor, the mink is the only alien predatory mammal that man has been foolish enough to introduce into this country. We currently hear a good deal about the New Zealand flatworm and the effect that it is having on earthworms and our ecology as a whole. Perhaps we should look more closely at the effect of alien introductions into New Zealand; but my choice of comparable man-made ecological disaster would be Ascension island—once known as Bird island—where rats came with sailors, who introduced cats to catch the rats, but the cats ate all the ground-nesting birds. The island is no longer known as Bird island.

Man has created another potential ecological disaster with mink in this country. In Leicestershire, in my constituency, water voles are now scarce on the River Soar, as was pointed out earlier this month in the *Leicester Mercury*. That newspaper is running a campaign to clean up the River Soar; what a tragedy it is that water voles are unlikely to benefit. Nearby, mink have been seen in the middle of Market Harborough on the River Welland, and they are certainly present on the Grand Union canal.

The Government recognised in the Mink (Keeping) Order 1992 that it is desirable to destroy any mink at large. The question arises whether it is possible to eradicate feral mink from the United Kingdom. I believe that it is possible, and so, with more authority, does the director of the Institute of Zoology. The success of the coypu control organisation that eradicated the coypu from the UK should be studied carefully by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

There are many similarities between coypu and mink. The coypu was imported for its fur—nutria—in the 1920s. Many escaped, and the population rose to a maximum of 200,000 in the wild in the late 1950s. That figure was dramatically reduced by the cold winter of 1962 and by a trapping campaign in the 1960s. The Ministry of Agriculture started a new campaign in April 1981, employing 24 trappers. The coypu was eradicated in six years, by 1987.

Man, the mink's only predator in the UK, currently undertakes localised trapping and catches several thousand a year. It is appropriate to mention and to pay tribute to mink hunts, of which there are 20. They disrupt breeding programmes, and have a significant local impact. A successful eradication programme would inevitably end the sport of mink hunting, which should appeal at least to many who supported the recent anti-hunting Bill. It would lead also to a ban on the distasteful practice of farming mink for their fur.

If we are to eradicate mink from the United Kingdom, the danger of further escapes must be removed. The last recorded was in 1989. There are now only 12 registered mink farms in England, compared with 52 six years ago.

My Bill proposes that, acknowledging the desirability of conserving our native wildlife by eradicating an alien predator, the Government establish and fund a research project. There has been far too little research, and the project would study the mink, its distribution and the feasibility of its eradication. The project team could make recommendations on how best to eradicate the mink. It would gather support from many quarters, which might assist funding an eradication programme.

The most effective way of destroying mink is to catch them in live traps and then shoot them. That also means that no other animals are harmed by the trapping. The project would almost certainly want to run a trial eradication programme in a specific local area, such as a river system. My own preference would be the Isle of Lewis. If proved to work there, it could also work throughout the British isles. Such a research project would demonstrate the feasibility of eradicating mink, and also show that costs need not be exorbitant.

My Bill is a conservation measure, to conserve our native wildlife—much of which is threatened by the foolishness of human behaviour in introducing mink. It will be supported by all who really care about our wildlife and countryside, and who appreciate the serious nature of the situation. Recently, there have been several excellent articles on the matter in *The Times* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, and in *The Sun* by my noble Friend Lord Tebbit, who was once famously and unfairly likened in this Chamber to a semi-house-trained polecat.

I considered calling my Bill the Water Vole Conservation Bill. Some hon. Members may oppose it because they fail to understand the damage done to our ecology by feral mink. To them, I quote Kenneth Graham's Ratty, whose descendants are most affected by the problem:

> "But don't you see what it means—you dull-witted animals?"

I commend the Bill to the House.

3.48 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): When "The Wind in the Willows" was written, there were no feral minks on the river bank. I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), but I am not convinced by the case that he made. I have read a range of studies of the impact of the feral mink on the countryside, and I have reached different conclusions from the hon. Gentleman. I do not believe that it is feasible to contemplate the eradication of feral mink, on economic or ecological grounds.

During the 1970s, the Ministry of Agriculture decided to cease its efforts to control mink. The hon. Gentleman was right to remind the House that mink were imported to North America for fur farming, which must be one of the most distasteful of the many abuses perpetrated by humans on animals. It was the escapes from those fur farms that led to the establishment of wild mink in the British countryside.

The way that fur breeders turned mink out into the countryside when the fur trade collapsed in the 1950s represented the height of irresponsibility. I agree with the hon. Member for Blaby that the animal liberation people who turn mink loose in the countryside are doing no favours to the mink or to the native inhabitants, but it is worth reminding the House that there are still mink and arctic fox farms in this country. Seeing the wretched state in which mink are kept in some of those places makes it easy to realise how quickly they can escape. Some of the people who farm mink make Arthur Daley seem like Lord Curzon.

Mink should never have been imported into this country. Those who profited from that are responsible for today's problem.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned coypu. I think that the comparison with the eradication of coypu from parts of East Anglia is not meaningful. Trapping coypu involved professional trappers; and eradication did not take seven years, either. My information is that it took about 15.

If mink are creating local problems in some areas, as they are, they can be dealt with by humane trapping. Mink are rather like Back Benchers—always curious—so it is easy to trap them. Alternatively, mink-proof fencing can be set up. The Ministry of Agriculture can give plenty of advice to the hon. Member for Blaby and others who have problems of this sort.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Vincent Wildlife Trust report in the context of the impact of mink on water voles, referring to that impact as the last straw. But he did not tell the House the other reasons for the decline of the population of water voles: habitat loss, changes in waterway management, and pollution. Certainly the mink came along and put additional pressure on the voles, but it is interesting that the hon. Gentleman omitted to mention these other points in the study.

Other studies have shown that otter hunting too had an impact on the increasing number of mink. Wherever otters breed, there are lower numbers of mink. Many other studies have shown that mink do not present the problem that the hon. Gentleman describes. There are ways of controlling feral mink populations in parts of the country where they might cause a problem.

Mink hunting is unacceptable and thoroughly ineffective. It is becoming the blood sport of the summer that fills the gap between the end of one fox hunting season and the beginning of the next. The one thing the British countryside does not need is another bunch of bloodthirsty sadists in waders damaging our river banks. No method of controlling numbers should be turned into a sport for perverts with a bloodlust. The people who hunt mink are far worse than their quarry. Indeed, they are the same people who wiped out the native otter.

I am not convinced that the mink constitutes the ecological threat to the countryside that the hon. Gentleman has suggested, and I shall oppose his motion.

MADAM SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business).*

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you confirm that the very fact that this Division is taking place will mean that valuable time is taken out of the debate on education, in which many hon. Members wish to take part, but which the Labour party is taking time to prevent from starting?

Madam Speaker: I should have thought that that was rather obvious.

Question agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Robathan, Mr. Peter Ainsworth, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Harold Elletson, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Rupert Allason, Mr. Bernard Jenkin and Mr. Iain Duncan Smith.

ERADICATION OF MINK

Mr. Andrew Robathan accordingly presented a Bill to eradicate mink from the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 July, and to be printed. [Bill 92.]

Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Education Cuts

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I have also imposed a limit of 10 minutes on all speeches by Back-Bench Members today, as a great number of hon. Members are seeking to take part.

3.56 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move,

That this House asks the Government to reconsider its position on the Teachers' Pay Review Body award for 1995-96, because of the impact of increased pupil numbers, and the threat to standards, opportunity and achievement from the shortfall in funding experienced in many local authority areas and the vast majority of schools in England and Wales.

The time has come for Conservative Members to make up their minds whether they are in favour of saving the standard and opportunity for education for children in their schools and communities, or whether they are in favour of saving their own skins by attempting to salt away cash for a tax bribe in the general election.

On this occasion, they cannot win, because if they take away money, as they are doing, if they insist that tax cuts in November and possibly in 1996 are to be preferred to putting resources into maintaining the number of teachers, into keeping down class sizes in their schools, they will be punished as surely as night follows day by an electorate who are sick of duplicity, of people pretending that they are interested in children's education, in what is happening in their schools, and then turning up in the House and voting the opposite way.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Not at the moment.

We are not asking Conservative Members to condemn their Government and their Cabinet. The British people are doing that effectively enough as it is. We are asking Conservative Members merely to request their Government to think again. Every Conservative Member who votes today against our motion, who votes down the opportunity for the Cabinet to give a second thought to what is happening to children in our schools throughout the country, will surely reap their reward, because we will ensure that every newspaper, local radio station and elector in his or her area knows which way that Member voted.

Do Conservative Members back the Secretary of State for Education, who whispers in dark corners to education corespondents that she cares about what is happening in schools and that she has been fighting a battle with her colleagues in Cabinet? Do they do that, or do they back those who believe that she has had enough?

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in Leicestershire, Labour councillors supported Liberal Democrat councillors in producing a budget that will mean cuts, whereas the Conservative councillors on Leicestershire county council produced a budget which would have increased spending on education by 2.85 per cent.? The increase is down to just over 2 per cent. because of a Labour-Liberal Democrat budget. What will the hon. Gentleman tell the newspapers about the way that councillors in Leicestershire voted?

Mr. Blunkett: People will say, "Do we believe those who have inflicted these cuts from the centre on every county and on every school in the country, or do we believe parents, teachers and governors who know what is happening in their schools?" It is not Labour and Liberal councillors who have inflicted these cuts: it is Conservative Members and their Cabinet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I will not give way.

The Secretary of State knows the truth. She is kind, well-meaning and very likeable. Unfortunately, she is totally ineffective. She is overridden and overruled, a schoolmistress who has turned into the bedevilled schoolgirl. The House does not need to take my word for that: it can take the word of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who only last week said:

"Gillian is making excellent progress and a satisfactory amount of finance is on offer."

Gillian is not making satisfactory progress: she is not making any progress at all. She has pleaded with her Cabinet colleagues for more money. While the Foreign Secretary and the President of the Board of Trade wring their hands and tell the people of Oxfordshire that they are in favour of looking after their children, it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury who are in command.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): The hon. Gentleman speaks about progress. Perhaps he could help the debate to make progress. How much money would the Opposition donate for the proposition that he puts to the House? It would help the House to know how much money the Opposition would like to spend to replace the so-called cuts in education.

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. Lady speaks about "so-called cuts in education". That shows no sense of reality about what is happening in the classroom. *[Interruption.]* I will answer the question, which is more than Conservative Members ever do on the radio—when they are not too frightened go on radio to answer questions about their policies. I will take questions and lectures from Conservative Members when they tell me about the £744 million that they spent on changing the national curriculum, changing tests and bedeviling education with turmoil for six years.

I have made it absolutely clear, and I repeat, that, when an independent review body report is accepted by a Government who have abolished negotiations between employers and employees, they have an absolute obligation, moral and political, to pay for it. We would have paid for it from moneys that the Government have cut from the projected expenditure on education that they promised at the general election. They promised tax cuts, but they increased taxes. They promised to increase public spending, but they are cutting it for every child in the land.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend is correct when he says that people out there know precisely who is to blame. On Saturday, 20,000 people went on a march through central London. Most of them had never been on a demonstration before. They included parents, school kids, and people who had never been to London. They know who is guilty in this case.

Another 5,000 from Derbyshire have been demonstrating today. To a man and a woman, they know who the guilty people are. It would be relatively easy to find the money if we started using the £35 billion that has been spent keeping more than 4 million people idle, and if we started taking back the £50 billion that has been given to the richest 10 per cent. in tax cuts. That is the way to improve our education system. Let us have smaller classes and more teachers employed.

Mr. Blunkett: I always welcome the powerful interventions of my hon. Friend. He is backed today by 3,000 people from Derbyshire—*[Interruption.]* No, I said that he was backed today by 3,000 people. *[Interruption.]* He is backed by thousands of people from Derbyshire. I would send Conservative Members out there to count them but, unfortunately, not many of them would be up to it.

Let me quote not Labour Members, parents, governors or teachers, but the words of Conservative Members. What about the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), a former Minister with responsibility for education? Four former Ministers with responsibility for education have publicly announced that they believe that the Government should think again. We believe that even the Secretary of State's predecessor thinks that she should think again. Some of us suspect that the right hon. Lady thinks that she should think again, but she cannot get enough support from Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No. The hon. Gentleman should listen to the quote from the hon. Member for Wantage, who said:

> "But in my view, the Government response to the teachers pay award is quite indefensible."

No Labour Member could put it more clearly than that; nor could we put it more clearly that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who today repeated on Channel 4 that he felt that he could not vote with the Government tonight unless more money was made available to his county of Warwickshire.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: Which of those wonderful people shall I give way to? I give way to the hon. Member over there on the right.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Paul Marland, who has been standing a long time.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the bind that Gloucestershire schools find themselves in is the result of the profligacy of Liberal and Labour councillors on Gloucestershire county council, and that debt servicing is the third biggest item in that council's budget? That is why the council is threatening to impose cuts on schools.

Mr. Blunkett: The response will be clear and decisive in both the local elections on 5 May and in the general election. People will deal clearly with Conservative Members who wring their hands and wash them of their responsibility, including their responsibility for other people's children.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall not give way. I have given way sufficiently for the time being.

Conservative Members, and certainly the right hon. Lady's colleagues in the Cabinet, would have understood what she was talking about in her famous letter telling them what the results of their actions would be if their children were in state education at state schools. The more people send their children to state education and state schools, the more they understand what is going on. If I let them in, some of the Conservative Members who are desperate to intervene might tell us immediately where their children go to school, where they went to school, or what sort of cuts their children are experiencing. This is not a game; it is about children's education. This is about every parent in every school that is affected feeling the result of Tory party policy. This is about those heads and governors trying to carry out their responsibilities having to sit down in the next three months and decide which teacher, which care assistant, which technician and which school secretary should be given a redundancy notice. That is what it is about: real people and real children in education up and down the country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman over there.

Madam Speaker: I think it was the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold).

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Both my daughters are in state schools in Kent, How would the hon. Gentleman justify funds being taken away from that school and all other schools in Kent by the Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled county council, which has spent between £100,000 and £250,000 on propaganda to try to talk parents out of voting for what they have always wanted for their schools—grant-maintained status?

Mr. Blunkett: I just wonder what the Grant Maintained Schools Foundation is doing with public money provided by the Department for Education. It has spent £250,000 in the past year on hospitality alone for those campaigning for grant-maintained status, including providing hotel accommodation and travelling costs for heads and teachers from grant-maintained schools, who clearly have time to travel the country persuading others.

After the intervention last time from a Kent Member about how people were spending money on take-away meals in the epitome of the competitive tendering, out-of-house catering of the future, I will take no more interventions from hon. Members from Kent.

Self-delusion is now commonplace in a Cabinet that is completely split down the middle on education.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way to my hon. Friend in a moment.

Let us take the Prime Minister's words on 16 March. He claimed in the House that there were

"two administrators for every three teachers in education".—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 1021.]

This is a Prime Minister who did not pass anything at school, never mind the 11-plus.

Mr. Dunn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I am making a point that I intend to finish.

The Prime Minister claimed on 16 March during Prime Minister's questions that there were two administrators for every three teachers. We have checked that out: 109,000 of the non-teaching staff turned out to be people employed directly under the devolution of budgets under local management of schools as school caretakers, clerical workers, care assistants and technicians; 150,000 turned out to be manual staff such as those working on school meals and on grass cutting; and just 57,000 of the 316,000 turned out to be people working in the central departments of education authorities.

That figure includes educational psychologists, people working on truancy and educational welfare and youth officers. One in seven who themselves are not administrators turn out to be the result of the mathematical genius that the Prime Minister obviously employs in the Cabinet Office.

We know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is geographically and historically challenged; we know that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is ethically challenged; and we know that the Prime Minister is mathematically challenged. They cannot add up, and they cannot tell the truth. *[Interruption.]* I will not give way, because I want to make one further point on the statistics used by the Secretary of State.

Last week, she claimed that the spending on children since 1979 had increased by 50 per cent. The real figure, because I have checked it, is a real-terms increase of 4 per cent., with a 5 per cent. cut in secondary education, before the £200-a-head cut in standard spending assessment this year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A moment ago, the House heard the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) make comments from the Dispatch Box to the effect that senior members of the Government could not tell the truth. I distinctly heard him say that. I ask through you, Madam Speaker, whether that is a proper use of words. Does it not transgress the rules of the House?

Madam Speaker: I was engaged at the Chair and did not hear the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside. But I am sure—*[Interruption.]* Just a moment. I am sure that, if he did utter those words, he will come to the Dispatch Box, say so and withdraw them.

Mr. Blunkett: I take your ruling entirely, Madam Speaker. What I was clearly referring to was the statistical truth of the misinterpretation of the facts which were being dealt with by the Prime Minister, and the obvious statistical difficulty that the Secretary of State herself has with similar information. The Secretary of State talked about the budget for books and equipment having gone up by 55 per cent. It turns out to be less than half that figure. I am using statistics from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—

Madam Speaker: Order. If I find tomorrow in *Hansard* that the hon. Member for Brightside has used language in this House which I find unacceptable, I shall return to the matter tomorrow. There seems to be some dispute now, but I must leave it until I see the written report.

Mr. Blunkett: Let me help with the *Hansard* report by making it clear that it is not always the case that those who do not present the truth deliberately lie. I am sure that the Prime Minister did not mean to tell a statistical inexactitude when he misled the House on 16 March.

What of the Secretary of State's claim that the repair and maintenance budget for schools had risen by 15 per cent. per pupil? The actual sum, according to CIPFA, has gone down from £84 per pupil to £83 per pupil while the Conservatives have been in office. The position is entirely different.

The position is also entirely different over whether Britain spends more money than many of its European and OECD counterparts. The Secretary of State, on radio last week, claimed that France spent less of its national income on education than Britain. It is not true. France spent 5.4 per cent. of its gross domestic product and Britain spent 5.3 per cent. The Secretary of State claimed—

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I shall not.

The Secretary of State claimed that the Netherlands spent less than the United Kingdom. In fact, it spent 6.8 per cent. of GDP, which, of course, for anyone who can calculate, is 1.5 per cent. more than the United Kingdom spent. Canada and Sweden and the United States all spent more than Britain as a proportion of their GDP on education.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, who has been very patient.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in Kent, the SSA per secondary school pupil is £13 less than it was in 1992-93? What is more, rather than cutting spending, the council has increased education funding by £11 million. It will still find, therefore, that it has to cut £8 million from areas of spending which include discretionary awards, schools' building maintenance, schools' delegated funds and management savings. I do not think that that ties up with what the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) had to say.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he now?"] I am sure that one of the hon. Members who represents Kent is here to be enlightened and to take on board what my hon. Friend said.

The simple truth of the matter this afternoon is whether the British people believe a discredited and enfeebled Government, or whether they believe parents, governors and teachers in their own communities about what is happening around them. I presume that the Secretary of

State was being honest when she sent her letter to Cabinet colleagues claiming what the result would be of the kind of settlement that the Government eventually inflicted on schools. I believe that she meant that there would be "7,000 to 10,000 redundancies" among teachers and that class sizes would "shoot up". I believe that she knew that in many schools, as at the Nicholas Chamberlain school in Bedworth, Warwickshire, there would be up to 10 redundancies for teaching staff.

I believe that the Secretary of State knows what the impact of the spending cuts will be, and I challenge her publicly to ask her Cabinet colleagues to think again about the settlement about which she warned, and which she said would mean cuts in the schools that we have been talking about. I challenge her to be honest and to say what she really thinks about the way in which her education policies are impinging on the British people. Otherwise, she will be a fairy tale turned into a nightmare—an Edward Scissorhands who ends up cutting, rather than being praised for having overturned the previous Secretary of State's policies.

I presume that the right hon. Lady and her colleagues will have the temerity to acknowledge that what we say is true. It is true that spending in general should be aimed at improving standards and opportunities. There is no better way of giving children the necessary prior attainments and start in life than to ensure that all three and four-year-olds whose parents so wish have a place at a nursery school.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I agree with what the hon. Gentleman says about the need for improved nursery education, but does he agree that, throughout the United Kingdom, parents who have children with recognised educational needs know that not enough is being spent to help those children to achieve their real potential?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. That is exactly what the debate is all about.

I gather that the Secretary of State has hidden talents and does a good imitation of Baroness Thatcher; she is a sort of Rory Bremner of the House of Commons. Perhaps she would care to mimic Baroness Thatcher by committing herself, as Baroness Thatcher did in 1972, to providing a nursery place, not a voucher, for every child whose parents want one.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that, under the Conservatives in the late 1970s, Kent county council undertook a major study of the impact of the voucher system in nursery education? Kent spent £9 million of public money on that experiment, and then abandoned it.

Mr. Dunn: You are joking.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not joking, and the people of Kent are not joking when they recall what the experiment cost them.

Yes, it cost £9 million to undertake a prolonged experiment in one part of Kent. The fact that Conservative Members do not know what happened is a good reason why they should start to listen and to learn, instead of talking about inflicting vouchers on the rest of Britain although they failed in one of the authorities that the Conservatives controlled.

The Secretary of State knows perfectly well what the dangers of vouchers are. She has said as much, as was reported by *The Independent* on 19 October last year. She knows that the voucher proposal would be a disaster, because she understands basic economics, even though her Cabinet colleagues may not.

Where supply does not exceed demand, a voucher system can assist and provide choice and diversity only for those who can top the voucher up with their own money. If the voucher system can provide enough cash for a place for every nursery-age child who needs one, we shall end up with transaction costs that increase bureaucracy without creating one extra place.

If we want to hear an independent view, we should ask the commercial business director of Kindercare, which is moving in from the United States. He told newspapers only a week ago that the firm was targeting Britain because of the high cost of nursery provision in this country compared with every other nation in the European Union and because of the sparsity of places here in comparison with our European counterparts. This is an area ripe for commercial development because the Government will not fulfil the pledge made by the Prime Minister at last year's Conservative party conference that the Government would provide nursery places for four-year-olds.

Where is the money? Where is the promise? What is the target? What sort of places is the Secretary of State proposing to provide? What commitment is there from a Secretary of State who wrote to her own colleagues recently to suggest—really, to demand—that they should berate Labour and Liberal Democrat authorities for providing nursery education? Item 2 of her letter asks her hon. Friends to discover to what extent the local education authority is expanding non-statutory services—for example, services for under-fives—at the expense of statutory education services.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Blunkett: That has brought a crowd of Conservative Members to their feet.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): The previous leader of the Labour party came to St Mary's hall in Ealing and to Northolt on April 29 last year and said that, if the Labour party won Ealing borough council, it would provide a nursery place for every child of nursery age. That was a promise. The Labour party did win the election—undeservedly—but not a single extra nursery place has been provided.

Mr. Blunkett: There are two responses to that. First, we have not seen the beginning of the fulfilment of the pledge made by the Prime Minister six months ago, never mind the pledge of a local authority. Secondly, how dare the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) have the cheek to berate a Labour authority for not providing places after 11 months when the Secretary of State has asked him and his colleagues to berate local authorities for trying to provide such places?

The Secretary of State's letter berates authorities for spending money on nursery education, and tells her hon. Friends to find out the facts. Presumably the hon. Gentleman found out the facts when he approached the authority at the request of the Secretary of State. He did so not to berate it for failing to provide places, but to find out whether places had been provided, in order that the Secretary of State could then criticise that authority.

[Mr. Blunkett]

It is time that Conservative Members stopped blaming everyone else, and started blaming themselves. It is time for them to stop whingeing and criticising and to stand up and take their medicine, as they will do at the general election.

What about surplus places, which the Secretary of State talked about in item 3 of her letter? Most of her "facts" turn out to be incorrect. She berates Warwickshire for having 19 per cent. extra places, but a plan which would reduce surplus places in Warwickshire to only 7 per cent. has been given to the Secretary of State. Let the right hon. Lady make the decisions.

Targets on surplus places were set in June last year for local authorities across the country. Let us be clear who is responsible for the failure to allow authorities to remove surplus places. The Government allow schools to opt out in order for them to escape playing their part in the planning and configuration of services, and in contributing to the removal of surplus places.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): What about choice?

Mr. Blunkett: What choice do schools have when they are being told to sack teachers, to increase class sizes and to stop providing nursery education? What choice do parents have when the Government introduce selection so that only some children can attend a school which, previously, everyone preferred to enter? What choice will parents have when the Government bring forward the legislation that they have floated in the pre-emptive Queen's Speech, suggesting that, once again, not all the nation's children but only a few will have access to capital funding, which the Government intend to make available only to grant-maintained schools?

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Such nonsense.

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that it is nonsense, but I give this pledge: whatever the Government make available to the few, and whatever changes they bring about in defining the public sector borrowing requirement in terms of allowing spending on education and the public-private finance initiative, we shall make available to every child, every school and every parent. We are not interested in looking after only the few; we are not interested in merely taking care of 5, 6 or 7 per cent. of the nation's children; we are interested in investing in standards and opportunity for every child in every school.

The Government have run out of steam and are in turmoil. They are at the end of their tether. They are a spent force, scrambling around for ideas—any ideas and any initiatives. Everyone knows that, under the Tories, they are worse off, because they pay more and get less. On 4 May, in the local elections, and at the time of the general election, whenever it comes, people will give their verdict on the Government: their spending; their cuts; and their attack on parents, teachers, governors and the future of our children. That is why, today, we challenge every Member of this House to vote for our motion and save the children of our nation.

4.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> 'welcomes the substantial increase in the real level of education spending since 1979; notes that in a tough settlement overall local authorities will still be able to spend more next year than in 1994-95; looks to them to set sensible priorities; welcomes the substantial improvement in standards of achievement by pupils in recent years, as demonstrated by examination and test results and by school inspection reports; and applauds the Government's education policies which are further driving up education standards, and giving parents more choice and information for the benefit of their children.'.

The best thing that I can say about the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is that it was predictable. It was predictable in its concern for input rather than output; in its desire to pour in taxpayers' money without ensuring proper value for money; in its pretence that the Labour party did not oppose each and every measure to raise standards and provide opportunities passed through the House in the past 16 years; in its dealing with myths and scare stories; and, as ever, in choosing to ignore the facts.

It may help the House if I begin by setting out the facts again. On funding, I admit that it is a tough year. I have maintained that from the start. We are talking not about a cut in funding, however, but about a rise. We have increased funding in education by more than 1 per cent., which is a good deal in such a tight year for public expenditure.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): The Secretary of State said that cuts are not involved, yet the figures for Durham show that its standard spending assessment this year has declined from £208 million—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about school rolls?"] School rolls have increased to an extent that would involve, if Durham were fully funded, another £1 million, but its SSA has gone down by £2 million. How does the Secretary of State square that fact with her statement that it has gone up?

Mrs. Shephard: This year's settlement allows all authorities to manage if they choose their priorities carefully. That is the position. It cannot be denied because, as I shall demonstrate, many of them are doing just that.

We should put the latest increase in its proper context. It follows a 2.4 per cent. increase for 1994-95 and constant increases in education spending since 1979. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) questioned the figures that said that spending per pupil had increased in real terms by almost 50 per cent., spending on books and equipment by 55 per cent. and so on. I remind him that he is indeed using Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy statistics, but statistics that have not been used for 10 years.

In that context, I am confident in repeating that spending on repairs and maintenance has increased by 15 per cent. and that spending on support staff is up by 135 per cent.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Secretary of State accept an invitation to come and tell the parents and governors of schools in my constituency that they have received an increase in accordance with her statement now, when in fact they are confronted by difficulties in meeting the budget to ensure that the education to which children are entitled, and which they need, will be provided this year?

Every parent in my constituency knows that the Government are responsible for cuts in education. If the Secretary of State is to be fair and just to people, she should admit that the Government need to put more money into education if we are to succeed in providing the quality of education to which people are entitled.

Mrs. Shephard: I would say to the hon. Gentleman, echoing what was said some time ago by the hon. Member for Brightside, that Her Majesty's chief inspector's report was

"about as unbiased as you can get".

That unbiased report said about resources:

"In overall terms the provision of resources is satisfactory".

The hon. Member for Brightside has also sought to question how we stand internationally. Perhaps I should explain to him that he has muddled two sets of figures. We indeed spend a larger proportion of our public expenditure on education than do Japan, France, Germany or the Netherlands. Public expenditure on education in the United Kingdom accounts for a larger share of gross domestic product than it does in Germany or Japan. Those are facts. The hon. Gentleman muddled the two.

Mr. Blunkett: I should be grateful to the Secretary of State if we could place the matter on the record once and for all. The normal assessment of comparisons is with GDP; everyone knows that it is. Will she confirm this afternoon that France and the Netherlands—which she said on the radio last week spent less than we do—spend more as a proportion of GDP?

Mrs. Shephard: Public expenditure on education in the UK accounts for a larger share of GDP than it does in Germany or Japan. We spend a larger proportion of our public expenditure on education than do Japan or France or Germany or the Netherlands, as I said on the radio last week, and as I have said frequently since. Those are facts. Our record of massive and increasing funding provides the clearest possible proof that education is, has always been and will remain a Government priority.

Mr. Dunn: Earlier, the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) referred to local authority funding. Does the Secretary of State realise that 13 authorities have domestic rates arrears of £167 million, 14 local authorities have community charge arrears of £347 million and 18 local authorities have council tax arrears of £160 million? That is more than £700 million in local taxation that has not been collected by Labour authorities. Does she also realise that the worst local authorities in terms of domestic rates are Camden and Liverpool, the worst in the context of community charge are Liverpool and Haringey and the worst in the context of council tax are Birmingham and, would you believe, Hackney?

Mrs. Shephard: I would certainly believe all that. As a result of those uncollected arrears, the money wasted on surplus places, the money in balances and the money that has been spent on clerical and administrative staff which might have been spent on front-line services, the independent review body found the pay award affordable.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs. Shephard: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. To whom is the right hon. Lady referring?

Mrs. Shephard: I am referring to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. Does she agree with or condemn the action taken by schools in Derbyshire which have closed on training days so that staff can come to London and lobby the House of Commons? Perhaps my right hon. Friend might investigate that action and see whether the Opposition agree with it. Will she further explain why the county council in Derbyshire holds back £720 per pupil while neighbouring Staffordshire and Nottinghamshire—which are both Labour authorities—hold back £570?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have now heard three long interventions—two from one side and one from the other. Interventions should be short. I call the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Shephard: I am very puzzled by the disclosure of my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire. Can it be that Derbyshire is so in funds that it can afford to pay for supply cover for teacher absences? Has it closed schools so that teachers can take part in demonstrations? That seems absolutely extraordinary. If the position is as my hon. Friend has described, it may be a matter for the district auditor; I do not know. It seems extraordinary and it certainly destroys at a stroke the myth that Derbyshire is hard up for funds.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs. Shephard: I will give way, but then I shall have to make progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the Secretary of State giving way to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Before she moves on from the issue of financial statistics, will she confirm that the average reduction in standard spending assessment per pupil in real terms in this year's settlement is £50 per primary school pupil and £194 per secondary school pupil? Will she further confirm that her 50 per cent. increase analysis is founded upon inflation based on the retail prices index and not upon an educationally based rate of increase?

Mrs. Shephard: I have already made the position absolutely clear: all local authorities can increase their spending on education this year if they choose to identify their priorities. I have already said that the CIPFA statistics which the hon. Member for Brightside cited are 10 years out of date.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I will give way later, but I shall now make some progress.

Local authority funding accounts for a quarter of all public spending. It therefore cannot be immune from tough decisions and economic reality. Public borrowing must come down if we are to keep a rein on inflation and increase prosperity and jobs. As the Audit Commission has said on a number of occasions and in a number of reports, local education authorities can cut their own costs. They still spend millions on running their central bureaucracies and on maintaining surplus places in schools.

[Mrs. Shephard]

As I said earlier, last year an Audit Commission report identified scope for saving half a billion pounds on the pay bill for local authorities' administrative and clerical staff. The number of non-manual staff employed by councils increased by 90,000 between 1987 and 1993. The Audit Commission found that less than half that increase resulted from central Government initiatives. If local authorities exploit opportunities like that, they will have more money to spend on teachers in the classroom. It is a question of management and the ability to take hard decisions.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): My right hon. Friend has correctly drawn attention to the appalling record of Labour local authorities in favouring town halls rather than spending money in the classroom. Does she agree that it is entirely predictable that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) did not mention the record of his local authority during his speech? This year Sheffield has reduced the proportion of its total budget to be spent in the classroom, and no less than 15 per cent. of the total education budget will go on town hall costs. That is one of the highest levels in the country.

Mrs. Shephard: I could expect anything from an authority that a couple of years ago increased spending on leisure by 109 per cent. and reduced spending on education by 15 per cent. Those were the priorities of that authority and now it has the temerity to say that it has a problem.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the profligate Labour and Liberal councillors in Gloucestershire, whom I mentioned earlier, are top-slicing their education budget by 21 per cent. compared with 16 per cent. in next-door Wiltshire?

Mrs. Shephard: Many authorities do far better than Gloucestershire in making funds available directly to schools. That is just what Gloucestershire should be doing.

Mr. macshane: A large number of the letters I receive every day on the subject from Rotherham are from Conservative voters—from managers and, if I may say so, from her people. Her description of education getting better has absolutely no correspondence with reality in South Yorkshire. Rotherham is not an extravagant council. It has cut by 40 per cent. its delayered staff in the education department, every single school in Rotherham is having to cut teacher numbers this year, despite massive cuts across the board in council expenditure. When will the Secretary of State speak for the children of Rotherham and England and not for the Treasury and tax cuts of the future?

Mrs. Shephard: The best way for the hon. Gentleman to speak for the children and parents of Rotherham is for him to ask precisely the questions of that authority that are being asked by my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland). That would be the way for the hon. Gentleman to protect the interests of his constituents. However, I have some interesting examples. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State continues, I should say that I am a little tired of running commentaries.

Mrs. Shephard: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I shall take Bedfordshire as my first example. The budget passed by the ruling combination of Liberal and Labour councillors represents a 3.5 per cent. cut in the schools budget, which could mean a reduction of 200 teacher posts. I wonder why the authority did not accept the alternative budget put forward by the Conservative group, which would have reduced the schools budget by only 2 per cent. and which would have been able to fund the whole of the teachers' pay settlement. It would have taken £250,000 less out of county council balances and still included growth items to cover nursery education, special needs and increases in pupil numbers in mainstream and special schools.

Why would any responsible council not have accepted that budget? Perhaps Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors in Bedfordshire are more interested in making a political point than in serving their communities.

Why did Labour Lancashire slash its schools budgets by £19 million against the officers' suggestion of £13 million, meanwhile reducing its administration costs by only £500,000? It rejected a Conservative proposal to set up a working group under an independent chairman to try to resolve some of the problems and restore some of the education cuts. I wonder whether those councillors are also more interested in political point scoring than serving the children of Lancashire.

In Cheshire, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat budget will fund the teachers' pay award in full and it will increase spending in primary and secondary schools so that there will be almost £10 million extra for schools—7 per cent. above the education SSA. The budget proposals put before Cheshire council by the Labour group did not include funding the teachers' pay award in full and provided only 1.2 per cent. above the SSA, leaving schools with a shortfall of £3 to £4 million. The vast majority of other authorities are coping—from Conservative Buckinghamshire to Labour Birmingham.

Local education authorities are in the best position to ensure that money goes where it is most needed in the light of local priorities. Many of them are doing that responsibly, focusing on front-line services.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I should like to make a little progress.

I am grateful for the level-headedness of councillors, governors and teachers who are working out manageable responses to the settlement and maximising the use of resources to secure the best possible education for their pupils.

Mr. Blunkett: The Secretary of State mentioned Buckinghamshire and praised Conservatives in local government for doing such a good job, thus equating Buckinghamshire with an absence of problems. Why, then, did her hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) send one of his constituents a version of the standard letter issued by the Department for Education and Conservative central office attacking Labour authorities, which attacked Tory-controlled Buckinghamshire county council for doing all the things that the right hon. Lady has just attacked Labour county councils for doing?

Mrs. Shephard: To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he missed my passing reference—and congratulations—to Birmingham city council, which I believe is Labour-controlled. I also mentioned the Liberal Democrats in connection with Cheshire. As for my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler), his correspondence is his own affair. Indeed, he may be in the House to speak for himself.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Buckinghamshire county council over-provided for the teachers' pay award and was thus able to fund it in full? Moreover, because of its prudent financial management over many years, the council has been able to make a substantial contribution from its balance to protect its education budget.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying the position of Buckinghamshire.

Although tough, this year's settlement is manageable, as many authorities are proving. The Government are committed to implementing review body recommendations in full unless there are clear and compelling reasons to the contrary. We think that there are no such reasons this year, and I am announcing this afternoon our conclusion that it would be right to implement the teachers' pay recommendation in full: teachers deserve no less.

I began by describing the speech of the hon. Member for Brightside as predictable. It was; but he was less predictable when he chose to extol standards and opportunity. In fact, it was difficult to believe what we were hearing from a party that had opposed those principles at every turn for the past 16 years.

I am delighted to talk about standards and opportunity, because Conservative Members know a good deal about them. Let us start with the action that we have taken—as opposed to mere chatter—in regard to standards and opportunity in education. When we came to office in 1979, we were faced with an education system that was based on inputs and took no account of outputs. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Brightside has demonstrated yet again that Labour is happy for taxpayers' money to be spent and is not interested in what it buys.

In 1979, there was no measure for what children should learn in schools; but a basic curriculum is central to the raising of standards. We therefore established such a curriculum, which laid proper emphasis on the basics of literacy and numeracy and provided a broad and balanced programme for all pupils aged between five and 16. To ensure that all that is working, we have introduced a framework of tests and assessment.

The Office of Standards in Education—Ofsted—reports that the national curriculum, which, sadly, was mindlessly opposed by Opposition Members, is already improving the teaching of mathematics, and that primary science can be counted a major success. Those improvements will continue. We can also applaud the steady improvement in GCSE results in recent years.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend speaks of educational opportunities. Can she explain why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday appeared to close the door on the new educational opportunity offered by the entry of Manchester grammar school into the state sector? I hope that she will not mention the assisted places scheme; there is all the difference in the world between doling out the odd scholarship in a lordly fashion and opening the best schools in the country to the best and brightest brains.

Mrs. Shephard: The proposals for Manchester grammar school are extremely interesting and I know that my hon. Friend has does an enormous amount of work on the interface between the maintained and independent sectors. My hon. Friend has discovered and expressed many interesting viewpoints. I take this opportunity publicly to invite him to tea, to talk to me about them. *[Interruption.]* A number of ribald suggestions are coming from the Opposition Benches. I can only say that hon. Members are becoming over-excited.

We applaud the steady improvement in GCSE results in recent years. In 1989, just under 33 per cent. of 15-year olds gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above. By 1994, the proportion had increased to more than 43 per cent. Those results and the record of all schools in achieving them are clear for all to see in our national performance tables, which we understand Labour Members now support. That is a good thing, because the tables also show performance in another vital area—truancy.

I was delighted that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) condemned truancy the other day, yet it is curious that he and his party voted against all our measures to combat and to record truancy. They talk now about standards with all the zeal of the recent convert, yet for 16 years all our moves to raise standards were met with unremitting opposition from Labour.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The Secretary of State talks about standards and opportunities. Nearly every school in my constituency faces cuts in teaching staff. I have met head teachers, and they blame not the authority but the Secretary of State for failing to fund the teachers' pay increase. How will those cuts improve standards and opportunities in my constituency?

Mrs. Shephard: I have given examples of authorities which are managing perfectly well with this year's settlement, even though it is tough. I advise the hon. Gentleman to take lessons from the examples that I gave.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) suggested that the SSA for Durham for the coming year will be less than for the current year. I checked the figures with the Library. Will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that Durham's SSA for the coming year will be in excess of that for the current year? Despite the fact that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West is a member of the shadow Treasury team, she got her figures wrong. She failed to take into account the children in Durham who are educated outside her county.

Mrs. Shephard: That is a matter for rejoicing for the hon. Lady, and I can see how delighted she is.

Independent inspection is crucial to raising standards. The Opposition seem to prefer a system in which primary schools could expect such an inspection once every 200 years and secondary schools once every 50 years, but we would not accept that. Our new inspection system provides

[Mrs. Shephard]

schools with a systematic and regular assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. With that diagnosis, schools can set clear targets for improvement.

Overall, inspection is indicating good standards across the system, but it is also confirming that a minority of schools have serious weaknesses or are failing. Where standards are unacceptably low, we will intervene. Our powers to do so have galvanised LEAs into action to improve their weakest schools. Most schools are making good progress while others are moving towards closure. Either way, pupils can look forward to better education. The policy is working.

The key to higher standards is good teaching, which is why we established the Teacher Training Agency. On Monday, I attended the launch of its first corporate plan—an impressive catalogue of activities, all designed to raise standards. The purpose of the agency is to improve the quality of teaching and of teacher education and training, in order to improve pupils' achievement and the quality of their learning.

Who could oppose a body with such a purpose? Who could oppose bringing together activities previously scattered among various agencies and Departments?

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose—*

Mrs. Shephard: Who could oppose setting up one body committed and able to concentrate on the fight for higher teaching standards? I think that someone is about to suggest himself.

Mr. Benn: Is the right hon. Lady aware that thousands of people have come down from Derbyshire today, and that tens of thousands have signed a petition, because all the words that she has used about higher standards stick in their gullets? Teachers, especially experienced teachers, are to be sacked; class sizes are to rise; school buildings are in disrepair. One of the greatest causes of their resentment is the fact that she does not reply to letters written to her by governors, parents and teachers. The information that she has given the House today is wholly misleading in respect of many local education authorities.

Mrs. Shephard: I must tell the right hon. Gentleman what I told my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) earlier. If the county council is in such financial straits, I do not understand how it has managed to provide supply cover to enable so many teachers to attend today's demonstration. That seems an extraordinary way of identifying priorities. If it is true that schools have been closed, it becomes even more extraordinary.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mrs. Shephard: I wish to make progress. I have already taken—

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. One of the rights of people in this country is to be able to come and lobby their Members of Parliament and bring them petitions, as you will agree. By and large schools have difficulties—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Sit down. That is clearly not a point of order. The Minister did not give way to allow the hon. Gentleman's hoped-for intervention, so he must resume his seat.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does not have a point of order, and he must resume his seat.

Mrs. Shephard: People do indeed have the right to petition Parliament; whether they have the right to do so at public expense is another matter.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): We are trying to improve standards in a difficult year for budget settlements. As we are the party of choice, does my right hon. Friend agree that the only realistic option is to open up the grant-maintained sector? Is it not appalling that only one school in Chorley has gone for GM status? Is not GM status the only way to ensure extra expenditure on schools—and extra capital expenditure on them?

Mrs. Shephard: Yes. It is a pity that the Opposition motion, which concerns opportunity, does not mention choice or diversity. Perhaps that is not surprising, for the Labour party has opposed choice and diversity at every turn: grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges, and even the Education Act 1980, which introduced parental choice in the maintained sector. Nothing has done more to establish choice and diversity than GM schools.

When we came to power, LEAs had a monopoly of state schooling and detailed control of schools. We have given more autonomy to all schools, and we have given parents a central role in determining how much autonomy schools should have.

Parents have the right to decide whether their child's school should become self-governing. Well over 1,000 schools have made the choice to go GM, and the number continues to grow. I hope that the numbers are growing in my right hon. Friend's constituency.

Dame Angela Rumbold: It seems to me that GM schools offer not only choice but the chance for governing bodies, without commitment, to do the arithmetic and work out the difference that it might make to them if they opted out of LEA control and became grant-maintained. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be interesting for schools to undertake those sums?

Mrs. Shephard: I do. Many schools are doing exactly that at the moment. They will also take into account the fact that, on average, GM schools perform better than their LEA counterparts. The primary schools have better test scores at key stage one. The comprehensive schools have better GCSE results and less truancy. Not surprisingly, therefore, GM schools are popular with parents—including a number of parents who sit on the Opposition Benches.

What a pity it is that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield—an apparent convert to GM—has so little influence over his own Labour town halls. The behaviour of many of them towards schools seeking to become GM, and to GM schools themselves, has been disgraceful.

Let us take one or two examples from across the country, ranging from deliberate attempts to terrorise to acts of petty spite. Birmingham city council waged a campaign of discrimination against the pupils and staff of Baverstock grant-maintained school. Pupils were banned from libraries during school hours and were not allowed to borrow books for school projects. The school was not allowed to use council football pitches, and pupils were unable to use the local swimming pool.

In April 1994, the Lib-Lab pact which controls Avon county council produced a guidance document clearly designed to intimidate schools considering the GM option, as the following sentences demonstrate:

> "A Grant-Maintained ballot unleashes deep divisions within parent groups and within communities . . . the experience of a ballot is a very unpleasant one for the Governing body, the staff and some of the parents".

But what price Labour town halls, when the right hon. Member for Sedgefield seems unable to convert his own education spokesman? The hon. Member for Brightside has stated his opposition to GM schools up and down the land and also quite clearly in the House. Speaking to GM heads last week he made soothing noises, talking about

> "flexible partnerships for GMs with their local community",

and saying:

> "coherence in the configuration of services is also a key process in which all schools should participate".

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to explain to the more than 1 million GM parents, not to mention their governors, heads, teachers and children, exactly what those phrases mean. Would he like to tell the House? Can he, as I asked him in a letter last week, give GM pupils, parents and teachers an assurance that he has no intention of changing or interfering with the freedoms, choice and diversity for which these parents have voted?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some of us are acutely aware of the movements of the Clerk of the House. I noticed just now that he turned to you to suggest that the right hon. Lady might be out of order. Will you consider what he said? We believe that she is.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I never comment on any advice that I may receive from Clerks. In any case, if the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister, he will find it couched in such wide terms that what the Secretary of State is saying is in order.

Mrs. Shephard: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand why this may be rather a sensitive subject for the Opposition.

I spoke of a letter that I wrote to the hon. Member for Brightside last week. I hope that he will give the House an answer to it. Many of his colleagues, including the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, are awaiting it eagerly, because the education of their own children is at stake.

Mr. Blunkett: The answer on grant-maintained schools is that they are as subject to cuts and redundancies as every other type of school—as spelled out in the right hon. Lady's letter to her Cabinet colleagues. We give this pledge: every child and every school will be treated equitably and fairly and will be given the same investment to lift standards and opportunities for 100 per cent. of our children, not just 7 per cent. of them.

Mrs. Shephard: Dearie me, those are very soothing words, and I do not think that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield will like that too much. Of course Labour Members do not like grant-maintained schools, because those schools manage their own affairs and control their total budgets. They escape from the iron grip of Labour-controlled town halls.

Mr. Marland: Did my right hon. Friend hear the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) in the same way as I did? He gave an assurance that all schools would be treated in exactly the same way. Does that mean that they will all be dealt with directly by a Labour Government and that they will completely sideline all the local authorities, because that is how I interpret it—no local democracy, no local influence, the whole thing controlled by the hon. Gentleman?

Mrs. Shephard: No doubt the hon. Member for Brightside will make his case with the right hon. Member for Sedgefield some time this evening. Whatever he meant, he meant the end of grant-maintained schools, that is for sure.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Shephard: No. I am not giving way any more.

The Government have an outstanding record of achievement in education. The reforms have established a new framework for education that raises standards and extends opportunity, choice, diversity and achievement. What has the Opposition's contribution been to all that? It has been opposition all the way. No one can deny it; it is clearly chronicled in their voting record.

They have voted against every measure to raise standards and increase opportunity; against every measure to increase choice in the maintained sector; against the assisted places scheme; against the introduction of more parent-governors; against the national curriculum and assessment tests; against GM schools and city technology colleges; against the establishment of Ofsted and the new inspection regime; against the establishment of a higher education funding council; and against the establishment of the Teacher Training Agency.

With that record, how dare the Opposition lecture us about standards and opportunity? How dare they pose as the guardians of opportunity—they who would deny to others the very choices that they seize eagerly for their own children?

It is the Conservative Government who have ensured that we have higher standards and greater opportunities throughout our educational system than ever before. The Government have given the young people of Britain wider choice and greater opportunity and thrown open the doors to a better education and training that is more sound. That is a record of which we are proud, and it is a record that we intend to maintain and enhance.

5.11 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): The debate takes place against a backdrop of growing concern about the funding of our education system, particularly in the state sector.

The Government have failed to deliver high-quality education in all our schools, and that is one of the devastating failures of the past 16 years of Tory party misrule.

The Government's over-prescription of the national curriculum, their failure to deliver on teachers' concerns over the way in which they conduct the standard attainment test and their interference in the GCSE examination have impeded, not promoted, the process of improving the standards that are achieved by our pupils in state schools. The Government's blind promotion of grant-maintained schools owes much more to political ideology of selection than it does to choice.

In its leader of 27 April 1992, *The Times* said:

> "To pretend that the selective opted out structure emerging as Government policy has anything to do with parental choice is a deception."

Those are powerful words. What they say has been underpinned by a concerted attack on the professionalism of teachers, as evidenced in the recent unhelpful comments by the Secretary of State for Education, who commented on what goes on in classrooms throughout the country.

The debate also takes place against a backdrop of remorseless and systematic education spending cuts. What brings today's debate sharply into focus is the united protest of parents, teachers and governors across the country. Thousands upon thousands of ordinary people, united in their commitment to fight for the best possible education for their children, have been spontaneously thrust into action by the Government's mindless refusal to fund in full this year's modest teachers pay award. That act in itself says a great deal about how hopelessly out of touch the Government have become.

The Government stand idly by while bosses in the privatised utilities award themselves massive pay raises, paid for out of the pockets of water, gas and electricity users, yet when it comes to the teachers' pay award, the Government agree that the increase is justified but meanly refuse to pay for it. Those actions have left thousands of governors with the atrocious task of sacking teachers and/or increasing class sizes. The Government do not care, because they believe that increasing class sizes does not in itself affect standards. What utter nonsense.

Faced with that choice—requiring almost a judgment of Solomon—school governors have protested loud and clear about the act of educational vandalism perpetrated by the Government. School governors are the same governors whom the Government claim to have liberated, empowered and given a voice to. Is it not ironic that, when those governors speak out in one voice to condemn the Government's actions over the refusal to fund in full the teachers' pay award, the so-called self-styled liberators—the Government—ignore their views? So much for the Government's rhetoric about giving parents and governors more say in education.

The Government are only the fickle friend of parent power. In response to the protest, we have seen the ignominious retreat of the Secretary of State for Education. At first she recognised that up to 10,000 teachers would be made redundant and that class sizes would shoot up as a result of the Government's failure to fund in full the teachers' pay award. She now says, however, that the pay award can be funded out of unpaid poll tax and the removal of surplus places. In other words, she is suggesting that local education authorities can fund the pay award with money that they do not have. She is engaged in fantasy politics, and she knows it.

Shire county LEAs are not responsible for collecting poll tax or council tax arrears, yet the Secretary of State suggests that teachers' pay should be partly funded out of the collection of those arrears. She cannot be serious in her suggestion that teachers' monthly salary pay cheques should become dependent on whether a district council has recovered sufficient poll tax arrears to meet the salary bill.

Likewise, on the issue of surplus places, the savings suggested by the Secretary of State are illusory, in that every time an LEA attempts to close a school because of over-capacity, that school applies to become grant-maintained and thus frustrates the efforts of the LEA to rationalise education places. If any proof is needed of that, all one has to do is look at Bankfield high school, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes). It was faced with closure. It applied to opt out and was granted grant-maintained status by the Secretary of State.

In response to the avalanche of criticism by school governors, the Prime Minister, at Question Time last Tuesday, said:

> "Of course we recognised from the outset that this year's settlement is tough in education."

He should have said that the Tory party's approach is tough on education. He went on to say:

> "If any local authority is thinking of cutting the number of teachers in the classroom, I would ask it what savings it had made in non-teaching aspects of education."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 140.]

That patronising nonsense beggars belief after 16 years of education cuts perpetrated by the Tories.

My own LEA—it was mentioned by the Secretary of State—Cheshire county council, which is Tory-Liberal Democrat controlled, is at the bottom of the league in spending per pupil. Cheshire county council spends only £1,321 per nursery and primary school place. The average is £1,580. Suffolk, which is at the top of the league, spends £1,944. On secondary school places, the position is similar. Cheshire spends only £2,072, when the average is £2,260. Cleveland, at the top of the league, spends £2,515.

At the time of the 1995-96 revenue support grant settlement, Michael Pitt, chief executive of Cheshire county council, wrote to me to say that his authority's administration costs are very low, that class sizes are higher and that its pupil-teacher ratios are far worse than the average. Yet the Secretary of State holds that up as an example of a good education authority. Of course, Michael Pitt is right. In 1994, Cheshire had 19.1 pupils per teacher and was the fourth worst in England. The 1995 figure shows that the ratio has worsened. In Warrington, there are 19.8 pupils per teacher, and in Halton Vale Royal, there are 19.4 pupils per teacher. The Secretary of State quoted that as a good example of providing education. Of course, that was before the decision on the revenue support grant and the Government's refusal to fund fully the teachers' pay award.

Cheshire county council's SSA for 1995-96 has been cut by 3.3 per cent. in real terms, and its revenue support grant has been cut by 0.8 per cent. in real terms. That, together with the £8 million cost of fully funding the teachers' award, has placed severe pressures on the education budget.

To balance its books, Cheshire county council has cut £1.6 million from its client services. That means cutting the number of free school meals and increasing the cost of school meals that are paid for. It has cut £90,000 from its education support services, £290,000 from continuing education and youth and community provision and £113,000 from inspection. The Secretary of State says that inspection is one of the ways to improve standards in our schools, but an authority that she congratulates has cut £113,000 from its inspection budget.

Worst of all, Cheshire county council made a cut of £3 million from student awards in this financial year, and it plans to cut them by £3 million in the next financial year. That means that no discretionary grants or support will be given to adults who wish to return to education. That cut alone hits standards and colleges alike. Warrington collegiate institute is set to lose £300,000 as a result, and adults who return to education will have to fund their own courses or forgo the option of enhancing their qualifications. The loss of discretionary awards hits working-class students hardest, and they are the very people who need to return to education.

Unfortunately, Cheshire county council did not stop there. It cut £575,000 from the primary schools budget, £1.5 million from the secondary schools budget and £440,000 from special education needs. However, the authority was still left with the problem of finding £8 million to fund fully the pay award for its teachers. If the Government had fully funded that award, Cheshire county council could have used the money to bring it from the bottom of the educational ladder on spending per pupil. It could have spent more on improving its poor pupil-teacher ratio in Halton, Warrington and elsewhere in its area.

The money could have been spent on establishing a junior school unit for hearing-impaired pupils at the Brow school in Runcorn. Much-needed extra resources could have been given to the learning support service in Warrington or to a multi-sensory impairment unit similar to the excellent facilities that are provided at the Russett school in Weaverham. It could have provided a much-needed unit in primary schools for partially sighted pupils.

It is clear that the Government have misjudged the mood of the nation on this issue and have ignored the harmful effects of these cuts on our education. They need to rethink their strategy—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are on a 10-minute limit.

5.22 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): The first matter that I should like to place on the record is that, since 1979, there has been a huge increase in Government expenditure on education. There are 50 per cent. more sixth formers than when we came to power, and the number of pupils moving to higher education is now one in three compared with one in eight. That is a 150 per cent. increase. All that has had to be funded, so there is no doubt that we have put vast sums into education. The Secretary of State mentioned that.

A comparison with other countries of the percentage that Britain spends on education will often show to our advantage. On the figures that I have seen, the comparisons with Germany, France and Japan are credible. However, no matter how much more money we have put in and how many more students there are at every level, what matters is the quality of teachers, the commitment of parents and the syllabus. On those three issues over the past 16 years, the Government have done a great deal in every way.

We installed a basic curriculum when we came to power in 1979 and I was privileged to be an Education Minister for four years. A headlong comprehensive reorganisation was jittering to a stop and the far left had encouraged do-it-yourself education in schools instead of real teaching, which means seating people at desks and teaching them with real teachers instead of joyriders.

As I have said, we introduced the basic curriculum. For a time it was too complicated, and I accept that for a while it was oppressive. But that was a trial period, and now there is a good curriculum in primary and secondary schools and testing at the ages of seven, 11 and 14. That is as it should be.

I make no apology for the introduction of league tables. There is a premium football league and there should also be a premium educational league because education is a necessity. In 1979, there was no parental choice and local authorities could increase or decrease the size of schools just as they wanted.

Mr. Dunn: They could do that at will.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I agree with my hon. Friend. Parents were not given the privilege of knowing the curriculum and there was no parental choice. We changed all that. In the past 16 years, the Government have done very well for education. All the changes that we have made to improve education have been opposed by the Labour party.

Mr. Dunn: And by the Liberals.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I had forgotten that the Liberals still exist. They also opposed the changes. The Opposition opposed every Second Reading—when I checked yesterday I found that only one Third Reading was unopposed. We introduced the curriculum and parental choice, but they preferred parents to be blindfolded and having to go where they were sent, like a conscript army.

Apparently, the Labour party now agrees with us on most matters, which is rather a compliment. However, it does not agree that reverse discrimination in education—the assisted places scheme—has worked. Some 34,000 children from some of the poorest homes in the country are in our best schools. The party that talks about reverse discrimination turned against the only good reverse discrimination ever carried out in education.

I am concerned about three issues, the first of which is the destruction of playing fields and the consequent lack of sporting facilities. Today, I asked for a list of school and other playing fields that have been lost in my constituency over the 21 years that I have been there. The Government should direct that no playing field should be

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

taken out of action from now on unless there is Government approval. There is no point in talking about sport if there are no facilities for it.

Secondly, I am concerned to maintain the standards of A-level and degree courses. No deterioration should arise from the fact that more people are sitting for those examinations, as that would put at risk the severity of the examinations. Thirdly, I am concerned to see the return of morning school assemblies because they bring the people in a school together. Such an assembly has a moral and a disciplinary place in a school and if the headmaster cannot keep 1,200 pupils in order at assembly, he cannot expect his staff to keep them in order in the classrooms. I sometimes suspect that assemblies are not held because of the fear of bad behaviour.

I should like to deal with another matter on which I think I might have the support of the whole House. That would be a surprise and a privilege, and I shall give my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who was also a teacher, a drink if I manage to do it. I do not think that we realise that the power in education has changed. In the beginning, the political parties organised it nationally and locally and there were agreements about setting up governing bodies. That has gone, and one of the problems facing the Government is that the power has passed to parents and teachers.

Mr. Dunn: What is wrong with that?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: There is nothing wrong with that. My hon. Friend is cross-examining me. I will have a word with him, too. He will not get a drink afterwards. The battles will now be fought with parents and teachers, not with the local authorities of old.

Let me end my speech as I know that a time limit has been imposed.

Mr. Marland: My right hon. Friend has three minutes.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I have three minutes, so I can move a little more slowly, even start again or ask which parts of my speech I should expand on.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way so that I can help him along?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: No, I shall not give way. My hon. Friend and I are speaking in a debate on Friday. He is giving an introduction for me. I have changed my mind. I shall give way to him.

Mr. Carlisle: I promise to say nice things about my right hon. Friend on Friday. Does he agree that corporal punishment is another old-fashioned principle to which we should return?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I would vote for that tomorrow. Capital and corporal punishment is coming back around the world, including in America. Eventually, it will come back here. We shall all have to have a drink together on the day that that happens.

In 1987, a MORI poll was conducted on whether parents were satisfied with their children's education. It showed that 74 per cent. of parents were satisfied. The 1994 MORI poll showed that 83 per cent. were satisfied. The Government have poured money into education because of the extension in the number of people staying on longer. Secondly, we have tightened education up through the national curriculum, parental choice and all those changes, against the wishes of the Labour party, which is so unqualified to go into government. Thirdly, we have to watch out that that vast expansion does not mean a lowering of standards. Apart from that, I have full confidence in the Government on education.

5.31 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): It is always difficult to follow the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). His ideas are often interesting and provocative but, sadly, wrong.

As the House will know, I act as an adviser to two teacher unions. I suspect that they will be slightly surprised to hear my opening remarks. I should like to pay a compliment to the Secretary of State for Education, who, sadly, is not in her place. The House will acknowledge that rejection, especially public rejection, is difficult to bear. All hon. Members know that, behind the scenes, the Secretary of State has been working hard to try to obtain additional money for the education service.

We know that, behind the scenes, the right hon. Lady has made it clear that she knows that the recent education settlement will damage the education service, that a number of teachers will have to be sacked, and that she believes class sizes will rise. I congratulate her on the fact that she managed to give a speech in which none of that, and none of the public humiliation that she suffered as a result of her Cabinet colleagues' rejection of her pleas, showed through.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): In my county of Leicestershire, the Conservatives put forward a budget that would have given an extra £1 million to education. The Liberal Democrat leader on Leicestershire county council said that, if he had an extra £1 million, he would not spend it on schools. Does the hon. Gentleman stand by that statement?

Mr. Foster: Many decisions have been made at local level by local authorities that are placed in considerable difficulty because of the restraints on finance imposed in recent settlements under the Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Foster: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Without knowing the details of the Leicestershire case, it would be inappropriate for me to comment, but it is interesting that, both in the Chamber and on the radio in the past 24 hours, we have heard a number of examples of what Liberal Democrat and Labour authorities have done. One relates to Bedfordshire county council. The Secretary of State suggested on the radio this morning, and repeated at the Dispatch Box today, that the Liberal Democrat and Labour administration in Bedfordshire had produced a budget that was less for education than the Conservatives had.

This morning, however, the Secretary of State received a letter from that council, pointing out that the information that she gave on the radio and subsequently did not tie in with the budget figures in Bedfordshire, where the Liberal Democrat-Labour administration put forward a budget amounting to nearly £250 million more than that of the

Conservatives. It is not the other way around. I need to know the details of the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan).

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): The hon. Gentleman should consider Bedfordshire's budget more closely. The Labour-Liberal budget has resulted in a 3.5 per cent. cut in school budgets. The Conservative budget, in addition to funding teachers' pay, resulted in a 2 per cent. cut. That is a difference of 1.5 per cent. Each 1 per cent. amounts to £35,000 in one upper school. Therefore, an extra £52,500 has been cut from the budget of one upper school in Bedfordshire. Those are the correct figures

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is making the point that Conservative Members are making the most incredible use of some statistics.

I have the budget figures that were contained in the budget proposals of the two political groups. Today at the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State told us clearly that more money was being made available for the education service. Of course, everyone knows that that amount of money is an increase on the previous year, but she refused to acknowledge that, in real terms, the amount of money has decreased by £50 per primary pupil and by nearly £200 per secondary pupil.

People outside need to know the statistics that make it clear what is happening on the ground. Parents, teachers and governors know that the education service in their region is being cut and that, as a result, the quality of education being provided to their children is being harmed.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: I shall not give way. Although I do not have to comply with the 10-minute rule, Madam Speaker is keen for me to stay as close to it as I can. Perhaps I shall give way when I have made a little progress.

It is interesting that the Cabinet is clearly split on education. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury wants nursery vouchers, yet the Secretary of State opposes them. Earlier today at the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State said that the ideas of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on Manchester grammar school were refreshing, and she invited him to tea to discuss them. Only yesterday, however, the Prime Minister rejected those ideas in his answers at Prime Minister's Question Time.

It is reported that the President of the Board of Trade and the Foreign Secretary, who are running scared of the backlash caused by education cuts, want more money to be spent on schools rather than on tax cuts, yet, needless to say, the Chancellor of the Exchequer opposes that.

The Prime Minister, meanwhile, makes claims about the number of local education authority administrators. Frankly, his claims would not pass key stage 1 in mathematics. If he considers his own local education authority, he will find that, out of the nearly 8,000 teachers and support staff, such as caretakers, cleaners and education welfare officers, less than one in 26 are involved in LEA administration—hardly the two administrators per three teachers that he claimed.

The Prime Minister knows, and the Cabinet knows only too well, that LEAs have already been forced to cut into the bone as a result of education cuts. To misquote Winston Churchill, the Government have got themselves into a shambles wrapped in confusion inside chaos.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Foster: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He and I have had extremely extensive correspondence on the issues that no doubt he wants to raise. He can refer to the letters that I have written to him in relation to the point that I am sure he wants to raise.

As a result of all that chaos, our teachers, our governors and, perhaps most important, our pupils suffer. They suffer from having larger classes—1 million primary pupils are in classes of more than 30, and 100,000 in classes of more than 36. They suffer because the school buildings are falling down around their ears. A survey last week revealed that more than a quarter of schools have been forced to close dilapidated buildings, and nearly 20 per cent. of schools have had pupils or staff suffering from illness or injury linked to poor conditions.

It is hardly surprising that truanting has increased. Instead of fining parents for not sending their children to school, perhaps we should fine Ministers for not making the money available to ensure that schools are places where children want to go.

The failure to fund the education service means that there is now a £4.3 billion backlog of repairs and maintenance to school buildings.

Mr. John Carlisle: It is, of course, easy to spend someone else's money, which is the hon. Gentleman's party's policy. He criticised the Conservative authority's budget in Bedfordshire, but I remind him that, under the Liberal-Labour budget now accepted by the council, it is estimated that between 250 and 300 redundancies will have to be made in the education service. Under the Conservative budget, some 140 redundancies would have to be made, because we are making greater savings elsewhere. In other words, his party is concerned not with jobs but with pouring more money into what seems in Bedfordshire to be a bottomless pit.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman has a very peculiar view of the nature of the education service. One of the problems is that many Conservative Members seem to believe—just like the Prime Minister when he talked about administrators—that one can provide an education service without any of the back-up and support that teachers desperately need in the classroom. That is what worries many people. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would reflect on the point of having Ofsted inspectors identify problems in schools—problems that teachers often already know about—but for there then to be no back-up and support to help the schools to put matters right.

The situation is already bad enough, but let us reflect on what the Government are now doing. The Secretary of State did not deny that, under the financial support settlement, the Government have cut £50 in real terms from spending on every primary school pupil and nearly £200 from spending on every secondary school pupil. In effect, that is a cut of £10,000 for a 200-pupil primary school, or a cut of £126,000 for a 650-pupil secondary school. The total is a £700 million cut. How can local education authorities possibly make up such a shortfall?

[Mr. Foster]

Many people outside have rumbled the Government. They know that the problems cannot be blamed on local education authorities, but that the blame must be put fairly and squarely on central Government cuts, where it belongs. Perhaps the most cynical reaction since Herod asked the wise men to take him to greet the baby was to support an increase for teachers but not to fund it.

The situation was beautifully summed up in a letter that I read recently in an education magazine. The letter read:

> "Dear Editor, My son was pleased when I told him I was putting his pocket money up by five pounds. He was a bit bemused when I told him I was not funding the increase. When he asked me where the money was coming from, I told him that was his problem."

That is the problem faced by schools across the country.

Mr. Duncan: Where is the money to come from?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps put that question to the Secretary of State, because she too has been asking for more money for the education service, but her request has been rejected. Perhaps she now knows how people in the education service feel. People in the service have rumbled the Government. They know that the Government are trying to save money for pre-election tax cut bribes. The Government should not be allowed to succeed.

I hope that the Secretary of State will continue to press the Cabinet for more money for the education service, and that she will not give up in the attempt. If she does not succeed, the only honourable thing for someone in her position is to resign her post. I am sorry that she is not here to hear me say this. She has, at least privately, indicated her support for the education service. The time has now come, however, for her to put her job on the line to secure a decent future for our schools, and I hope that she will do so this evening by supporting the Labour motion.

5.44 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): That was a fascinating tirade by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I happen to have had the privilege of knowing the Secretary of State for Education for a very long time. She was, in fact, the inspector at the village school to which my children went—six of them. She was a very good inspector, just as she had been a very good teacher.

My right hon. Friend was far from humiliated in the recent Budget discussions. Although the national Budget was frozen overall, two Secretaries of State won increases for their Departments' budgets—the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Education. I reckon that the ladies did rather well.

The remarks of the hon. Member for Bath do not entirely surprise me. He had the great privilege of attending Lancaster Royal grammar school—he was the only Liberal it ever turned out. His school report boded ill for the Liberal party. It read as follows:

> "Muddle-headed and impulsive. May grow out of it. Daft and illogical. Does less than justice to work by indulging in irreverence and orgies of bad spelling."

We cannot judge the quality of his spelling, but we can judge the quality of his logic.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the motion ranges very widely. I have the great privilege of having several superb schools in my constituency, and many of the pupils who have attended them—including the hon. Member for Bath—went on to university. As the House may be somewhat tired of hearing by now, I also have an absolutely superb university in my constituency. In today's hierarchy, it is third only to Oxford, which is a superb university, and to Cambridge, which is not too bad.

Lancaster university has led the field in so many subjects and is now on an international plane. It set the scene for the whole university world when, last week, it raised no less than £35 million on the stock exchange on the strength of its reputation. Is that not an enormous tribute to the work it has done?

I am very interested in the observations that have been made about staffing, and I am very keen to learn about staffing at county hall. I was astounded to find that, although further education has been removed from the orbit of the county councils, and although much of the county councils' work has been removed because of local management of schools, staffing gains have nevertheless been made in administration. In Preston in 1990-91, there were 503 full-time equivalents. The figure then shot up to 543, despite the fact that further education had been removed from county council control, and local management of schools had transferred much work from county to schools. Last year, the figure went up to 548.

The Secretary of State referred to a cut of £500,000 in Lancashire's administration. I laughed, because the £500,000 cut was a tightening of the rules because of the excessive amount of sick pay taken by county hall staff, which was mentioned by the Audit Commission.

I was so extremely incensed by the way in which the county had cut the money for our schools that I decided to go into the question of grant-maintained status. GM status was not only a Conservative idea you know, ladies and gentlemen—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I mean hon. Members, although some hon. Members are ladies and gentlemen.

There was a fascinating item in the *Evening Standard* a week last Tuesday which quoted Eric Hammond, a chairman of a school which is trying to become grant-maintained. I could not have agreed with him more. I do not recall having agreed with him before, but I did on that occasion. He said:

> "It is not in our interests to be tied to an expensive bureaucracy."

By golly, it is not in our interests either.

There is also a very good school in Bradford which has just become grant-maintained. The headmaster of that school is a former Labour councillor. He told a friend of mine who was there only last Friday, so it was fairly recently, that, if a Labour Government were elected—heaven preserve us—and abolished grant-maintained status, he would take immediate early retirement.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to Baverstock school. I have been circulating the cutting of Mr. Hammond's piece and the cutting about Baverstock school to all the parents who write to me about GM status, because it shows what can be achieved when governors, parents and teachers take their courage in both hands and decide that their fate and that of their children shall be in their own hands and not those of the county.

Baverstock was an extremely rundown school, and now it is in fine fettle. Since becoming grant-maintained, it has taken on 12 new teachers. It was forecast that, once it gained GM status, it would get rid of children who were more difficult to educate—but far from it. Of those 12 teachers, two teach children with special needs on a one-to-one basis .

My right hon. Friend the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) who, alas, is no longer in her place, suggested that school governors should get out the figures for how much better off their schools would be if they were grant-maintained. I have gone one better. I have found out how much better off every school in my constituency would be if it was grant-maintained, and I have circulated the figures to every head teacher and all chairmen of governors.

On Friday, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) and I are holding a seminar to discuss with some head teachers and chairmen of governors who have—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who is paying for it?"] It is at our expense—50:50. The seminar is so that teachers and governors can learn how much better off they would be from those schools which have already gained grant-maintained status. One school in my constituency has had a bite of almost £250,000 taken out of its funding by the county.

All schools would be better off. I have always known that, but I did not know by how much until I went into the matter so carefully. The people at the seminar will be able to hear for themselves what has happened to those who have gone down the path of GM status. They will be able to ask as many questions as they like. If hostile people attend, they will be more than welcome, because we will be able to convert them. The future of our children depends on such people having the chance of getting the money they should have direct from the Government. It should not be watered down by county hall, which fritters it away.

5.52 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The speech of the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was also a fascinating tirade. I was glad to hear the combative opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). I thought that the Secretary of State, however, made only a grimly determined speech. It did not convince the House. It was perhaps contrived by a desiccated calculating machine. The right hon. Lady certainly came to the House with a weak hand, and she delivered a very weak speech. Indeed, all she offered the nation, in effect, was "tea and sympathy", to quote her words. It was an uncomfortable speech, and her supporters looked uncomfortable as well.

This year, I have made only nine visits to schools in my constituency. When I talk to the class teacher, I find morale very low indeed. When I talk to head teachers, I find them deeply worried. When I talk to governors, I find that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by what are now very onerous responsibilities.

When the deputation came to the House last week for the mass lobby by people from all over the country, I met four people from my locality—two class teachers, a representative of those who lead ancillary workers in the school service, and a local education authority chairperson. They made the point that there was an absolute and urgent need for more investment and more teachers in the school service.

Anybody who takes the trouble to visit our schools and spends some time in classrooms observing what is going on will quickly be converted to the side of the teacher. Most classrooms are a credit to enter. They display first-rate work. The decoration of the walls and the presentation of the various schemes and projects of the children show any visitor that the class teacher is doing first-rate work.

I praise the dedication, conscientiousness and professionalism of the teachers of our country. In the circumstances, they are doing a wonderful job. I would like them to receive more praise and more resources to enable them—even better than now—to deliver a first-rate service to the children in their care.

I could sum up the feeling of secondary school head teachers by citing the reaction of one, who said that there were very few problems in the school itself; the problems came through the letter box. Head teachers are angry at the demands made on them by ministerial fiat, by local education authority questionnaire and by various bulletins.

Head teachers at whatever level want to provide an even better service to the local children and parents. They feel overwhelmed time and time again by a tide of paper—by diktat from central Government—and they are asking for a respite while they try to cope with the demands which have already been made of them. They must be right. The nation's schools now need a breathing space.

If we consider the impact of the leadership by a succession of Conservative Secretaries of State and their legislation, the House might think it sobering. First there was the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), then the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and then the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten). It would be uncontroversial to say that those Secretaries of State were highly controversial.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) tried to secure some peace in his work. From the contribution made by the right hon. Lady, the present Secretary of State, she appears to be suing for peace. History may be kind to the late Sir Keith Joseph, if only because of his technical and vocational education initiative. I did not think there was any malice, since there was certainly no command, from Lord Carlisle.

As Cabinet Ministers in charge of the nation's school service, the reigns of the right hon. Members for Mole Valley and for Oxford, West and Abingdon and of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe were disastrous. They were always seeking to make a reputation, but in so doing, they almost destroyed the school service that they were supposed to be leading and restoring. They almost destroyed the coherence of the civil service, and of the inspectorate and its interface with the school service. Certainly the confidence and self-respect of the teaching force was gravely impaired by many Conservative Secretaries of State, and that communicated itself to parents and governing bodies.

Governing bodies then found that there was an urgent need to raise money through sales of work and so on to provide the essentials for our schools in the late 20th century. Her Majesty's Government carelessly embarked

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on a series of privatisations of public utilities, and used the funds raised from those great sales of the family silver to give tax cuts to the better-off. Meanwhile, the cuts in the school service continued. That had to be wrong.

Today, there remains a miserable scene of cuts and frustration. Children in communities with large-scale unemployment and poverty are not getting the chances they deserve. They are only young once. Many children stay up far too late at night, are irregular attenders and exist on poor diets. Concentration can be woeful, and distractions are legion.

Many children in our schools do not have two parents, and for some children, the school is frequently a substitute home. It also provides them with a source of protein, and a venue for standards and for prayers. Schools are the places where right and wrong are patiently explained by dedicated teachers. We should not starve our schools of resources and of the desperately needed additional teachers.

From parliamentary answers given to me, I know that class sizes are creeping up, and now teachers are expected to cope with the consequences of a powerful social revolution roaring through our country—and this at a great pace. That poses serious problems for them, and they must be given the resources to get on with coping with those massive challenges.

Above all, parents are asking the Government for more teachers. In the primary sector, especially, average class sizes are increasing; in the smaller high schools there is a sense of desperation. We want central Government to provide a better delivery of the essential services at the chalk face for teachers, parents and governors.

To sum up, parents want the leaking roof to be plugged and the classrooms to be redecorated. They are not asking for the earth. They do not want a revolution; they simply want justice, and a fair deal from the Government.

6.2 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): In listening to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and to all the Opposition Members who have spoken so far, I detect a close similarity in their speeches. That reflects the lack of choice, diversity and excitement in Opposition education policies that always becomes clear in such debates. Perhaps that is partly explained by the report on the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), about which we enjoyed hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman).

I am glad that this is a wide-ranging debate, because it will give me the chance to talk about selection, choice and excellence in education. Those issues underpin the reason why Opposition education policies have failed in the past, and will fail in the future, should they ever be tried.

As the debate is partly about teachers and their pay, perhaps at this stage I should declare a connection with, and an interest in, the Professional Association of Teachers.

There is no doubt that in the constituencies there has been a political campaign on education orchestrated by the Opposition. It has been unscrupulous and unhelpful and has done education no service at all. I have made a point of visiting schools in my constituency in Norwich, and I am well aware of the situation in Norfolk. The Secretary of State for Education is right when she says that schools' problems should be examined objectively, discussed properly, and where there are difficulties—here I agree with Opposition Members—they should be debated and tackled. But that is not the same as a mega-political campaign that does education no good.

In Norfolk we recently had a meeting of governors and parents, and schools have been advised, unwisely I believe, to go beyond their deficits and to set illegal budgets. I agree with the Norfolk politicians who are telling the governors and parents that they should reconsider before plunging their schools into the red. I am glad to see one of the Opposition Members nodding in agreement, because it is the Labour leader of the Norfolk education committee who is giving that advice.

I am happy to support the Government amendment. After all, since 1979 there has been a substantial increase in education spending under the Conservative Government, and more money is available for local authorities than there was last year. But my main aim tonight is to highlight the Government's determination to improve standards and choice in education—and choice extends to methods of funding.

I believe that perhaps we should have moved more quickly to direct funding of schools by the state. I prefer the grant-maintained system, which my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster supports so enthusiastically, as do many of my hon. Friends. It represents a step in the right direction.

I support that mode of funding because of the greater transparency that it provides. Arguments about education would not be mixed up with standard spending assessments and local authorities if school funding were not mixed up with the complications of local authority funding. That is the problem. The problem is not the excellent performance by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is doing an excellent job, but the way in which schools are funded. I support those who say that we should have more direct funding and expand the grant-maintained sector where possible.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thompson: No, I shall not, because of the time limit; otherwise I should have been happy to do so.

I must refer to an important matter of which I have personal experience. The Opposition opposed the idea of grant-maintained schools, root and branch. I know that because I was on the Committee considering the legislation that introduced it. I am not sure what the Opposition's present view is; perhaps there will be more time to debate that on another occasion. However, they opposed it, root and branch, at the time, as they always oppose attempts to give parents, teachers and children greater diversity and choice in education.

Opposition Members may have forgotten what happened in the past, but I have not, because I entered teaching in 1960—at Manchester grammar school, which is in the news at the moment. I hope that Opposition Members will listen carefully to what I say because the Labour party, in Manchester and elsewhere, opposed everything that stood in the way of steamrollering in the comprehensive system. Whatever one may feel about comprehensive schools—and there are many good ones—the manner in which they were introduced did damage to education from which the country has still not yet recovered. That was done by Shirley Williams and by Anthony Crosland, who said:

> "if it's the last thing I do, I'm going to destroy every grammar school in England and Wales and Northern Ireland".

The damage was done at that time, and that is why direct grant schools—such as Manchester grammar school, Bradford grammar school and many others—were forced, against their will and better judgment, to leave the state system.

I do not have time to say very much about this matter, but I remember the tradition of Manchester grammar school because I taught there. The tradition was to help poorer pupils who were bright to have the very best opportunities, and many Opposition Members and civil servants have gained from education at those schools.

The Labour party forced those schools to go independent. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), who brackets those schools with other public schools. There is a difference, as the tradition of direct grant schools is to help poorer people. Labour was responsible for the plight of such schools.

The Labour party is still opposed to selection. Having read recent reports on the matter, I know that Manchester grammar school—even if it returns to the state, which it wants to do as that is true to its traditions—still believes in selection. I heard the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), and it is clear that Labour is still implacably opposed to selection. It is still on the egalitarian ticket which is doing so much damage to education, and it will have a problem in the future.

The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham is important, because direct grant schools are still tremendous schools and everyone here recognises that. I hope that all Members will think seriously about ideas which have been put forward for their future. Perhaps the Schools Funding Council, or even the grant-maintained schools concept, is appropriate, but I understand the funding implications which lie behind that.

I think that I have made my point about the difficulties that the Opposition have in terms of education. It is the same old problem of levelling everyone down which always destroys Labour's education policies; it could do so again. That is why I support the Government's amendment. We are right to go for choice and diversity and to encourage good standards, not only in our direct grant schools but in all schools. I hope that Ministers will continue to aim to fund education as much as they can, but—more importantly—that they will continue to pursue policies which will lead to the best quality of education for our young people.

6.12 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): This is an important debate on the most important asset of this nation—our children and their future education—and it is right to try to focus attention on what the Government are doing.

I wish to refer to a letter that appeared in the *Burnley Express* last Friday which underlines the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). In the main, the people who are leading the opposition to what is happening are not county councillors or Members of Parliament, but the parents and governors who recognise what is happening. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) referred to the involvement of parents and governors in the issue; if we want them to be genuinely involved in the local management of schools, we must take account of what was in that letter.

The letter stated:

> "As a school governor and parent, I am appalled at the horrendous cuts in school budgets which the Government is to impose in the financial year 1995/96 . . . If letters arrive by the sackful we may be able to persuade the Government to stop these swingeing cuts which are about to befall schools and, ultimately, if left alone will destroy our education system."

Many parents and governors—they are not involved in politics, and are not Conservatives, Liberals or Labour supporters—say that, following the introduction of local management of schools they have been given responsibilities to do certain things, but they have not been given the finances to do the job. Many of them do not understand that, because they believe that the Government have given them the responsibility and genuinely expect them to do the job. That is why they are now concerned at the further tightening of the financial screw which will occur this year.

The front-page headline of the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* last night was "Savage Staff Cuts At Schools". The story underneath went on to say:

> "Secondary schools throughout East Lancashire are facing cutbacks averaging £100,000 each and are having to ask two or three teachers to take early retirement.
>
> At least one school is also considering spending more than it has been allowed by Lancashire County Council to try to stave off the worst effects of the most savage cuts in years."

A teacher from St Theodore's high school in my constituency said:

> "We are reducing our staff level by three. They will be taking early retirement. Spending on capitation—books and equipment—is frozen at last year's level which is almost the same as the previous year's. Repairs and maintenance will be down to essential, day-to-day repairs."

The editorial of the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* yesterday stated:

> "The cruel truth is that for the sake of a relatively small amount of cash, everyone is suffering. Children, the most important people of all, tomorrow's citizens who will ultimately hold the future of this country in their hands, will receive the direct hit.
>
> Then there are dedicated and already hard-pressed teachers wondering whether they will be out on the streets next week.
>
> Parents, too, are worried sick about their children's future worrying if they will get the attention they need, whether those with special needs will have enough help, and whether even the brightest can manage to cope against a background of cutbacks and decaying buildings . . . The latest round of cuts is an iniquity. The pain is not limited to Lancashire, it is being felt all over the country.
>
> Things have gone too far this time. Before long, one way or another, those responsible can expect the caning they deserve."

We all want the opportunity to make those responsible pay for the cuts. They should be put into opposition, and let us take over the Government and provide money for education, as one of our priorities is to ensure that education is provided with the funds that it needs.

I have been in correspondence in recent weeks with Ministers, including the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools whose word processor must be

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churning out replies by the dozen. The Minister made a number of wrong statements in a letter that he sent to me. He stated:

> "Allowing for the reform of inter-authority recruitment, Lancashire's education SSA for 1995-96 represents an increase of 1.4 per cent. (almost £7 million)—above the national average increase of 1.2 per cent."

What the Minister did not say was that that 1.4 per cent. is tied directly to the increase in the number of children within the county of Lancashire. Last year, Lancashire got 2.3 per cent. against the average at that time of 2.7 per cent. because of the increase in the number of children on that occasion. He also failed to say that the figure is less than the rate of inflation. If so, it is really a cut, however anyone may wish to look at it, and the Government cannot get away with saying that it is not a cut.

The Minister went on to refer in his letter to school balances of some £700 million at the end of March 1994, adding that

> "it is not unreasonable to think that some at least of this sum could be applied towards the pay settlement where it is possible for that to happen."

The Minister also says that that money should be used to help with school repairs and maintenance, as well as with the pay settlement; so he wants to use it twice. Neither he nor the Secretary of State know what the balances will be at the end of the current financial year. It must be taken into account that it is not spare money hanging around in school coffers. Each school needs to keep about 3 to 5 per cent. so that they do not run into deficit and have to borrow money. Almost all schools have committed projects on which they wish to spend that money to enable them to provide a better education to the children whom they teach.

The Under-Secretary of State for Schools then said:

> "How Lancashire determines its spending priorities for the services for which it is responsible is solely a matter for the County Council."

What nonsense when, because of how local government is now funded, the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Education effectively fix the budget for every county council and borough council in the country. There is no flexibility or room for manoeuvre as budgets are fixed and rigid.

Lancashire county council is spending 108 per cent. of the SSA which it is deemed necessary to spend on education. That means that Lancashire county council regards education as so important that it spends 8 per cent. more than the Government wish it to spend. What the Minister fails to say is, if Lancashire county council spends more, where that money will come from. It is capped, so the money must come from cuts in other services. Should those be in social services? Should we close more homes for the elderly? What should we do? What the Minister says is nonsense.

In her speech today, the Secretary of State inadvertently misconstrued the evidence—I choose my words carefully—that was supplied to her. She said that Lancashire county council chose to impose cuts in education amounting to £19 million when officers recommended cuts of £13 million.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) has checked on those figures during this debate. He found that the officers gave an illustrative figure if the cuts were to be 4 per cent. They also gave a big list of cuts totalling £42 million from which the county council could select. Ultimately, it had to come forward with cuts of 5.5 per cent., which is the £19 million to which the Secretary of State referred, so it was wrong to give the impression which the Secretary of State gave.

Lancashire county council does not have enough money to provide its services. It is time that the Government gave it more money and allowed it to provide the education that our children need.

6.22 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): First, I apologise to the House for being absent for 45 minutes. I had to leave the Chamber to take the Chair of the Procedure Select Committee, but I hastened back immediately. I was determined to speak because of how the Liberal Democrats in Devon have set out to mislead the people of Devon and because of the speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) who, in Goebbels fashion, kept repeating a misrepresentation about the Government. The Government are not discredited. They have a new desire to ensure that people are properly represented, and the Opposition had better realise that in the next two years.

I make the accusation against the Liberal Democrats because, even before they had agreed a budget for Devon, their chief education officer said that, as the Government had cut Devon's grant for education, teachers would have to be sacked. Parents do not think that education should be a political football. They are interested in their children's education and want that carried out properly and as efficiently as possible.

Let us look at the truth. On the accusation by the county council that funding for education was being cut, in 1994-95, the standard spending assessment for education in Devon was £321.7 million. For the coming year, it is £328.4 million—no cut whatever but an increase of £6.8 million, the equivalent of more than £51 for every child in education in the county of Devon.

On the accusation that the Conservative party has paid no attention to education and are not interested in it, let us look at the education SSA for Devon over the past five-year period. In 1990-91, it was £276 million; by 1992-93, it had increased to £343 million. Given that, in 1993-94, sixth forms and FE colleges were taken away, expenditure for Devon was estimated to decrease by £34 million, but it still increased to £314 million that year. As I said, in 1994-95, it increased to £321 million. Whichever way we look at the matter—whether we put the £34 million at the beginning or at the end, because statistically it can be done either way—the SSA for education in Devon rose by between 30 and 35 per cent. over those five years, which represents a direct gain for Devon.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the figures provided by the House of Commons Library, based on a parliamentary question, show that in real terms, the cuts in SSA per primary school pupil in Devon are £46 and, per secondary school pupil, £178? Will he also confirm that the failure to provide funding for the teachers' pay award is costing Devon county council £5 million?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman is so misleading as to be wrong. What I am trying to explain is that net institutional expenditure for nursery and primary education in Devon is £1,879 per pupil, which is the average of any county in the country. The accusation that Devon is doing worse than other counties is wrong. It is interesting to note that expenditure per pupil in the nursery and primary and the secondary sectors has increased. In 1992-93, Devon was 24th and 25th respectively in the national league and in 1995-96 it was 19th and 18th respectively as a result of the increases which the Government have provided. That is how the Government have been assisting education in Devon.

What is so wrong is that Devon county council is taking money away from education and putting it into other services. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, will he consider the fact that education SSA should be ring-fenced so that local authorities cannot use education SSA for purposes other than education? Despite the increase in funding for Devon of £6.8 million, most schools have had their education budgets cut. How can that possibly be right?

Let us consider the alternatives that Devon was given. A budget was suggested by the Devon Conservative group, which would have ensured another £4.4 million for education in Devon and would have restricted the amount to the capping level. However, the Liberal Democrats have chosen a budget that will have to be capped. They voted the Conservative budget down. That cannot make sense and must be wrong.

Spending per pupil in the country has increased by almost 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Spending per pupil on books and equipment has increased by 31 per cent. in real terms. Let us consider the teachers, because those are the people whom most of us want to look after. The average teacher's pay will be between £20,000 and £22,000 a year from April 1995. Since 1979, the average teacher's pay has increased by 36 per cent. That is considerably greater than the average increase in wages of 23 per cent. for the rest of the country. Teacher vacancies today are fewer than at nearly any time in our history.

What are the alternatives? We are ensuring that there is a national curriculum; what does the Labour party wish to do about that? It opposed the national curriculum, but I think that it will now accept it. The regular testing and assessment of children and students is an essential part of our education reform. The informal revolution involving the publication of results is a major benefit for parents and must be judged as such; and the examination results, GCSE and A-levels, are better than ever. That is what Conservative education policy is doing; it does not resemble the terrifying story that we heard from the Opposition Front Bench.

What do the Liberal Democrats want to do? They want to remove the right of parents to choose their children's school; they oppose grant-maintained schools; they want to abolish objective testing and performance tables; and they want to end the assisted places scheme and scrap A-levels, although I think that they are having second thoughts about that now.

Mr. Don Foster: No we are not.

Sir Peter Emery: We now have a definite statement.

The Liberal Democrats also want further and higher education institutes to submit to local authority control.

Is that what the country really wants? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Of course it is not. Therefore we need to ensure that we stop having battles such as this about education. Let us make it absolutely clear what the Conservative party has achieved. If we let people in Devon know what the Conservative party will do for education in Devon, we will be a lot better off.

6.32 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make before I call the next speaker. In his speech moving the motion now before the House, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) used some words that were challenged at the time by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools. I explained to the House that my attention was disturbed at the time, and I undertook to look at the transcript. I have now been able to do so.

The hon. Member for Brightside was challenging the validity of education statistics given by members of the Government at various times in the recent past. Although he explained later the meaning he intended to convey, in my view he went too far in describing the Chief Secretary to the Treasury as "ethically challenged" and saying, in his words, that "they"—that is, Ministers—"cannot tell the truth".

I know that the House can get over-excited in major debates of this kind and that words are used which, when read on the page, appear clearly unparliamentary. While accepting what the hon. Member said after my second intervention, I think it would clear the matter up if he would formally withdraw the two brief unparliamentary phrases to which I have now drawn attention.

Mr. Blunkett: Madam Speaker, I was aware of your concern on the issue of the second phrase that has been used, and I unconditionally agree to withdraw that. I should be grateful, because it is the first time that it has been raised with me, in relation to the phrase that I used in respect of the Chief Secretary—

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Member were to look at the words in the dictionary as to the meaning of being "ethically challenged", it is a question of morally not knowing right from wrong, and it is quite a serious parliamentary statement. As I said, I understand the hon. Gentleman did try to clear the matter up later, but I should be much obliged if he would withdraw, so that we might proceed with the debate.

Mr. Blunkett: Of course I accept your ruling, and I would not for a minute accuse Ministers of not knowing what they were doing.

Madam Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps we can now proceed with the debate.

6.34 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on his speech in opening the debate, which he did extraordinarily well in the face of what appeared to be organised disruption by the yobbo tendency on the Conservative Benches.

I found the Secretary of State's comments—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must settle down and hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Pope: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I found the Secretary of State's comments, although not surprising, certainly disappointing. She seemed to be trying to blame everyone else for the cuts in education rather than taking any responsibility herself. Education Ministers have a duty to take responsibility for what happens to the country's education service, but they have failed to do so.

My constituency is a marginal seat which was held by the Conservatives until the most recent election. By no stretch of the imagination could it be described as Labour heartland, but I have to tell Conservative Members that the Government are no longer despised or loathed in my constituency—it has gone far beyond that. The vast majority of my constituents, even those who voted for the Conservatives at the last election, now hold the Government in contempt, because the Government are never prepared to accept that it may be they who have made a mistake or got it wrong.

As councillors struggle to balance budgets and school governors are confronted with the prospect of having to sack teachers, what is the reaction of the Government? Is it to take some of the responsibility for that? Is it to show some leadership? No, it is not. The Government's reaction is to blame councils, governors, the BBC—anyone rather than themselves. It is no wonder that they are held in utter contempt.

I have had letters from representatives of every type of school in my constituency—aided schools, council-maintained schools, primary schools and secondary schools—all expressing genuine outrage at the level of cuts confronting them. I have even received a letter from the chair of governors of a grant-maintained school, although there are no GM schools in my constituency—parents and governors in Hyndburn have far more sense than to want the education service to be dismantled in the way that GM status implies.

Following the comments of the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who is no longer in her place, about the so-called benefits of GM status in Lancashire, it is interesting to consider what the chair of governors of St. Wilfrid's GM school in Blackburn, which is in a neighbouring constituency to mine and which some of my constituents attend, had to say about the effects of Government policy. In a letter to the Secretary of State, he said:

> "even after allowing for a known reduction of 2.5 staff, and a possible further reduction of two staff, a drastic cut in spending on capitation items will be inevitable and together these will have a very serious effect on the curriculum. If part of the cost of the pay award has to be borne as well as these reductions, it will not be possible for a budget to be approved which would enable the school's commitments to pupils to be met."

There we have it.

GM schools are the Government's flagship. Yet the chairman of governors of a GM school in Lancashire admits that, as a result of the Government's funding of GM schools as well as local education authority schools, his school will not be able to meet its commitments to pupils. That is a disgrace. It is no wonder that the promised avalanche of school opt-outs has failed to materialise.

The chairman of governors of St. Wilfrid's GM school and the great number of other people who have written to me are not Labour party activists. They are not even Labour party members. I have no idea what their political affiliations are. They entered the teaching profession and became school governors because they cared about children and wanted to contribute to a successful education system, and they are extremely angry about the current situation.

A secondary school in my constituency was recently praised by the Office of Standards in Education. It is now about to lose 3.6 teachers. A large primary school in Accrington, in an area of intense social deprivation, a school where four out of five pupils have English as a second language, has lost three teachers in the past six months as a result of the Government's cuts in section 11 funding. Now the head teacher telephones me to say that it will have to lose another three teachers, possibly another four, as a result of that round of cuts.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pope: No, I will not give way. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) has only just returned to the Chamber and my speaking time is limited to 10 minutes.

Leaving aside the current round of cuts that the Government are inflicting on the education system, I should be grateful if, in summing up the debate, the Minister could explain how he justifies the cuts in section 11 funding for children and teachers in schools such as the one to which I have referred in my constituency. It is nothing short of an act of barbarism meted out to the most vulnerable children who are struggling within the education system. The Minister should be ashamed at the way in which the Government have cut that funding.

A primary school in another part of my constituency has received a favourable report from Ofsted, which found good relationships between staff and pupils and very good student behaviour. It is a school of which we can all be proud. However, the head teacher has told me that that school is to lose the equivalent of 2.3 teachers. One of the year 2 classes is to disappear, which will drive up the number of pupils in the other classes. Teachers will lose what little non-contact time they have at present.

That is happening in one school after another, not just in my constituency but up and down the country. Ofsted inspectors make constructive suggestions about how schools can improve, and the schools are keen to implement those suggestions, but they then find themselves unable to do so because they no longer have the resources.

Decision making in schools up and down the country is being driven increasingly not by educational requirements, but by budgetary needs. Children with special educational needs who attend mainstream schools—particularly those children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties—are not being catered for as effectively this year as they were last year, and they will not be provided for as effectively next year as they are being provided for now.

The Government have stubbornly failed to comprehend that the code of practice—which the Opposition welcomed—has resource implications. Until they do so, the problems will be compounded. There are increasing health and safety risks as children are taught in overcrowded classrooms, with dilapidated furniture and equipment that schools cannot afford to replace.

I know that some Conservative Members will seek to blame local education authorities for those problems. I have some experience of the distortions being peddled—not by hon. Members, of course, Madam Speaker, but by Tory central office—about my local education authority in Lancashire. It has been suggested that Lancashire has one bureaucrat for every 17 teachers, but that is not true. To arrive at that figure, one would have to include every educational psychologist in the county, every educational welfare officer, every adviser, and all the staff who deal with statements. They are not pen-pushers or bureaucrats; those people provide essential, core, front-line statutory education services. If Conservative Members do not understand, it shows how much they have to learn about education in this country.

It has been said that Lancashire should allocate more funding to schools so that they would have more money to spend. But Lancashire already spends far in excess of the Government's allocation target on education. Most of the centrally retained funds in Lancashire relate to statements and even if they were delegated to schools it would not compensate for the cash cuts that the Government have imposed.

There has been distortion after distortion, as the Government have sought to evade responsibility for the cuts. They said that Lancashire has large cash reserves. Again, that is not true. The local authority is operating on a minimal budget.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pope: No, I will not give way.

Conservative Members have suggested that Lancashire has too many surplus places. Yet Lancashire has met and exceeded every Department for Education target for reducing those surpluses. If every surplus place in Lancashire were abolished tomorrow, it would save the authority £500,000. But the authority is facing education cuts of £28.3 million in the coming financial year.

The Government are comprehensively failing my children, the children of my constituents, and children up and down the land. The Secretary of State has sought to avoid any responsibility for those cuts, and I am sure that the Minister will do the same in his winding-up speech: he will try to shift the responsibility on to local education authorities, governors and anyone else. But we know who is really responsible: the Secretary of State, the Minister and their colleagues in the Treasury who are more concerned about taking a penny off income tax in six months' time in a squalid attempt to bribe the electors yet again rather than spending the money where it is really needed—in the classrooms in my constituency and in those up and down the country. The Government's policy is a disgrace.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. David Evennett.

6.44 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I welcome the opportunity to draw attention to the situation in schools in my constituency, and particularly that in the 15 primary schools which I have visited during the past year. I did so in response to an organised campaign urging parents to complain about over-sized classes, adverse comparisons between our education standard spending assessment—*[Interruption.]* Is there a problem, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes. I called Mr. Evennett, but I am very willing to hear from Mr. Atkinson.

Mr. Atkinson: I am relieved to hear that, Madam Speaker. I was saying that I visited 15 primary schools in my constituency in response to an organised campaign urging parents to complain about over-sized classes, the adverse comparisons of our education SSA with that of neighbouring counties, and a lack of resources generally.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools for his helpful responses to those concerns. He pointed out that parents and teachers can be misled into making false comparisons between the SSAs of local education authorities, and that my local education authority of Dorset has not done at all badly in recent years in response to our representations. A 27 per cent. funding increase between 1991 and 1993 was followed by a 4.9 per cent. increase last year.

I cannot argue with those figures, which are well ahead of inflation. I also cannot argue with the trend in the amount that we receive per pupil compared with other LEAs. It is moving in the right direction. Nevertheless, it is clear from the meetings that I have had with head teachers and from the visits that I have paid to primary schools in my constituency that those schools are deteriorating. Their essential problem is overcrowding, with classes of 35 or more packed into rooms designed to take 25 or fewer. At one school, two toilets serve 100 boys, and in another a mobile classroom has been condemned for eight years. That is simply unacceptable.

Why has that situation arisen? It is simply because the LEA has failed to anticipate and plan for the school population explosion that we are experiencing in the Bournemouth borough. It seems that our present strategic planning system fails to match increasing education provision—that is, school places and class sizes—with planning permissions which inevitably attract young families. It is simply irresponsible to allow new housing developments without providing for the education of the children who move into them. Housing association developments are approved without taking account of the extra provision for special needs that will inevitably be required. I give an unreserved welcome, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), to the Government's acceptance last week of the Local Government Commission's recommendation that Bournemouth should return to unitary authority status and become its own LEA once again.

In spite of that situation, we have no complaints about our teachers. The education standards that are achieved, despite those difficulties, are above the national average. The schools are passing their first ever Ofsted inspections, which is a great tribute to the teachers' professionalism, dedication and commitment. I believe that insufficient public acknowledgement is given to the teachers and head teachers who are delivering the educational achievements

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for which we claim credit. My hon. Friend the Minister will also be encouraged to learn that those teachers whom I met were unanimous in welcoming the more streamlined curriculum, the simplified testing, the 20 per cent. free periods, the promise of less paperwork, and not least the promise of no more changes for the next five years. I hope that that promise will be borne out in fact.

Teachers also welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the review body's recommended pay increase. I hope and expect that my LEA will enable teachers to receive that increase in full. I have no problem with the policy for LEAs to make provision for teachers' pay in their budgets. That is what local government is or should be all about, although this year's SSA settlement represents the greatest challenge since education spending was cut by £1.6 billion under the last Labour Government.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in her opening speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it plain in his Budget statement last November that this year is the crunch year for getting our public borrowing down and I fully accept his strategy. If he succeeds, parents, governors and teachers can expect the increased resources for our schools that they rightly demand. What I should like to hear from my right hon. and learned Friend is that the commitment that the Government are honouring to increase resources substantially to the NHS should also be extended to education.

There should be more resources for special needs to ensure the success of the new code of practice which teachers have welcomed. Without extra funding, there is a real danger that some schools will refuse to recognise those children requiring special needs. When my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State replies to this debate, I hope that he will assure me that when Bournemouth becomes an LEA in two years' time its education SSA will reflect our urban labour costs better than the present SSA of Dorset has been able to do.

Finally, I hope that every school in my constituency will continue to keep the issue of grant-maintained status on their governors' agendas. They owe it to their pupils and to parents not to ignore the resounding success stories of grant-maintained schools. As the headmaster of St. Walberga's school, the only grant-maintained primary school in Bournemouth, told me last month, it has enabled him and his governors to decide their own priorities, it has been good for his school, and he would not go back. That is the message that my right hon. Friend and her team must continue to bring to the attention of every school, notwithstanding the obstacles being put in the way by Labour and Liberal LEAs.

6.51 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): Until a month or so before I came to the House, I was chair of my county council finance committee, and for the past few years, together with my colleagues on Gwent county council, I have strived to protect front-line services from the worst excesses of public spending cuts imposed by the Government.

In the financial settlement for local authorities announced by the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Wales, councils were told that they could expect an increase of 2.7 per cent. in funding for the coming year, but when the funding for police was stripped away, and with it the provision for careers services, the real increase is a paltry 0.7 per cent. Against that background, LEAs, working in partnership with school governors, sought to protect our children's education.

I have been a school governor since I was 18, and I have never known a time when teachers have been more demoralised and so many want to leave the profession. They are good and experienced teachers, such as those I met at last week's lobby; they are teachers whom the education service can ill afford to lose, but under the present Government they feel undervalued and taken for granted. They are blamed for falling education standards and for all society's ills, from rising crime to industrialists saying that they cannot recruit enough skilled people.

The Government's failure to give teachers the respect that their contribution to society deserves has brought us to the sorry state we are in today, as school governors, many of them supporters of the Conservative party, are faced with the prospect of sacking teachers because they cannot afford to employ them.

The Government will not fund the teachers' pay award. What is the reason for that? Can the country not afford it, or do they have something else in mind? Last year, one of the schools in Gwent balloted parents on whether or not it should go grant-maintained. The parents rejected the notion of leaving the partnership with the LEA, but the pro-opt-out campaigners were able to distribute to every parent promoting grant-maintained status a rather classy video produced by the Department for Education at a cost of £64,000. They have no money for textbooks or for teachers' pay, but they have plenty of money for political propaganda. That is the record of the Government.

In commenting on the case being made across the country for the Government to allocate additional funds to meet the costs of the teachers' pay award, the Chancellor has insisted that LEAs have sufficient funds to meet the award and to fund schools adequately, if only they would reduce the "wasteful bureaucracy" in town and county halls.

In many LEAs, Gwent included, the council's budget strategy for some years—certainly since local management of schools was introduced—has been designed to protect school budget shares despite cuts imposed by Government.

In the past three years, Gwent county council has taken almost £18 million from balances to sustain front-line services such as education. Schools in Gwent hold almost £8 million in balances, but the money is not evenly shared. Some larger schools have built up balances intended for projects in the coming year. Some have a few hundred pounds, and others have nothing at all.

The formula is so constructed that we cannot do anything to help the schools that are worst off. It is not possible to top-slice school budgets to help less well-off schools, because that would cut right across the board. It would be taking from the poor to help the rich—something that the Conservative party has been doing ever since it came to power.

As for the so-called wasteful central bureaucracy, many education authorities have pursued a vigorous policy of scrutinising all vacancies in order to reduce costs. They have slimmed down central staffing levels, and constantly keep them under review.

In a typical LEA, the proportion of the total education budget controlled by schools themselves is around 65 per cent., the remaining 35 per cent. being used on nursery education, which, despite the sweet words of the Prime Minister, is still the statutory responsibility of local education bodies to provide. They also use it for adult education, public libraries and the so-called bureaucratic central services.

What are the bureaucratic central services that the Conservative party would sweep away without so much as a second glance? They include services provided directly for pupils and students: the operation of home-to-school and home-to-college transport, educational psychology services, services for pupils with special needs, and the operation of discretionary awards to students.

Who are the bureaucrats, and how does sacking them affect learning opportunities? The bureaucrats are those who, for example, prepare statements on special educational needs for pupils with learning difficulties. They are the people who administer free school meals for pupils from families on income support, and there are plenty of those as a result of the Government's dependency culture policy. They deal with pupil welfare and truancy. They support pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds who have poor or little English. They are the architects and engineers who plan and implement education building programmes. They are the craftsmen and technicians who organise and carry out repairs and maintenance to schools. They provide financial management support for heads and governing bodies. They organise the payment of salaries and wages to school staffs, and educate children in hospital or at home if they cannot attend school.

Those people advise and support teachers in the implementation of the national curriculum, and with the number of changes that the Government have made to the national curriculum, that has almost become an industry in itself. They teach pupils to swim or to play a musical instrument. They administer Government regulations on the citizens charter, student awards and grants for education support and training, and ensure that the education Acts are implemented.

Public service is labour-intensive. We cannot take teachers out of the classrooms and sit children in front of computer screens and say that that is education. We cannot sack home care assistants and give every pensioner in the land a microwave and say that that is care in the community, and we cannot take bobbies off the beat, put video cameras on street corners and say that that is policing.

When council budgets are squeezed and various departments compete for funds for services, the number of posts in the central services of an LEA are obviously reduced—to what effect? Parents have to pay for or contribute towards the cost of their children receiving tuition in swimming or a musical instrument. Nursery schools are closed or reduced in size. Tuition for children too ill to attend schools is reduced.

School buildings are not maintained adequately. Awards to students attending further education classes are reduced or delayed. Fewer adult education classes are provided. LEA youth clubs are closed, often with a social price to pay. Delays occur in providing pupils with statements for special educational needs or free school meals. Advice and support for teachers attempting to deliver the full national curriculum are reduced, or totally eliminated in some subjects. Libraries are closed, or have restricted opening hours; school meal prices are raised.

In other words, parents may have to pay more for services. The support given to pupils by local education authorities is reduced. The community as a whole loses learning opportunities in adult education classes and youth activities. Schools are given less support in the fulfilment of their responsibilities, and buildings fall into disrepair.

The Government fail to recognise that local education authorities are non-profit-making organisations, whose only reason for existence is to deliver education in partnership with school governors. LEAs are democratically run by elected councillors, who often work in coalition with teachers, parents and representatives of religious denominations. There is none of the quango state there.

Parents and teachers recognise the value of the support services provided by LEAs: they know that sacking those employed in support services to find money for the teachers' pay award is no answer. Adequate funds for teachers and those who support them is needed if we are to deliver a rich and meaningful education service—but I fear that hell will freeze over before the Conservative party recognises that.

7 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Education is important to everyone, not just those going through the school system or parents of schoolchildren. It highlights major differences between the main political parties. This country needs a well-educated and well-trained work force to compete in world markets, and the Government's education policies will ensure that we secure it.

I was disappointed by the speech of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who confirmed what people in my borough of Bexley have always believed—that Liberal Democrats have no education policies, local or national. Conservative Members have a distinctive education philosophy that encompasses opportunity, choice and diversity; we also strongly believe in standards, discipline and testing in schools. We want parents, as the primary educators of children who have a vital role to play, to be allowed choice. Labour does not believe in opportunity and choice for parents: the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) contained no policies, and no concern for parents or standards.

I was privileged to attend a grammar school in the 1960s, where I was given a very good education. Such schools were destroyed by the Labour party in the 1960s and 1970s, and replaced by huge monolithic comprehensives. In the 1970s, I was a school governor in Hackney, and saw at first hand what Labour local government was like under a Labour Administration. We endured appalling standards, demoralised teachers and a general decline in education. During the past 16 years, there has been a gradual improvement, with education reforms, investment and development.

The untruths that we have heard from Opposition Members must be nailed. They do not like to be reminded of their record when Labour was in office in the 1960s and 1970s, when resources were reduced and standards fell. Expectations were low then, and teachers were demoralised. We know, however, that, since 1979, spending per pupil has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms; spending on books and equipment has risen by 55

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per cent. in real terms. Opposition Members do not like to hear those figures, but we must continually remind them of the facts.

Teacher vacancies are now at an all-time low, and teachers' pay has increased by 59 per cent. in real terms since 1979. That is a real achievement, thanks to Conservative policies and Conservative government: that is what is really happening in education, and what has happened for the past 16 years.

I want to concentrate on two aspects of education: nursery education and education for those over 16, in which regard I think the Government still have work to do. Much of the debate over the past 30 years has centred on secondary schools—their type and organisation, the implications of the national curriculum, the effects of local management of schools and grant-maintained status and so forth.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: All Tory policies.

Mr. Evennett: Indeed they are—all opposed by Labour, all supported by parents and all doing good in the education world. The Government should be congratulated on re-establishing the foundations of good, balanced, effective secondary education: it now provides choice, diversity, opportunity and improving standards.

In primary education, too, considerable strides have been made. The return to good, traditional teaching is bringing results. A number of primary schools in my constituency and my borough of Bexley never abandoned the traditional approach, and continue to flourish. St Paulinus Church of England school in Crayford, under the leadership of Mr. Vinall, has an excellent reputation, as has Hillsgrove school in Welling, which I visited last Friday. I was extremely impressed by the work of the head teacher, Mrs. Spooncer, and her staff. As I toured the school with the chairman of the governors, Councillor John Raggett, I observed much good practice, achievement and enthusiastic learning.

That is what we have achieved in 16 years of Conservative government: that is the real story of education today—not the doom and gloom that we hear from the Labour party, or the non-policies advanced by the hon. Member for Bath.

I commend the Prime Minister's commitment to expanding nursery provision. My borough of Bexley already has a rolling programme of increased provision, established by the previous Conservative-controlled council. I believe that children benefit from learning and socialising before they reach the statutory school age. I am well aware that some 90 per cent. of three and four-year-olds are already involved in some form of pre-school activity, and I support the expansion of nursery education, but I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to abandon the Conservative belief in choice and variety.

The establishment of a monolithic provision by local authorities would be a disaster. I strongly support the voucher system: not only would parents be allowed a real choice, but the providers of nursery education would have to ensure that they were offering parents and pupils the highest standard of service.

I am also concerned about the possible effects on playgroups. My constituency has some excellent playgroups, providing a first-class service for children, parents and the local community. I do not want such good institutions to be destroyed. My recent visits to local groups—including a first-class group at Christchurch in Erith—have shown me the educational content, the dedication of group leaders, the support of mothers and the enthusiasm of the children. We must not destroy good organisations; we must ensure that balance and choice are available in future provision.

Much has been achieved in post-16 education, and there is a good story to tell. I congratulate the Ministers, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education, who recently visited our local university in south-east London—the university of Greenwich, where so much good work has been done.

I stress that, like other speakers, I strongly support the traditional A-level examination and school sixth forms, both of which provide a benchmark of excellence which should not be destroyed. Sixth-form education also enhances schools in many ways. Sixth-form education and A-levels are not popular with the Labour party, but Conservative Members believe that they have a vital part to play in education for those over 16.

My borough is fortunate in having a first-class further education college, Bexley college. Under its principal, Dr. Jim Healey, it is another success story. The Government's policy of giving colleges autonomy and freedom from LEA control has helped the sector enormously. The expansion of Bexley college's pupil numbers and courses is a worthwhile consequence of that development. More resources, vocational courses, students and mature students have given post-16 education a boost. I welcome the Government's achievements. I am a great believer in continuing education, and welcome the post-16 development.

We have only to remember the way the Inner London education authority operated to know that money alone does not guarantee good education. More money per pupil was put into ILEA than into any other authority. More money was also wasted by that profligate authority. The results were disastrous. We abolished ILEA and gave more power to parents, teachers and governors.

That is the way forward in increasing success and raising standards, and Government policies are the right policies. They are supported by parents, and the results will show in educational achievement—and the pupils will be the beneficiaries.

7.10 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett). In 21 years in the House, I have never heard a more snivelling and ingratiating speech. Such a speech makes Uriah Heep sound like a man of principle. It was appalling.

The one good thing about the hon. Gentleman's presence in the House is that at least it means that he is not lecturing schoolchildren. One can say little else about such a speech. Any resemblance between it and educational realities is purely coincidental. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's opponents at the next general election, whoever they are, will point that out.

The picture in the metropolitan borough of Sandwell is a good deal less rosy than that painted by Conservative Members. The four of us who have the honour to represent constituencies in that borough are, as you know, Madam Speaker, seeking a meeting with Ministers to discuss education provision and the shortfall arising from the settlement that we are debating. The capital programme allocation for the borough totals only £275,000 for a population of 250,000 people, which is parsimonious to say the least. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will offer some hope.

At that level, the settlement represents a loss of £1 million per annum on recent years. Given the problems and backlog of work in the primary and secondary sectors in Sandwell, the settlement is intolerable. For primary schools, there is a backlog of £10 million, including £8.5 million for three replacement schools for Warley infant, Black Heath primary and Great Bridge primary schools.

The head teacher and chair of governors of Tipton Green junior school in your constituency, Madam Speaker, have written to all four Members of Parliament about its phase 2 project, describing as a paltry sum the capital building allocation—particularly that for Tipton Green. Given that phase 1 has been completed, it would be scandalous and wasteful not to proceed with phase 2. I hope that the Minister will comment when he winds up, or when he meets the borough's Members of Parliament, as I hope he will, in the near future.

There is a similarly sad story to be told in respect of secondary schools. We have heard much about the so-called irresponsibility of local education authorities. Most are controlled by the Labour party because of the present Government's prolonged incompetence. It will not do for Conservative Members to shrug off all responsibility for the crisis facing schools in Sandwell and elsewhere by blaming the LEA.

I will pick at random one item of secondary education expenditure in Sandwell—Menzies high school in my constituency, where a serious fire last year destroyed one building. The insurance claim shortfall for the cost of replacing that building is £500,000. One cannot blame the LEA, but the Government are giving no consideration to meeting that shortfall.

Dartmouth high school is the biggest LEA school in the west midlands, with more than 1,700 pupils. It faces a £1.1 million bill for replacements and general repairs. Its all-weather sports pitch cannot be used, because of lack of money for repairs. Three teachers retiring this year cannot be replaced, according to the chair of governors to whom I spoke this afternoon, because the school does not have the funds. He said, "It's a blessing that we had a comparatively mild winter, because we have spent money allocated to the gas bill on general upkeep and repairs"—broken windows and the other things that happen in schools these days. Again, no provision has been made for that in the school's capital grant settlement.

Worst of all for Dartmouth high school, given that its orchestra is well known throughout the west midlands, £7,000 has been cut from its music budget. What is wrong with the Government that they cannot see the damage being done to schools and education in areas such as mine?

Many figures have been bandied about, and most of those from the Secretary of State were misleading. In Sandwell, budget share per pupil in the primary sector in the financial year 1993-94 was £1,322. In 1995-96, it will fall to £1,319. The share per pupil is even worse in the secondary sector. In 1993-94, it was £2,041. In 1995-96, it will be down to £2,000.

Taking 1993-94 as a base, and allowing for inflation of 3 per cent. in 1994-95 and 2.5 per cent. in 1995-96, just to stand still Sandwell should have a budget share per primary pupil of £1,396, but it is receiving £77 less. In the secondary sector, it should have £2,155, but it will have £155 less than that per pupil.

Why is Sandwell's allocation per pupil done on the cheap? Why do each of the pupils whom I and my hon. Friends represent have a budget share of £200 less than pupils in the borough of Westminster? Why do the Government think they can continue getting away with rigging standard spending assessments to favour a few chosen boroughs? There is no fairness in the allocation of resources, particularly for education, when a borough such as Sandwell suffers from real terms cuts.

Much has been said about the Government's failure to fund the teachers' pay rise. It is a collective act of hypocrisy to agree a figure at national level but refuse to fund it, saying that it is someone else's problem and that local authorities such as Sandwell are supposed to find the money from their own resources. Do not the Government accept any responsibility for their decisions? Will it always be somebody else's fault? The Government are fooling nobody. One week ago, there was a lobby of thousands of teachers, governors and parents from all over the country. None of them is fooled by the Government's propaganda. They know full well who is to blame.

At least one good thing came out of that lobby. On the day of the lobby, national officers of the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters met in my office at Millbank. If those two unions can come together under one roof without falling out with each other, clearly something serious must have happened. They were not discussing wages, or funding the 2.7 per cent.; they knew who was to blame for that. They were more concerned, as professionals, about the damage being done to the education of the children for whom they feel responsible in boroughs such as mine.

The next election cannot come quickly enough for most Opposition Members—although of course the opposite applies to the Conservative party. The Government are planning to give away some money in taxes before the election. That is why money is being withheld from school budgets all over the country—to fund tax cuts. Meanwhile, the Government have done incalculable damage to our education infrastructure and the prospects of many of our children, especially in boroughs such as Sandwell. We shall hang that around their necks, and they will suffer for it at the next election.

7.20 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I should like to sound a slightly different note. Although I hold no brief for Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire county council, I must point out that if it had adopted the budget that the Conservatives suggested, things would have been a lot easier. Like many other county councils, our county council must look much more carefully at its overall spending—that message has come through time and again this afternoon. The council's overtime bill for staff, for instance, is £10 million.

We have 20,000 surplus school places in our county: one in four desks is empty. That problem has persisted for many years. If the county did not have those surplus places, we would be able to fund every child by another £250. That is a fundamental point.

[Mr. Richard Alexander]

I must however suggest to Ministers, who sometimes believe that dealing with surplus places provides the only answer, that it may not. I have followed the advice frequently and rightly given us by the Secretary of State, and have found out what is going on in my local authority. We need to know that, although sometimes it is difficult to find out what is happening. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, with the resources available to his Department, to consider finding out, county by county, where there are inefficiencies and where improvements could be made, so that we can target and make responsible the people who should be far more active in funding our schools.

Here I sound the note of caution which has not thus far been expressed by any other Conservative Member. Ministers will be aware that there is a great deal of disquiet about how schools are to be funded this year—in Conservative as well as in Labour constituencies. I have expressed that concern in correspondence with the Secretary of State on behalf of schools, parents, teachers, and governors. I am sure that colleagues in the House have done the same.

What is not always clear—I hope to have the answer from my right hon. Friend when she replies to me—is what has gone wrong and who is at fault. Still, the anxiety is genuine, and it is non-political. We need to know exactly what funding is going into our schools.

I have corresponded with the director of education on the county council; he has been most helpful, and I have no complaints about how he has informed me of what is going on. He tells me that there has been a reduction in the aggregated schools budget in Nottinghamshire of £11.280 million for 1995-96. That represents almost exactly the equivalent of the amount that I quoted earlier which is paid out in overtime to county council staff.

I can accept a 1.2 per cent. increase this year, tough though it is. What I find more difficult is learning how school after school in my constituency is having trouble balancing its books for the coming year. I offer two examples. Tuxford comprehensive school, a fine, large school, is experiencing a cut of £160,000. That is extremely difficult to live with. It must be very difficult to maintain the school's standards following a cut of that order.

A school at the opposite end of the range, Muskham county primary school, is receiving £6,363 less than it got last year, while taking on five more pupils than it had last year. That brings its pupil numbers up to 138. The head quite properly wants to balance his books—he does not want to get into deficit—but the way he has to do so is worrying. He is cutting down on midday school supervision. His governors tell me that health and safety cover in the playground is minimal and a cause for worry. He is cutting his secretarial assistance to two and a half days a week. In a school of 138 pupils that is clearly ridiculous. He is doing most of his own typing. What a waste of a professional man's time! He is an excellent and experienced teacher, and this should not be happening.

Something has clearly gone wrong, and teachers, parents and governors tell us that it is our fault. So the time may have come for Ministers to look more closely at how schools are funded this year and at the effects of the cuts on education, school by school. This has gone beyond being a political matter. It is an education matter now.

It is quite true that the county council is guilty of inefficiency. In theory, the regime can be rejected at the next local elections, but that is of little comfort to parents and schools now.

Mr. Hawkins *rose*—

Mr. Alexander: I am sorry, I have only three minutes left.

There is some mileage in the argument that the county has surplus school places. This afternoon, I took a deputation to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Schools to discuss the amalgamation of schools—not to object to it, but to make certain improving suggestions. Of course, until those amalgamations are approved and take place, the surplus places will not be available for savings for the county. Although we have far too many surplus school places, it is not always easy to wipe them out at a stroke and thereby to save money this year.

I also took up with the director of education the amount of school balances in the county. Interestingly, of the nearly £15 million of balances in the schools, 37 per cent. in primary schools and 43 per cent. in secondary schools is being used to pay for the schools' survival this year. So we are right to point out that there are school balances that can be used, but sometimes we need to look more closely and see whether they are just floating about unused or whether they are allocated and unavailable. I am informed by the director that 77 per cent. of primary balances and 84 per cent. of secondary balances are specifically earmarked. If a school has no balances, it is not terribly satisfactory to be told that there are balances somewhere else. School by school, there is not a great deal of fat that can be used.

For those reasons, I support the Government. I believe that there are savings that our county councils can make, but I want to alert my hon. Friend to the situation in many schools, particularly in my constituency.

7.30 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I must tell the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) that education essentially is a political matter. The Government have had 16 years to show the nation, parents, employers and children that they can be trusted on education, that they can be trusted to deliver excellence and high standards for all our children.

Today's debate is an opportunity to judge the record of the Government. It is a record that shows an unforgivable betrayal of trust, a betrayal which some Conservative Members will try to hide by being economical with the truth, but a betrayal that is felt by thousands of men and women, boys and girls in communities, families and industries the length and breadth of the country.

Let us examine the record on what counts—whether enough money has been invested in the most effective way to achieve the appropriate outcomes for our children, and they are "our" children. Too few hon. Members who occupy the Conservative Benches trust the system for which they are responsible. Too few of them use state schools for their own children, and that indictment speaks for itself.

So what is the record? I am not thinking here of those at the top of the pile, who are likely to succeed whatever the state of our schools. My concern is for those from less-privileged backgrounds, who will be able to fulfil their potential only if we ensure that they have the opportunity of well-resourced and rigorous schooling. It is for them in particular that we need proper investment in education. We know that schools do make a difference. All the many studies tell us that. It is therefore the overwhelming duty of Government to ensure effective policies and well-resourced schools, so that our schools can make a difference for all our children.

The Prime Minister himself accepted that it is the job of Government to tackle inequality. Nowhere is that more important than in education, yet the Prime Minister's deeds belie his words. That will never be the case for Labour in government. We intend to tackle inequality, and for that reason, education is our passion.

So let us look at the record. It is a national scandal that one in three of our seven-year-olds fails to reach the Government's set standard in handwriting. A similar number fail in spelling, and almost one in four fails to reach the grade in arithmetic. It is not good enough to say two out of three succeed. The reality is that one in three fails. Yet the Government have so under-resourced primary schools that 1 million children are being taught in classes of more than 30. Think of it. Hon. Members should imagine themselves in the place of a teacher of five and six-year-olds, with 30 children. It would take that person five hours a day to hear each child read. If one cannot hear them read, how can one expect them to reach the required standard of reading? Of course class size counts, especially at the primary level, and that is why the financial settlement is wrong.

Furthermore, we know that an effective school depends on effective leadership—a first-class head. Yet reports earlier this year showed that governing bodies were finding it increasingly difficult to recruit head teachers. In London, three in 10 headships were not filled at the first attempt in 1994. In primary schools, the number of vacancies nationwide rose from 1,509 in 1993 to 1,790 in 1994. Why? One reason is that we simply do not value and pay primary head teachers enough. Secondly, we do not invest sufficiently and effectively in head teacher training. We get what we pay for, and that is often not good enough for our children.

Again, the Government ignore the evidence. How a child performs at seven is one of the greatest influences on GCSE scores. Extensive research by the Institute of Education shows that nearly 25 per cent. of the variation in GCSE scores was accounted for by performance at age seven. The Government's failure to resource our primary schools properly betrays our children. At the age of seven, they begin to fail. By 14, the results are worse. One in three cannot master basic English, maths and science. That national failure places the country at the bottom of the league table of advanced industrial countries.

Taking the most recent set of comparable statistics, only 27 per cent.—just over one in four—of 16-year-olds secured GCSE passes in maths, English and a science in 1990-91. That compares with 66 per cent.—two out of three—in France, 62 per cent. in Germany and 50 per cent. in Japan. At A-level, the figures are 80 per cent. in Japan, 68 per cent. in Germany and 48 per cent. in France, yet just 29 per cent. in England.

What an indictment of our education service. Why is that happening? Because the Government have focused their resources on those who are most likely to succeed anyway, not on those who most need support. We should not be surprised. They are a Government who reward the rich and punish the poor. They have done so in tax. They have done so on wages and they are doing so in education.

The Government tell the nation that they believe in choice for parents. Yet in practice their policy does not deliver that choice. By focusing on the few, not on the many, they are creating oversubscribed schools, which, in turn, become more and more selective, so that the schools are choosing the parents, rather than the parents choosing the schools. That is why appeals by parents for places in their chosen school have increased by a staggering 420 per cent. in four years. The way to increase choice is to improve quality, not just in a few centres of excellence but in all our schools for all our children.

Our schools are in crisis. The Secretary of State knows that, but she cannot admit it publicly. Nobody out there believes the Government's figures. It is a classic case of lies, damned lies and statistics. Out there in the schools, they know the truth. Parents know, governors know, teachers know. Tory councillors—admittedly a rare breed these days—know that their Government are letting us down. The Government's formula for the standard spending assessment for education is woefully inadequate. In my borough of Barking and Dagenham, the Government use 1991 figures to calculate the number of children entitled to free school meals. In fact, poverty has increased since then, mostly as a direct result of the Government's policy, so the council is losing around £1 million, which it could have spent on educating children in the classroom.

I now address another crucial point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, it was 1972 when Baroness Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education, said in her White Paper that, within the following 10 years

"nursery education should become available without charge, to those children of three or four whose parents wish them to benefit from it."

The Prime Minister, at the Conservative party conference last year, placed great emphasis on the importance of nursery education. Although his was a lesser pledge, the speech was welcomed as a step forward.

Since then, we have heard much but seen nothing. Sheila Lawlor, the architect of many of the Government's disastrous education reforms, has been pushing for vouchers because she is so hostile to publicly funded and publicly provided nursery education. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has put in his oar and has shown up yet more divisions in the Government ranks by suggesting a beauty contest between competing providers. There has been reference to a leaked letter from the Secretary of State to her Conservative colleagues. Is that yet another example of the Government breaking their promises?

The evidence that the availability of services for under-fives gives children a head start in life is overwhelming. A recent study in Wandsworth showed that children will benefit.

Sixteen years of Conservative education has failed our children. The latest round of education cuts has awakened middle England. Most governors, teachers, parents and children know that. We look forward to an early opportunity to implement our policy in government.

7.40 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am not prepared to take any lectures from the hon. Member for

[Mr. Harry Greenway]

Barking (Ms Hodge). I spent 23 years teaching in comprehensive schools and in adult education and my three children attended state schools. That is characteristic of my hon. Friends and it is wrong of the hon. Lady to try to say that the reverse is the case. She has a great deal to answer for. She presided over the borough of Islington which demoralised excellent schools, such as Highbury Grove, by disgraceful and unsatisfactory appointments of heads and teachers. Such was the extent of it that the leader of her party will not use any school in that borough. What sort of tribute to the hon. Lady is that? What did she do for children? She did nothing but put them down the drain. For her to deliver such a sanctimonious speech is totally unacceptable and absolute nonsense. It convinces no one, and I am sure that it will not convince any of her electors or anyone in her party.

Labour has no ideas for education. It simply suggests that we must go back to what it attempted to give the country when it was in government. There has been no new thinking at all, and that is serious. If I were a Labour party supporter I would be terribly worried. The party has no dynamism on what is perhaps our most important subject for debate. It produces nothing except grumbles. But what is happening in education is important and valuable and it is a tribute to the Government.

There are many more nursery places than ever before and, as I said in an intervention during the speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), a former leader of the Labour party came to my constituency and promised a nursery place for every child if Labour won the local election, which it did. That deceit helped the party to victory and it now resolutely refuses to implement that pledge. I was at well-attended public meetings of parents who demanded that Labour implement its promise. But it will not, and the party will pay heavily for that because parents know that they have been sold a pup and deceived.

Willow Tree primary school has a great need for expanded nursery school education, but it has not got that. Wood End infants grant-maintained school also wants to expand nursery education. It has the room and has everything in place, but the local council will not allow it. Compared with the record of its predecessor Conservative council, which put in no fewer than 400 new nursery places during its term of office at a cost of £1 million, that is a pretty dismal performance and Labour will answer for that as for so much else.

There is no point in the Labour party spokesman talking to the heads of grant-maintained schools, as he did last week, because they report to me. All but one secondary school in my constituency are grant-maintained. In some instances the parents, governors and head teachers achieved that status against bitter opposition by the Labour party. On one occasion not only the education committee chairman, Hilary Benn, but the deputy chairman of education and the education officer and deputy education officer in Ealing opposed grant-maintained status.

The parents could not have been more pressurised not to go grant-maintained. Every attempt was made to intimidate them. On my recommendation, a former leader of the Labour party, Mr. Neil Kinnock, had sent his daughter and son to that school in my constituency. I am glad that he did because they have both done well. That is a tribute to them and, in a way, to him. That school had to work hard to become grant-maintained and it will not give up that status. It will not be cheated out of it by weasel words such as, "We will try to find some way to work with grant-maintained schools." The school is determined to retain its independence and the Labour party had better understand that.

The value of the school maintaining its independence is that it does so well. The parents support the school, which is oversubscribed. Maintenance is of a standard that has not been seen before. As I have said before in the House, Northholt grant-maintained high school saved £70,000 on cleaning by cutting out the cleaning services of the local authority. I can tell the hon. Member for Barking and everybody else that that money is used to buy books, pencils, rubbers and teachers. That is the advantage of such a saving. The hon. Member for Barking shakes her head, but how does she know? I can tell her that that is the truth. That is what parents want and it is what they will have.

Labour is already giving out the jobs that will follow the next general election. It has another think coming. Labour has done that four times in a row and is doing it again, but it will have a big surprise. Opposition Members have convinced themselves as never before that they will win the election but they will not because Labour has nothing to offer people and people know that.

As we have heard, spending on education has increased by 50 per cent. since 1979. Is not it a great tribute to our Government and to the people and children of this land that one child in three goes on to higher education compared with one in eight formerly? If that is not a tribute to every level of education and to dedicated work by teachers I do not know what is. It is not as if there are high failure rates. Students going into higher education achieve good degrees and there are very few drop-outs. That statistic speaks for itself.

I could say much more. Britain now spends more on education than on defence. For many years Labour said that we had our values wrong because we spent more on defence than on education. It did not care about the fact that there could be no education if the land was not defended and was overrun or demoralised. Labour Members made much of that moral argument, as they called it. Now that the balance is so greatly changed it is right to draw attention to it. It is right that the balance should be in favour of education because that is where the future of the country lies. At £28 billion a year, our spending on education is high and compares with that of any other country.

I must mention my constituency. In Ealing the local council has £17 million in reserve so there is no excuse for selling schools short. I question the figures that Labour puts about. A few days ago I went into a primary school and the chairman of the governors, who is a Labour party supporter and a former councillor, said to me, "Harry, there will be a shortfall of £45,000 on the school budget. That will mean two teachers going and I shall make sure that the parents know that it is your Government who have done it." I said, "What is the pay budget? What is the cost of teachers this year?" The head teacher got the figures out. The cost was £302,000 for the year. I said that the award was 2.7 per cent., and that that did not come to £45,000. We do not always hear the right and honest figure. Every time a figure is thrown around, we should quote the true figure, question the first figure, and find out whether it is right or wrong and what the true facts are. We shall find that, for political purposes, there is quite a lot of misrepresentation of figures.

In my professional life in schools, I always stood for high standards in work, attendance and behaviour. Over many years, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) and I worked together to that end. High standards of work, attendance and behaviour are the policies of the Conservative party and the Government. With such policies, we stand by children in the way that we must for their future achievement.

7.50 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): This year's education budgets have left teachers, parents and governors bewildered and angry. They are even more perplexed by the attempt of the Secretary of State for Education to pretend that that is somehow the fault of local education authorities, but parents are not so easily fooled. They know who to blame and why that has happened.

Governors and parents are fully aware that the Government are cutting public expenditure so that they can make Budget tax cuts next year in time for a feel-good factor before the general election. People are angry that their children are being made to suffer for cheap political expediency. On this occasion, the Secretary of State and her friends in the Cabinet will find that they have made the worst mistake of their political lives.

Let us consider what has happened in the Secretary of State's own county of Norfolk. She says that spending on schools there has increased, but the standard spending assessment per secondary school pupil in Norfolk is £100 less than it was in 1992-93. I wonder if she thinks that she can disguise that as an increase in spending. The Norfolk education budget has had a cut of £3.3 million. The local authority has chosen to cut discretionary awards, community education, adult education and school meals.

What about the next-door county of Cambridgeshire, in which the Prime Minister and I have our constituencies? In Cambridgeshire, the SSA per secondary school pupil is £64 less than it was in 1992-93. It is difficult to disguise that as an increase in spending. The education budget is being cut by £4 million in Cambridgeshire. Even that is not as bad as was originally feared, because the county has taken £7 million out of county budget reserves, which were put aside for a rainy day. It is a rainy day today, and the trouble is that, if it continues to rain next year and the year after, nothing will be left in the reserves to bail out the county's budget—and schools are looking to make a £10 million cut in 1996-97.

The education committee in Cambridgeshire has had to consider cuts in a number of sectors. They have included the community education service, in which Cambridgeshire once had a proud record, charging for school transport, and changing arrangements for admission for the rising fives. Presumably, that has resulted from pressure from Conservative Members of Parliament in the county, who have had their statutory letter from the Secretary of State urging that schooling for under-fives should be one of the sectors to be cut.

The Secretary of State has said that councils are capable of putting more money into education if they choose to do so, but that they do not choose to do so. In Cambridgeshire, we have always spent well above the SSA on education. Even when the county council inherited the budget from Conservative control in 1993-94, spending on education was 4.1 per cent. above the SSA. Education spending in 1994-95 was 6.1 per cent. above the SSA and it is predicted that in 1995-96 it will be 6.6 per cent. above SSA. That is not without pain. Education spending increases mean cuts elsewhere. The county council has already had to make some difficult and painful decisions.

Let us consider another of the Secretary of State's statements. She said:

> "Too much money is kept back by the Education Department for central costs. A recent Audit Commission report showed that local authorities could make efficiency savings of £500 million".

In Cambridgeshire, this year's spending on administration per pupil is £34.55. The county average is £43.47, so Cambridgeshire is spending 20 per cent. less on administration than the county average.

The other extraordinary statement made by the Prime Minister was that there are two administrators for every three teachers. In Cambridgeshire, there are 10 teachers for every administrator. If we take cleaners and caretakers out of the definition of an administrator, the ratio of teachers to administrators is more than 20 to one. I wonder where the Prime Minister obtained those extraordinary figures. Is he still sticking by them? They sound as if they came out of some random number generator.

What do parents and governors think? I have had more than 400 letters about education service cuts and it is difficult to find anyone who believes that the county council is to blame. All of them know that the Government are imposing the cuts. I am surprised not to see some of the right hon. and hon. Members who represent Cambridgeshire constituencies in the Chamber. At least one of them has been outspoken about the cuts, particularly when speaking to my local newspaper, the *Cambridge Evening News*. I wonder why he is not here tonight to express some of those views so that Ministers with responsibility for education can hear them.

In my brief visit on Monday to a special school, the Rees Thomas school for children with severe learning difficulties, I saw some excellent work by dedicated staff, some worrying deterioration in playground furniture—which is due to be condemned by health and safety officials next year—and overcrowding that severely restricts education opportunities for those children. Two of the governors invited me to visit the school so that I could see for myself the difficulties that it is working under even before further cuts are imposed.

A letter on behalf of one of the secondary schools in my constituency states that staffing will be cut from 32.7 to 30.4. It says that that will mean that some classes will increase from 24 to 30 pupils. One of the parents from that school wrote to me:

> "Good education is not cheap. But the results of an inadequate education system are too costly to contemplate."

Another person writes that she would rather education standards were maintained than have one or two pennies off her income tax. I know that that view is widely shared in my constituency.

Another school that wrote to me is one of the few ecumenical schools in my part of the world. I remember that the school was threatened with closure in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has made great efforts. Its standards are now excellent and it has a strong parental following. One of the reasons why people are able and choose to send their children there is that the county council promised that it would provide children with free transport to that school. That promise has had to

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

be broken. The county council is having to impose a charge of £25 per term for each pupil travelling to that school. The school's very existence depends on pupils travelling from a distance. I fear that the only children who will be able to attend that school in future will be those whose family have money or who live nearby.

I finish by quoting from a letter that I received from Cambridge and district chamber of commerce and industry. It points out that the southern part of the county may lose 75 teaching posts and states that industry and commerce depend on a well-trained work force and are afraid that it will not be possible to maintain proper standards because of the freezing of money spent on education and because of the failure to fund the teachers' pay increase. Those people would not complain about education cuts if they did not believe that education in the county was in crisis. I urge Ministers to listen carefully to what is being said by such people because we are talking about the future of our nation and of our country.

8 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): The Labour motion refers to

> "the threat to standards, opportunity and achievement",

yet nothing has been said or done by the Labour party in the House or in the country to contribute ideas that would lead to the raising of standards, an increase in opportunities and the full recognition of achievement. Nor do I believe that Labour supporters in control of local authorities in areas such as Kent—and Kent in particular—have any other agenda than the policies of the 1960s.

This education debate, like so many others, shows the state of intellectual honesty in the Labour party today. Principles have been hidden and commitments fudged because nothing must be said or done unless it is to the benefit of the Labour party. Wheeling, dealing, dodging and downright deceit have always been the posture of the Liberal Democrats, but it is only in the past two years that we have begun to realise that they are also the stance of the Labour party. It is very sad that a once great party should descend to the level of the Liberal Democrats in the way that it chooses not to present its policies as it should. The Labour party is revealing not its intellectual honesty but its intellectual dishonesty.

A few days ago, the Leader of the Opposition said, "I have a passion for education, for order, for law, for cold water and for apple pie." The trouble is that no one knows precisely what that means. Of course, it is evidence of the soundbite mania of the spin doctors who have now been "Mandelised" into the Labour party, that the Leader of the Opposition is having to say that he has a passion for this and for that—it does not matter for what, as long as it wins votes. Labour is being told to forget its principles; winning is all that matters. There is no longer any intellectual honesty in the Labour party.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) has shown great interest in the county of Kent. I welcome that because whenever left wingers from Liverpool come to Kent our majorities shoot up even higher than they were. However, the hon. Gentleman has taken an interest, and we are having a real debate.

Like his colleagues, the hon. Gentleman will have to learn that to find the true voice of the Labour party in Kent one needs to speak to those who control the county council, who wish to abolish grammar schools, take back grant-maintained status from schools, close the city technology college and do away with all that we have done. That is the true voice of the Stalinist Labour party, as I have known it all my life.

Tonight we need from the hon. Member for Walton some account of the row taking place between his team and the Leader of the Opposition. I would love to know what is happening because, clearly, there is no great joy or happiness but, rather, a darkness, between them. Indeed, we know that that is the case elsewhere. There is a darkness between the Leader of the Opposition and his spokespersons in the health team and, of course, there is absolute, total blackness between the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader. Perhaps we can look forward to a bit of excitement from the Labour spokesman tonight. I say, "Give us the beef. Tell us the truth about what is happening in the Labour party," and let us see whether John Humphrys uses it on the "Today" programme tomorrow.

The House knows that I have been a strong advocate for schools in my constituency for as long as I have been a Member of Parliament. There are nine grant-maintained schools in Dartford—the Dartford grammar school for boys; the Dartford grammar schools for girls; the Wilmington grammar school for boys; the grammar school for girls, Wilmington; the Horton Kirby primary school; the Sutton-at-Hone primary school; Wilmington primary school; the Holy Trinity Church of England primary school; and Our Lady Roman Catholic school in Hartley.

All of those schools have taken advantage of the opportunity to break free from the bureaucracy of local authorities. We also have a city technology college in Dartford, so we have a real choice which the Labour party would destroy. There are 60,000 children educated in grant-maintained schools in the county of Kent. I warn those 60,000 children and their 60,000 families—many hundreds of thousands of voters—to watch out because Labour will destroy their schools.

We have to read the press to find out what Labour party policy is, inasmuch as the Labour party knows what it is or inasmuch as its spokespersons are allowed to reveal it. On 19 March, Andrew Grice wrote an article in *The Sunday Times* with the headline, "Labour Pledge to ballot parents on handing back of opt-out schools". The small print states:

> "Schools that vote against returning to town hall control, however, will not be permitted to operate in isolation from their community; some governors would be appointed by the local authority."

In other words, a school can have democracy—it can stay in local authority control or vote to opt out—but, if it does not vote to come back in, Labour will put a majority of governors on the governing body to ensure that it does.

That is the lesson of Liverpool and inner London in the 1970s and 1980s. Labour will appoint a majority of governors on the governing body and intimidate the head, the teachers and the parents and force the school back into LEA control because that is Labour's wish. Labour wants nothing but the comprehensive system. That is what Labour is about.

It is a strange phenomenon but I feel that, at long last, we are having a dialogue—at least I am having one with myself—on what the Labour party believes. I like the hon. Member for Walton, who, is a nice chap. I am sure that he is—anyone who takes on the Militants in Liverpool cannot be wholly bad.

I want Labour's policy spelt out. It is an act of gross dishonesty not to reveal the truth. Under Labour, parents would see their schools going back into LEA control. They have to be told by the Conservatives what Labour will do. Labour would bring in the "thought police" and get them on the governing bodies of schools and, by hook or by crook, by intimidation, threat and sheer pressure from the organised vested interests in our communities, bring schools back into local authority control. That would be a monstrous thing to do.

I expect the hon. Member for Walton's winding-up speech to be brief so I hope that he will explain to me in writing something that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said today. He said that Kent had spent £9 million on a nursery voucher experiment. I think that the hon. Member for Walton is nodding, or else he has a nervous tick. In any event, he is indicating that I am right.

I have checked with the county council. There was an experiment that was financed and surveyed but not put in place. Had the county council put it in place in Ashford, the cost would have been £1.2 million but, as it was not put in place, the cost was not £9 million, nor was it £1.2 million. May we have an apology today, or later in writing?

I believe that the Government are going to make great strides with this policy. People like it and want it and do not want it taken away. If the Labour party wishes to protect its own interests, it should start to side with grant-maintained schools, the parents and governors. I hope that, in time, the Conservative party will decide that all schools should be grant-maintained. Let us have done with the dead hand of local authorities and the dead hand of Stalinism that exists in Kent and Liverpool.

I hope that the hon. Member for Walton will explain to the House in words of one syllable, so that even in Liverpool they can understand what he is saying, why Liverpool has domestic rates arrears of £23 million, community charge arrears of £68 million and council tax arrears of £10.7 million. That is the missing money; that is where the problem lies. It lies with the Labour party and with those in local government who support it and we must have none of it.

8.9 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): It is a great pleasure to follow the voice of—to use the phrase of the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—a once great party, with its £15 million overdraft, its disappearing membership and its universally reviled policies. It is very nice to hear the hon. Gentleman talking about Stalinists in Kent—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And Liverpool.

Mr. Pickthall: No, he did not mention Liverpool.

The Government have a simple purpose behind the cuts that they are inflicting on education, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) explained. Our school and college students are to pay for the core of the Government's next election campaign: income tax cuts. All their efforts are now bent on shifting the blame to local education authorities. They will use every statistical lie and every myth that they conjure to that end. Their efforts are not succeeding and their sheer desperation has been indicated by the Secretary of State's decision to encourage her Back Benchers to give the black spot to nursery spending. Tory Back Benchers seem wisely to avoid being seen doing that. Indeed, they are usually at the front of the queue, demanding more nursery provision from their LEAs for their constituents; and who can blame them.

The basic figures which explain what is happening are clear enough. I shall, of course, use Lancashire as my example. Lancashire's education standard spending assessment for next year is £484 million—£37.6 million less than it spent last year. Lancashire's SSA per secondary pupil is £133 less than it was in 1992-93.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Surplus places.

Mr. Pickthall: I shall come to surplus places. Such reductions cannot be sustained without pain and disruption and, probably, without sackings.

Lancashire is one of the four biggest shires in the country in terms of population, but it is the only one of those four which does not benefit from the area cost adjustment. For example, in Essex, the SSA per secondary pupil is £2,755, plus a few pence. In Lancashire, the SSA per secondary pupil is £2,610. So a secondary pupil in Essex is deemed to be "worth" £145 more than a pupil in Lancashire.

Within that comparison, weighting for free school meals in Essex is £42.62, while in Lancashire it is £45.67. Weighting for the additional educational needs index in Essex is £353.13 and in Lancashire it is £428.04. But for the ACA, Lancashire would have an SSA per secondary pupil £75 higher than Essex. Similar comparisons can be made with the primary figures and between Lancashire and Kent and Lancashire and Hampshire, the other two counties of similar proportions.

It has always been recognised by all hon. Members that London's needs are special and that the ACA should account for them, but it is unacceptable to those outside the south-east that the counties surrounding the capital should benefit equally from that adjustment. Twelve of the 13 counties with the highest SSA per pupil benefit from the area cost adjustment. In no way do I suggest that Kent, Essex and Hampshire should have their funding cut, but how on earth can counties outside the south-east provide the same service to pupils and achieve the same results in league tables, across the board, with such resource differentials? I am astonished that more Conservatives who represent constituencies in the midlands, the north of England and the far west are not up in arms regularly about it.

The result for Lancashire of all the proposals is a 5.5 per cent. cut in school budgets. The blow falls especially heavily on those schools with a settled and stable work force where teachers are at the top of their scales. Visiting St. Thomas the Martyr primary school in Up Holland in my constituency last week, a first-class school with an excellent reputation, I encountered just such a school. It will have to lose the equivalent of 1.5 staff. A member of the staff told me bitterly:

> "We are an expensive staff so we have to be clobbered."

[Mr. Pickthall]

It seems that this time the Government cannot pass off the viciousness of their cuts by picking on a handful of LEAs that they most dislike to pour on them their vilification. Almost all local authorities and their citizens are up in arms. Even among those lobbying the House on Tuesday last week, I came across a large contingent from Buckinghamshire, the last of the Tory shires.

Moreover, parents and governors know where the blame lies. I have had hundreds of letters, as I assume have all hon. Members, but not one of them blames a local education authority. Some of them, I have to say, blame me because I have not stopped the Government. They think that I can do that. Indeed, the letters have included all sorts of suggestions, from talking nicely to the Prime Minister, who will obviously understand and change his mind, to knee-capping various members of the Cabinet. Gently, I have to tell the parents and governors that neither method is likely to work.

Many desperate myths are being perpetrated to justify what the Government are doing. In some parts of Lancashire, the Tories are encouraging schools and governors to go for grant-maintained status so that they can secure additional funding to get round the cuts. That is an absolute fabrication. Grant-maintained status can do nothing for those schools about the cuts that the Government are now instituting, however legitimate the discussions. The funding formula will still apply.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Member, who has flitted in and out of the debate like Marley's ghost and expects to intervene all the time.

We are told that the Government have increased spending on Lancashire education by 1.4 per cent., but they have also told Lancashire that it cannot increase spending by more than 0.5 per cent. The education share of that increase is £2.7 million, but an increase of more than £30 million is needed to meet existing commitments—for a standstill budget. That £2.7 million would not even cover the increased number of pupils coming on stream in 1995-96: an increase of 1.5 per cent.

The Government's extra funding of 1.4 per cent., in itself only a tiny part of what is needed, must be put alongside the 0.5 per cent. limit on spending. So, 1.1 per cent. may be used only to reduce the increase in the council tax; it cannot be used for schools. It has been said that Lancashire has reserves to deal with the problems. Some absurd figures have been put forward by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). I notice that she did not refer to them today so she has probably now read the proper material. From £33 million in schools' reserves, much is being spent now and most is committed to development projects.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: No I shall not give way, I have only about 30 seconds left. The LEA—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: No. The LEA has no control over those resources. Local management of schools encourages independent control by governors over those funds.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I hope that it is a point of order for the Chair.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is a point of order. The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) is deliberately misleading the House. I am not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a not a point of order and the hon. Lady, with all her experience, well knows it.

Mr. Pickthall: The county balance at the moment stands—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must withdraw the words "deliberately misleading the House".

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I withdraw the word "deliberately", but I shall say that the hon. Gentleman is unintentionally and entirely misinforming the House.

Mr. Pickthall: The hon. Lady knows all about being misinformed, I am sure. The county balance stands at £9 million—the minimum that the county treasury will allow as an appropriate level, having regard to the council's legal duty to set a balanced budget.

Stories are also being put around about the amount being spent on central services. I do not have any time to go through all the figures—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose—*

Mr. Pickthall: Perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster would like to take them up with me in detail, at some other time.

Central administration costs in Lancashire stand at 3 per cent.—right at the bottom section of the county league table. And if we look properly at how the funding is divided between teachers and administrators, we see that the ratio of staff providing direct services to schools and teachers is 1:74.7, not 1:17, as the hon. Member for Lancaster said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8.19 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to be called in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was beginning to wonder whether there was something wrong with the annunciator, because there are only three Labour Back Benchers in the Chamber for what we are told is such an important debate. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] Ah, here comes another one—the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

The Government have been radical in their education policy, and I greatly welcome the diversity that has been introduced into the state education system. We have introduced the national curriculum, grant-maintained schools and local management of schools. The Labour party bitterly opposed each of those policies. Our radical approach to education is wholly to our credit. All that the Labour party has ever been is the mouthpiece of the National Union of Teachers and the education establishment, and Labour Members prove that time and time again.

Yesterday I asked the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), a question about spending in Derbyshire schools in 1994-95 prices. In 1978-79—I do not think that we were responsible for that budget—spending in primary schools was £1,064 per head; in 1993-94 it was £1,632 per head. That shows our true commitment to education, because over a long period there has been a substantial and consistent increase. That is most important.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister, however, that we have to find a way of getting the figures over to the public and explaining to them what is being spent on the education budget. The trouble is that the explanations are so confusing, what with standard spending assessments, general schools budgets, potential schools budgets and aggregated schools budgets. How on earth is anybody supposed to get to the bottom of what is going on in school funding with all those variations?

Derbyshire county council has excelled itself in efficiency. One would not often hear me praise that authority. But last week I asked the Secretary of State a question in which I pointed out that there were about 17,000 surplus places in Derbyshire. Unfortunately, I was wrong; there are more than 20,000. However, within 12 hours of my saying that the chairman of the education committee put out a press release showing where all the surplus places were in west Derbyshire. He did not cover the rest of the county, just west Derbyshire. I wrote back to him saying that his response had been very good and efficient, and that perhaps he could let me have the figures for the whole county within the next 48 hours. We are now 28 hours on, and I am still counting.

The facts about overall spending levels are important. At the end of the day it is difficult to work out the true facts and statistics. Derbyshire county council consistently talks about standard spending assessments and says that it would like the same SSA as Surrey. But when I wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), he told me that Derbyshire's SSA per head of population was £549, whereas in Surrey the figure is £524. If my county council really wants the same SSA as Surrey, it is calling for a reduction. We should judge the whole area of local authority spending rather than specific individual figures.

I note that these days Labour Front-Bench spokesmen pay great attention to the Library, regarding its staff as independent statisticians who will give us the true figures. Well, the Library has done some research for me, and yesterday we were told that in 1994-95 Derbyshire local education authority spent £720 per pupil in addition to the sums delegated to each school. That figure compares with £570 in Nottinghamshire and £550 in Staffordshire. In other words, Derbyshire spends an extra £150. If that money were going directly into schools, we would be talking not about reductions but about substantial increases.

Perhaps it is time that we thought about having a national funding formula, designated by the Government, for all schoolchildren throughout the country. As things are the Government get all the blame, but we do not have the responsibility. So let us take the responsibility and cut out the local education authorities. I believe that there is much inefficiency in LEAs, and it is difficult to get to the bottom of their budgets.

I also asked a parliamentary question about subsidies for school meals in Derbyshire. Today I received an answer from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State telling me that the income for Derbyshire's school catering service was £9,051 million whereas expenditure on the service amounts to £22,959 million. There is therefore a subsidy, or a discrepancy—I do not know what the Labour party likes to call it—of £13,900 million on school meals. If the county wishes to pay such a subsidy, that is a policy decision that it is entitled to take. But the fact is that one cannot spend money in two places. The county cannot subsidise school meals and spend a huge amount on central administration, and then complain that it has not the money to delegate to schools. That is an important point, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to deal with some of those issues. I was encouraged by a story that I read on the front page of *The Times Educational Supplement* at the weekend suggesting that the Government might be considering a national funding formula. I do not expect my hon. Friend to comment on speculation in the papers, but may I tell him that if the Government are considering such a policy I should wholeheartedly endorse it? The sooner it is adopted the better.

I also have something to say about grant-maintained schools. I have a letter here from Michael Collier, the chief executive of the Funding Agency for Schools, and I am concerned about the way in which GM schools are notified of their budgets. The education budget is announced by the Chancellor in November, and local authorities hear about their budgets from the Secretary of State shortly after that.

However, in the letter Mr. Collier writes:

> "It is anticipated that the Final Annual Maintenance Grant will be issued in early May."

That is six weeks into the new financial year. I do not think that it is a fair way to treat large secondary schools with big budgets, or indeed primary schools, if they do not find out what their final budgets are to be until the year has started. That is an important problem which needs to be dealt with.

There is no question in my mind but that local authorities could find the money for this year's pay increases. However, I must tell my hon. Friend that although one can get away with a pay freeze for one or two years, it is not possible to do so beyond that point. I hope that when discussions take place on next year's spending round that thought will be at the forefront.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) said that he would like every school to become grant-maintained. I should like every school not only to become grant-maintained but to know, by means of a national funding formula, what its budget will be. At the moment there are too many dark holes through which money can be filtered away by local education authorities, and even some grant-maintained schools do not get the right amounts of money. I believe that we as a party and as a Government have a good reputation in education. We have changed the whole education system by diversifying and providing choice in the state system, and that is something to which the Labour party is totally opposed. It wants to bring everyone down to the same level, but we want to allow people to excel in state education—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.29 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): It is convenient for me to follow the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), who represents a neighbouring constituency to mine, as I can refer to some of his arguments.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

One argument that the hon. Gentleman used—it has also been used by the Prime Minister and by other Conservative Members—was to compare the level of expenditure on education in 1978-79 with the current level of expenditure. That is a considerable period, and an analysis of what has happened within education cannot just be made with such a broad-brush approach. Some consideration must be given to what has happened in the past five years—particularly in Derbyshire—as that would show a different pattern.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire stressed various issues such as surplus places. One of his solutions to the current crisis in Derbyshire is school closures and amalgamations, which he believes would solve a great problem within the vast rural areas of west Derbyshire. The hon. Gentleman also wishes to cut out the role of the local education authority. Unfortunately, the role of the LEA has just about been cut out altogether by the present financial arrangements. Because of the Government's policy, LEAs have virtually no options as to the policies that they can adopt. I assume that that call by the hon. Gentleman is a reflection of his lack of success in trying to get rid of Derbyshire county council and follows the arguments about boundary changes that he has been notably unsuccessful in pursuing.

Another matter referred to by the hon. Gentleman was price increases for school meals, but I suspect that he really means cutting out the school meals provision. Following assault upon assault by the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members from the county, Derbyshire increased the price of school meals. Following that decision, the take-up of school meals was not what it had been. To argue that school meals should not be a part of education provision seems to me to be entirely inadequate, so we can dismiss the arguments of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire.

Before the hon. Gentleman incensed me, I had initially planned to apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber for the entire debate. This was because of the subject matter that we are discussing today. There has been a mass lobby from Derbyshire at the House of Commons, which has included teachers, pupils, parents and governors.

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): They should have been in school.

Mr. Barnes: Those people are in school on many occasions. They are concerned about the major problems and they are here to represent their views. They have important points to make to which the Minister—instead of lecturing them—should listen. Many petitions and letters were presented to me concerning north-east Derbyshire, and other activities took place. The number who came here today—a limited number compared with the numbers who are incensed by what is taking place—presented their petitions, which will see the light of day in the House quite soon.

The Government's policy is to divide and rule, and they hope that a squabble will take place in areas such as Derbyshire about who gets what. Our policy is to unite and fight, and that is seen as important by some angry teachers, pupils, parents and governors. Thanks to Government policy, those governors have begun to understand the financing arrangements in schools. Local management of schools has turned governors and head teachers into accountants so that those in charge are no longer bemused by some of the arrangements, and they have begun to understand the problems.

In 1988, I asked the then Prime Minister—now Lady Thatcher—to compliment Derbyshire county council on its teacher-pupil ratio. Derbyshire had the best ratio in special education and in secondary education, and in primary education it was second to Nottinghamshire. Since then, we have had cuts in real terms in the budgets of £152 million. Some £54 million of that has been in education, with £28 million being cut this year.

Those figures tie in with the development of changes in the structure of local government finance following the legislation which introduced the poll tax. Although the poll tax has changed into the council tax, the structure of the business rate and other arrangements which were determined then and the technique for the standard spending assessment—which gets bashed about in this House considerably and correctly—came within that area. Compared with Hertfordshire, Derbyshire is £90 million behind the level it had at that time; its SSA initially was very similar to that of Hertfordshire.

When addressing the governors at Holmgate school in Clay Cross, I attempted to explain the methodology of the SSA. One teacher said that he never knew that there was a formula for the SSA, and that he assumed that things were so bad in Derbyshire that the figures were just plucked out of the air. There has to be a formula as far as the law is concerned, but it is a fiddled formula.

The education spend this year is down in real terms, and the maldistribution which occurs within that is more serious. The hon. Member for West Derbyshire may have picked up some points about that maldistribution, as he has criticised the area cost adjustment in the House in the past.

Yesterday, I asked the current Prime Minister about the situation, but I could no longer ask him to compliment Derbyshire on its student-teacher ratio. I had to ask him how he could expect teachers not to be sacked and classes not to be increased in size following the cuts. I asked whether he agreed that education generally could be destroyed because the very fabric of our schools is facing problems. There was no answer. He simply said what the hon. Member for West Derbyshire said in his speech, which was that we should compare 1978-79 expenditure with current expenditure. The Tories think that that is the answer to every problem in the universe and that we need think about nothing else. But there are many other things to think about.

Unfortunately, my time has nearly run out. In the remaining minutes, I should like to mention a letter from the head of governors at Grassmoor primary school, in which he asked if the Secretary of State for Education would come to Grassmoor school and let the governors, parents and others explain their case—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.39 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I hope that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and other hon. Members will forgive me if I do not necessarily follow them down the same route. I would dearly love to have time to debate choice, rising standards and the grant-maintained status system—I have listened with great interest to speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin)—but, like other hon. Members, I shall concentrate specifically on issues that affect my county of Wiltshire.

I listened carefully to the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) who, sadly, is no longer in his place. He commented at length on the scare stories and problems that had arisen in his constituency and in Devon as a whole as a result of activities by Liberal Democrats locally. I readily acknowledge the presence of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) throughout this debate, but it is instructive that, although massive petitions have been organised by Liberal Democrats in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and throughout the west country, hon. Members who represent those counties have been ignominious by their absence tonight.

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): They cannot all be in Bosnia.

Mr. Faber: As my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) says, they cannot all be in Bosnia at the same time.

When the funding settlement was first announced in Wiltshire, we faced no problems. Indeed, an opposition spokesman on Wiltshire county council said that there were no scare stories or talk of sacking teachers in Wiltshire, and that we faced no problems. Yet on 15 February this year, in an extraordinary letter which the chief education officer was mandated to send to all chairmen of governors by the Labour and Liberal Democrat ruling group on the council, he urged all chairmen of governors to write to the Chancellor asking for the teachers' pay increase to be funded in full.

Mr. Blunkett: Quite right.

Mr. Faber: The hon. Gentleman says, "Quite right." I shall explain how wrong and misguided he is.

Sadly, many governors have been hoodwinked and scared by the LEA into writing that letter. They have been led to believe that education funding in Wiltshire is not sufficient, whereas nothing could be further from the case. The chief education officer acknowledges in his letter:

> "The budgetary prospects in Wiltshire are better than in many other LEAs, due to the Council's readiness to put front-line services first. The budget will meet the costs of increased numbers".

It is certainly true that the budget and the grant handed down by central Government will meet the increased numbers of pupils in schools but, sadly, it has nothing to do with the local council's good housekeeping.

Pupil numbers in Wiltshire have risen more quickly than nationally. The upshot is that Wiltshire pupils now make up a larger proportion of the national pupil total, so Wiltshire gets a larger share of national funding. As a result, the education SSA for 1995-96 in Wiltshire will be £188.56 million, a 2.7 per cent. increase, against a national average of just 1.2 per cent., so the Government have fully funded the rise in pupil numbers in Wiltshire.

The letter goes on to tackle the problem of teachers' pay and to explain the LEA's position. Of the 2.7 per cent. increase agreed nationally, it says that the budget can cope with funding 2 per cent. and asks schools to find the remaining 0.7 per cent. Even on that, it is not strictly accurate.

At primary level, all but 0.35 per cent. of the settlement has been funded, yet some primary school governors are still writing to me in the expectation that they will be 0.7 per cent. short. That shortfall represents just 0.2 per cent. of the total primary school budget in Wiltshire, a global figure of just £150,000, which the county council has the nerve to say it cannot find. At secondary level, 0.7 per cent. is not fully funded by the county council. That represents 0.45 per cent. of the total budget.

My hon. Friends who represent Wiltshire and I were not surprised that county councillors' initial reaction was to say, without daring to blush, that that was all they could fund and that, if teachers were to be sacked, it was the Government's fault. I put it on the record that the Conservative group on the council voted against sending that letter to the chairmen of governors.

Let us examine a little more closely the expenditure of the local education authority and of Wiltshire county council as a whole—expenditure which the LEA has conveniently ignored or glossed over. I am afraid to say that Wiltshire has done all too little to reduce central administration costs.

Why is it that, in neighbouring Dorset and nearby Hampshire, 4.5 per cent. of the total school budget is spent on administration? I understand that, in Lancashire—the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) has now left the Chamber—it is just 1.7 per cent., yet Wiltshire still spends 5.2 per cent. of its total budget on administration. That may sound a small percentage difference, but it is a huge sum when taken out of an approved budget of £201 million.

Let us look, too, at how successful Wiltshire is at delegating its budget to schools under LMS. My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire mentioned the potential schools budget, a figure that represents the LEA's total planned expenditure in respect of schools operating under local management, less the authority's planned central expenditure on items that are statutorily excluded.

In 1994-95, Wiltshire, like other counties, excluded the normal sums for capital expenditure for school transport, school meals and other items. Yet last year, Wiltshire delegated less of its potential schools budget to schools than it had the year before. In 1993-94, Wiltshire held back 12.8 per cent. of its budget for its own use, yet in 1994-95, that figure rose to 14 per cent., an unexplained increase of 1.2 per cent. That means that, across the board, schools in the county had 1.2 per cent. less to spend last year than they had the year before.

I am sorry to say that those figures make Wiltshire one of the worst performing counties in the country when it comes to delegating its budget to schools. It is often said that the success of LMS has made opting out unnecessary. Those figures show just how much council schools are at the mercy of local politicians, who, as in the case of Wiltshire, have chosen to put the delegation process into reverse. Grant-maintained status gives the schools control over their budget as of right, not out of grace and favour and at the whim of local councillors.

Wiltshire county council has other so-called "crucial spending plans" in its budget this year. It has decided to continue with the employment of an environmental

[Mr. Faber]

co-ordinator, plus support staff, and a crime co-ordinator, plus his support staff. Most outrageous of all, it continues to support neighbouring Somerset county council's legal quest to ban hunting on council land. Despite the legal decision of the Court of Appeal just two weeks ago, Wiltshire continues to fund Somerset's legal campaign. Just yesterday, it voted through an extra £13,500 to take on a survey to be run by the agricultural college at Cirencester to prove that hunting damages the environment.

Now is not the time to debate the merits or otherwise of hunting, and I have no interest in doing so. But surely children's education comes first. Those figures must rise from the £50,000 that has already been spent towards £100,000. I remind hon. Members that, just a few moments ago, I pointed out that the shortfall in funding the teachers' pay rise in primary education in Wiltshire is just £150,000, yet it seems to be more important to those councillors to spend money on banning hunting in neighbouring Somerset—not even in their own county—than on providing teachers in Wiltshire's primary schools.

Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors on Wiltshire county council are shamelessly playing party politics with children's education. They have jumped on a national bandwagon of protest when no such bandwagon need exist in Wiltshire, because no such problems exist. Local opposition spokesmen on the council admitted as much when the grant settlement was first announced.

The letter from the chief education officer to the chairmen of governors in schools is a shameful attempt to scare them and bully the Government. I pay tribute to the hundreds of governors in Wiltshire who give of their time so generously, and to the thousands of teachers who do such invaluable work in our schools. I appeal to them not to be taken in by what has been said by the local politicians. I appeal to them to ask those local politicians searching questions along the lines that I have tried to lay out today.

My message to Wiltshire county council would be to find the money, fund the pay increase in full and put children's education at the top of its agenda, and not relegate it below some of its little pet projects.

8.49 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the debate. For the information of the Minister, some pupils from my constituency were in Westminster today—pupils from the Sacred Heart primary school in Wideopen.

Mr. Forth: Why were they not at school?

Mr. Byers: The Minister will be glad to hear that they were here on an educational visit, and I hope that *Hansard* will note that the Minister objects to the fact that they were here. For the Minister's information, the guide who took them round commended them on their knowledge of history. Like many other hon. Members whose constituents have had school trips here, I am sure that it is a valuable learning exercise.

It is deeply disappointing that the Minister does not appear to agree that visits by schoolchildren are to their benefit. I believe they are, and it is deeply disappointing that the Minister who sits there on the Government Bench shakes his head, disapproving of that visit. I shall ensure that those schoolchildren and their parents are made fully aware of the way in which that Conservative Minister says that they are too young to benefit from such a visit.

The key is that all political parties should broadly agree that education is about raising standards and improving quality. I think that all hon. Members will agree that we must seek to do that. We disagree, because the Government do it on the basis of dogma and the introduction of market forces because they believe that that is the politically correct thing to do, while we, on the Opposition side of the Chamber, believe that the market has no part to play in education provision.

We believe that the market is about profit and loss, gainers and losers. It is our opinion that any philosophy of education based on the opinion that some of our children must be losers so that others can be gainers is unacceptable. We need an education service that meets the needs and demands of all our children.

We arranged the debate today—

Mr. Forth: "We"?

Mr. Byers: As the Opposition, we have used one of our supply days.

We arranged the debate because it is our opinion that the policies being pursued by the Government have failed, and will continue to fail, the schoolchildren of our country.

We need only read the official reports from the Office of Standards in Education to realise—those reports show it clearly—that about one third of our schoolchildren are being failed by the system. They receive a substandard education. That is unacceptable. We need policies that will ensure that that 33 per cent. of schoolchildren receive the education they need and deserve.

The Government amendment talks about "giving parents more choice". I remind the Minister of the comments he made in Committee during the passage of the Education Act 1993, when he accepted, and said very clearly, that the Government were not offering choice to parents. Those were the Minister's words—that the Government could not offer choice to parents. All they could do was allow parents to express a preference. That is all the Government are doing—allowing a preference to be expressed. Parents cannot choose the school to which they will send their children—they can only express a preference.

However, the Minister, the Government and the Conservative party, by talking about choice, have raised parental expectations. It should be no surprise that, in the past three years alone, the number of parents appealing against not obtaining a place at the school of their choice for their child has more than doubled. Those are the Government's own figures.

Spending is at the heart of the debate. The settlement for schools takes no account of the extra 116,000 pupils who will be in the school system from September 1995. It takes no account of the additional financial burdens of the introduction of the new code of practice for those children with special educational needs, and no account of the additional demands of the national curriculum. The Government introduce all those policies, but choose to ignore them when allocating resources.

The way in which the Government have dealt with this year's teachers' pay award has highlighted, not just for politicians but for parents and governors, the way in which the Government are treating the funding of our education system. The current Secretary of State for Education has failed to deliver for our children, their parents and school governors.

The last time there was difficulty in funding a settlement for teachers, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), rustled up an extra £67 million from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help fund the teachers' pay settlement. He did what he could for the education service, as recently as three years ago. The present Secretary of State has failed.

What about the standard spending assessments? We heard from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) about the problems being caused to the education budget in Derbyshire. The hon. Gentleman should have found out what Derbyshire is spending on education this year and compared it with the standard spending assessment given next year for education in Derbyshire. If he had compared the two figures—as he is a Conservative Member, I can understand why he did not do so—he would have discovered that this year Derbyshire is spending £333 million on education, but next year it has a standard spending assessment for education of £303 million. There is a gap of £30 million.

There is a warning here. Conservative Members speak about a national funding system for education. If we had that, based on the criteria of the Government, £30 million would be cut from Derbyshire's education budget. Nationally, it would mean a cut of £486 million.

We are aware that standards are under attack throughout the system. In our primary schools, more than 1 million children—one in four—are in classes of more than 30. The Office of Standards in Education has been told that there must be a primary inspection every four years for every school, but, at the present rate of performance, it will take eight years, because the Government have not provided the resources to allow the job to be done properly, and indeed intend to cut the budget for future years.

We have a Department for Education that knows a great deal about waste. The failed national curriculum cost tens of millions of pounds. The Minister who sits there on the Treasury Bench has an office in a building the rent of which is £1 million—and for the information of those schools that worry about capital, not £1 million a year, but more than £1 million a month rent is being paid for the Department's offices in Sanctuary buildings. That is where the real waste exists.

What about the example of the proposed city technology college in Brighton? The Government paid £2.3 million for the site. Two years later, when there were no takers, it had to be sold for £1.5 million—money wasted.

We may have a new Secretary of State with warm words and sweet smiles, but we have a harsh settlement for local government. Our children will suffer school budget cuts this year so that taxes can be cut next year. Our children should not be sacrificed on the altar of political expediency.

8.59 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I am delighted to be able to contribute to the debate this evening, and I am equally delighted to be able to answer the question posed by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). He asked where Conservative Members were educated, and what their hopes were for their children. He will know that I was educated in Sheffield in the state system from primary to tertiary level, and I hope that my children will enjoy the same benefits as I have gained from a state education.

I am also delighted to take part in a debate in which there is so much underlying accord between the two parties. In the past few weeks, Opposition Members have made a mad scramble to nick our clothing on many key issues. It must have been with difficulty and a sense of embarrassment that the hon. Member for Brightside has been forced to make U-turns on the subject of league tables, opt-out schools, charitable status and a number of other very important issues. I hazard a guess that there are more U-turns to come—and not only in education.

I recognise that there have been fewer emotive debates in the House this year. However, in the county of Cornwall I have rarely witnessed a debate in which so much mischief and emotional blackmail has been peddled by so few to so many. I hazard a guess that, if the Liberal Democrat-controlled county council had a remit for health, it would have trooped out nurses rather than teachers in this ritual dance.

The Liberal Democrats have cynically used education in the county in an attempt to derive some rather shabby political advantages. They circulated a bogus and misleading petition in that county; my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and I have written to the leader of the Liberal Democrats asking him to withdraw it. The Liberal Democrats have made a tremendous amount of mischief in Cornwall, but not one Liberal Democrat representative from that county has set foot in the Chamber all afternoon. I think that that shows in true relief the crocodile tears that they have shed over the issue.

The bogus petition circulated in Cornwall simply said that children in that county were worth £100 less than children in any other part of the country. That is a shabby statistical sleight of hand. The Liberals did not take into account the area cost adjustment and other key components.

Will the Liberal Democrats in Cornwall tell the children on the Isles of Scilly, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives, that the benefits of extra considerations will be removed? I have not noticed a huge campaign being carried out in the constituencies of Bermondsey, Christchurch and Newbury in favour of the removal of the area cost adjustment. There is total silence about that issue.

Cornwall sits mid-table as far as expenditure is concerned. In the past 20 years, spending on secondary and primary education has risen, and it has increased most profoundly in the past 10 years. At the annual general meeting in his constituency a few weeks ago, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives described the whole argument being pushed by Liberal Democrat councillors and Members of Parliament in that county as lies, damned lies and Liberal Democrat statistics. We must punch a hole in those statistics, because they do not hold water.

There is no doubt that this local government settlement is tight; it would be naive and coy of me to pretend otherwise. However, I ask the county to look very carefully at its reserves; at the amount of money that is held back centrally for administrative services and for surplus places. It should examine its unspent balances and look very carefully at reordering its priorities.

[Mr. Sebastian Coe]

If the county sacks teachers—which is what it is threatening to do—let us make it clear that that is the priority of a Liberal Democrat-controlled county. It is not the priority of the Conservative grouping, the Labour grouping or the independent grouping in that county.

The Liberal Democrats are finding life a little difficult. They promised the earth in the build-up to the county elections a year ago, and they are now finding that the reality of democratic control means that occasionally they must make difficult decisions. As I am told time and again by the council that reserves are sacrosanct and should not be touched, I will leave the House with an interesting observation about my previous political year.

In the parlance of "Match of the Day" pundits, it was a year of two halves. I spent the first half of my year fighting with county hall and imploring the council to dip into its reserves in order to reinstate two primary schools in my constituency—Trevithick school in Camborne and Stithians school in the village where I live—which had been cynically removed and placed down the list of the council's priorities for capital expenditure. When I approached county hall about the matter, I was told that under no circumstance could I push the council any further on the question of dipping into its reserves.

I spent the second half of my political year fighting county hall about the imposition of four new age traveller transit sites in my constituency. Anyone who is familiar with the constituency of Falmouth and Camborne will know that we need four new age traveller transit sites like we need a hole in the head.

County hall said that, if I could not support its bid to Government for funding—which was to be repealed three weeks later—it would dip into county reserves. Education priorities in the county of Cornwall were demonstrated by the refusal of Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament to oppose the establishment of those sites, and by the councillors who sat in the background and hoped that the whole issue would go away.

We ask a great deal of teachers in this country and in my constituency. They are committed, loyal and professional. I was educated in the state system. I attended Tapton school in Sheffield, Abbeydale Grange and Loughborough university. They were two very good schools, and I was delighted to attend them, but we are now asking more from our teachers than we have ever asked before in exactly the same way as we are asking more of our police service.

Teachers in my constituency, and the length and breadth of the country, are dealing with children with fewer social skills than ever. I meet head teachers regularly at my parliamentary education forum, and they say exactly the same. There was a time when that was at least compensated for to some extent by children's television. The waterfall of rubbish that passes for children's television is a sadness, and on Saturday mornings is little more than an orgy of commercial interests pushing videos and CDs—and it is not helping.

We have to kill the myth that what happened in the 1980s was a continual starvation of education funding in Britain. In 1980, we were spending 20.4 per cent. of our national income on welfare, including education. By 1990, we were spending 21.4 per cent. of a significantly larger national income.

In the county of Cornwall, and on national indices, there is no getting away from the fact that education has been well funded by the Government. Teachers' pay has risen by 55 or 60 per cent. in real terms, and there have been increases of 35 per cent. on school equipment and books, and more than 50 per cent. in real terms on gross expenditure in education.

It is nonsense to pretend that those are the statistics of starvation and deprivation. They are not. We have a great duty to skill properly and make sure that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

9.9 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am also delighted to take part in the debate, as I took part in the earlier one when the local government settlement was first announced. I offer the House my apologies for not being present when the debate began, but I was in a Select Committee until about 6.30 pm.

In the debate on the local government settlement, I drew the Minister's attention to the spending pressures that have been imposed upon my local authority, Barnsley. In the past four years, Barnsley has had to absorb enormous pressures. For example, between 1990 and 1994, the number of children on free school meals has increased to 9,591. That represents a 58 per cent. increase. The number of children receiving a grant for clothing has increased by 54 per cent. and there has been an enormous increase in the number of children requiring special needs education. The figure has increased from 1.3 to 3.1 per cent. of pupils in Barnsley. That has meant that the authority has had to find about another £6 million to meet those increased pressures.

When we discussed those issues in the last debate, the Minister looked askance when I drew attention to the facts about Barnsley and when I intervened on his speech, he said that I was trying to square the circle. The circle is that Barnsley has not been able to use the resources available for its children because of the cuts and their impact.

The schools maintenance programme is now estimated to be more than £12 million. That is what is required to bring schools up to standard. Some schools have bucket monitors. When it rains, children are sent out with buckets to catch the water because the buildings are in a such a bad state. The impact of the cuts will be enormous.

According to the report of the education department in Barnsley, another £3.7 million will be required this year to meet the 1994-95 standards. The Minister will be aware that our SSA has been considerably lower, but the authority is spending its full SSA on education.

If the Minister will pay attention, I shall point out the real impact of the cuts on Barnsley. The report prepared by the education department draws attention to the increased class sizes in our secondary schools. It points out that the class sizes for science and technology are likely to be in excess of 28. When one bears in mind the real need to increase the skills in that age group, particularly in terms of GNVQs, it is clear that larger class sizes will not be able to provide that little extra to enable pupils to reach the required standard. That will impact on opportunities in further education.

There will be an increase in the number of classes that will be taught by non-specialist teachers and that again will mean a lowering of standards. If non-specialist teachers are used in Barnsley, the standards there will be lower than those in areas that can afford qualified teachers. There will be large reductions in capitation. It is estimated, for instance, that in some secondary schools the capitation fee will be as low as £10 per pupil. The money restriction will mean a restriction on examination entries as well: children will be denied the opportunity to extend their education by taking examinations.

There will be no provision for pupils with additional needs. Non-statemented pupils will not receive the essential support that they require. I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State is present: she probably is not aware of the impact that the cuts will have in Barnsley. Class sizes will increase in secondary schools, particularly in science and technology. As I have said, that will have a huge impact on general national vocational qualifications. Children need to specialise if they are to use their skills in jobs.

Class sizes will also increase in primary schools. The Secretary of State may not know that it is estimated that some class sizes in Barnsley may reach more than 40. Primary education is particularly important to children in their formative years, but many children in Barnsley will not have the opportunities that are available to children in other areas.

There will also be an increase in mixed-age groups. Many schools will have three age groups in one class, and there will be cross-phasing: for instance, key stages 1 and 2 will be in the same class. There will be no provision for pupils with additional needs, in both primary and secondary schools.

9.17 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): All that we know about the world before us tells us that our investment in education will be crucial for the personal development of our children, for the quality of our democracy and society—if we fail to educate children adequately, the public expenditure bill will ineluctably come back on the social security and police budgets—and for our capacity to compete in an ever-more demanding global economy in which knowledge-based activities and intellectual skills are increasingly at a premium.

I note with satisfaction that the Government have indeed invested in education. They have increased spending in real terms by 50 per cent. per pupil. I note the enormous increase in the numbers who stay at school after the age of 16, the exciting developments in further education and the huge rise in participation in higher education. I share the Government's pride in that. Now, however, my right hon. and hon. Friends seem to be withdrawing from that commitment. They are reducing their planned expenditure on education, and just at a time when the fiscal imperative for public expenditure restraint has abated. In the coming year, the public sector borrowing requirement will be 3 per cent. of gross domestic product; it is heading towards 0.75 per cent. of GDP in 1997-98. We can afford to invest properly in education; indeed, we cannot afford not to.

Of course it is not easy to balance growth in investment with tight cost control, but that is the task of responsible central Government and local authorities. My right hon. and hon. Friends argue that it will be possible, by dint of increased efficiency, to maintain education provision within budgets that increase below inflation. The scope for efficiency gains varies markedly from authority to authority. Every LEA, like every large organisation, is capable of some efficiency improvements. At one time, I was sharply critical of Warwickshire, considering that there was scope for savings on marginal expenditure and improved efficiency. Then, for two years in succession, my county was capped, and in the three subsequent years the Government permitted the county to increase expenditure only below inflation.

The squeeze on Warwickshire has been tight and its administrative expenditure is below the county average. Any economies that remain within Warwickshire's power would not be commensurate with the savings that the Government require. The effect on the county of capping has been the more severe because Warwickshire's SSA is plainly wrong. The theory is that SSAs underpinned by central Government grant provide for parity of provision throughout the country. As it is, Warwickshire is spending 9 per cent. above the SSA and 3.6 per cent. per head below the counties average, yet one third of its primary schools have classes of more than 30 pupils and one tenth have classes of more than 35. The county effectively has no discretionary awards and its youth service has been cut by half.

The conclusion must be that the Government have miscalculated Warwickshire's SSA. The Treasury and the Department of the Environment should acknowledge that, whatever the theory, in practice SSAs throw up anomalies and they should act to correct the system's deficiencies and injustices.

For five years, Members of Parliament representing Warwickshire constituencies and representatives of all parties on the county council have been waiting on Ministers to explain the deficiencies of our SSAs and to seek help. Always we are told that the matter will be looked at for next year and that Warwickshire should sort things out within the Association of County Councils. When next year comes, there is no significant relief and we know that other counties in the ACC will not come to Warwickshire's rescue because that would be to their detriment.

The Government's present requirements are impossible for Warwickshire to meet without significantly damaging education provision. The 1.2 per cent. increase in the SSA is academic because, under the cap, the county is permitted to increase spending by only half of 1 per cent.—yet the Government require teachers' pay to be increased by 2.7 per cent. We can square that circle only by reducing the number of teaching posts and increasing class sizes.

Of course it is right to improve teachers' pay. On 24 November 1990—a pregnant period in the history of the Conservative party—my right hon. Friend who became Prime Minister was quoted in the *Daily Mail* as saying:

> "We need to give teachers back the status they once had and that will mean more money for the right teachers delivering the right service."

Teachers want to deliver the right service.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows the difficulties in Warwickshire because we have had a series of meetings with her. She knows that our concern is shared across the political parties. In her internal letter, leaked in *The Times Educational Supplement*, she warned of the damage and of what could happen to the

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

atmosphere in the education service that my right hon. Friend, through her commitment to the nation's children and to teachers, has done so much to improve.

Having studied Warwickshire's school budgets, I know how well founded were my right hon. Friend's warnings. The budget for Stratford high school for the forthcoming year is down £310,000. That secondary school will have classes of more than 30 pupils, in classrooms that were never designed for such numbers. Eight teachers will lose their jobs and the school has averted the loss of another eight posts only by using reserves accumulated to improve the computer network to meet the requirements of the national curriculum. The school is even more deeply worried about the consequences of the following year, because it cannot use those one-off reserves twice.

In Brailes junior and infant school, the number of full-time teachers will be reduced from five to four and classes will increase to 34 pupils. Shipston junior and infant school loses £43,000 from its budget, and Bidford junior and infant school loses £35,000. Bidford and Studley junior schools will have their special educational needs provision cut. The Minister of State has done a marvellous job improving the policy framework for special needs, but we shall not realise his aspirations if we do not have the requisite resources.

Warwickshire school governors are public-spirited people, and we have done much to increase their responsibilities. They are now faced with a cruel dilemma. Twenty Warwickshire school governing bodies have decided to return the responsibility for drawing up school budgets to the local education authority. I cannot criticise them for doing so.

At Shottery junior and infant school, there are plans to raise money on appeal, to the tune of £50 per family. Those families have paid their taxes. They would be happy to pay more to ensure adequate education provision. They would be happy to pay an extra 23p a week on their council tax. That would raise £2 million, which would be enough to save the jobs of 100 teachers in the county—but the Government have imposed a cap on the county that prevents them from doing so.

If these limitations on education spending are designed to clear the way for tax cuts later this year, I repudiate that policy. It would be entirely wrong to cut taxes on the affluent while the needs of our public services are not properly met. We are not highly taxed in this country. Historically, people have voted Conservative because they have seen the Conservative party as the party of relatively low taxation. That remains true. A Labour Government would always intervene more and spend more; taxes will always be lower under a Conservative Government than under a Labour Government.

More importantly, people have voted Conservative because they have seen us as more competent to manage the economy and they have accepted our genuine commitment to public services. My right hon. Friends have done much to retrieve the Conservative party's reputation for good economic management. Evidence of that is all around us in the economic recovery. By that same token, we can afford to improve public services. We shall not be forgiven if we neglect the trust that people have placed in us to provide properly for the public services.

Unless my hon. Friend can offer me some immediate relief for Warwickshire schools this evening, I would be failing my constituents if I were to support the Government in the Division Lobby.

9.26 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), but I begin mine by complimenting my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on his exposition of the educational failings of the Government—ably supported as he was by many Opposition Members. It is pity that we did not hear the same reasoned intellectual defence of the Government's position by Conservative Members. Instead they trotted out the same old myths—and "Trot" will be a word to which I will return when I deal with the suggestion of the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) about Stalinism in Kent.

The Government amendment

> "welcomes the substantial increase in the real level of education spending since 1979; notes that in a tough settlement overall local authorities will still be able to spend more next year than in 1994-95".

Parents, governors, teachers and councillors throughout the land know that that claim is nonsense. The Government's capping limits restrict most LEAs to a cash increase of 0.5 per cent., out of which they must pay for the teachers' pay rise of 2.7 per cent.—not to mention adult education, nursery education, increasing pupil numbers and special educational needs.

In real terms LEAs are having to cut an enormous £390 million from their education budgets, with the English shires bearing the brunt. There appears to be a consensus among all interested parties—including many Tory Ministers, Back Benchers and local councillors—that the current system of education funding does not work. There is widespread agreement that the funding awarded by the DFE for the 1995-96 financial year is inadequate and reveals a stark lack of understanding of the limitations under which schools are already struggling to function. Many simply will not be able to provide the amount and standard of service that is necessary without dramatic changes to schools' make-up. There are countless nationwide illustrations of that.

Schools are often obliged to fund part or all of the teachers' pay increase by adding tens of thousands of pounds to their payrolls. They are having to reduce numbers of teaching and support staff by means of pushing experienced teachers towards early retirement, voluntary redundancy, non-renewal of temporary contracts, or of taking on newly qualified, inexperienced teachers, rather than the more mature pedagogues who cost more on the salary scale. They are having to make further cuts in spending on books, equipment and maintenance. Faced with the possibility of staff cuts, schools are having to increase class sizes, resulting in less quality time teaching and more mixed-age and ability groups.

The Government show either culpable ignorance or malicious contempt for education, with their failure to address the reality of education in the country today. As the Secondary Heads Association—a body that includes the headmasters conference among its members—put it, there are systematic problems. First, future spending is largely determined by historical levels of spending, and that leads to all sorts of anomalies. Secondly, there is no direct linkage between funding decisions and decisions regarding the type and amount of education provision that should be available. Thirdly, the data used to calculate budgets are far too removed from the actual costs.

If I may, I shall quote directly from the Conservative-dominated Education Select Committee, which warned two years ago:

> "The decision that whilst schools would be funded largely by reference to pupil numbers, the actual costs (including actual, rather than average salaries) which they incurred would be charged to their budgets. Whilst this is, on the surface, relatively simple and fair, schools which in the past had a relatively high proportion of experienced teachers at the top of the salary scale (and therefore higher costs) have lost money as a result of a switch to a system of resource allocation which assumes that all teachers cost the same amount. Many of those 'losing' schools will have lost relatively small amounts, but anecdotal evidence has suggested that a significant minority of schools have sustained losses which can only be absorbed within a relatively small and inflexible budget by parting with senior teachers and replacing them with inexperienced teachers, or not replacing them at all."

What does that tell us about standards in our schools?

The hon. Member for Dartford made heavy going of his claim of increased or better standards from the Government. Let me give him a yardstick with which to test the standards that the Government have achieved over the past 16 years, noting that, within the age group 16 to 24, the education of a huge number of people has been determined by 16 years of Tory Government. In that age group, 750,000 young people are out of education, out of training, out of jobs, out of benefit and out of Government statistics. I am afraid that it is a distortion to look only towards one end of the scale in terms of the end product of the education system.

That has now come to pass with a vengeance. The examples of the losses to schools are many. I shall give the House just a few. The Secretary of State's own authority—Norfolk—has suffered. Its education SSA for next year is £234.8 million. Last year, it spent £252.5 million. It has had a cut of £3.276 million. What that really means, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said, is that cuts were made to discretionary awards, community education, adult education and school meals. Nottinghamshire, which houses the Chancellor's constituency—we heard from the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) earlier—spent £378 million last year. But the pay increase will cost the authority nearly £6 million and there will be a shortfall of £2.5 million. If that does not mean cuts, I do not know what does.

Oxfordshire, where the previous Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) has his seat, is an excellent example of the duplicity of the Government's amendment. The frustration and anger of middle England has manifested itself there, as in Warwickshire, Shropshire and other shires not noted for their revolutionary tendencies. In Oxfordshire, one can quote Wesley Green middle school, on the now infamous Blackbird Leys estate, which is now £64,000 down on what it was spending three years ago, and it anticipates losing a further £40,000. Or Mr. Betteridge, a parent governor at Burford school, who said that schools now had to decide which law to break: whether to exceed their budgets or fail to deliver the national curriculum. A teacher at the same school suggested that it would lose six posts. Judith Bennett, who chairs the governing body of Chalgrove primary school, said:

> "We are going to concentrate nine classes into eight. At the moment, they are low to mid-20s and this will now go to over 30."

The cuts to local authorities were so great that it moved a Tory councillor to prepare a confidential briefing paper to Oxfordshire's Conservative Members of Parliament. He wrote:

> "It is clear that 1995-96 contains real problems and is going to be the most difficult budget the county has had to set",

with only two services, education and social services, costing enough to

> "bear the brunt of the necessary reductions . . . It seems certain that there will be reductions in school budgets, possibly of 3 to 4 per cent."

He said that primary schools would "probably cope" by reducing numbers of learning support staff and that the

> "secondary schools may have to reduce teaching numbers with an impact on non-contact time or slight increases in class size".

If Conservative Members are ignorant, it is culpable ignorance. There may be method in the Government's madness because in *The Guardian* of 7 February another Tory councillor stated:

> "The silver lining for the Tories is a possible resuscitation of the opt-out policy. Only one Oxfordshire school has gone grant-maintained. It is to be hoped that budget pressures will force more of them to realise they can kick away the crutches of the LEA and stand quite adequately on their own two feet".

A Berkshire head said:

> "If things get worse we would look at going for CTC status and opting out. It sends a shiver down my spine to be forced down this route."

The Prime Minister would deny that the cuts are real or politically motivated. He would certainly find it hard to convince Mr. Brian Brown, a head teacher in a primary school in the Prime Minister's constituency, who in his anger at the £20,000 worth of cuts that he has been forced to make, told *The Daily Telegraph*, which is not exactly a radical newspaper:

> "Mr. Major is not doing his job representing the interests of the people here."

Most of us do not think that he is doing the job of representing the interests of the country, and certainly not in terms of education. The House should note this in the light of his ignorant comment last week when he said that if any local authority was thinking of cutting teachers in the classroom, he would like to ask it what saving it had made in non-teaching aspects of education. Clearly, he has no understanding of how the school community functions on a day-to-day basis, nor of the increasing bureaucracy involved in running a school, much of which is due to Government changes.

I am sure that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State will again tell local education authorities to set sensible priorities. On 21 March the Prime Minister said that there were two administrators for every three teachers. That is utter nonsense and the right hon. Gentleman's assumption vanishes immediately under examination. *[Interruption.]* That is a credit to the education system that operated when I was at school. Left-wing educationists taught us to prepare adequately, a function in which the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) does not appear to be adequate.

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

About 65,000 non-manual staff are employed by local education authorities. Many of them are important front-line personnel on whom key services depend. They are educational psychologists, education welfare officers, inspectors and advisers, and youth and community workers. Only the residue can fairly be labelled as administrative staff, and they certainly form less than 5 per cent. of the total education complement.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside said, staff watch figures for local authority employment show that there are 404,000 teachers and 337,000 staff in England and Wales. The "others" category includes 162,000 manual workers such as cleaners, caretakers and ground maintenance workers. The Department for Education's evidence, which is quoted in the 1995 review body report, is that, of the balance, 109,000 are employed in schools in England on education support and administrative and clerical work.

Does the Prime Minister seriously suggest that school secretaries, dinner ladies, caretakers, psychologists, education welfare officers, advisers and youth workers should be sacked? The sensible citizen would hope not. The Secretary of State reinforced the cynical image of this tired, discredited Government when she wrote to Conservative Members urging them to question local authority spending on nursery education as schools face budget cuts. Margaret Lally, chair of the National Campaign for Nursery Education, said:

> "We have always doubted the Government's real commitment to increasing state nursery education. This just shows how little they have".

The National Governors Council agrees, given the Prime Minister's pledge to his party conference, to provide nursery education within the lifetime of this Parliament. *[Interruption.]*

I shall now deal with some of the earlier comments. I could not believe them and had to consider them at great length. The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) made a big play about the assisted places scheme. I remind him of the review that he wrote about state and private education, and the value of the assisted places scheme. I am sure that he will take kindly to my quoting him directly:

> "Certainly ministers, including myself, have claimed in the annual debate on the scheme in Parliament that the sons and daughters of bus and lorry drivers, miners, butchers, recent immigrants and one-parent families, for example, have through the scheme received a first-class education . . . Even more significantly, 68 per cent of mothers and 51 per cent of fathers of such pupils attended either private or selective education.
>
> I suspect, however, that the aspirant assisted-place parents with their educational backgrounds would not have sent their children to inner-city sink comprehensives . . . Thus if there is any damage it must be to the better . . . comprehensive schools."

I cannot think of anything that is more invidious and more designed to undermine the education provision of the vast majority of children.

Sir Rhodes Boyson *rose*—

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am conscious of the time. I have given way many times.

I move to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). I do not know whether he is in his place. He pleaded—

Sir Rhodes Boyson *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Member for West Derbyshire said that he waited 28 hours for an answer from the chairman of the Derbyshire education committee. I have news for the hon. Gentleman. I managed to meet the chairman today. He was here taking part in a lobby with thousands of Derbyshire parents, teachers and pupils. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not go out and meet them today.

Mr. McLoughlin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has said that I refused to meet people today. He is wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Member for Dartford talks about Stalinism. I do not know what he knows about that or about democratic centralism. I know a fair bit about both. Outside the Militant Tendency, I have never known of a better example of democratic centralism than the way in which the Conservative party conducts the country's affairs.

When the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) wants to sing the praises of grant-maintained schools, I hope that he will consider the position of St. James school in Bolton, where the head teacher was sacked for corruption. One may say that that was the exception that proved the rule. I could not understand why the Grant Maintained Schools Foundation, which had a base in that school, could not, apparently, monitor what was going on there.

Education in Kent was raised by the hon. Members for Dartford and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) in an intervention, as *Hansard* will show. Whenever I see the hon. Member for Dartford and his close friends and collaborators the Members for Gravesham and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—who is off on an antipodean visit—I tend to think of the Bash Street Kids. I think of Plug, Danny and Smiffy in educational terms. In a kinder moment, I tend to think of the Three Stooges—Larry, Curly and Mo—except that they were amusing. There is nothing amusing about the attritional warfare that those hon. Gentlemen wage against education provision in Kent.

Mr. Dunn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you ask the hon. Gentleman to repeat the attack on me? I could not make out what he was saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I shall provide *Hansard* with a translation if it needs it. The hon. Member for Dartford fails to point out that, in the 18 years before the new administration came into Kent, not one new nursery place was built in Kent. Eight new nursery units have been set up this year, including one in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman failed to point out that the administration has given £750,000 to voluntary and independent sectors, that it has doubled the number of classroom assistants in infant classes or where there are children with special needs, and that it has reduced the number of children waiting for special needs assessments. It has also injected an extra £11.8 million for children with special educational needs by fully funding the code of practice. He also failed to point out that it has made good a shortfall of nearly £500,000 for section 11 funding which was caused by Home Office decisions and withdrawals, that it fully funded the teachers' pay rise last year and that it is providing £6 million extra to take care of repairs in the county. The silence that greets these points is instructive.

I urge the House to vote for the Labour motion and to treat the Government amendment with the contempt that it deserves.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): The few people who have witnessed the debate—sadly, there have been relatively few—would be forgiven for thinking that it has taken place under entirely false pretences. This is styled an "Opposition day" debate—a debate called by the Opposition—and one would therefore have assumed that the Opposition regarded the subject as being of passing importance. However, I have made a careful note of the numbers of Labour and Liberal Members present during this debate on what the Opposition claim is an important subject close to their hearts.

At 5.30 pm, there were four Labour Back Benchers and one Liberal Member in the Chamber. At 8.15 pm, there were two Labour Back Benchers and no Liberal Members at all. Even half an hour ago, there were as many as six Labour Members present and the same Liberal Member—the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)—who, I concede, has been here most of the day and who is still in his place.

The numbers that I have cited are bad enough but the depths of cynicism displayed by the Opposition are well illustrated by the briefing that has fallen into my hands. It is headed "PLP Briefing by David Blunkett MP". I shall not weary the House by relating its irrelevances—

Mr. Blunkett: Read it out.

Mr. Forth: I shall read out part of it. The hon. Gentleman must be patient—I shall read his words to him. The last page of the briefing states:

> "We now have a major campaign running throughout the country with a petition available, leaflets prepared and education is a central part of our thrust for May 4".

So much for the alleged spontaneity of what is happening across the country. It is perfectly obvious that the protests that the Opposition claim are taking place are nothing more than a cynical and carefully orchestrated attempt to worry people unduly.

Regrettably, the debate has not, as one might have hoped, been about standards, achievement and opportunities in education. We would have welcomed such a debate. In reality, it has been about money. I shall dwell for a moment on money because a number of interesting facts have emerged.

For example, it has emerged that the total rates, community charge and council tax arrears run up by local authorities amounts to some £1.5 billion. In other words, authorities have failed to collect money that they should have collected, although some are at the same time complaining about not having enough money. That is bad enough, but the independent Audit Commission said that there are some £500 million worth of savings to be made through local authority efficiencies.

We have also heard that surplus school places could represent savings for local authorities of up to £250 million. Mention has been made of local education authority and school balances. The independent schoolteachers review body said that its pay award was affordable.

In her opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the Ofsted report. She quoted the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) as having said that the chief inspector's report was

> "about as unbiased as you can get".

She went on to point out that the same report said about education money:

> "In overall terms, the provision of resources is satisfactory."

All in all, the picture is one of many opportunities being available to the local authorities that care to use them and manage their affairs and choose their priorities properly. They can make available to themselves substantial sums of money to spend on education, if they so wish.

That is the key to this whole debate. If we then consider individual authorities, some very interesting facts emerge. I was told today that, apparently, there was some sort of protest emanating from Derbyshire. Labour Members could not make up their minds earlier about how many people were involved in that protest. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who has not been seen since and, certainly, has not been present throughout the debate, claimed that 5,000 people were involved. The hon. Member for Brightside thought that the figure was 3,000 and then said that, anyway, there were a few thousand involved.

We do not know how many people were involved in that protest, but what has emerged is that the people who were here from Derbyshire included teachers and, it is said, pupils. I have been told—I cannot believe that this is true—that the teachers were taking what in the trade is known as a Baker day, so that they could come to the House of Commons on a political protest. I will be making it my business to make further inquiries about that, because if teachers in Derbyshire or anywhere else are using a Baker day to be away from their classrooms for a political protest, I would want to know a lot more about it.

The situation is worse than that. If supply cover was having to be introduced in those teachers' classrooms to continue the education of their pupils, I would like to know how Derbyshire could find the money for supply cover to cover a political protest at the same time as it is apparently complaining about a lack of money.

Dr. Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for threats to be made against persons approaching this House with a view to lobbying their Members of Parliament? Is that not a breach of parliamentary privilege—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All hon. Members are responsible for the words that they utter in this Chamber.

Mr. Forth: I would have thought that the House would regard it as a dereliction of duty if I did not make it my

[Mr. Forth]

business to satisfy myself that taxpayers' money, which is intended to be spent on education, was not being spent instead on political protest.

Dr. Reid: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not honestly think that there can be anything further to that point of order. It is very clear. Every hon. Member is responsible for his own words in this Chamber. That is crystal clear.

Dr. Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It had better be a new point of order.

Dr. Reid: I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on whether it is a breach of parliamentary privilege to threaten those approaching a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know that he should write to Madam Speaker about such matters.

Mr. Barnes *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Forth: I seem—*[Interruption.]* I seem to have touched a rather raw nerve end.

Mr. Barnes *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I shall follow the rather bad example of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and I shall not take any interventions.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Absolutely!

Mr. Forth: I was going to point out that expenditure on education is of course a matter for local education authorities. That has emerged clearly from today's debate. What has been really important about today is the number of interesting examples that my hon. Friends have given of what their local education authorities have chosen as priorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), in a very telling intervention, pointed out that her local authority of Lancashire had increased its administrative staff over three or four years from 503 to 548. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) pointed out that Nottinghamshire had run up an overtime bill for its staff of £10 million and was carrying 20,000 surplus school places. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) pointed out that Ealing has some £17 million in its reserves.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) referred to 20,000 surplus school places in Derbyshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), in an excellent speech, pointed out not only that his authority of Wiltshire was spending 5.2 per cent. of its expenditure on administration, but, unbelievably, that it was wasting valuable money, which could be going on education, on pursuing some sort of anti-hunting vendetta.

Such examples tell us clearly not only that the opportunities exist for local authorities to reorder their priorities and put more money into education, but that authorities such as those mentioned by my hon. Friends are wilfully refusing to order their spending priorities so as to put money into education. That is a condemnation of the kind that the debate has brought out clearly, but which Opposition Members have chosen to ignore completely.

What has emerged during the debate about Opposition policies? Predictably, the answer is almost nothing. Nothing has emerged about what the Opposition would do about education—although I must admit that the hon. Member for Bath has said that his party would put more money into education. However, on a platform that he shared with me recently—I am breaking no confidences because it was a public occasion—he said that the absolute priority for the Liberal Democrats was to put all the money into education for under-fives.

So the Liberal Democrats are not talking about funding the teachers' pay increase, repairing crumbling school buildings or anything similar. I realise that education for the under-fives is where their priorities lie, but we should not let the debate pass imagining that they would put more money into the teachers' pay award, which is the subject of the Opposition motion.

We listened in vain to hear what the Labour party would do about the education spending issues that Labour Members talk about. They talk about class sizes, arrears of building repairs and further and higher education expansion; occasionally they refer to student grants and loans; they have been known to refer to the reading recovery scheme. But they are not prepared or able to give any idea of whether they would fund even one of those areas. There is silence on that subject, and that is one of the most telling facts to emerge from the debate—the avoidance of any commitment by Opposition Members on what they would do to improve or even to change education spending. They are silent, and that fact should be well known.

Things get worse when Opposition Members start talking about standards and quality in education. As was pointed out forcefully by my right hon. Friends the Members for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) and for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), we know all too clearly that time and again when the Government have brought forward positive measures to improve education standards, the Labour party has systematically opposed them. Labour opposed testing pupils to establish their educational needs, and opposed the publication of school results, until—

Mr. Blunkett: No, we did not.

Mr. Forth: Labour opposed that until the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) experienced a conversion. Now he tells us that not only does he welcome the publication of results—

Mr. Blunkett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forth: No, I shall not.

Apparently the Leader of the Opposition would welcome the publication of even more details about what is happening in schools—although whether his Back Benchers support him remains to be seen.

As for the hon. Member for Brightside, he said recently about grant-maintained schools:

> "I am having no truck with middle-class, left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area".

I cannot imagine whom he was thinking of. And when he was challenged during the debate about his attitude to grant-maintained schools earlier in the debate he said something from a sedentary position, which I shall now have written into *Hansard* for him, because I made a note of what he said. It was, "I have not changed my views on opt-outs." In other words, in spite of his recent attempts to con headmasters of grant-maintained schools, the hon. Gentleman has not changed his mind on opt-outs, and his implacable opposition to grant-maintained status remains unchanged.

Therefore the debate has been informative, but not in the ways that the Opposition wanted it to be. We have established that education is in no sense starved of resources. It has received more and more money systematically, year on year, ever since the Government have been in office.

Secondly, we have clearly shown our commitment to improving quality and standards in education. All of the measures which we have put in place—the curriculum, testing, independent inspection, the publication of the performance results of schools—have systematically ensured an increase in the quality and standards in education. That is our continuing commitment. We have heard no commitments and nothing of any substance from the Opposition tonight. I urge the House utterly to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 289.

Division No. 119] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*

Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea Wasst)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter

Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 254.

Division No. 120] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stem, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bames, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bemie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbemauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springbum)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milbum, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Emie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tumer, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm

Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the substantial increase in the real level of education spending since 1979; notes that in a tough settlement overall local authorities will still be able to spend more next year than in 1994-95; looks to them to set sensible priorities; welcomes the substantial improvement in standards of achievement by pupils in recent years, as demonstrated by examination and test results and by school inspection reports; and applauds the Government's education policies which are further driving up education standards, and giving parents more choice and information for the benefit of their children.

WAYS AND MEANS

Atomic Energy Authority Bill

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Atomic Energy Authority Bill, it is expedient to authorise the imposition of charges to corporation tax by provisions relating to the transfer of property, rights and liabilities of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in accordance with schemes under the Act.—*[Mr. Page.]*

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matter relating exclusively to Scotland),

PRISONS

That the draft Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 (Release of Prisoners etc.) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.

That the draft Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 (Release of Prisoners etc.) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 2nd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Drugs and Appliances

10.27 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Amendment Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 643), dated 8th March 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th March, be annulled.

Opposition Members are not here solely to voice our opposition to this savage increase in taxes on the sick; we are here to give Conservative Members a chance to speak for their constituents, and to defeat the proposal. We want to hear from the Government why they are pushing through this increase, this year.

It is clear beyond doubt that, throughout all their years in office, the Government have pursued a policy of milking prescription charges as fully as they dare. Despite what the *Daily Mail* claimed was a pledge not to increase prescription charges, the process began with a whopping increase of 125 per cent. in the very first months of the Government's life in office. That was followed by a rise of 55 per cent. in 1980.

In fact, since the Conservative Government's election in 1979, in only two years—the boom years of 1988 and 1989—has the increase in the prescription charge been about the same as the rate of inflation. In every other year the charge has risen by massively more than the inflation rate: there was an increase of 25 per cent. in 1984-85—conveniently after the general election—four times more than the then rate of inflation, which had risen by 6.9 per cent. In the following years, increases averaged two to three times the rate of inflation, but since 1992 and the last general election we have again seen increases massively ahead of inflation.

The increase was 10.3 per cent. in 1991-92, when the inflation rate was 1.3 per cent. It was 11.8 per cent. in April 1992-93, when the inflation rate was 2.6 per cent. The regulations would raise prescription charges 10.5 per cent.—three times the current rate of inflation. If the price of bread had increased at the same rate as prescriptions, a loaf would cost £8.08. A pint of milk would cost £3.78. The proposed charges bear no relation to average price rises but bear a close relation to a secretive, undeclared tax on the sick—only on them, and levied only because they are sick.

Those spoils—that loot—is being extracted from the sick by overcharging, in half of all cases, for the medicines sold. We know that that is true because the Secretary of State herself admitted that daylight robbery. Answering a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) last December, the right hon. Lady said that in 55 per cent. of cases the total cost to the NHS of a prescription item was less than the proposed charge of £5.25.

Given that charges have increased way ahead of inflation and in many cases are providing a profit for the Treasury, they are not just a tax but a fiscal mugging. It is the kind of criminal offence that Dolly Rawlings, the powerful widow of gangland fame, would utterly deplore. The Dolly Rawlings of the Department of Health, however, is just the kind of mugger who gives crime and taxation such a bad name.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): No doubt the right hon. Lady read the article in *The Economist* last

[Mr. John Marshall]

weekend which suggested that she does not have a policy on health. What would the right hon. Lady do with prescription charges? Would she get rid of them?

Mrs. Beckett: I did not read that article in *The Economist*. Obviously it would have been a waste of time.

Mr. Marshall: The right hon. Lady should have read it.

Mrs. Beckett: Well, clearly it did not convey much information to the hon. Gentleman, so it seems that it was not worth reading. Our approach to prescription charges has been stated repeatedly in the House. We believe that the whole system of prescription charges should be subject to a thoroughgoing review. The system has huge absurdities. It is crystal clear—not just from statements made from the Dispatch Box but from the record of past Labour Governments—that we never have and never would use prescription charges as a tax on the sick, in the way that the Government have done since 1979.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): A Labour Government introduced them.

Mrs. Beckett: That is not true. I know that the Prime Minister made that claim at the Dispatch Box two or three days ago, but the Minister should know better than to believe anything said by his right hon. Friend at Prime Minister's Question Time. A Conservative Government introduced prescription charges—

Mr. Malone *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Beckett: So the Minister knew that his remark was not true. A Conservative Government introduced prescription charges, not a Labour Government. I hope that we have nailed that lie.

Ministers are quick to argue that the level of charges is unimportant because 80 per cent. of prescriptions are dispensed free. That creates the impression—as I am sure it is intended to do—that only 20 per cent. of people pay, and then only those who can afford to pay. As always when it comes to tax, Ministers are being at least economical with the truth. The latest figures for 1993 show that no fewer than 50 per cent. of the population are liable to pay prescription charges.

It is not true that all vulnerable people are exempt. Ministers list pensioners, children, people on income support, pregnant women and people with certain specific conditions. However, the Library calculates that if one excludes the only two groups who are completely exempt—pensioners and children—85 per cent. of the remaining population are liable to pay. The overwhelming majority of men and women, whatever their income or family circumstances, are liable. People whose incomes are low enough to receive council tax benefit are not thereby exempt. Those in receipt of invalidity benefit—who by definition are long-term sick or disabled—are not exempt. Asthmatics and people suffering from cystic fibrosis are among those with long-term illness who have to pay for their prescribed medication. So do patients with AIDS, motor neurone disease, asthma, multiple sclerosis, chronic rheumatoid arthritis, leukaemia, breast cancer, emphysema and renal failure, to name but a few. All are liable to pay prescription charges.

Mr. Malone: Will the right hon. Lady give an undertaking to the House today that she would include them in the list of exemptions if she ever had the opportunity to do so?

Mrs. Beckett: I have already told the hon. Gentleman that we are committed to a thorough review, precisely because of the issue that he raises. There are huge numbers of people, some with diseases only relatively recently identified, but not one of whom has been added to the list. So far as I know, none of them has even been considered by the Government for adding to the list. The Government's policy is clear: huge increases in prescription charges, and no consideration of the addition of any of these groups.

The Minister knows perfectly well that the British Medical Association is calling for the kind of review that we advocate. First, there is a need to reconsider the list of those who are exempt, and the conditions that are included. Secondly, there is a need to look into the question of a person with one condition getting all their prescriptions free. These are serious and important issues which deserve careful consideration by the medical profession. That is what the medical profession wants, and what we would provide. The professsion does not want what the Minister is doing; it opposes it root and branch.

Mr. Malone *rose*—

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Minister have a serious point to make?

Mr. Malone: Yes.

Mrs. Beckett: That will make a change.

Mr. Malone: I thought from the reaction of the House that my last point to the right hon. Lady was serious. When these matters were last looked at, on 21 March 1968, when a Labour Government were in power, the BMA set down the exemption conditions. Is the right hon. Lady telling the House that the BMA has come to her with a list to add to the exemptions laid down back then? If she is not, this debate is dishonest.

Mrs. Beckett: That is rubbish. Certainly the BMA was involved in the discussion of the list in 1968, but is the Minister suggesting that nothing has changed since then? How many people had AIDS in 1968? How many children had asthma then? What were the charges? What was the treatment available then, and how essential was it to people's well-being?

A huge number of things have changed since 1968, but what has changed most is the prescription charge under the Conservative Government. Under the Labour Government, it did not increase by so much as one penny. Under the Conservatives, it has gone through the roof. And all the time Ministers refuse to look at new kinds of treatment, at new concerns which arise, and at a range of issues which the professionals believe deserve re-examination.

What is more, charges at the level that the regulations propose can be clinically damaging. I do not refer only to those who cannot, because of their incomes, afford to pay all their prescriptions, though they are a growing group. I spoke recently to a GP who explained that he had a patient who was acutely depressed, who had just lost her job and who was extremely anxious about her financial position. It was likely that she would need to be on anti-depressants for some time. Because of the woman's financial position, the doctor would have preferred to give her one long-term prescription, but because she was a suicide risk he dared not recommend more than a week's supply. Regular weekly prescriptions at a regular weekly charge are increasing her costs, adding to her anxiety and damaging her chances of a speedy recovery.

Another patient, with an eye infection, was given a prescription that she did not collect because she could not afford it. A few days later she returned to her doctor with her eye in a much worse condition. He was so horrified at what had happened that he paid for the drug himself.

The BMA says today that, with each appalling rise in prescription charges, doctors are concerned that more and more patients will be dissuaded from visiting their surgeries at all. All GPs and pharmacists have anecdotal evidence of patients asking which of two or more items on a prescription form are the most important because they cannot afford to pay for more than one at a time.

It is crystal clear that this is a tax, that many more are liable to pay it than Ministers pretend, and that among those are large numbers of people who cannot afford to pay, including many who cannot afford to pay so much precisely because they are long-term or chronically sick. I have little doubt that the Minister of State will claim—as Ministers always claim—that there is no alternative, especially as next year they expect to raise £310 million from the charge. Almost a third of that could be found instead by abolishing the subsidy on private health insurance, which cost the Revenue £95 million last year. The Government could have held back the £100 million to £120 million that they spent on the legal costs, the logos, the uniforms and the PR that went with the structural changes in their so-called health reforms. There are a number of ways in which they could have economised on the £1.3 billion that is estimated as the overall total costs of the changes.

In other words, the Government are not forced to raise all the money in this way. The sheer scale on which the Government cheat the sick is demonstrated by one simple comparison. If, as the then Mrs. Thatcher indicated in 1979, they had increased prescription charges only in line with inflation, the charge today would be 53p instead of £5.25. In other words, 90 per cent. of the charge that we are debating is down to deliberate Government tax raising.

The Conservatives are the tax-raising party. In these weeks, we are seeing increases in income tax, increases in water charges, increases in prescription charges—every one of them in stark contradiction to the pledges, the promises and the programme that the Government put before the people of Britain. They are dishonest. They are deceitful. They should depart.

10.41 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am astonished that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who has had a considerable time to reflect on these matters—as has her party over the past 16 years or so, or even longer because it was the Labour party that reintroduced prescription charges in 1968—comes to the House tonight and criticises what the Government are saying, and then simply promises a review. The truth of the matter is that she understands, as I think the whole House does, that we have these debates every year, usually in relatively heated circumstances, but nobody from the Opposition Benches is ever able to suggest what should replace the prescription charges that the Government have put in place on a fair basis to increase the amount of money that is spent on health care in this country.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): We need a review first.

Mr. Malone: If it takes Labour Members 16 years to work out what the review and the decisions of that review should be, I hope that the whole House will note that the right hon. Lady had not a single substitute to put in place for the benefits that prescription charges provide for the population of this country.

Each year we have to make careful judgments about how the resources of the NHS should best be spent, so that we can continue to provide the highest standard of patient care. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently reminded the House, surveys of patients show high satisfaction rates with the NHS, and broadly we have a record that I believe that we can be proud of.

Mrs. Beckett: Those are characteristically accurate statistics from the Prime Minister. Of course, what he does not point out is that levels of satisfaction may be slightly higher now than they were two or three years ago, but they are substantially lower than they were 10 years ago, before these reforms.

Mr. Malone: If the right hon. Lady looks at the British social attitudes survey, she will see precisely how satisfaction has increased in recent years, and it is something for which the Government take a great deal of credit. I did not hear many Opposition voices saying that resources are not an important matter. To make the best use of available resources, successive Governments have taken the view that those who can afford it should pay for prescriptions, thereby making an important contribution.

I remind the right hon. Member for Derby, South that it was a Labour Government who in 1949 first took powers to introduce prescription charges. They introduced the first NHS charges in 1951, and a Labour Government abolished them in 1965, only to reintroduce them in 1968.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What do I tell my constituents who come to my surgery and say that they simply cannot afford to pay prescription charges?

Mr. Malone: What I shall say to the hon. Gentleman is that I will now deal with a point that I had intended to deal with later. It is that no pensioner, no child and no student up to the age of 18 pays prescription charges. There is a low-income scheme. Prescription charges are sensible and people who can afford to pay them make a contribution to British health care. What is the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party about replacing prescription charges? I shall be delighted to give way to him.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I and all my hon. Friends think that we need a total review. That is absolutely right, and we shall have it and have sensible conclusions as a result.

Mr. Malone: The one certainty that I have noticed in my occasional appearances at the Dispatch Box is the

[Mr. Malone]

repeated Opposition cry of, "Let's have a review." There are more reviews in the Opposition than ever appear in the *Evening Standard* theatre section.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): The Minister repeatedly mocks the idea of a review of prescription charges. Is he aware that the Select Committee on Health, which has a majority of Conservative Members, has called for a review? The Committee's recommendation stated:

> "We therefore recommend that there should be a review of prescription charges and the current exemption categories."

In her response to that the Secretary of State for Health promised to examine the potential for change. The Minister's Department has agreed to a review. When will it take place?

Mr. Malone: There is a great deal of difference between what the hon. Gentleman says and what his right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South said earlier. The right hon. Lady has absolutely no solution to filling the gap that would be left by the loss of the £310 million which contributes to greater patient care. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I cannot hear the Minister. I wish to hear him and I do not want sedentary interruptions from what sounds like overgrown schoolboys.

Mr. Malone: I shall remind the House of what the £310 million would pay for. It would pay for 75,000 hip replacements or 235,000 cataract operations. Where would the right hon. Member for Derby, South find that money if not from those who can afford a modest charge?

I shall now deal with the whole question of the cost of prescriptions. Increases in prescription charges have never been linked to inflation. The Government believe that it is reasonable to ask those who can afford to pay charges to do so. There is no firm evidence that charges deter people from getting the medication that they need.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the Minister tell the House what percentage of prescription items cost less than £5?

Mr. Malone: The average cost of a prescription is approximately 55 per cent. of the real cost of the drugs that are provided. That is the important point. That statistic is used because people use a mixture of prescriptions. Over the course of a year, it is right to consider not specific items, but the average cost because that is what the taxpayer is supplementing. It is as clear as it ever has been that prescription charges are good value for money when the cost is averaged out. It is reasonable to ask people who can afford to pay to do so.

As I said to the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) the charge is related not to a particular item but to an average. That is an extremely important point to bear in mind. I am aware of the fact that a number of items cost less than the prescription charge. That is and always has been the case. That was the position when charges were reintroduced by the Labour party in 1968.

The charge is a flat rate. To have something akin to banded charges, or charges directly related to the cost of individual items, would be costly to operate and would not in the least be cost-effective. There are occasions when people are able to buy a prescription item over the counter at a cheaper price. They are free to do so. Many people do not know what sort of medication they need until they see the doctor, so it is not surprising that that happens.

Purchase of over-the-counter medicines for the minor ailments which form the bulk of illness is in line with the strategy in "The Health of the Nation". People should take more responsibility for their health, in consultation with their general practitioners and pharmacists. Other items need to be prescribed.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Why will not the Government allow general practitioners to write private prescriptions for items that cost less than £5.25?

Mr. Malone: GPs may do that. Nothing prevents them from issuing private prescriptions. Undoubtedly, they may wish to make a charge on that, or, as the hon. and learned Gentleman well knows, the pharmacist may charge a fee when the drug is dispensed. There is no question about that. There is no reason why that arrangement cannot be entered into.

I turn to exemption and remission arrangements. It is vital that hon. Members recognise what those are. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has often said to the House, we have the most generous exemption arrangements in Europe. More than 80 per cent. of prescription items are dispensed free, compared with 60 per cent. when the Government came to power in 1979. Only 42 per cent. were dispensed free in 1968 when the Labour party were in government and reintroduced charges.

It is important to remind the House about the arrangements. No child, pregnant woman or pensioner has to pay for their prescriptions. People on low incomes, such as income support and family credit, also receive free prescriptions, as do those entitled to full help under the national health service low income scheme. From 1 April, people receiving disability working allowance, who had capital of £8,000 or less when they made their claim, will receive free prescriptions. We are protecting people who are most vulnerable. People with certain chronic medical conditions who need regular or expensive medication also get their prescriptions free, and it is our intention to maintain that position.

We will not reduce an exempt list that has endured since it was first introduced in 1968 by Labour. I know that no change has been made in recent years, but the Government do not intend to extend the list because to do so would benefit only those whose income was above the level of qualifying for help on low income grounds, and an extended list would have to be agreed with the medical profession, which made it clear in 1968 that it would agree only to readily identifiable conditions needing lifelong medication. Nothing has occurred to change that up to now.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend the Minister is delivering a speech that needs to be heeded by all parties. He is presenting some relevant facts and statistics, but is he aware that some Conservative Members believe that a number of lifelong illnesses such as cystic fibrosis merit free prescriptions and being included in the exempt list of illnesses that require considerable medication? In the light of recent experiences and some of the views that have been expressed, would the Government perhaps consider exempting such diseases?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend's point highlights the dilemma that faced those who had to reach this conclusion in 1968. An agreement that would endure was needed then. It is difficult to include other categories of diseases in the exempt list for the simple reason that it is difficult to get a consensus in the medical profession about the very definitions of the sort of illnesses alluded to by my hon. Friend. The questions that were examined in great depth in 1968 with the British Medical Association resulted in an important list of exemptions that we shall not revise or revisit.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): That was 30 years ago.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman says that it was 30 years ago, but a number of the diseases and problems to which many hon. Members refer were well known in those days. The medical profession at the time considered that they did not fall into the category that required exemption. That is a consensus that the Government do not intend to disturb.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Minister is saying. The shallowness and hollowness of the Labour party's call for a review is clear in that the party has not a word to say about what it would do. What most annoys my constituents and, I dare say, many of my hon. Friends' constituents, is that some people have to pay an increasing amount but many pay nothing at all. There may not be a review just yet, but will my hon. Friend consider the important problem of the waste of medicines? People who do not pay for them are not being encouraged to use them sensibly. What most annoys those who face the higher charge is that many people pay nothing.

Mr. Malone: I shall respond directly to my hon. Friend's point about the proper use and waste of medicines. We are moving towards original pack dispensing with a more educational form of drug use, which is extremely important. Yes, as my hon. Friend suggested, it is important that when drugs are prescribed and dispensed they are used properly. Moves are being made in the right direction. It is widely recognised that the effectiveness of therapy is often connected with the proper use of drugs over time.

There are many other ways in which fairness is brought to bear in considering prescription charges. For example, prepayment certificates can be of enormous benefit to those who require therapy over time. I am delighted to say that those certificates are available on a basis which allows tremendous and quite dramatic savings to people who require regular prescriptions. On average, those who have a prepayment certificate can save over the period that the certificate is valid some £100 or so if they are on an average dose of drugs.

We have this debate on a regular basis. If the Opposition were providing an alternative to what we do—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We are.

Mr. Malone: Well, they are offering a review yet again. To the people in Britain who benefit from the additional cash that comes into the health service on a direct basis and receive the additional benefits of all that because of our procedures, the response of the Labour party is hollow. It protests much, but it knows little about what to do. It has no alternative to what is being put forward. It promises a review after having looked at this problem for 16 years. It is a hollow promise.

We have fair arrangements which are firmly in place to ensure that those who can afford to contribute towards the cost of drugs that they receive do so and thereby provide benefits for patient care elsewhere in the health service. It is a proper policy. It is the right policy and the House will recognise tonight that the Labour party has no policy.

11.1 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): We have heard the word review bandied about a lot tonight in what I suppose may be regarded as the late-night revue on prescription charges. On one hand, we were reminded that the Secretary of State has said that she will keep prescription charges under review. On the other, we have heard that the Labour party is going to have a review of the whole system of prescription charges.

The Government have raised prescription charges way beyond inflation on the basis of the excuse that the charges have never had anything to do with inflation. That is arguing from a position of least advantage against the least advantaged, and the Minister knows it very well.

The Labour party says that it does not yet know what it will do about prescription charges. It would have been helpful—I agree with the Minister to this extent—if the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) had been able to tell us, for example, that she thought that prescription charges should not be raised. It would have been helpful if, for example, she had said what I believe to be the case—it has been my party's policy for a considerable time—that taxes on tobacco could be higher.

If one applied a hypothecated system of taxation to the national health service, the money that could be raised by increasing tobacco taxes could be applied to keeping prescription charges down to a reasonable level, not more than they are now. The many elderly people who now have to pay for eye tests could be spared. Many who are reaching the stage at which they have to change their spectacles frequently could be excused from paying for eye tests.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No I shall not.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Come on.

Mr. Carlile: I shall give way—possibly—in a moment. I do not want to speak for a long time. In reality, the Government have converted prescription charges into a health tax. Prescription charges were never concealed—

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The Liberals would not lower charges.

Mr. Carlile: The right hon. Gentleman is interrupting from a sedentary position rather more energetically than we are used to from him. A late night away from the family I see. He and the Minister know very well that prescription charges were not introduced as a tax. They were introduced as a way in which to obtain a small contribution to offset the cost of the national health service.

[Mr. Carlile]

It is very important that the Government should now be honest about the whole basis on which prescription charges are levied. Is the Minister saying that the charges are intended to offset the cost of prescriptions, or that they are a way of raising money for the Government coffers—that they represent simply a general contribution to the Government's tax collection system?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman tell me by how much he thinks that the price of a packet of 20 cigarettes should rise?

Mr. Carlile: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, my party has said that the tax on a packet of cigarettes should rise by at least double the rate of inflation each year.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Why?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman intervenes from a sedentary position.

Mr. Winterton: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No, I heard what the hon. Gentleman asked. The answer to his question is: because smoking is extremely unhealthy and costs the national health service an immense sum, and because those who, possibly like the hon. Gentleman, enjoy their pipe or cigar—perhaps he enjoys a King Edward cigar—would be prepared to pay the extra money rather than give up.

Mr. Winterton: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No I shall not, because this is a short debate and we should concentrate on prescription charges.

The Minister should tell the House the basis upon which the Government levy prescription charges. Are they a tax or merely a modest subvention?

Mr. Malone *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: I shall give way to the Minister if he will answer the question.

Mr. Malone: A prescription charge is a modest subvention; it is certainly not a tax. The charges represent a very small proportion of the health service budget, and are levied on those who can afford to pay. They are a contribution to health care, in addition to the record sums that the Government are already spending on the health service.

Mr. Carlile: The Minister has deliberately failed to answer the specific question. However, he has made it clear that in his view the charges are a tax on health, not a subvention on prescriptions. They represent a way of trying to get many people who cannot afford to do so to pay an extra impost to line the Government's coffers so that they can cut taxes at a later stage.

The Minister knows that his claim to rely on opinion polls and reviews of public attitudes towards the health service is not based on a single question about public satisfaction or otherwise with prescription charges. I challenge the Government to ask the public whether they approve of a prescription charge of £5.25. Of course they would not dare to ask that question, because they know what the answer would be.

The Government spend a lot of time complaining about scroungers. Yet, incomprehensibly, this tax is aimed at the very people whom the Government believe might, in a mad moment, vote for them. It is a tax on taxpayers. We know that many people are exempt from prescription charges, but how do the Government justify to the parents of the children who are exempt, the children of the pensioners who are exempt, and the carers who pay their taxes, a prescription charge increase at three times the rate of inflation?

How do the Government justify to doctors and pharmacists the fact that they must act as tax collectors for the Government? That is what happens with prescription charges. How do the Government justify their ignorance, and especially the Minister's ignorance, of what happens in doctors' surgeries? Does he really believe that if one's general practitioner says, "If I could give you a private prescription you could have the drug for £3 not £5," he or she is entitled to write a private prescription? That is not what GPs think that they are entitled to do. If the Minister approves of the practice he should say so tonight, because many GPs believe that they cannot do that. Indeed, I was so advised today by those who represent the doctors. It is an important point, and I challenge the Minister to tell us whether that is the case. I am willing to give way to the Minister, as it is a simple question. Can GPs give their patients an NHS prescription for part of the drugs which they are prescribing and, on the same occasion—

Mr. Malone *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Carlile: The Minister is now changing his mind and revealing his true ignorance. Earlier, he was suggesting that that was the case. Now, I understand him to be saying that the Government refuse to allow doctors to enable their patients to save money by giving private prescriptions on individual items costing less than £5.25. If that is the situation, why will the Minister not change that regulation and allow doctors to serve their patients with the best health care and also to assist in their economic interests when prescribing drugs?

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The position is that the British Medical Association wants the word "shall" in the GP contract to be changed to the word "may" to give GPs some discretion. In other words, it wants the Minister to review the situation.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I received the same briefing from the BMA, which made the situation clear. The Minister should have known that, and should not have tried to cloud the issue when he intervened. He has been a Minister for long enough, and as such he has been energetic enough, to know the answer to a simple question such as that by now. It is simply a fraud on the public. The Government are using as the innocent tools of their fraud the hard-working GPs and pharmacists who are hard-pressed seeing patients every day.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I was under the impression that extremely skilled pharmacists can advise patients to have something that is not on their prescriptions if they think that it would help patients.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Lady is right—pharmacists do that all the time—but she is missing the point. There are many drugs which pharmacists cannot sell across the counter, and that raises my next point. Surely the time has come when we must have a close look at the system which operates in France, where it is possible to buy far more drugs across the counter. There is no evidence that health in France has been significantly damaged by that. For example, why should not some antibiotics be available across the counter? That is one example of the many drugs which might fall into that category.

These new regulations impose a tax on the public.

Mr. Malone *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: If the Minister wants to intervene, I shall of course allow him to do so. But will he now tell the House whether he is prepared to review the regulations so that GPs may give private prescriptions for drugs costing less than £5.25 at the same time as prescribing drugs which cost more than £5.25?

Mr. Malone: The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that GPs may well give such a prescription for a drug, but somebody who goes to have that drug dispensed may find that there is a charge for doing so. There is a balance in every case, as the hon. and learned Gentleman well knows.

The point of my intervention is that the hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting that prescription charges are a tax. I put to him the question that I put to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who failed to address it. I have listened to the hon. and learned Gentleman's speech with care. How would his party replace that £310 million? Would he get rid of prescription charges? What pledges will he give to the House tonight on the subject?

Mr. Carlile: The Minister should have been listening earlier. Did he not see his hon. Friend, the smoker from Macclesfield, getting excited about the Liberal Democrats' policy on the issue?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is telling the House an untruth. I do not smoke and I never have smoked. I was telling the House that the tobacco tax brings the Exchequer about £9 billion a year and that the cost to the health service is about £1 billion a year. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman apologise for his allegation?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a point of information.

Mr. Carlile: I shall certainly withdraw. I must say that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) misled me by his enthusiasm into the belief that he must occasionally have a quiet weed somewhere near Black Rod's car park.

The Minister has intervened three or four times but has failed to answer a basic question. Why do the Government allow patients to be ripped off by having to pay more for the cost of drugs because they have an NHS prescription? That is not fair and the regulations are not fair. The Government have an unfair attitude. They know that the regulations are hitting some extremely poor families.

11.15 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On these occasions we hear ritualistic speeches. None was more ritualistic than the praise of France by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). He told us that France was wonderful but chose not to tell the House that in France, unlike in the United Kingdom, not all pensioners are exempt from prescription charges. He might have told the House that in France pensioners have to pay boarding charges when they go into hospital. That is the society that the hon. and learned Gentleman was praising.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be dangerous to adopt the policy proposed by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and dispense antibiotics over the counter? Chemists do not have the medical records of their customers and they should not dispense antibiotics. Their customers would build up an immunity to antibiotics, and they would then be of no use to them.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend is right. If someone does not have access to the medical records of the patient, it would be wrong of him or her to prescribe antibiotics across the counter.

On these occasions we hear a great deal of synthetic indignation from the Labour party. The sincerity of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) can be judged from the fact that last year she was an even more prominent member of the Labour party. Did she decide to table a prayer against an increase of 11.8 per cent. in prescription charges? That was a slightly higher increase in percentage terms than this year's.

The right hon. Lady did not table such a prayer. Why is she so angry this year when she was so silent last year? Is she trying to hide the fact that she has no policy on health? The right hon. Lady is no longer in her place. I do not know where she is. Perhaps she has gone to read *The Economist* of last Friday, which contained an article headed "Labour's health policy: Improvising". It is suggested that the Labour party lacks "a coherent strategy" on health. It added that the Labour shadow health spokesmen were like a group of "frightened rabbits".

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way to a frightened bunny rabbit?

Mr. Marshall: Yes.

Mr. Brown: That is very good of him.

I enjoy *The Economist*. It is a good magazine until it writes about something of which I have knowledge.

Mr. Marshall: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was the member of the Opposition Front-Bench team who is reputed to have said, "If we are ahead without a policy, why do we need one?"

We have heard this evening a great pledge by the Labour party that, if it wins the election, it will have a thoroughgoing review. So at the next election we shall hear the slogan, "Vote Labour for more Royal Commissions. Vote Labour for more reviews."

On one occasion, the Labour party was accused of offering the British people a menu without prices. On this occasion, it will be a menu without products and without prices, and both will be filled in after the election. What a load of stuff and nonsense.

Mr. Bayley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that VAT on fuel was rather like a menu without prices or items on it?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: What has that got to do with this?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated comments, and very few of them seem to have any value whatever.

Mr. Marshall: That did seem to be one of the less relevant comments that we have heard this evening.

Let us consider the history of prescription charges. Some Members in the House remember the 1964 general election campaign, during which the Labour party said that it would abolish prescription charges. It did, but it did not promise at that election that it would reintroduce them at a higher level than it had inherited, so that, by the time of the 1970 general election, prescription charges were two and sixpence per item instead of the two bob per form that prevailed in 1964. By the end of the first Wilson Government, prescription charges were greater than when he came into office in 1964.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South fought the 1974 general election. She should read the 1974 Labour general election manifesto. It said:

> "Revise and expand the NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE".

Promise No. 1: "abolish prescription charges". What happened? Labour did not abolish prescription charges. Perhaps that is why, at the most recent general election, the Labour party did not even mention prescription charges. It did not say whether it would abolish them, reduce them or have a thoroughgoing review. In the document "Health 2000" there was no mention of them either. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am extremely tired of these rather stupid sedentary interventions. I am making a special note of those who engage in them. The next time that they want to catch my eye to make a speech, they may find that I am rather blind.

Mr. Marshall: Madam Deputy Speaker, it would be very difficult to be blind to some hon. Members in the House, but I am sure that we wish you good luck in your attempts to do so.

We have to remember, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, that prescription charges cover no more than 10 per cent. of the total drugs budget. He reminded us that the revenue from prescription charges would pay for 75,000 hip replacement operations and that 80 per cent. of prescriptions are exempt. He might have told us, if he had been trying to make partisan points, that the level of exemptions for prescription charges in Britain is much more generous than that in other countries of the European Union. He might have said, for example—

Mr. Illsley: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he skipped from the 1974 general election to the 1992 general election. He said that in 1974, the Labour party committed itself to abolishing prescription charges. Will he tell us what the charges were in 1974, or indeed in 1979, when a Labour Government committed themselves to abolishing those charges? Was it not something of the order of 20p? If those charges had been increased at the rate of inflation, we would be talking now of abolishing a charge of 53p rather than £5.25.

Mr. Marshall: I should like to thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding the House that the rate of inflation in recent years has been very low—very much lower than it was under the most recent Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman admits that the Labour party made a promise in 1974; he admits [illegible] did not keep that promise.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: What did Mrs. Thatcher say in 1979?

Mr. Marshall: The right hon. Lady Baroness Thatcher said in 1979 that she would improve the quality of the health service, and that is what has happened. She promised that more people would be treated; more people are being treated. She promised that waiting lists would decrease; they are decreasing. We kept our promises, and the money from prescription charges has helped to improve the quality of service given to the people of the country. The Labour party should welcome that fact.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): The hon. Gentleman said that people are being treated much better by the national health service. A 70-year-old constituent of mine was recently taken to hospital at 3 am with a heart complaint. He was sent home alone in a taxi at 6 am and taken back to hospital at 8 am where he died at 10 am. That is the kind of service that has been provided since the trusts have taken over. It is a greyhound service and we could fill Hampden park in Scotland with the people who have been sent home and have then returned to hospital.

Mr. Marshall: My sister worked for the NHS in Scotland for many years, and the case to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) refers is not typical of the NHS in Scotland or England. It is an insult to the devoted people who work for the NHS to point out the mistakes that occur when the majority of those who are treated by the NHS welcome the treatment that they receive.

I conducted a survey in my constituency in which we asked the questions: have you recently been treated by the NHS and, if so, were you satisfied with that treatment? Those who had received treatment, almost to a man and to a woman, said that they were satisfied with it.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He referred to the situation in Scotland. Does he know that the Royal Alexander trust hospital recently charged a 12-year-old American who was suffering from a sore stomach £800 for a 36-hour visit to that hospital? Yet the private hospital up the road would have charged £237. Is that not a case of privatisation through the back door? In the end, the people will suffer. Prescription prices are rising so high that, at the end of the day, people will have to treat themselves, as they will not be able to get into trust hospitals.

Mr. Marshall: I think that our remarks are ranging far wider than the scope of the debate. The hon. Gentleman referred to an American who was treated in a Scottish hospital. The charges that that parent paid to the hospital are a fraction of what he would have paid if his child had fallen ill in the United States of America.

Labour Members should tell us—they will not do so in this debate or, I suspect, in any other debates before the election—whether they intend to increase spending on the national health service. If they intend to abolish or restrict prescription charges, how would they pay for the net impact of that loss of income? Would not the Labour party's vendetta against private medicine put a great strain upon the health service?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now ranging rather wider than the subject matter of the debate tonight. His remarks must relate to prescription charges.

Mr. Marshall: What impact would the Labour party's policy—which I understand that the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) unveiled to a surprised audience in the City recently—of imposing value added tax on private health care have upon the health service, the cost of drugs and therefore the cost of prescriptions? That would clearly restrict the number of people who use private health care and it would force more people into the prescription net.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: That is not our policy, and we could not pursue it, even if some Labour Members wanted to, as the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) knows very well.

Mr. Marshall: It seems that, when the frightened rabbits go to the City and find that a thoroughgoing review is not enough, they make up policy on the hoof and they get it wrong. It is no wonder that Labour Members are like frightened rabbits.

Finally, we would like to know whether a national minimum wage would do anything other than hurt the health service because many of those who work for it—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) tries my patience. He must return to the subject of prescription charges or sit down.

Mr. Marshall: I will return briefly to the subject of prescription charges to say that they provide £310 million of income for the national health service. They allow the provision of extra services and the exemptions in this country are more generous than in any other European Union country.

11.29 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): It is a shame that the pharmaceutical industry has not yet developed a pill for bunkum and hogwash because it would have been in order this evening, given the myths peddled by Conservative Members. Both the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and the Minister came out with the myth that the most generous prescription scheme in Europe is ours in the United Kingdom.

When the Select Committee on Health was taking evidence on the NHS drugs budget we were told at paragraph 882 of the report:

> "Holland does not have a prescription charge".

Who was the source of that subversive nugget of information? It was none other than the then Minister for Health.

In an intervention earlier, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) asked the Minister why a GP cannot prescribe privately items which cost less than £5.25, the cost of a prescription, and the Minister replied that a GP can do that.

In paragraph 216 of our report we made the following recommendation to the Government:

> "We recommend that the Government introduce a system whereby the pharmacist may dispense an item privately if the cost of the product prescribed is less than the NHS prescription charge."

The Government response was:

> "The Government notes the Committee's views and will examine the potential for change.".

They are still examining the potential for change and they have not yet pronounced. It is part of a review that the Government are currently conducting.

The Minister said that there was no evidence whatever that high prescription charges deter people from getting the drugs that they need and which are prescribed by doctors. I urge the Minister to look at the *British Medical Journal* of 2 October 1993, which reports that 14 per cent. of prescriptions are not dispensed. They are given to patients and the patients do not cash them in. Surely that is evidence that, having been given a prescription by their doctor, patients are deterred from taking it to a pharmacy and getting it dispensed. The Minister should answer those questions.

Mr. Malone: The relevant fact is whether the hon. Gentleman can say how many of that 14 per cent. were exempt and how many were due to incur charges. If he cannot do that, he is making a totally irrelevant point.

Mr. Bayley: It is not a totally irrelevant point; it is a point which we put to many people who gave evidence to the Select Committee.

I refer to the evidence that we received from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. Its president, Mr. Nicholas Wood, said:

> "Sometimes patients do say, 'I have not got enough money with me. There are three items on the prescription. Which one shall I take?' It is very unfortunate and it puts a pharmacist into a difficult position."

There is evidence from the professionals that people are unable to get the drugs that they need because of the charge. It is not good enough for the Government blindly to dismiss it and to say, "It does not matter. We shall carry on putting up the charge, not just by the rate of inflation, but by three times the rate of inflation." There is evidence that patients are not getting the treatment prescribed to them by their doctors and the Government should act on that evidence.

Mr. Illsley: Has the Select Committee come across any reason why anyone should not cash in a prescription, other than the threat of the cost?

Mr. Bayley: Intuition suggests that people who have to pay are less likely to cash in their prescriptions, but there is evidence from the *British Medical Journal* and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and there was the evidence to the Committee from the British Medical Association. It is extraordinary that when the evidence is brought to the attention of the Secretary of State in our report, the Government neither respond to the evidence nor do they tell the House that they are investigating it.

The Minister won a few laughs from his side by deriding Labour's policy of conducting a thorough review of prescription charges, but in their response to the Select Committee report the Government said that they were conducting a review. Who is undertaking that review, and when will the report be produced? If the Minister cannot

[Mr. Bayley]

tell us the answer, I imagine that the Select Committee will want to know why the response to its report was made in such terms. There is a contradiction between what the Minister has told the House today and what the Secretary of State told the Committee in response to our report.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) asked the Minister directly what proportion of prescriptions cost less than £5.25. He could not give a figure. Instead, he gave an answer to a question that had not been asked. The Select Committee's evidence revealed, however, that 52 per cent. of items prescribed—the majority—cost less than the old, lower prescription charge, and the current estimate is in excess of 60 per cent.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): In a letter that I received from the Minister today, he estimates that

"over 50 per cent. of prescription items will have a total cost to the NHS of more than . . . £5.25".

It follows that just under 50 per cent. will cost less than £5.25.

Mr. Bayley: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing me up to date. That is a substantial number.

The Select Committee—which, like all Select Committees, has a Conservative majority—said in its report:

"We consider it unreasonable that any patient should have to pay the full cost of prescription charges in respect of items the actual cost of which is less than the prescription charge."

That is what a Committee with a Conservative majority is saying to the Minister. How does he respond to his hon. Friends' proposal?

Our Committee—whose majority reflects the composition of the House—has called for a review of prescription charges and exemptions. The Minister asks what such a review should cover. I will make some suggestions. Under the regulations, the cost of an annual prepayment certificate—an annual prescription season ticket—will rise to £74.80. Why do not the Government, in a review, consider a system whereby people could pay in instalments?

People who are, by definition, on low incomes—otherwise they would not want a prepayment form—but not quite on income support level which would make them exempt from charges will find it difficult to pay nearly £75. That is a benefit that the Government could have introduced if they were keen to ensure that patients received the medicines that their GPs prescribe. The Minister could also examine the low-income exemption categories: why is someone receiving unemployment benefit not exempt? My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South gave other examples.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out that there are exemptions for some chronic diseases, such as epilepsy and diabetes, but not for others, such as chronic asthma, cystic fibrosis and hypertension. Those anomalies need to be resolved: given that certain people need regular prescriptions throughout their lives, it is plainly wrong for some to be exempted while others are not.

Mr. Malone: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman cleared that shopping list with his Front Bench. It is clear that Opposition Members can come out with shopping lists that their Front Bench refuses to acknowledge.

Mr. Bayley: The Minister would find it outrageous if, as a member of a Select Committee, I went running to my Front Bench to ask permission to include something in the Committee's report. Every one of the suggestions on my list was the Committee's suggestion, backed by every one of its Conservative members. They were the authors of that revolutionary shopping list—that drug-inspired psychedelic madness that the Minister derides.

Just for good measure, I will add a suggestion of my own which was not included in the Select Committee's list—although it was suggested in evidence from the British Medical Association: someone who has a repeat prescription should not have to pay a repeat prescription charge. We heard earlier about a patient whose drugs for depression were prescribed at weekly intervals, for her own good. If the Government do nothing else, surely they can agree to drugs being prescribed in smaller amounts—which would be less wasteful and cost the NHS less money—without penalising the patient by imposing a further prescription charge since the charge is a tax.

Mr. Malone *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bayley: The Minister may shake his head at my use of the word "tax", but when his predecessor gave evidence to the Select Committee he acknowledged that the prescription charge

"is in the nature of a tax."

He explained:

"Patients are not making a payment for the drug that they receive. They are making a contribution to the NHS."

The charge is a general contribution to the cost of the NHS. The Minister argued tonight that that is the purpose of the prescription charge. It is a Tory tax which has gone through the roof. If it had increased in line with inflation since 1979, the prescription charge would be 53p instead of a proposed £5.25. That is the mega inflation of a mega Tory tax.

11.41 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) did patients no favours with her speech. She was terrorising them with her emotive language and dangerous, misleading and scaremongering statements. A patient at home listening to the debate could only be deeply alarmed.

The proposed 50p increase in prescription charges is equivalent to two first-class stamps, two sliced loaves or not even a pint of beer. We must keep a sense of proportion. Every person in the land knows that health is a priority in their family budget. If charges are as burdensome as the right hon. Member for Derby, South and her supporters claim, why is not my surgery packed with complaining patients? Instead, people tell me about the excellent NHS treatment they have received. They tell me how quickly they received treatment, and how quickly they recovered, returned home and got back to work and to help their families.

That is the good news from the national health service. Labour chokes on admitting that we do have good news. The good news has come because we have managed to eliminate waste; we have packaged our resources to ensure that the maximum amount of money is available for patient care. The £310 million to be raised by the charge will go to the front-line patients, who will benefit by it.

Let us examine the sort of treatments that could be on offer as a result. There could be more than 75,000 hip replacements. Or there could be more than 50,000 coronary artery bypass operations—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Lady is straying rather far from prescription charges.

Lady Olga Maitland: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!] I am saying that prescription charges—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair cannot hear what the hon. Lady is saying.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am saying that the money raised by the prescription charges will pay for all this treatment—and for 200,000 cataract removals besides. Surely any patient queuing up for these treatments would be delighted to get them. How can the Labour party seek to deny them those treatments?

The Labour party talks about a review. What good is a review to my patients? None at all: it will not speed up treatment. More, I suspect that the review will just be another device to bring about delay and upheaval. In the end it will mean fewer resources for patients.

It might help patients to learn a bit of history, too. Charges are a long-standing feature of the NHS. I remind the Labour party that the Attlee Government, on coming to power, decided to introduce prescription charges. In 1949, Labour, not the Conservatives, made that decision. Mr. Attlee announced it himself, and the Opposition can read that in *Hansard* of 24 October 1949.

Finally the charges were introduced in 1952, but then, Labour had already introduced charges for dentures and spectacles in 1951. And charges for dental treatment were introduced in 1952. Labour abolished prescription charges in 1965, only to reintroduce them in 1968. That shows how much hypocritical cant we have heard from the Labour party today.

It would also benefit those outside this place to go over some comparisons with other countries in the European Union. In many other EU countries, charging for treatment is much more widespread. The fact is that we have the most generous health service of all. Spain and Britain are the only EU countries to exempt pensioners from prescription charges. In Germany, pensioners have to make a contribution from their pensions into a sickness fund. In France, pensioners are expected to pay towards hospital charges; and in Belgium, pensioners pay up to 25 per cent. of doctors' consultation fees. Do the Opposition agree that pensioners in this country are infinitely better off?

In other countries, too, pensioners are expected to make a financial contribution. Many people in the Irish Republic have to pay charges for doctors' consultations and in-patient stays. In Italy, there are daily charges for the first 10 days' stay as a hospital in-patient, although pensioners are exempt. In Luxembourg there are daily charges for hospital in-patient stays. There are charges for doctors' consultations in Portugal.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): She is reading out a central office brief.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must quieten down.

Lady Olga Maitland: One thing that is for sure is that the Conservative party and the Conservative Government respect our responsibilities in caring for the sick, the frail and the weak. We give them our priorities. We spend more money on the health service than the Labour party has ever dreamt of. It is salutary to bear in mind the fact that we spend £100 million a day on our health service. That is good news. As far as I am concerned, patients' health is safe in Conservative Governments' hands. It would be wrecked and undermined by the Labour party.

11.49 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I do not want to be accused by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) of suppressing good news. The good news that is before the House today is the Government's proposition that prescription charges should rise at three times the rate of inflation. We are debating the Labour party's prayer against that proposition—a prayer that I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support.

The Minister opened the debate by whingeing about its timing. The timing of our prayer is directly consequent on the timing of his announcement. Is the Minister proud of what he is doing? Indeed, are Conservative health Ministers ever proud of increasing prescription charges? The evidence seems to suggest that they are not. These announcements have been repeatedly sneaked out. The House will recall that the latest increase was announced on a Wednesday. On the Monday, there was a debate on health care, in which it could have been announced. On the Tuesday, there was a debate on health care, in which it could have been announced. But no, it was a written answer, put out proudly in the name of the Secretary of State—no, slipped out in the name of the Minister of State, when there was an important announcement on Northern Ireland at the same time.

Indeed, only a week before, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) had asked the Minister of State whether he had any plans to increase prescription charges. The Minister replied:

> "Any announcement will be made at the appropriate time."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. *637*.]

So it is a bit rich of him to whinge about the timing now. It is par for the course. In 1994, the 50p increase came out in a written answer. In 1993, Madam Speaker had cause to rebuke the Secretary of State and the then Minister of State for abusing the pursuant device to sneak out a supplementary written reply. In 1992, the 35p increase was sneaked out during a high-profile dispute about employment figures.

In other words, the evidence is perfectly clear that the Government are not proud of what they are doing. If they are not proud of what they are doing, the Labour party is saying that it is not unreasonable for them to pause and think again, to review what they are doing. As my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) has perfectly

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

correctly pointed out, prescription charges have risen from 20p in 1978 to £5.25 from April 1995—a tenfold increase in real terms. If the charges had increased in line with inflation, they would now stand at 53p. The issue that the House must consider is why prescription charges are getting these regular, steady increases, dramatically ahead of the rate of inflation. Why single out prescription charges?

A number of hon. Members have drawn comparisons. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam treated us to a shopping list. I know that several of my hon. Friends were rather hoping to persuade her to get our shopping in at those prices. She referred to equivalents. In 1978, the prescription charge was equivalent to the price of half a pint of beer. It is now equivalent to more than three pints of beer. In 1978, the charge was less than half the price of a packet of cigarettes. It is now around twice the price of a packet of cigarettes. Why is the relative price of prescription charges rising against the price of beer and cigarettes? What are the Government trying to say to the British people in the relative judgments that they are making on these matters?

The Minister said that there was no evidence to show that price affected consumption—in other words, affected the number of prescriptions. That is not so, as his own Department could tell him—if it dared, or if he asked it. The figures that his Department has issued show that the average number of charged prescription items per person in 1978 was 5.5 per year. In 1993 there were 2.2 items per year.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies looked at prescription charges in a report published in 1990 and concluded that the entire fall in the increase in charge prescriptions could be accounted for by the increase in the real level of the prescription charge. That evidence runs counter to the Minister's statement. There was similar research by the York centre for health economics which estimates that the prescription charge increases have halved the demand for prescriptions among those who are not exempt. People are not taking the medicines that they should take because of price, although they are being advised by clinicians to take them. That must be wrong and it is false economy.

Precisely the same reasoning applies to national health service eye tests. There is a compelling case for free tests for those over the age of 65. That case was made in the debate and the principles that underpin it are the same as those that apply to prescription charges.

The Government claim that more people get free prescriptions under them than they did under Labour. But that is not because the Government's prescription exemptions are any more generous: they have not changed at all. It is because more people are now living in real poverty, more are unemployed and there are more elderly people, although I cannot blame the Government for that. Increased costs are deterring those who have to pay. *[Interruption.]* I say to the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who screeches at me, that the Government should take demographic factors into account. That is why we say that these matters should be reviewed.

Some 50 per cent. of the population are liable to pay for their prescriptions and they are being excessively picked on. Those people are being picked on well beyond the degree to which the Government pick on any other item for which they charge.

The Minister will ask what Labour should do. It is perfectly clear that we shall vote against this impost, and we shall do so now.

11.56 pm

Mr. Malone: If our strategy had been to try to slip the increase out by sleight of hand at dead of night, doing it by way of a parliamentary question and my appearance on the Jimmy Young show to justify the Government's policy, which I was pleased to do, and having a debate about these matters after the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) prayed against the regulations, it would have failed.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) has come up with no policy at all. He suggests a review and that is it.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [24 March].*

The House divided: Ayes 238, Noes 281.

Division No. 121] **[11.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter

Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis

Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter

Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas

Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

George Beattie

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

12.8 am

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The subject of this Adjournment debate is the George Beattie case. I wish to draw the attention of the House, and especially that of the Minister, to the worrying history of the police force in my constituency, which was involved in the investigation of the murder of Margaret McLaughlan and the wrongful conviction of my constituent, George Beattie, in July 1973.

First, let me tell the House of the conspiracy that took place on the day that the girl's body was found—a conspiracy which set the tone for the entire investigation that followed. The court and the jury were told a story which is at great variance with the facts as many now tell them.

The man who went to court and told the story of finding the body was a uniformed inspector from Lanark police. He still lives in Carluke today in retirement. He told the defence solicitor:

> "She appeared to be dead and must have been dragged down the path. I noted the time as 2.25 pm."

I repeat the time of 2.25 pm, so that hon. Members will not forget it. Inspector Harry Robson found the body at two minutes to 3 in the afternoon. He called in the CID, and the pathologists arrived at the scene at 6 o'clock in the evening and began their examination of the body. They had come from Glasgow—perhaps an hour away at the most.

When Inspector Robson went to the court at Beattie's trial, he was not so precise about the time of finding the body. Hon. Members may later come to some conclusion as to why the inspector did not tell the court an accurate time for finding the body. The inspector said that he had left the police office in Lanark at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, so it seems that his timing of finding the body at two minutes to 3 would confirm that. Why then am I now aware of some five police witnesses who have testified at one time or another that the body was found in the morning?

Last year, the woman police constable who was assigned to question the family of the dead girl, now former WPC Stewart, gave an interview to BBC television. When she was asked the time when the body was found, she replied:

> "I think I was in the house until about lunch time, twelve o'clock, half past twelve, something like that when the CID officers came in and then I was taken out to get on with other inquiries."

Another person interviewed by the BBC at that time was the man who found the body, Constable John Baker, now a retired policeman. He said that, after he had discovered the body, the procurator fiscal was quickly on the scene. What time had the procurator fiscal arrived?

> "Between ten and eleven o'clock",

said John Baker. The interviewer was astounded and said:

> "You're talking about the morning, then, not the evening".

It was true. John Baker had found the body at about 10.30 am.

Imagine that a girl had been murdered and that news had got out around the neighbourhood. Who of all the people in that neighbourhood would remember to the very minute when he or she heard the news? It would, of course, be the parents.

When the mother of Margaret McLaughlan was asked when she was told of her daughter's murder, she said that it was half-past 11. That was not said off the cuff to a television reporter. It was not said while she was being questioned on the morning that her daughter's body was discovered. It was not said in any informal manner, but under oath in the High Court in Glasgow, on the morning of Tuesday on 2 October at the trial of Beattie.

Let us get to grips with the situation. The court was deceived, the jury was deceived, the defence lawyers were misinformed. I believe that the prosecution counsel was misinformed. Why? I suspect that a policeman in Strathclyde police force made a ghastly error on that Saturday morning, and that everyone involved was told to cover it up. I believe that the police thought that the murderer might return to the scene of the crime, so they waited for him.

In the meantime, the pathologists were not called, and they could not examine the body at noon, as they might otherwise have done, so their estimates of the time of the girl's death, which was very important at the trial, were ruined. The temperature rose very high that afternoon. It was the longest day of the year, and a sunny one.

Then, when some senior officer decided that the stupidity had gone far enough, all the officers entered into a conspiracy to cover it all up. How they ever imagined that they could get away with it is beyond belief. But they did—for 21 years. Any conspiracy within the police is unforgivable, but that one is especially so, because it helped to convict an innocent man.

The conspiracy also tells us much about the attitude of the police force that conducted the inquiry, and that will be important when we assess what later happened to George Beattie during the investigation. But before I deal with the events that led to the charge of murder against George Beattie, let me illustrate that attitude in the force and demonstrate its source, because it came from the very top.

The man in charge of the inquiry was Detective Chief Superintendent William Muncie. When he arrived at the scene of the crime on the Saturday, he was shown a knife sticking in the ground by the side of the path leading up to the glen, towards the railway—the general area where the girl had been attacked. He sent the knife off to the laboratory for testing, along with a soil sample that he had taken from around it.

The scientist at the laboratory wrote a letter to Mr. Muncie saying that neither the knife nor the soil sample had any trace of blood on it, but by the time the letter was received Mr. Muncie had already charged Beattie with murder, chiefly because, as he claimed, Beattie had told him where the knife had been, and had described its general shape.

Did Mr. Muncie doubt the validity of his case against Beattie when he learned that the knife and the soil sample had no trace of blood on them? Did he renew his efforts to find evidence of blood on the knife that Beattie had apparently named as the murder weapon? Not at all. He simply suppressed the document that destroyed his case against my constituent. He suppressed the best evidence.

The Lord Justice-General made much of the word "suppression" at my constituent's appeal last November. Well he might, because it was a copy of that document that caused the Secretary of State to refer the case back to the Court of Appeal. But of course, the document that Lord Hope had in front of him had not been suppressed; it was the original of the document that had been suppressed.

Show me a copy of the letter from the scientist to Mr. Muncie that has a letterhead on it. Show me the scientist's signature at the bottom of it, and then I shall say that the document was not suppressed. Show me the evidence that Mr. Muncie even asked for a further test for blood. Show me when he asked for the blade to be taken from the hilt so that the dirt from the joint could be examined for traces of blood. Show me any such evidence, and I shall begin to believe that Mr. Muncie might have done otherwise than destroy the document that ruined his case against my constituent.

I invite the Minister to ask the scientist involved, Mr. Hamilton, how a copy of the letter came into the hands of the procurator fiscal and subsequently the Crown Office. Why did Mr. Hamilton deem it necessary to duplicate the evidence in that way—unless, of course, he thought it odd that the knife was never sent back to his laboratory for further testing after it became a production in evidence against George Beattie?

Now, having touched on two conspiracies perpetrated by the police in the case, I shall rehearse the major evidence against the police force that convicted my constituent. At Beattie's trial, the police claimed that they had elicited admissions from him at Carluke police station, during the course of two interrogations. They claimed that he had told them details about the scene of the crime that only the murderer could have known.

There were three key points. The police said that Beattie knew where the body had been, where the large knife had been left stuck in the ground, and where the girl's suitcase had been thrown. The police claimed that this was special knowledge. Beattie, they said, had revealed his guilt during two interrogations on the night of the Wednesday after the murder. He had then shown them the secret locations.

What the police forgot to tell anyone was that there was a third interrogation on the Wednesday night, during which Beattie was fed all that information. One may well surmise that there must have been an inevitable conspiracy in a force such as that to suppress the truth about the matter. The first interrogation in Carluke began at 8 pm, and the second began at 9.30 pm. Beattie was charged with the murder at around 1 am.

The interrogators were two police officers from Lanark CID, DC John Semple and Sergeant Dougie Mortimer. A sketch of the murder site was produced in court. Both officers were questioned closely about the rough plan during the trial, because it was claimed that Beattie had described where the attack on the girl took place and where the umbrella had been left after the attack.

If the two officers were telling the truth, and there is no reason to doubt their word, the sketch they produced was a simple plan of the glen that anyone in Carluke would have been able to draw. There is nothing incriminating in it at all. I emphasise that Beattie never touched the sketch; nor did any other officer, according to the police.

The official story is that, after Mortimer finished the second interrogation, Beattie was charged with the murder. He was then taken to the cells in Lanark. During the car journey there, said Mortimer, Beattie mentioned the knife for the first time, and said that he would show

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

the police where it had been left at the scene of the murder. Mortimer took Beattie down to the scene of the crime early the next morning, and Beattie was alleged to have shown him where the knife was stuck in the ground by a concrete post. He also showed the police where the girl's body had been and where the suitcase had been thrown.

The demonstration of that special knowledge—particularly the location of the knife, only 20 yd from the body—left a deep impression on the jury at Beattie's trial. Unfortunately, the police never had to demonstrate in any way the circumstances surrounding any of the interviews that they conducted with Beattie during the inquiry, or the complete background to any of the admissions he made—or that they alleged he made—during the interviews.

If the procurator fiscal had had the duty to make such inquiries to further investigate any suspicious circumstances about the interviews, the case against Beattie would never have been presented to the jury at the trial. No one—particularly no one on the jury—looked at the rough plan. That was the major mistake that cost George Beattie the best years of his life. There were other marks on the plan, which neither of the police interrogators had mentioned. In particular, the three main points of special knowledge were clearly marked.

If the Minister cares to take another look at the rough sketch, he may see that for himself. I have a copy of the sketch for him tonight. The sketch clearly shows the location of the concrete post and the knife beside it. All that has carefully been drawn in, and there are dots showing the actual locations, which have been ringed as if someone had pointed them out. None of that information had been discussed during the two recorded interrogations.

The rough sketch is incontestable proof that there was a third, secret, interrogation. So it is not at all surprising that Beattie gave the police the special knowledge when he went to the scene of the crime the next morning. He had been given it during the secret third interrogation the night before. Beattie had even had a picture of it drawn for him.

The story gets worse, but unfortunately I am running out of time and must move to my conclusion. More evidence was suppressed in the case—best evidence, as it is termed. This was deliberately withheld from the prosecution, because of ethics, and was of course withheld from the defence, because the content of that documentary evidence could have severely damaged the police case.

There is a much longer, more comprehensive and more clearly documented version of what occurred when Beattie was questioned by the police. A retired police officer has retained his notebook over the past 21 years, even though he has been retired for several years. He was in attendance during the key interview that the police conducted with Beattie, the interview that caused Beattie to be charged.

His notes of the interview far outstripped in length the paltry 163 words of the sergeant who conducted the interview. His notes take up pages and pages of his notebook. It is and was clearly the best evidence available of the interview. Yet the procurator fiscal never saw the notebook. The Crown Office never saw it, and nor did prosecuting counsel. Perhaps most importantly, Beattie's defence solicitor and counsel did not see it.

Best evidence was ignored by the police. The officer in question appeared at the trial. He was asked whether any record was kept of what Beattie said. He replied:

> "Sergeant Mortimer made notes, yes."

The Minister might care to look at that section of the trial transcript. It is on page 262, paragraph D.

At best, the officer's answer was a half-truth. Why did he say, "Sergeant Mortimer made notes"? Why did he not say the whole truth, as he had sworn to do, which was, "I made notes and the notebook is in my pocket at this moment; it is the best record of the interview that is available"? Why should he ever have been instructed to hide his noteboook from the defence lawyers and the jury that day?

I can tell the House that the officer knew what Mortimer's evidence had been. He knew the story that was the police version of the interview with Beattie. There were salient alleged "facts" in that version that he could not corroborate from his notebook.

Another astonishing fact about the officer's evidence is that he failed to hear a conversation that Mr. Muncie claimed to have had at the scene of the crime on the Thursday morning. It was a crucial conversation, which was read out to the court from notes with great solemnity. In that conversation, Beattie described the handle of the knife that was supposed to be the murder weapon. It had a kind of hook at the end of the handle. And that clinched the matter.

Why is it that the officer who was taking the most comprehensive notes of these events did not take a note of a crucial conversation? That is strange. He might have claimed, as his partner Sergeant Mortimer did in court, that he did not hear the conversation. Mortimer told the jury that he, Beattie, spoke with Mr. Muncie, but he did not know what he said.

Perhaps Mortimer could have wandered off and not heard Beattie's final comments—but not the officer whose notebook has recently come to light. He must have heard the conversation, if it ever took place. He must have been within a couple of feet of the conversation. He was handcuffed to Beattie throughout Beattie's visit to the scene of the crime. Yet he did not hear what was one of the most crucial conversations in the entire investigation. He made no note of some of the most important evidence supposed to have been given by George Beattie.

How can that be explained away? The long arm of the Lanarkshire law extends to the men involved even to this day, for the retired officer will not give up his notebook. I understand that he has even said that he has disposed of it. I ask the Minister to order an independent inquiry into the affair with such speed that the notebook in question can be obtained and secured in a safe place.

The Minister would no doubt like to see the details set out in the police officer's notebook—the best evidence that I mentioned earlier. The notebook may be burned even now, so that my constituent will not gain freedom from conviction.

I have a copy of a verbatim minute of that notebook in my possession, which I shall hand to the Minister when I take my seat. It was taken during a two-hour interview by two investigative journalists with the former police officer concerned.

The Minister may well like to know what the officer in question has to say when confronted with the evidence that is so at variance with what he now knows from his own knowledge. I present the Minister also with a signed statement containing that information from Peter Hill, an investigative journalist and a television producer.

The Minister may well care to know the name, address and telephone number of the retired police officer who is currently obstructing my inquiry into these matters by refusing to give up his notebook. I decided to name that officer in the House tonight. I cannot allow him to hide from his public responsibility.

I discussed that person with the Minister early this afternoon, and I sought assurance from the Minister that, when I presented this evidence to the House tonight, he would immediately hold an investigation into the allegations made, and seek to obtain possession of that book and put it in safe keeping.

The officer's name, address and telephone number are included in the documentation that I shall hand to the Minister when I take my seat, along with a signed statement and a copy of the sketch from the scene of the murder.

The Minister has assured me that he will investigate the matters that I have mentioned tonight, so on this occasion I have agreed with the Minister not to name that police officer, so as to allow the authorities the opportunity to go to that person and seek to obtain his evidence from him.

In the near future, I shall petition the Secretary of State for Scotland for another appeal for George Beattie.

Tonight, the BBC Scotland "Front-line" programme will run another programme on the case of George Beattie, including more evidence that proves that he is innocent. I hope that all Scotland will watch that programme tonight. I hope that the Minister will watch that programme tonight. I hope that the Secretary of State, Lord Fraser and Lord Hope watch that programme tonight.

George Beattie is innocent. In his words,

> "he is free on parole—but he still has the ball and chain around his ankle".

It is for the House to give him the justice that he deserves.

12.31 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on his success in securing a further debate on the Adjournment about the case of George Beattie, and on his obvious commitment on behalf of his constituent.

The present position with regard to Mr. Beattie is that there is no petition before the Secretary of State, following the decision reached by the Court of Appeal on 2 December 1994. The court concluded then that no grounds had been put before it would show that there had been a miscarriage of justice at Mr. Beattie's trial.

I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's worries about Mr. Beattie's case with great attention tonight. I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is prepared to consider any further representations that may be submitted on Mr. Beattie's behalf.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned conspiracy on the part of the police. He mentioned the withholding of evidence in relation to the notebook, and he made certain statements in relation to Mr. Muncie. The appropriate procedure is for those matters to be laid out in a petition so that they can be properly considered, and the hon. Gentleman, as I understood it, said that that course would be adopted on behalf of Mr. Beattie.

I am sure that those who attended Mr. Beattie's appeal last November, or who subsequently read the detailed opinion delivered by the Court of Appeal, will be ready to acknowledge the careful and meticulous scrutiny that the Court of Appeal gave to his case in November and December 1994.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland refers a case to the Court of Appeal under section 263, the court is not restricted by the particular grounds that caused my right hon. Friend to request the review; it is the appellant who is responsible for identifying in his note of appeal all the grounds on which he claims that there was a miscarriage of justice at his trial.

Mr. Hood: The petition and the appeal will be pursued. Can the Minister confirm what I assumed he agreed with tonight, when I put forward the evidence concerning that former police officer who has in his possession a notebook that is relevant to the case—that he will take steps to try to get the authorities to obtain that notebook and put it in a safe place?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Member for Clydesdale said that he will submit the documents, and I have assured him that the matter will be investigated as is deemed appropriate. We will obviously have to study those documents, and I will be grateful to receive the papers concerned at the conclusion of the debate.

Counsel for Mr. Beattie was pressed by the court to ensure that his note of appeal identified all the grounds on which he claimed that there had been a miscarriage of justice at the original trial. In consequence, the single ground on which Mr. Beattie's appeal originally rested was extended to four grounds of appeal. They focused on: an erroneous statement by the Court of Appeal in 1973 to the effect that Mr. Beattie had himself given evidence at his trial; the sufficiency of the evidence at that trial; the time of death of the victim; and the fact that the forensic scientist's letter of 7 July 1973 had not been made available to the defence.

Significantly, however, none of the grounds lodged for last November's appeal made any suggestion whatsoever of police malpractice. In particular, it was not suggested that the special knowledge which Mr. Beattie had revealed by his statements to the police and his actions at the scene of the crime had been imparted to him by the police themselves; nor was it suggested at the trial or at the recent appeal hearing that the police evidence about what he said and did was in any respect incomplete or inaccurate. I shall look very closely at the information which the hon. Gentleman intends to submit tonight.

The Court of Appeal considered the submissions made on Mr. Beattie's behalf last November in the light of the evidence which had been led at his trial, but it concluded that the appeal had to be refused. The Court of Appeal indicated that it was satisfied that there had been sufficient evidence at the trial for a conviction.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

The court was also satisfied that the evidence of the bloodstains on the tissues, when taken together with other evidence from which it could be inferred that Mr. Beattie had the tissues with him at the locus and had the opportunity to commit the murder, was sufficient to corroborate the inference of guilt which the jury were entitled to draw from what Mr. Beattie said to the police and pointed out to them at the locus.

The court was not satisfied that the evidence of testing of the deceased's blood on the MN system revealed by the letter of 11 July 1973 would have had a material part to play in the jury's decision on the question whether the bloodstains on the tissues could have come from the deceased, as there was no evidence as to what the result of testing the bloodstains on the tissues on the MN system would have been.

I should like to clarify a misunderstanding on a question of fact. In the last Adjournment debate held on Mr. Beattie's case, I referred to correspondence between the late Dame Judith Hart, the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, and the then Solicitor-General. I make it quite clear that the then Solicitor-General confirmed to Dame Judith that no blood was found near the scene of the crime belonging to a group to which neither Beattie's nor the victim's belonged.

In a subsequent press article, my reference to that statement was quoted out of the context, and it was made to imply that blood of Mr. Beattie's grouping was found near the scene. It is important to clarify for the record that there was no forensic evidence available to indicate that blood of Mr. Beattie's grouping was found at or near the scene of the crime. There is no disagreement between the hon. Gentleman and me on that point, which I have sought to clarify tonight.

My right hon. Friend is prepared to consider any further petition which may now be submitted. I have noted the number of criticisms made of the police investigation of the case in the media. Allegations of police malpractice, if substantiated, would be a matter of grave concern to any civilised society. However, it is equally important for society to protect the reputation of its police officers, whether serving, retired or dead, against unfounded allegations.

We therefore stand ready to review the case further. Any evidence which may be submitted on Mr. Beattie's behalf—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 20 April.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 19 April at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Marriage (Financial Incentives)

1. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a series of financial incentives to marriages which last (a) 10 years, (b) 20 years and (c) 30 years. [15275]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): While I strongly believe in the institution of marriage, I see difficulties in introducing the concept of a loyalty bonus into the married couple's allowance.

Mr. Steen: The Government offer a disloyalty bonus to broken marriages by providing all sorts of state benefits. Although virtue has its own reward, in a highly materialistic society surely we should give some reward to those people who follow Government policies. Just as there are financial incentives to preserve the environment by using unleaded petrol, for example, could we not have some financial incentive for those who preserve the family, such as an anniversary award for those who stay married?

Sir George Young: A marriage that endures happily for 30 years is its own reward. I am not sure whether the Inland Revenue could significantly enhance that reward. We certainly use the tax system to influence economic behaviour, but I pause before accepting my hon. Friend's proposition that we should use the tax system to encourage people to like each other and continue to live with each other.

Mr. Ashton: If the Minister cannot give financial rewards to people like me with 37 years' service, could he hand out a tin hat and a medal and arrange for a day such as VE day when we can celebrate the battles and wars that we have had and enjoy a proper anniversary?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his wife have the ingenuity and the resources to celebrate each year of their infinitely happy marriage. I am sure that in the current framework of the Labour party he would not want to advocate any expenditure of public money on celebrating his marriage.

House Price Inflation

2. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received which suggest that renewed house price inflation would divert resources from productive investment; and if he will make a statement. [15276]

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): It is generally recognised that rapid house price inflation would be detrimental to productive investment.

Mr. Duncan: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he accept that for years people have been urging that the British economy should be run along strict German lines, but now that that is happening people are suggesting that we put up house prices to make people feel better? Does he accept that democracy has a straightforward choice: it can either vote for long-term economic well-being, or it can fall for the tricks of the Labour party and be bought by cheap promises? Will he undertake to go up and down the country extolling the virtues of what we are doing now?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Of course the Government want a sound and healthy housing market and a thriving construction industry, but at the end of the day the country cannot live on bricks and mortar. Productive investment requires assets to be devoted to that area. My hon. Friend makes the point very well and I hope that it will be heard.

Mr. Pike: While no one wants an uncontrolled rise in house prices, which causes problems, does the Minister accept there is a serious problem for the many people with negative equity who cannot sell their houses or move jobs and are in a cleft stick because of Government policy?

Mr. Nelson: The Government are concerned about cases of negative equity, but it is fair to point out to the hon. Gentleman, first, that the number of people with negative equity has declined by half. Secondly, the value of that negative equity has reduced by nearly two thirds. Thirdly, last year I announced a couple of measures on the transfer of security and the ability to borrow unsecured so as to enable people with negative equity to move. So the Government have done something about that to advantage.

Personal Disposable Income

3. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the change in real personal disposable income in 1995-96; and whether he will make a statement. [15277]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): At Budget time, I forecast growth of 1½ per cent. in real personal disposable income during 1995 as a whole.

Mr. Forman: That is welcome news. Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it is largely due to his determination and that of the Governor of the Bank of England to keep a tight lid on inflation, and to the Government as a whole pursuing policies which have improved the supply side of the economy, that people have been enabled to earn more in a productive way?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend's analysis. Real disposable personal incomes, over and above the low inflation that we now enjoy, grew last year and they are forecast to grow this year. People can feel confident that this increase in prosperity is based on very sound and secure ground, precisely because we are pursuing the approach that my hon. Friend commends.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Does the Chancellor agree that millions of people are worse off under the Conservatives, first, because there have been 20 tax rises in the past two years, secondly, because of two mortgage rises in the past few months and, thirdly, because of the overcharging by water and electricity companies? Will he explain why no action has been taken on that overcharging until now? Does he agree that water companies—not just one, but all water companies—should be reducing their prices and that there should be a refund for past excesses?

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman is trying to imply that people are worse off under the Conservatives since we came to power, that is an absurd claim, as he well knows. Average incomes are up by about 40 per cent. in real terms since we came in, whereas they crawled up, barely increased at all, when the Labour party was in power.

As for what is going on at the moment, it is true that the last few tax increases in the pipeline will cost the average family about £1.10 a week when they come into effect in April. Nevertheless, over and above that, people's disposable incomes will rise. Somebody on average earnings and with an average mortgage has seen their disposable income, after their mortgage, go up by almost a quarter since 1990. So living standards are rising and will continue to rise under the Conservatives.

On water companies, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is a balance between the investment, which is at last coming in through privatisation. Investment was neglected when they were state owned, but it is now raising our water quality, improving our drainage and services, and the prices have been reduced by competition. The old state-owned water industry did not serve this country well, and it is absurd to single that out to try to damage the impressive evidence that I have given the hon. Gentleman of rising living standards in this country.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. and learned Friend refers to the abysmal performance of the Labour party in failing to increase real personal disposable income in 1974-79. Can he think of a single policy advocated by the Labour party which would make it do any better next time?

Mr. Clarke: It is rather difficult to think of a single policy advocated by the Labour party full stop. If I may, I shall judge the Labour party by its actions. It has voted against all our attempts to raise revenue and against all our attempts to cut public expenditure. It has given no clue that it has given any thought to the level of public borrowing, and it would plainly disregard inflation. This country would be in deep recession and people would face reduced living standards if we had taken the slightest notice of such hints of interest as have come from Members on the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Chancellor aware that when the Tories came to power in 1979, out of disposable income the amount that the average family owed in debts of one kind or another was 45 per cent? After 15 years of a Tory Government, that has now risen to well over 100 per cent. That is why people realise that there is no feel-good factor because, like the country, most of them are up to their necks in debt. They are living on tick.

Mr. Clarke: That is a quite ingenious but wholly selective use of figures. The real incomes of people, every section of society in this country, are substantially higher now than they were in 1979. When the Labour party was in power, we were an industrial laughing stock. The country was suffering from stagflation, and the real living standards of people rose by barely 1 per cent. per year. Since that time, they have taken off and real disposable incomes are about 40 per cent. higher than they were then.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: While I very much appreciate the sound way in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is seeking to manage our economy and to keep inflation under control, is he not aware that the construction and housing sectors of our economy—which are of immense importance to the economy of this country as they purchase from practically every manufacturing sector—are in deep decline? There is a crisis and we need a regeneration of confidence in that area, not to increase house prices as rapidly as happened in the late 1980s, but to get some confidence back into that sector of the economy. What can my right hon. and learned Friend do to achieve that?

Mr. Clarke: I do not agree that there is a crisis or that those sectors are in decline. However, my hon. Friend makes a serious point: the housing and construction market is completely flat, which makes economic judgments very delicate. We must sustain the strong recovery, particularly in manufacturing, we must ensure that unemployment continues to fall, and for that we must have low inflation. The recovery is unbalanced, with manufacturing and exports doing well and housing and construction very flat. I believe that growing consumer confidence—people's growing feeling of security in the future of their jobs and the fact that mortgage rates are so much lower than they were in 1990—will create enough pent-up demand to make the housing market move. I should be wary of any artificial stimulation, which would have the effect that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) warned us against and return housing prices to unrealistic levels.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Chancellor accept that there is a massive disparity between personal incomes in different areas? In Gwynedd—my own county—Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan, gross domestic product per capita is now lower than the average in the Irish Republic. What will the Chancellor do to try to ensure that areas which have fallen behind can catch up?

Mr. Clarke: There have always been discrepancies in earnings and living standards in different parts of the country, but comparisons between living standards—which are what matter—must be made very carefully, especially when borders are involved, because exchange rates and so forth must be taken into account. In most parts of the United Kingdom, actual disposable incomes in terms of purchasing power compare very well with those in most of Europe, and we have a high level of consumption. The old regional disparities have changed greatly in many ways, as we see when we examine actual economic activity. Another healthy feature of the current recovery is the fact that there is no longer a performance gap between the north, Scotland, large parts of Wales and south-east England.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

4. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the public sector borrowing rate for this financial year. [15278]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): We anticipate that the PSBR for 1994-95 will be in line with the Budget forecast of £34.5 billion.

Mr. Spellar: I am not surprised that the Chief Secretary did not want to elaborate on that answer. This is one of a long series of deficits: under the current Prime Minister, the national debt has almost doubled, from £155 billion to £285 billion. Are not the Government living on tick?

Mr. Aitken: My reply to the hon. Gentleman is that people and parties living in glass houses should not throw stones—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Let me remind him that under the last Labour Government the PSBR averaged 6.8 per cent. of GDP, reaching 9.4 per cent. at one stage. That was the moment at which the bailiffs had to be called in, in the shape of the International Monetary Fund. Under the present Government, the PSBR has averaged 2.75 per cent., and we are on track to eliminate it completely before the end of the decade. Our Government are a Government of good housekeeping, and they are doing well in reducing public borrowing.

Mr. John Townend: As a believer in a balanced budget, my right hon. Friend will appreciate my pleasure in congratulating him on the speed with which the PSBR is falling. Does he agree, however, that the best way to bring it down in the future is to cut spending rather than increasing taxation? Will he launch a crusade against waste, overmanning and extravagance in the public sector at both local and national level?

Mr. Aitken: I am certainly willing to join my hon. Friend in his admirable crusade. Indeed, we have already made progress. I remind my hon. Friend that in the last Budget my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced cuts in public spending which have reduced our spending plans for the next three years by £29.5 billion. That included a great deal of rooting out waste and cutting unnecessary bureaucracy: for example, Government running costs over the next three years have been reduced by 10 per cent. in real terms, and we now have the smallest civil service since 1939. We are progressing in the direction that my hon. Friend recommends.

Mr. Harvey: If the Government's determination to reduce excessive borrowing is the reason why they are going ahead next week with tax rises equivalent to 1p on the basic rate, and if it is responsible and necessary to put taxes up next week, could it possibly be responsible to bring them down again in November?

Mr. Aitken: The PSBR reduction has been a difficult process involving tax rises as well as spending cuts. The PSBR is now on a virtuous downward path. The Government would very much like to return to their core belief of reducing taxes and we shall do so as soon as it is prudent and right to do so.

Mr. Congdon: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his success in reducing the PSBR and urge him to continue his efforts to reduce public spending, which is still too high? Does he agree that people—and not the state—know best how to spend their money?

Mr. Aitken: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The crusade that has been announced by one Back Bencher this afternoon is gaining recruits fast. It is essential that we reduce public spending to allow more money to be kept in the pockets of our citizens and taxpayers.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Given the importance of the right hon. Gentleman's responsibilities for the PSBR, and the importance of his office, does he believe that he now has the confidence of the country?

Mr. Aitken: Yes, I do, and I believe so because the facts are clear. I welcome this opportunity to reiterate them, since the hon. Gentleman has challenged me. Let me make it crystal clear that at no board meeting of the company that I was on the board of seven years ago, and in no board paper of that company, was I ever given the slightest indication or information which could suggest that the company's wholly legitimate contract with Singapore might subsequently result in components being shipped to Iran. My view of these matters has now been publicly supported by four former directors of the company, including General Isles, who was responsible for the contract, and the managing director, so the deposed and bitter chairman is now isolated on his own in making irresponsible comments. What we are seeing is an unholy alliance of a failed chairman and a failing newspaper: it is no reason to challenge my integrity or my position in the Government.

Alcohol Smuggling

5. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress Customs and Excise has made in the past 12 months in tackling cross-border smuggling of alcohol. [15279]

6. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs and Excise staff are involved in front-line work to prevent the cross-border smuggling of alcohol. [15280]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): Customs and Excise has some 250 staff employed directly to prevent cross-border smuggling of excise goods. There is no separation of their duties between alcohol and tobacco goods. They take vigorous action against those engaged in cross-border smuggling, and in the 12 months to 31 January 1995 they made 910 detections related to alcohol with a revenue value of £1,871,000.

Investigation staff and those employed on VAT and other customs controls also contribute to the prevention of smuggling.

Mr. Alexander: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware of the adverse tax implications of that activity. I assure him that there are adverse implications for the brewing industry due to severe inroads into its turnover. Will he assure the House that, to deal with that activity, the number of front-line staff will be increased rather than reduced—as some people think may happen—and that there will still be enough of them?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The fundamental expenditure review that we have completed shows that in some regions Customs and Excise can maintain or increase its output with fewer staff, but in the coming year there will be an increase in excise verification officers engaged in anti-smuggling activity. The matter will be kept under review to ensure that it is controlled.

Mr. Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that he and his European Union colleagues remain committed to the introduction of the harmonisation of duties, as well as of VAT, throughout the single market, which is the only long-term solution to the problem?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I would go halfway with what my hon. Friend says. We would certainly wish to retain our veto over unwelcome tax proposals, so we would resist compulsory harmonisation. Within that constraint, however, we are working to lift the minimum rates of duty, especially for wine and beer, in order to iron out the current distortions between member states in the single market.

Mr. Roy Hughes: There is a large modern brewery in my constituency and the company which owns it complains bitterly about this illicit trade. Does the Minister accept that it could eventually affect employment, and is he examining the problem from that angle?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, we monitor closely the performance of the brewing industry and we are mindful of the employment consequences. I can therefore give the hon. Gentleman the welcome news that excise receipts from alcoholic drinks as a whole have kept up and are buoyant as against 12 months ago.

Mr. Mudie: In view of the Minister's complacent answers, may I ask whether he is aware of the pressure being put on thousands of small businesses—the difficulties were initially in the south but have now spread to the north—which are having great problems holding themselves together because of smuggling? Is he satisfied with the number of customs officers? In view of the pressure on small businesses, will he announce moves to increase the number in an attempt to prevent smuggling and give a more forceful answer in respect of the equalisation of duty, which is the real long-term solution to the problem?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have already dealt with harmonisation. We wish to see a measure of harmonisation, but it must be compatible with our ability to veto other unwelcome taxation measures. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not in the slightest bit complacent about smuggling. We keep the matter under review, and I am glad to say that the courts are taking an increasingly severe view of those caught smuggling. The law already allows for unlimited fines and up to seven years' imprisonment for those who are caught.

Far East

7. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from Ministers and business men in the far east regarding the prospects for Britain's future economic success. [15281]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I regularly meet Ministers, officials and business men from the far east. Britain's good economic prospects always feature strongly in my discussions with them.

Mr. Key: In little more than a decade, China will be the world's biggest economy. Is not the dramatic rise in Britain's exports to China in the past couple of years proof of the effectiveness, efficiency and competitiveness of our economy in the world?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am extremely glad to say that exports to China rose by 70 per cent. in the last year for which we have full figures alone. China is now one of the most dynamic economies in the world. It is a sign of how much Britain has changed over the past 16 years that British business and industry is now competitive and so effective in taking part in the affairs of that part of the world which has the most dynamic economies.

Mr. Stevenson: Is the Chancellor aware of the flood of investment from this country to the far east? For example, Royal Doulton in my constituency has just announced its intention to build a factory and create 600 jobs in Indonesia. Is he concerned about this so-called out-sourcing? How is it in Britain's interests? Is it not just another example of the export of jobs?

Mr. Clarke: The abolition of exchange controls and the opening up of investment from this country overseas and into this country by overseas investors is one of the most dramatic and beneficial changes that the British economy experienced in the 1980s. The hon. Gentleman epitomises just how old-fashioned the Labour party is in its approach to these matters. This country benefits from investment by Japanese, Korean, American and European companies. It also benefits from the flowing back into this country of what is earned from investment by British companies overseas. Indeed, we have now restored the old level of investment that Britain used to have before its past portfolio went during the wars, and the flows into this country are extremely valuable—as valuable as visible trade to the well-being of this country.

Mr. Marlow: As an avid reader, has my right hon. and learned Friend read the very interesting article in today's edition of the *Daily Mail* by Mrs. Fukuda, vice-chairman of a major Japanese investment bank, Nikko Europe, in which she says that she suspects that Japanese investors would be happier if Britain stayed outside the single European currency? Is that a fit subject for discussion with his hon. Friends and, if so, is his door open?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that there is a range of opinion on these matters in Japan as there is in this country. I would be happier if the Japanese lady would wait until the single currency has been designed—*[Interruption.]*—until we have seen whether Britain is likely to join it and when we have an altogether better basis on which to make a decision on that event if and when it ever occurs. At the moment, I think that Japanese opinions are mixed. Certainly, our involvements with Europe and in south-east Asia are both essential to the continued success of this country in the world economy.

Mr. Corbyn: In his discussions with business men in the far east, does the Chancellor of the Exchequer ever raise the subject of the use of prison labour and child labour and of human rights abuses in the economic zones of China that he is so quick to praise? Will he link Britain's trade relations with China with the urgent need for a review and improvement of that country's abominable human rights record in those areas?

Mr. Clarke: I have never been to the People's Republic of China, so I have never had an opportunity to raise the matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Every hon. Member is of course against slave labour, child labour, prison labour for export and the other things that the hon. Gentleman described. Our trade with China is extremely beneficial to this country—straightforward trade and investment, which is of great benefit to the people of this country. We look forward to China becoming a successful, free-market economy and a more liberal and democratic society, which increased prosperity there will tend to produce. Britain should be a close trading and investing partner with that country.

Income Tax

8. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money would be raised by an increase in the top rate of income tax to 50 per cent. [15282]

Sir George Young: In 1995-96, £2.9 billion and £4.6 billion in a full year.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that higher income tax rates reduce incentives to work hard and that they limit economic growth? Will he perhaps refresh my memory as I have forgotten what the top rates of income tax were when the Conservatives rescued this country from socialism in 1979?

Sir George Young: I am happy to refresh my hon. Friend's memory. Some people were paying tax at 98p in the pound under the Labour Government. *[Interruption.]* I hear cries of "Not enough" from Opposition Members. We have reduced the top rate to 40 per cent. and we have increased incentives. The higher paid are now paying a higher percentage of the total income tax, so the lower paid have benefited from the reforms.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Minister confirm that once the changes in taxation are implemented next week, additional tax under this Government will be the equivalent of 7p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax?

Sir George Young: The average family is about £80 a week better off in real terms since the Conservative Government came into office in 1979, which is a dramatic contrast with the virtually stagnating rate of growth under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Jessel: Far from suggesting an increase in the top rate or any other rate of income tax, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that income tax produces only about a quarter of all Government revenue? The Chancellor of the Exchequer in the early 1950s, Mr. Butler, made it a Conservative target to double the standard of living in 25 years, which was achieved. Should we not make it our target, over 25 years, to abolish income tax lock, stock and barrel?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend invites me to subscribe to an ambitious target. He will understand that it would be wrong for me to prejudge my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget later this year.

Third-world Financial Markets

9. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will made a statement about the impact of the decline in the bond market and third-world stock markets on prospects for the United Kingdom economy. [15283]

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom economy remains fundamentally healthy, with sound prospects. The decline in world bond markets last year and recent falls in some third-world countries' stock markets are unlikely to have a material effect on the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Livingstone: Have the Government considered the fact that one of the reasons preventing the decline in third world stock markets from feeding through into the British economy, and ours from following them down, is that it is still easy to borrow cheaply in Japan to invest in the stock market here, which is sustaining stock market levels? As the money supply in Japan increases, inflation takes off and interest rates rise, that restraint will be cut out and our stock market will decline and precipitate another recession.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman seems to have omitted the subject of exchange rates, which certainly have some bearing on borrowing in one country and investing in another. I dare say that the proposal that he has just made would not have been profitable for anyone who had taken his advice. There is plenty of investment in this country from abroad. We take the lion's share of investment in Europe, and that is regenerating growth in our manufacturing industry and capability. Our prospects are sound. In decrying the prospects for this country, the hon. Gentleman fails to mention that in the last quarter of last year we had a current account surplus, for the first time in eight years, of £800 million. Surely he would do better to welcome statistics of that sort.

Mr. John Greenway: Following what my hon. Friend has said, does he agree that deregulation and the ability to invest internationally across the world has enabled this country's economy to grow significantly over the past 15 or 16 years? Are not the excellent trade figures published last Friday, which my hon. Friend has just mentioned, the result of much of the international overseas investment by British institutions and companies? Will he ensure that Government policy is to permit that to continue, and to have no truck with the Labour party, which would favour more regulation that would close down those investment opportunities?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is spot on. Our healthy current account figures derive in large part from the investment return on substantial foreign investments made. One reason for that is the fact that the Government got rid of exchange controls early on. The consequences of what is proposed by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who speaks for old Labour, would be the reimposition of exchange controls, capital controls and, presumably, penal rates of taxation on investment income.

Single European Currency

10. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extent of the Government's participation in the practical steps needed to create a single European currency. [15284]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As I have said before, we are playing a constructive part in the technical preparations, but that does not prejudge our decision on whether to participate, which is protected by the United Kingdom opt-out.

Mr. Milburn: But which Minister speaks for the United Kingdom Government in the discussions? Is it the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Euro-supporting Chancellor of the Exchequer, or is it his comrade in arms, the Euro-sceptical Chief Secretary to the Treasury? How can Britain's national interest be properly represented when members of the Cabinet are in such open disagreement over European policy?

Mr. Clarke: I advise the hon. Gentleman to keep a straight face, even when asking frivolous questions. The last time that we debated the subject the Prime Minister made our position clear. We have negotiated an opt-out which means that the British are quite free from treaty obligations when deciding whether to join in economic and monetary union if the other member states ever decide to go ahead with it. Meanwhile we play a constructive part in the technical preparations, so that when we make our choice, if ever we have to, we have had some hand in designing what we are being asked to confront.

Mr. Legg: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept my congratulations on the excellent improvement in our trade figures, and will he further accept that that improvement is largely due to his policy of maintaining a floating currency? Does he agree that such a marked improvement in our trade policy would not have been possible if we had remained in the exchange rate mechanism at DM2.90 to the pound, and that it certainly would not have been feasible under a single currency?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend in his praise of our trade performance—in 1994 we performed spectacularly well—but I disagree with him if he believes that devaluation of the currency is the only way in which this country's competitiveness has been restored. That happened because of the success of British industry and commerce in making itself competitive in world markets, and the Government's success in keeping down inflation at home and our business-friendly policies that support exports overseas. If my hon. Friend analyses the trade figures he will find that the myth that it all happened only because we left the ERM is no longer sustainable.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Does the Chancellor still reject a referendum ever being held on a single currency—yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: If the question ever arises, it will be a matter for the Parliament of the day to decide how to take the decision.

Mr. Budgen: May I refer the Chancellor to his remarks of 10 days ago, in which he said that the Euro-sceptics formerly in his party were undermining the value of the pound? If that is true, will he explain why it is important, or does he have some secret exchange rate target so as to bring us back into the ERM which he so much favoured?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend produces about the fifth or sixth version of what I said in a press conference in Brussels when I was asked why the pound at the time was declining when I was confident that the economic fundamentals in this country were going very well. One of the remarks that I made was that I accepted that the divisions in the governing party about Europe were not exactly helpful to market confidence. That has been turned into my personally blaming Lord Tebbit for the decline in the pound, which was not what I was saying. The political uncertainty gives rise to some weakness occasionally in the exchange markets because people fear the return of a Labour Government. The more the Conservative party looks like a strong and determined governing party, which I believe will last the course of this Parliament, and maintains the present improving economic climate, the stronger sterling and the stronger confidence overseas in this country's economy will be.

Customs and Excise (Scott Inquiry)

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he is giving to the protection of the reputation of Customs and Excise officers named by the Scott inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. [15285]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We shall have to wait and see what conclusions Sir Richard Scott reaches and I do not propose to speculate in advance of the publication of his report.

As was made clear in the evidence of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry, the Government's view on the accountability of Ministers remains as set out in Sir David Maxwell Fyfe's speech to this House on 20 July 1954 on the Crichel Down case.

Mr. Dalyell: Since, in a reference that I sent to the Minister, the late Nicholas Ridley—not exactly the most uncritical admirer of the British civil service—pointed out that the Customs and Excise was due great praise for what it had done on the super-gun, can we be told what has happened to the doctrine of ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Nothing has happened to the doctrine of ministerial responsibility. It is true, as the hon. Gentleman has reminded the House, that the late Nicholas

Ridley complimented Customs and Excise on its performance in the Iraq super-gun case. That compliment was fully deserved. As for any blame or criticism that may accrue under the Scott inquiry, we must await the publication of the report. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that I, as a Treasury Minister, am responsible for the overall conduct and performance of Customs and Excise. It is an independent prosecution service and Ministers are not consulted on whether to investigate or prosecute in individual cases.

Mr. Darling: Arising from that, does the Minister accept that the Maxwell Fyfe doctrine has been changed and undermined by the conduct of the Government in the past 16 years? Will he give an undertaking that if he or any other Minister is criticised in the Scott inquiry, he will accept the consequences and resign forthwith?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is no. In answer to his second question, I repeat that we must await the publication of the report.

Endogenous Growth Theory

12. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to pursue post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory; and if he will make a statement. [15286]

Mr. Aitken: The post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory is receiving the study it deserves.

Mr. Nicholls: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. What conclusion does he think that the public should draw when even the Labour hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) realises that the post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory is a load of claptrap, but it is nevertheless accepted as official Labour party policy by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)?

Mr. Aitken: I always enjoy the sarcastic wit of the hon. Member of Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), particularly when it is applied to his own Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman is a literary sort of bloke, and he will perhaps forgive me if I summarise his position by saying that the Labour party's endorsement of a growth theory is totally unnecessary. The Government do not need one because we have a growth reality of 4 per cent. last year. We have record exports and inward investment, and manufacturing investment is up by 4.4 per cent. Unemployment is falling by 1,000 a day. If that reality does not prove that there is no need for absurd academic theories, I do not know what does.

Mr. MacShane: Does the Chief Secretary agree that the best contribution that he can make to the theory of honest and incorruptible government is to resign his seal of office now?

Mr. Aitken: No.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15305]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Prime Minister agree that the greatest asset of the national health service is the loyalty and dedication of its staff? He will know that many NHS workers are greatly angered by the fact that they will receive pay increases of between 1 per cent. and 3 per cent. this year. It is within the Prime Minister's power to lift the morale of 1 million people by agreeing that no one will be paid less than 3 per cent. this year. He has the power to do that. Why does he lack the commitment?

The Prime Minister: Of course the greatest asset of the NHS is the skills of the doctors, surgeons, dentists and nurses who work in it. There is no doubt about that. The hon. Gentleman is concerned about the 3 per cent. figure, and it may be that many people get precisely that sum. He may also recall that the last Labour Government cut nurses' pay by exactly 3 per cent.

Mr. Renton: Did my right hon. Friend note that the question asked by many non-political speakers at yesterday's "Britain in the World" conference was how could we expect other countries to think much of us if we evidently think so little of ourselves? While some modesty and humility is always welcome, does my right hon. Friend think that it would help British exports, and thus British jobs and morale, if politicians from all parties and the media spent rather more time praising evident British successes and less time indulging in destructive recrimination and criticism?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend may have spoken for millions of people in the country when he called for a more balanced presentation of the many virtues which exist in this country in industry and in our traditional aspects and institutions. I have no doubt that many people would wish to support them.

Mr. Skinner: Stop whingeing.

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) regards saying anything good about this country as whingeing. That says rather a lot about the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blair: If, under the new nurses' pay scheme, substantial numbers of nurses get less than the 3 per cent. which other nurses get for effectively the same job, will he accept that such a system is unfair? Will he undertake to change it?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give that undertaking to the right hon. Gentleman. As I said a moment ago, nobody wishes to be unfair to nurses or anybody else in the health service—certainly no one in the Government. We gave nurses a review body of their own so that their interests could be looked at dispassionately, and we have scrupulously honoured the recommendations of that review body in full.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister will know that the review body has pointed out that it was acting on the prompting of the Government.

The Prime Minister *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Blair: That is what the review body says in its own report. Is the Prime Minister prepared to accept a situation where substantial numbers of nurses who are doing the same job are paid substantially less than 3 per cent?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman still does not understand the point. I shall make it to him again so that it is clearer. We have accepted the recommendations of the review body in full this year, as we have done every year in the past. The right hon. Gentleman must look at the actual offers which are being made to nurses as a result of local pay determination. The majority of those are in the order of 3 per cent. or more, and I am confident that that trend will continue. We set up the review body—which was welcomed by nurses—and it has made recommendations which I think we should stick to.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister cannot have it both ways. Either he believes—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair: Either the Prime Minister believes that the nurses deserve 3 per cent., in which case he should deliver it, or he is content for many of them to be paid less than that, in which case he should have the honesty to say so. May I put it to him this way: if some nurses turn out just to get a 1.5 per cent. pay increase, when they already face mortgage and tax rises and the rest, is not the danger not just of a sense of injustice among nurses, but of yet another damaging blow to the morale of the national health service?

The Prime Minister: It is the right hon. Gentleman who is seeking to have it both ways. He and every hon. Member of this House agreed that it was right for there to be an independent pay review body for the nurses. That is what there is and we have accepted the recommendations that it has made and provided increased funding to the national health service—some £1.3 billion—so that pay awards of that sort can be met. That is the right way to deal with it; it is the way that we are dealing with it; and it is scrupulously fair. I notice that it was this Government who provided an independent pay review body for the nurses and not previous Governments.

Mr. Harris: Has my right hon. Friend found time to read the report in *The Daily Telegraph*, which shows once again how Spanish fishermen are plundering stocks, especially by catching undersized fish? Taking into account the events off Canada and the report by his special advisers, under Sir Crispin Tickell, will my right hon. Friend take a personal lead in the matter and try to bring some sanity back into this whole question of conserving fish stocks and ensuring that our fishermen have a future to look forward to?

The Prime Minister: I certainly understand and share Canada's desire to preserve fish stocks. That is a perfectly legitimate concern and it is entirely right of Canada to seek to do so. The real issues here are allocation of the quota and enforcement—two separate, but related, issues. The allocation must clearly be resolved by negotiation. Good progress is being made and I see no reason why an accommodation cannot be struck.

Enforcement is clearly the key and we need tough rules that are enforced. Again, I understand that we are close to a deal. I believe that Canada is right to take a tough line on enforcement, but I hope that in taking such a line she does not undermine her own good case, which exists at present. There have been discussions about trade sanctions. We have made it clear that we would strongly oppose the imposition of such sanctions.

Q2. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15306]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Prime Minister think that the director of a company that traded illegally with a foreign power is a fit and proper person to be in his Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury dealt with that matter very forcefully and to great acclaim from most of the House just a few moments ago. He has made his position absolutely clear. No evidence has been found to counter that, either by *The Independent* or anyone else.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend recall Lord Tebbit's definition of loyalty and commitment to a country as the side that one supports in, for example, a cricket match? Will the Prime Minister join me and this House, therefore, in cheering enthusiastically for Canada in its forthcoming fixture against Spain?

The Prime Minister: I believe that I am right to say to my hon. Friend that, in 1868 or 1874, Canada beat England at cricket in Canada. As I said a moment or so ago, I think that Canada is right to take a tough line on enforcement. She has our support in doing that and we shall not support the imposition of trade sanctions. This is an area where a satisfactory accommodation between the sides can be achieved, and should be achieved speedily.

Q3. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15307]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: Has the Prime Minister seen from today's Audit Commission figures that spending on education in secondary schools in Northumberland is lower than in any other county? As it is not possible to explain that by how the council allocates its resources because it results from the Government's spending formula applied in a scattered rural area and the capping limit on council spending, will the Prime Minister stop pretending that there is no problem and try to do something about it?

The Prime Minister: I think that many interesting things are thrown out by the Audit Commission report; not all of them would be very well received by the right hon. Gentleman when he actually has the opportunity to study them. On the specific matter of education, I have made the point repeatedly to the House in the past and I reiterate it today: there is a question of priorities within the education budget. I do not believe that it is right for education authorities to look, as their first priority for making savings, at the classroom teacher. That is the last place to look, not the first.

Q4. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15308]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Peter Tapsell: May I welcome my right hon. Friend's reassertion yesterday of his absolute determination to continue to maintain Britain's role as a national power in international affairs? Will he give a commitment that, at the intergovernmental conference next year, he will veto any attempt to include the pillars of foreign and home affairs in the European Union in the supranational Rome treaty?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me advance notice that he planned to raise that detailed matter. I confirm that, at the IGC, what I wish to see is more effective intergovernmental co-operation between Europe's nation states to fight cross-border crime and promote joint policies internationally. But I shall make it absolutely clear on that occasion that Europe's foreign policy and home affairs pillars remain outside the treaty of Rome. The United Kingdom's right of veto on those matters is important to us. It is at the heart of national sovereignty and I shall protect it at the intergovernmental conference.

Q5. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15309]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is essential that, at the Berlin climate change conference, the need for significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions after the year 2000 is explicitly stated and that we must have a decision to negotiate a reductions protocol to that effect? Does he further agree that, if current strong rumours that the UK and the European Union are prepared to compromise with the Americans and others on that fundamental principle, we shall all stand condemned by future generations?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will attend the Berlin conference and will call on all the developed countries to agree a figure of between 5 and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels for all greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2010. We believe that that represents both a credible and an achievable next step and demonstrates the commitment of the United Kingdom to the framework of the climate change convention. I should say to the House that the United Kingdom is on course to meet current commitments under the convention, and we have been at the forefront of international work over recent years. We were the first country to present our programme up to the year 2000, and my right hon. Friend is now leading the way in calling for agreement on a realistic target up to 2010.

Mr. Batiste: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports in the papers this week that in the middle east seven drugs dealers were executed, but in Leeds a gang of drugs dealers burnt down the house of a black policeman? Is it not time that, in our war against drugs dealers, we treated them as the mass murderers that they are?

The Prime Minister: I believe everyone in this country shares the distaste for drug dealers to which my hon. Friend refers. As he will know, my right hon. Friend the Lord President has been preparing a comprehensive anti-drugs strategy, and the Government have already taken a number of initiatives in line with our European and other international partners. There is no doubt about the danger of that trade, and we will do all that we can, domestically and internationally, to help to stamp it out.

Q6. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15310]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Janner: As we approach the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Belsen concentration camp by British troops, will the Prime Minister express what I am sure is the wish of us all—that there shall never be such a tragedy again? Will he also consider whether we should not be dealing rather better with Hitler's heirs in our own country—not least the thugs of Combat 18 and their ilk, who have been sending through the post to constituents of mine, Asians in the city of Leicester and elsewhere, racist, threatening and abusive cards and razor blades? Will he ensure that the police have the resources and the determination to deal with those awful people?

The Prime Minister: I agree without qualification with the hon. and learned Gentleman about that. Combat 18 is a repellent organisation. The literature that it circulates is utterly disgusting, and there can be no place for its type of politics in the United Kingdom.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman is aware, we have comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 introduced a new imprisonable offence of intentional harassment, which I hope will give the police more powers to deal with serious racial harassment. We are also making the distribution of racially inflammatory material an arrestable offence.

However, the best reassurance that we can give to victims is the one that the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned, and that is to help the police to ensure that those people are caught and punished for their crimes.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 3 APRIL—Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 4 APRIL—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

Motion relating to the infant formula and follow-on formula regulations.

WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, in connection with which I remind the House that the first three hours, from 10 am until 1 pm, will be under the heading of "Matters to be Considered before the Forthcoming Adjournment" and will be comparable to the previous recess Adjournment three-hour debates.

Remaining stages of the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill.

The House will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the Easter Adjournment on Wednesday 5 April until Tuesday 18 April.

TUESDAY 18 APRIL—Second Reading of the Environment Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill *[Lords]*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

THURSDAY 20 APRIL—Remaining stages of the Criminal Appeal Bill.

FRIDAY 21 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information, and especially for the information about the week after Easter. I ask him to bear in mind the requests for an Opposition Supply day in the following week, so that Members on the Opposition Benches may draw attention to issues that they consider especially important.

As the Leader of the House has given information to the press recently with regard to the Government's long-term plans in another Queen's Speech, will the Leader of the House tell us today why the Government have not yet found time to introduce legislation to ratify the chemical weapons convention? May I make him an offer? The Opposition will co-operate fully in the speedy passage of such legislation, perhaps even taking all stages in one day. Could we make progress on that immediately after Easter?

In view of the widespread public concern about the recurring crises in the health service, particularly today's alarming reports that, since the new quango was put in charge of blood transfusion services, blood stocks have been reduced, operations are being cancelled and doctors are fearful of what would happen in the event of a major disaster, should we not be debating the issue before the recess so that our constituents can find out the true extent of the problem?

Finally, on a matter that must be of concern to hon. Members of both sides of the House, will the Leader of the House seek to resolve the questions, which were not clarified today at Question Time, surrounding the activities of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in respect of defence contracts in the middle east? Will the Leader of the House ensure that an immediate, specific and independent inquiry is set up to look at the new allegations to ensure that Parliament has the chance to learn and assess the full facts surrounding the case?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, the hon. Lady is well aware that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has issued two full statements setting out the position clearly. He has added to that in exchanges today, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also referred to the matter in the past few minutes. I do not intend to add to what they have said.

On the national health service and the position in respect of blood, I understand that the National Blood Authority is coping with increased demand—up 4 per cent. last year—by increased donations—up 5 per cent. last year—and considerably better co-ordination between centres. If the hon. Lady wishes to raise other points in that respect, I draw her attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is due to be answering questions on the first day back after the recess.

As always, I shall bear in mind the hon. Lady's request for an Opposition day, although I can make no commitment from the Dispatch Box this afternoon.

I said in response to a question from one of the hon. Lady's hon. Friends a week or two ago that the Government are firmly committed to making progress on the chemical weapons convention. The hon. Lady has made a generous offer this afternoon, which I shall certainly consider carefully.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): May we have a debate next week on a subject on which the House has not reached a decision: whether hon. Members should have in their rooms television sets showing what is happening on the Floor of the House? While that may be convenient for those writing constituency mail while watching what is happening on the Floor of the House, it may deplete the numbers attending in the Chamber. Until the public can see both the Floor of the House and hon. Members sitting in their rooms watching it, such a move may have a bad affect.

Mr. Newton: I understand my right hon. Friend's point, but I must make two points in reply. First, at many times of the day—for reasons that hon. Members understand and, no doubt, from time to time seek to explain to those outside—there is a relatively limited number of hon. Members in the Chamber participating in debates. There is nothing new about that. Secondly—and I say this with all due respect to my right hon. Friend, who is well versed in the ways and procedures of the House and its Committees—the proposal to provide the clean feed in the way that it is being done to offices throughout the Palace of Westminster and its associated buildings, was put to and agreed by the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): We understand that announcements on the future of the health service in London are to be made very soon by the Secretary of State for Health. Can the Leader of the House tell us whether there will definitely be a statement about that next week? If not, can he give us a guarantee that there will at least be an announcement by way of a statement in the House, if not next week, after the Easter recess?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a specific date at the moment. However, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will seek to make announcements at the earliest appropriate moment and I am sure that she will give careful consideration to representations about how that should be done.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have promised to introduce legislation on aircraft noise at a suitable time. Is he aware that there is deepening anxiety in mid-Warwickshire about night aircraft noise that is generated at the small Coventry airport? In view of that fact, does he think that it would be a good idea to have a general debate in the House about aircraft noise as a precursor to introducing that legislation?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure about having a general debate on aircraft noise. However, I will undertake to bring my hon. Friend's concern to the attention of my right hon. Friends. I make the point that there was an Adjournment Debate about those matters not long ago which was introduced by an hon. Member whose constituency—like that of my hon. Friend—is in the vicinity of Coventry airport.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the Leader of the House arrange to have an early and extremely urgent debate on the fate of Nicholas Ingram, a British citizen who was born in Cambridge in my constituency and who is currently awaiting execution by electric chair in the United States? The execution date is set for 6 April and the Georgia board of parole has said that it will listen with utmost gravity to any appeal that is made by the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Newton: The whole House will understand and respect the reasons why the hon. Lady has raised the matter with regard to one of her constituents. I hope that she, in turn, will understand that at this stage it is appropriate for me to undertake to bring her comments to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the courteous and conciliatory way in which, on 11 January, he dealt with the unfortunate rift between the nine Euro-sceptics and the remainder of his party. He assured the House that on all occasions the nine would receive the full rights and privileges that were necessary for them to represent their constituents properly in this place.

In view of the grossly discourteous way in which the Chancellor of the Exchequer refused to receive his former colleagues, and the fact that we are still not even receiving the all-party Whip, will my right hon. Friend assure us and the House that every attempt will be made to ensure that we are able to represent our constituents properly?

Mr. Newton: I have three points to make. First, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his references to the tone of my remarks during the debate to which he alluded. Secondly, on his point about the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend did not intend his actions to be interpreted in the way that my hon. Friend has interpreted them. However, it is clearly a matter for individual Ministers to consider requests for meetings and to make their own decisions about whether such meetings are appropriate in relation to particular matters at particular times. Thirdly, I will undertake to look into my hon. Friend's point about the all-party Whip.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on parliamentary accountability and the accountability of Ministers, particularly in the light of Ministers' statements about their treatment by the BBC, which we now believe has more power than we in Parliament have? Many of us are deeply concerned that the questions that we ask of Ministers are not being answered and that there has been a clear deterioration in the standard of replies, certainly over the 15 years that I have been a Member of Parliament. I believe that a huge accountability crisis is developing, and the only means of solving it rests in the hands of the Government.

Mr. Newton: From my dealings in these matters—and I have had a fair number of questions from the hon. Gentleman, as have many other Ministers in recent weeks—I have certainly not participated in any design to reduce the quality or the extent of information given in response to proper and reasonable questions. I note the hon. Gentleman's concern and will reflect on it as may be appropriate, but I would make the point that in recent years there has been a huge increase in the volume of questions which has itself imposed certain strains on the administrative machine.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my right hon. Friend offer any encouragement to those of us who believe that it is probably time for a debate and legislation on the matter dealt with by the Latham report, which has wide support within the industry and cross-party support in the Chamber?

Mr. Newton: I noticed some weeks ago that *Building* magazine made some friendly references to some sympathetic remarks that I had made in that respect and interpreted me as undertaking to advance the prospects of the legislation. That may have gone a little beyond what I said, but I certainly listened sympathetically to my hon. Friend's representation.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): While the Leader of the House is considering next week's business, will he bear it in mind that on the day when thousands of health workers are campaigning against the Government's policy, particularly towards their pay, the *Financial Times* and *Today* newspapers have released details that the package available to Sir Duncan Nichol when he left the health service last year was approaching £200,000—equivalent to the salaries of 20 nurses for a whole year? Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on this important matter?

Mr. Newton: I have already said that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is due to answer questions on Tuesday 18 April. The hon. Gentleman might care to raise the matter with her.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): My right hon. Friend may be unaware that in a Committee Room in another place, an organisation called the Maranatha Fellowship

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

launched a booklet called, "What on Earth are We Doing to our Children?". It is a serious and moderate catalogue of the most appalling degradation and shame which is afflicting children in Britain and throughout the world. It convinced many of the people in that room that Parliament, as the centre of the country's legislature, is failing in its duty to children world wide. Will he provide time for a debate on the matter?

Mr. Newton: I made some reference to that at business questions last week or the week before, referring to proceedings in an another place. I cannot add to that, but I certainly acknowledge on behalf of the Government the seriousness of the problem and the importance of taking proper and practical steps to help deal with it.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Can the Leader of the House offer us an early debate on the regulation of the water industry, given the revelations this week that the water companies have negotiated with their regulator a high level of investment, but are actually committing a lower level of investment, the difference being used effectively to prop up their share prices in the meantime? I imagine that all right hon. and Members within the Thames Water area will have received the same letter as I received from the chairman of Thames Water about the programme for the next five years and confirming that that was their intention. It said:

> "When the work is completed . . . we will decide and make public how we intend to pass any savings on to customers and shareholders."

Does that not expose a massive hole in the current regulatory framework for the water industry, and may we urgently debate the issues that it raises?

Mr. Newton: I shall look with care at the hon. Gentleman's comments, but the industry's spending plans in respect of infrastructure renewal investment have been in the public domain since privatisation. I remind him that the water industry has been investing some £3 billion a year since privatisation, compared with the Government who he would have supported had he been here at the time, who cut capital spending on sewage treatment by some 45 per cent.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on law and order, with an emphasis on the security of our towns and their streets and car parks? That would give me—and the Members who represent the 110 other areas into which the Government have put money for those grants—an opportunity to thank him first hand for the £23,000 grant that was given towards the closed circuit television camera system in Chesham. It would also give us an opportunity to point out that our actions speak louder than words and that it is the Conservative Government who are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, not the Labour party.

Mr. Newton: I endorse the my hon. Friend's latter remarks and express the thanks, I am sure, of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for what she said about the money for CCTV in many towns and cities. It is indeed an extremely good scheme and deserves more attention than it has yet had.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Leader of the House will be aware of the worsening NHS dental crisis in many areas and of the fact that the Government have been considering their response for many months now to the consultations that they have had on the matter. Can he find time for a statement to be made in the House before Easter, because of the worries that it is causing to so many people?

Mr. Newton: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is actively considering that matter at the moment. I cannot make a commitment this afternoon that the matter will be brought to a conclusion before the Easter recess, but I will pass on the hon. Gentleman's hopes in that respect.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): We do not appear to have heard too much about Hong Kong recently. I would have hoped that we would have been given a full update, preferably by a debate, but if not certainly by a statement as soon as possible.

Mr. Newton: I am considering the possibilities of having such a debate. Whether it will be possible in the second half of the month after the Easter recess, I cannot yet be sure, but I am considering it carefully.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why cannot we have a statement next week about the plight of nurses' pay? Members of Parliament from Scotland, England and Wales all get the same pay and the same increase on the same day. If it can apply to Members of Parliament, why cannot nurses get a flat rate increase in line with inflation without having to scramble for it?

Mr. Newton: The short answer to that is the one that has already been given several times during Prime Minister's questions by my right hon. Friend: the move to local pay was set out in the nurses and midwives' own independent pay review body and the Government accepted its recommendations in full. As I understand it, the position of the Opposition must now be either that they would end the review body or that they would refuse to accept its recommendations.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time at an early opportunity for the House to debate early-day motion 533, which is about the cadet forces, and air cadets in particular and the good work that is done in the inner cities in the development of young people? Could it be combined with the long-overdue debate on the Royal Air Force?

[*That this House congratulates the Government on its policy of supporting the Air Cadets and the cadet organisations of the Army and Royal Navy; notes that in these difficult times where there is a worldwide problem with youth, drugs and crime, that the volunteer officers and civilian instructors of the cadet forces by leadership and example coupled with demanding and challenging training programmes contribute massively towards the personal discipline and development of the nation's young people; and further notes how vital and important this task is in inner city areas.*]

Mr. Newton: I will of course look for an opportunity to provide time for the debate on the Royal Air Force, when that is practicable. It would provide an opportunity to make the important points that my hon. Friend has made. I pay tribute to the air cadets, who give young people an opportunity to take part in many pursuits that help to develop, among other things, good citizenship. Indeed, I have an excellent air cadet force in my constituency with which I have a number of connections. The good work is not confined to cities.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If the Leader of the House has received his water bill for next year, he will be aware that, for 93 per cent. of domestic householders, the price increase next year will be above the price review cap that was imposed by the regulator less than 10 months ago. It is becoming clearer by the day that the price and charging regulation in that industry is totally discredited from both the industry and the consumer's point of view. Will he find time for a debate either before or after Easter on the issue of the regulation of the water and waste water industry?

Mr. Newton: I understand that charges for "measured" customers are rising by less than prices generally, owing to a reduction in standing charges, and that as a result of rebalanced tariffs, bills for metered customers are much fairer than they were, giving a proper incentive to customers who want to economise on water. It is manifest from what the hon. Lady said that she does not like that, but she might at least have acknowledged that it is a factor.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on the success of yesterday's "Britain in the World" conference? Does he agree that it is time that we debated the questions raised by the Prime Minister? In particular, would that not give us an opportunity to allay some of the false fears raised by Britain's not joining a single European currency? The deputy chairman of Nikko Europe plc, for instance, said that many Japanese investors would prefer us not to join a single currency, so that we can remain flexible and competitive.

Mr. Newton: Of course I shall give careful consideration to the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, and draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am more than happy to join my hon. Friend—who is my near neighbour in Essex—in congratulating my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Leader of the House give further consideration to the strong Opposition view that before the House rises for the Easter recess a statement should be made about nurses' pay? As one who has experienced the dedicated work of nurses at first hand, I consider it shameful that the Government are treating them in such a way. That is one of the reasons for the widespread support for nurses: people are aware of the stressful work that they undertake with such dedication. Nurses certainly should not be treated as the Government are treating them.

Mr. Newton: Notwithstanding the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, all hon. Members on both sides of the House—even those of us who are sometimes the subject of rather aggressive remarks from him—will wish to welcome him back to the House following the treatment to which he has referred, which has manifestly not reduced his vigour.

As for the rest of what the hon. Gentleman said, I do not think it reasonable to describe as shameful—or anything remotely approaching that—circumstances in which an independent review body has been established, and has made recommendations that have been fully accepted.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Next week or during the week of our return, may we have yet another debate on education? I found yesterday's debate very illuminating: British people watching it could observe not only the progress that has been made in schools throughout the country as a result of Conservative policy, but the vacuum—punctuated by occasional cries of "me too"—that passes for Labour policy. The 60,000 children in Kent who attend grant-maintained schools, and their parents, would like to know what Labour's policy is on those excellent schools.

Mr. Newton: I understand that yesterday's debate provided considerable illumination of what was happening in a number of places, but none whatever of Labour's policy on the matters to which my hon. Friend has referred. He will keep at it; I will keep at it; we will keep at it; but I have little expectation that the clarification that he wants will be forthcoming.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): The Monopolies and Mergers Commission's important report on the proposed acquisition of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. by British Aerospace or GEC is due to be published during the Easter recess. Given the report's importance not only to the future of jobs in my constituency but to the future size and shape of the defence industry as a whole, will the Leader of the House make a commitment today to ensure that a Minister makes a statement to the House in the week following the recess so that the matter can be debated fully?

Mr. Newton: The appropriate time at which to consider how to deal with such a report is when it is delivered to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, which I understand has not yet happened. Of course I shall draw those representations to my right hon. Friend's attention; but, as it happens, he is answering questions next Wednesday, when the hon. Gentleman may have a chance to put them to him directly.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend use his good offices to encourage my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement before the Easter recess on the Government's proposals to enlarge the M25? The Leader of the House will no doubt be aware of the speculation in the newspapers that a Cabinet committee has taken a decision. As most of the road affected is in my constituency, I am sure that he will understand why I want the full facts in the public domain as quickly as possible.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may understand why I should not join in that speculation, not least because I am a member of the committee to which reference has apparently been made. I am sure that, should he have anything to announce on the matter, my right hon. Friend

[Mr. Newton]

the Secretary of State for Transport will seek to do so as quickly as possible and with due regard to the House's wishes.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on the Government's failure to generate the feel-good factor? Following the announcement by Northern Foods that it will close a factory in my constituency, with the loss of 320 jobs, will he arrange for the President of the Board of Trade to come the House next week and explain to my constituents why they should feel good about losing their jobs as a direct result of Government policy?

Mr. Newton: Changes take place in many industries. I would feel happier about giving the hon. Gentleman a more positive response were he to pay tribute to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and of many other Ministers, which, in recent years, have resulted in a steady flow to the country, not least to its northern part, of massive new investments in industry.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider arranging for a debate on local government spending? Has he read a report in today's *Daily Express* drawing attention to Labour-controlled York district council, which invited an army of graffiti artists into its town centre and equipped them with aerosol cans at a cost of £1,000? The graffiti artists went out of control and the police had to be called in. Council tax payers now face a £40,000 bill to clear up the mess. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if that is an example of the new Labour party, we should stick with the Conservatives?

Mr. Newton: I have not seen that story, but my hon. Friend's account is of something that appears quite astonishing. I hope that it will be considered not only by the local authority, but perhaps, if appropriate, by the district auditor.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I press the Leader of the House on the question from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who apparently implied that Northern Ireland Members may be receiving the same pay in here, but who left Northern Ireland nurses out of his question? If the Government accept the 3 per cent. increase, will an inquest be held into trusts that do not provide the extra 2 per cent. that the Government have been recommending, bearing in mind the fact that the pay of trust managers has increased significantly and that the nurses do the work?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's question, which I am sure was put with the best will in the world, implies some misunderstanding. The review body report contained the proposal for the move to local pay. I understand that a survey published only today by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts shows that the majority of trusts that have made their intentions known are offering nursing staff a pay rise of about 3 per cent.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. Friend has been successful in arranging debates on the planning system, notably the recent debate on the Select Committee on the Environment report on out-of-town shopping. Will he consider arranging a further debate on a specific subject—population experts' rather debatable assumptions about demographic growth and new housing need in the south and south-west? Those assumptions are causing great concern not only in Somerset, where 50,000 new houses are threatened in the next decade or so, but in many other constituencies where people do not want to see more slabs of the countryside concreted over?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that those views are widely shared, but, whatever dispute there may be about the statistics, there are pressures from increased population in some cases and from an increased number of families, due to various causes, in others. I cannot promise a debate, but my hon. Friend has already informally indicated to me—I hope that he will not mind my saying so—that he intends to engage in his usual practice of taking part in next Wednesday morning's debate. Should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker, and be able to do so, I will try to make sure that I have the briefing to give him an answer.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Twenty minutes ago, the Leader of the House complained to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) about the strain of questions. I confess that 155 of them are mine. They are all on the same subject—Lockerbie. As the Leader of the House knows, during Monday's business he has an ideal opportunity to announce the establishment of a Select Committee. If he cannot do that, could he go for a walk at the weekend in the Essex sunshine, in some beautiful spot in his county, and contemplate the conundrum of how on earth the Lord Advocate and the Crown Office are going to be made responsible to Parliament?

Mr. Newton: I did not intend any remarks that I made to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to be particularly a complaint, merely an observation that there has been a huge increase in the number of parliamentary questions, which has created difficulties for the House authorities as well, as you are aware, Madam Speaker. It was certainly not intended as a compliant, let alone a criticism of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

I have no doubt that every effort will be made to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions as best may be. He has already had an Adjournment debate, which was replied to by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary himself. I have written to the hon. Member for Linlithgow further following my reflection on his earlier remarks. I hope that he does not intend to imply any discourtesy. There is nothing much that I can add to that from the Dispatch Box this afternoon.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on planning so that I can convey to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the extreme frustration of the traders of Tewkesbury? They delivered a coffin to the Department of the Environment this afternoon to demonstrate that their town centre will die if he grants planning permission for a huge factory outlet outside the town.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will understand that, in the circumstances, I can only draw those representations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of

State for the Environment. My hon. Friend will know that those matters have been the subject of general debate on an estimates day in the past few weeks.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Will the Leader of the House prevail upon the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement to the House on the proposed introduction of the Meat Hygiene Service? I know that he deposited a statement in the Library yesterday arising out of what he called a "Final Industry Forum" on Monday this week. Since then, there has been a mass revolt among the members of the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers who say that they were not properly represented at that forum. To date, 160 out of 400 have expressed their dissent and by the end of this week I expect dissenters to be in a majority. There really is a crisis in the fresh meat industry and the Minister should come to the House to answer questions on that matter.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware that some of the relevant regulations have been prayed against and arrangements have been made for a debate in Standing Committee.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on polling, in particular so that we can evaluate the MORI poll in *The Times* last Friday which reported that research had shown that 62 per cent. of electors believe that any Labour Government would increase taxation drastically and that they further believe that the Labour party in national or local government always raises taxes, despite all the huffing and puffing that we heard in recent months?

Mr. Newton: As it happens, the business that I announced for next week includes two days on the Finance Bill, which would appear to provide some opportunity for my hon. Friend to make those important points.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 928?

[*That this House congratulates Linda McKenzie and Julie Rawnsley of the Allerton Outreach Team on their remarkable success in obtaining jobs for local people and in assessing their training needs; notes that since 6th February the team has placed 51 of the area's 500 unemployed people into paid work and 25 into training; further notes every unemployed person now costs the state £9,000 a year on average in benefits and lost tax payments; is dismayed that the Allerton Outreach Team, which has brought jobs and hope to a most deprived local community now embarking upon a long-term regeneration scheme, will be forced to close within weeks unless modest permanent funding is arranged; and urges the Secretary of State for the Environment to take the necessary action to safeguard the most important work being undertaken by the Allerton Outreach Team.*]

Will he arrange a debate on unemployment, which would allow me to urge Ministers to visit the Allerton Outreach team in my constituency and discuss with Linda McKenzie how she has been so successful in getting more than 50 people into full-time paid work in only seven weeks and another 25 into full-time training? It would be very helpful for Ministers. It would—one hopes—enable them to do the same for many other people throughout the country and to abandon their grudging and piecemeal policy towards funding that very important and successful project.

Mr. Newton: I have two points. I am not sure that the Opposition Front-Bench team would welcome a debate on unemployment since the one thing that they appear to wish never to mention is the considerable and continuing fall in unemployment in this country. On the specific point relating to the Allerton Outreach team, I am pleased that Bradford training and enterprise council has agreed to part fund a continuation of the work on the estate next year. It is now, as I understand it, for Bradford council to consider meeting any shortfall. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman may care to make his representations in that direction.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a discussion of devolution along the lines suggested by the Labour party? No doubt devolution would mean extra costs for all taxpayers. What really concerns me is that the dedicated group of nurses, about which we have heard so much today, as well as teachers, policemen and others, would have to pay 3p in the pound more tax just because they lived in Scotland than would members of that dedicated group of workers who lived south of the border.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Yes, let's have a debate.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) is also urging that we have a debate. I am increasingly tempted to arrange a debate, or possibly even to offer an Opposition day, provided that the hon. Lady undertakes to make it a day in which we are told the details of Opposition policy on devolution and regional government, education and taxation. I bet that she will not want it.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): The Leader of the House may be aware of the recent legal opinion sought by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the International Fund for Animal Welfare on the transportation of veal calves. It seems that with the new legal advice it is quite possible for the Government to ban that barbaric trade from this country to other parts of Europe. Will he ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement so that this matter may be cleared up quickly?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend is studying carefully the legal document issued by the RSPCA, to which the hon. Gentleman has just referred, which argues along the lines that he has described. Of course it needs to be considered alongside the other legal advice which my right hon. Friend has received.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Following on from my right hon. Friend's comments about the unwillingness of the Opposition to debate economic policy, is he aware that out of 12 Opposition day debates so far this year, not one has related to the management of the economy? Will my right hon. Friend give the Opposition Front-Bench team an opportunity to overcome that shyness and explain how they would control public expenditure, deal with taxation and achieve high levels of growth, falling unemployment and low inflation? May I warn him,

[Mr. James Clappison]

however, that in view of the feeble performance by the Opposition Front-Bench team in Treasury questions today, such a debate would not take very long?

Mr. Newton: I will of course look for such an opportunity in response to my hon. Friend's blandishments. I must make the observation, however, that providing an opportunity and ensuring that it is taken are two very different things.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will an early opportunity be provided to discuss a promise made five years ago by the then Home Secretary that the imprisonment of unconvicted 15 and 16-year-olds would be discontinued? It is essential to have that debate now, as three years ago 57 youngsters were in custody and today 220 are in custody. What has happened to that promise?

Mr. Newton: While I cannot promise a debate, I can certainly bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The hon. Gentleman may care to bear in mind the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend is due to answer questions on Thursday 20 April.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday, while announcing plans for a private prison in Nottinghamshire, the Home Secretary bragged and boasted that there were no longer any cases of three prisoners to a cell? Is he also aware that, on the same day, instructions were sent out from area managers to prison governors which effectively told them not only to return to putting three people in a cell, but that there was a need to put prisoners in television and recreation rooms and in workshops? Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate about the developing crisis in Her Majesty's prisons?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly Government policy to ensure that the prison service has the resources to provide accommodation for those whom the courts send to prison. That is why there has been a substantial increase in the number of places provided. However, I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will it fall to the Leader of the House, in his own right, to make a statement on conflict of interests? As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, at present the issue is the role of defence procurement Ministers. Would it be helpful if we had a clear statement of principles so that when the facts of a matter were not in dispute, the necessary action would follow?

Mr. Newton: I am not entirely clear precisely what the hon. Gentleman is referring to—unless this is a further attempt to raise questions about my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. However, the rules concerning people holding ministerial office at the time are all clearly set out in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", which under the present Government is published and available for the first time.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): May we have an urgent debate on Customs and Excise, which is part of the Treasury, so that we can be reassured that Ministers will encourage that service to investigate every suspect, without fear or favour, even if the suspect has been a Treasury Minister?

Mr. Newton: Clearly that is another attempt to reopen the same subject. If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence to suggest that those matters have not been properly investigated he should make it available and not make allegations by innuendo across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House make time available for a serious debate on the invasion of northern Iraq by Turkey, and the danger of an explosion in that whole area, with attacks on the Kurdish people not only by Iraq but by Turkey, and attacks by Iran on the Kurdish people within its frontiers? Such a serious debate would cover Britain's military involvement in the area through supplying intelligence information to the Turkish armed forces, and British arms sales to Turkey, Iran and Iraq in the past?

Mr. Newton: The right course is for me to bring those questions to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Has the Leader of the House seen the report in *The Guardian* today, headlined:

> "Mandarins censor damning report on County Hall sale"?

It would appear that the National Audit Office report is being censored by the Department of the Environment under its Permanent Secretary, Andrew Turnbull, who wants to take out the parts that show clearly that civil servants did not give Ministers the full evidence about the competing bids by the Shirayama hotel group and the London School of Economics. When the report is published next week, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement to be made in the House so that we can find out whether civil servants stitched up Ministers or whether Ministers stitched us up?

Mr. Newton: I understand that the report will be published next week, which means that it would be wrong for me to join in speculation about what it may say—even if, indeed, I were yet aware of its contents. However, talk of censorship is absolute nonsense. It is established procedure for NAO reports to be discussed and agreed with departmental officials. It is important to ensure that there is an accurate account of the facts for the Public Accounts Committee, and that is really what we are talking about.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Now that European Commissioner Neil Kinnock has announced that there is no European obstacle to banning the use of bull bars on vehicles, a safety measure desired by Members on both sides of the House, and now that it has been made clear by traffic laboratories all over Europe that bull bars cause 35 extra fatalities every year, and 350 additional serious accidents in this country, should we not debate that matter now to make sure that the accidents that are otherwise certain to take place will not happen? The Transport Research Laboratory has told us that if a child is hit by a vehicle with bull bars, even if it is travelling at only 12 mph, that child will almost certainly die.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps the most appropriate course for me in the circumstances is to make to the hon. Gentleman the point that I have made earlier to others, which is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to answer questions on Monday.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Instead of disappearing for another fortnight, should the House not use part of that time to deal with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? It could do so in a Committee of the whole House so that the Bill would no longer be blocked in the Committee queue. The remaining stages could then be dealt with. There is still a considerable distance between the Disability Discrimination Bill, which has been through the House, and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which is so widely supported in the House and outside, by organisations including the British Medical Association.

Mr. Newton: As I have told the hon. Gentleman on at least three or four occasions in recent weeks and I have to repeat today, I have no plans to change the normal arrangements for dealing with private Member's Bills. As for the rest, I simply note with pleasure that the Disability Discrimination Bill completed its Report stage and received its Third Reading in the House two nights ago. That is good news for disabled people. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am sure that the Leader of the House will have seen the reports that Tenovus, one of the best-known cancer research charities, which has its headquarters in Cardiff, has had to close its scratch card operations, which brought in half its £3 million annual income, which all went to fund its three cancer research centres? It has done so because of the competition from the national lottery scratch card game with top prizes ten times greater than the charity is able to offer. Does he agree that the national lottery's all-embracing expansion is getting to the stage at which it is almost like a Spanish trawler taking the whoppers and the tiddlers alike. Does he agree that we should consider the side-effects of the expansion of the national lottery in a debate on its effects on medical research and cancer research in particular?

Mr. Newton: I should make several points, albeit briefly. Obviously, I understand why the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter. Equally, everyone will share his regret at the decision of Tenovus to end its lottery. I understand that Camelot, the operators of the national lottery clearly say that there is no question that retailers were asked to stop selling tickets for other lotteries. The national lottery is raising large sums of money for many important purposes.

BILLS PRESENTED

Parliamentary elections

Mr. Jeff Rooker, supported by Mr. Austin Mitchell, Dr. Tony Wright, Ms Glenda Jackson, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Keith Hill, Mr. Mike Watson, Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Hugh Bayley and Mr. Graham Allen presented a Bill to amend the law relating to elections and political parties: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 93.]

Point of Order

4.22 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that yesterday the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) made a statement and that when you subsequently examined *Hansard* you made a ruling that he should withdraw that statement. In the "Yesterday in Parliament" programme this morning, the BBC broadcast his statement. Although it said that he subsequently apologised, it did not broadcast your ruling or the retraction. Will you consider contacting the BBC to say that if it is to broadcast the proceedings of the House it should make an accurate and unbiased broadcast and that it should have broadcast also your ruling and the subsequent retraction?

Madam Speaker: I normally hear the radio in the morning, but this morning I was busy on other things. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has brought it to my attention. May I see what I can do about that matter? If I have given a ruling on such an issue, it ought to be properly reported by whatever media are interested in making such a report. Thank you.

Contracting Out

4.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I beg to move,

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in relation to the Registration of Companies) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

The order is made under section 77(2) of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. It is the first use of this important power, which enables certain statutory functions to be discharged by contractors where at present they may be discharged only by public servants. That power was introduced as part of the Government's drive to ensure improvements in the quality and efficient delivery of public services. The Government's "competing for quality" programme has produced a sea change in the way in which such services are delivered, and has ensured two important matters—better value for money for the taxpayer, and higher standards for customers.

Companies House has been a part of that success story. Since it became a "next steps" agency in 1988, and achieved trading fund status in 1991, it has shown continuing improvements. However, it is worth making the point that the decision to move to agency status in 1988 was not without its critics. Not the least of those was Ron Webster, the chairman of the civil service unions at Companies House, who claimed that the real purpose of agency status was to fragment the service and to expose it to privatisation.

Interestingly, the move to trading fund status has also been recognised latterly as a success, although it is of some interest that, when the matter came to be debated in Committee, the Labour members of that Committee—the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Redcar (Ms Mowlam)—opposed that proposal.

It is worth underlining the fact that, since agency status and trading fund status were granted, improvements have taken place. In 1992, Companies House received its charter mark for excellence in the provision of public services. In 1988, it took 30 days for a document to be processed and made available to the public. It now takes less than five days.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Minister accept that, in the case of Companies House, one must be careful on any question of privatisation, because much of the information held there is extremely commercially sensitive, and the way that that is handled must be seen and felt by all concerned to be beyond reproach?

Mr. Evans: The issues turn not upon privatisation but upon contracting out certain services. The hon. Gentleman is wrong in terms of the function of Companies House, which exists not to keep information confidential but to disseminate information about directors of companies and about annual reports. The line that the hon. Gentleman has taken is some way wide of the mark.

I was speaking about the improvements that have been brought about as a result of changes which the Government have introduced, in the face of some opposition. The proportion of companies which meet their annual filing obligation has risen from 80 per cent. in 1988 to more than 90 per cent. this year. I consider that a significant achievement.

Companies House is now deservedly held in high regard by its users, but that was not always so. I happily pay tribute to the management and staff of the agency for the improvements they have achieved. However, like every organisation, Companies House must strive for continual improvement. The timely incorporation and dissolution of companies, the proper keeping of company records, and the pursuit, compliance and speedy and accurate dissemination of information are all essentials of our commercial system.

Hon. Members will be aware that it is our standard practice in Government to review the status of each agency periodically. The review of Companies House was undertaken to see how best we could build upon that record. The Government's decision following the review was announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 20 December. We concluded that the best way of achieving further improvements is through closer involvement of the private sector in the running of Companies House.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Have the Minister and his colleagues considered the bad effect of these changes on staff morale? I should have thought that that would be highly detrimental to the whole operation.

Mr. Evans: Since my appointment, I have had the opportunity of meeting the unions at Companies House—certainly before 20 December, when the President of the Board of Trade made the announcement. At that time, there was substantial concern about the prospect of "full contractorisation", as it was described, but the announcement, which is reflected in this order, does not go down that route at this time. In those circumstances, it is important to draw a distinction between the fears that have been whipped up and the proposals that are before the House today.

The business information industry is in the early stages of a major technological change, as microfiche is replaced by digital technology. We plan, therefore, to proceed on a progressive basis. Companies House will remain an executive agency and will work in partnership with the private sector to develop new technologies. At the same time, it will work through a programme of contracting out a number of areas, putting each out to tender to private providers. I envisage that about 270 jobs out of a total of 950 will have been transferred to the private sector by 1996. Just over 100 of those will be in Cardiff, and the rest will be mainly in London and Edinburgh.

The programme involves a number of statutory functions, which is why this order is necessary. They are presently carried out at Companies House in London, the satellite offices in Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester, Companies House in Edinburgh and, in the case of postal search, at Companies House in Cardiff.

In London and the satellite offices, the statutory functions are to provide facilities for inspecting company records and to receive documents for filing. The offices also undertake same-day incorporation and changes in company names. The Edinburgh office carries out the full range of Companies House functions in Scotland, including the recording and retention of company information. The fact that strategic decisions, including technical change, will continue to be managed from Cardiff makes it feasible to include the Edinburgh office in the programme at this time.

The order sets out the statutory functions that the contractor may be employed to carry out, but it is by no means the whole story. In the first place, under section 72 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, in all cases where statutory functions are contracted out, the registrar or the Secretary of State, as the case may be, remains legally responsible for anything that is done, or not done, in connection with that function.

I emphasise that contractorisation is a process of testing. Potential bidders will be required to demonstrate that they can offer and deliver better value for money than would be achieved if the activity were not contracted out. By value for money, I do not mean merely a lower price—it is essential that the contractor maintains, and where possible improves upon, present levels of service. Unless that can be demonstrated, contracting out will not go ahead.

Our intention is to make rapid progress with the programme and to have it completed by 1996. We expect to issue an information memorandum and to invite expressions of interest in respect of the contract for London and the satellite offices soon after the making of the order, with an invitation to tender following before the summer. Details of the contract for postal search and Edinburgh will follow later.

The information memorandum for the other non-statutory activities in Cardiff will be published during the spring and summer, and those activities include building management and cheque processing.

We believe that the contracting-out programme offers the best way of building on the excellent record of Companies House. The agency plays a crucial role in this country's commercial system. Our aim is to ensure that it operates as efficiently as possible and that, as taxpayers and users, we get the best value for money. I commend the order to the House.

4.33 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am grateful to the Minister for taking us through the order so quickly and promptly, and for making a number of points with which we would concur to some extent, and others that we want to consider.

The Minister mentioned the agency, trading status and the reduction from 30 days to five in the time necessary for processing a document. We would all accept that things have changed at Companies House during the past 10 years. Essentially, the industry was labour-intensive, and it has been harnessed to the information technology age. In 10 years, things have changed considerably, which has brought us to the present situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the specific matter of the morale of those who work in Companies House, and I shall deal with that in my structured and prepared speech. I remember a phrase by Pierre Mendès-France many years ago: that we cannot treat people as tools; they must be treated as individuals. In our debates in the House, we sometimes get carried away and forget that, ultimately, we are dealing with people. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East made that clear.

I was struck by the Minister's definition of the order. We have heard much during the past 15 years about privatisation. We have debated the question of partial or public privatisation, and we now have privatisation defined as "a closer involvement of the private sector in the running of Companies House". We are not entirely clear what that means. It turns out not to be full contractorisation at this time, although we might get there eventually by 1996. We might not get there, because, if the testing process does not work, we shall not have better value for money, and therefore privatisation will not go ahead.

Does that smack of firm government, decisiveness and belief in the projects of partial privatisation and contractorisation? Again, the Government are dithering. Their uncertainty will, however, satisfy Conservative Back Benchers. I often have to come to the House late on a Thursday night and make a great speech with the serried ranks behind me. Tonight, they are not as serried as they should be—indeed, they are fewer than normal.

But so little is Conservative Members' interest in privatisation and so exhausted have they become as a result of their 16 years in office that not a single member of the Government, who will soon be the Opposition, has bothered to come to discuss a matter that concerns Cardiff, Edinburgh—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and London.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Perhaps they have already been privatised.

Mr. Bell: Some of us may say that they have been vaporised rather than privatised.

The Minister told us that 270 jobs will be transferred from the public sector to the private sector, 100 of which will be in Cardiff. At the outset of what I called my "structured speech", I thank the Minister for being courteous enough to meet my hon. Friends and me to discuss this privatisation. He took us through the arguments, and said that he would consider the points that we made.

However, we know, as he knows, that he is not responsible for tonight's order, as it is the result of a long review. The review of the future of Companies House shows how the Government have unravelled themselves over the months and years, because their approach was never firm, set or determined. The review has been on-going since October 1992, the second phase was launched in May 1993, and the current phase started in July 1994.

A remarkable feature of the review is that our dynamic President of the Board of Trade dithered over the future of Companies House. Did he believe in privatisation or partial privatisation? Was he an optimist or a pessimist? Lord Healey told a story from this House which applies to the President of the Board of Trade. This dynamic man of action who goes on a pleasure cruise is trying to put up his deck chair. Is he facing the bow or the back of the boat? Is he an optimist or a pessimist? What does he believe in: full or partial privatisation? In the end, he cannot get the deck chair up.

So it is with the President of the Board of Trade—that mighty man, that great figure in the Conservative party. In his book "Where There's a Will", he vaunted how he had defended privatisation throughout the years of Labour

[Mr. Bell]

Government from 1974 to 1979, and how he fought tooth and nail to prevent nationalisation. He tells us how wonderful privatisation is, but what, ultimately, does he do? He comes to the House, through his Under-Secretary of State, and speaks of a contractorisation process that may or may not end in a successful contractorisation of Companies House by the year 1996.

We do know—and the Minister has confirmed it—that specific parts of the organisation have been selected for contractorisation, such as the whole of the Scottish companies registry, involving about 50 jobs. One may ask, with thousands of jobs lost here, 3,000 jobs lost there, jobs lost throughout the country with the aim of becoming competitive, why should we concern ourselves with 50 jobs in Scotland? In the London search room, about 50 jobs are involved. Why should we concern ourselves with the 150 jobs that will go from Companies House in Cardiff?

> "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

François Villon asked that question in the 15th century. Where are the major privatisations of the present Government? What has happened to the Government in 17 years, that their privatisation programme ends with the semi-contractorisation of Companies House?

The President of the Board of Trade wrote a chapter about privatisation in his fantasy novel, "Where There's a Will". It did not read as well as that of the Conservative Member who wrote a novel recently. I forget the name of her constituency, but she is well known to the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Derbyshire, South".] "Where there's a Will" certainly does not compare with the novel of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie).

Nevertheless, in that novel, the President of the Board of Trade vaunted privatisation; he promulgated it; he sang its praises; and at the end of the day, he privatises the London search room of Companies House. Opposition Members believe that this is a fag-end order of a fag-end Government.

The President wrote in his book:

> "The Tory philosophy must build upon the individual".

We are entitled to ask, which individual supported the contractorisation of services in Companies House? Where does the desire come from? *[Interruption.]* We know that it does not come from Companies House staff, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) says from a sedentary position, partially sotto voce and partly not. It does not come from the business community. The Institute of Credit Management, on behalf of its 8,000 members, made a strong representation to the management consultants who made their privatisation study. It wrote repeatedly to the President of the Board of Trade and to the predecessor of the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

The management consultants also canvassed the opinions of other organisations. They concluded that there was no significant user demand for privatisation of any type. So why have the Government proceeded? Why bother with a consultation exercise if the results are to be ignored and the Government are to ride roughshod over the wishes of the business community?

Opposition Members hear a great deal about how business is big; business is beautiful; it is all about capitalism; it is all about consumerism; it is all about setting businesses free; but when the business community shows no interest whatever in privatisation, full, partial or contractorisation, of Companies House, nevertheless that is what we get.

I hoped to hear from the Minister, but did not hear, that that is part of a deregulation drive. If he had had a motive for his order tonight and it was deregulation, we might at least have tried to understand that and ask for an explanation.

We know from the Government that theirs is only a paper drive to deregulation. The Government have made so little impact in their so-called deregulation that few people in the business community believe it. If they are strangled by red tape, they know who put the red tape around their necks. If they are bogged down in paperwork, they know who gave them the paperwork. I was going to say in my prepared speech that it was no use hon. Members shaking their heads in dissent, but none of them is there to shake his head in dissent.

I attended a dinner at which the President of the Board of Trade made a speech. He said that the Government had cut 3,500 regulations, only to find that they were duplicate regulations. Nothing had changed. One can cut 3,500 regulations from the statute book and make no progress in deregulation.

When the previous Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, the hon. Member for Honiton, whom I had hoped would be here tonight because he took a strong interest in the subject, was in the post presently occupied by the Minister, he brought to a Committee of the House two bookloads of consolidated regulations, most of them—*[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Gentleman like to intervene?

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It was Tatton, not Honiton.

Mr. Bell: I had misunderstood the hon. Gentleman. I thought that he said "tacky" rather than "Tatton". That is why I wanted him to give way, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), had two books of consolidated regulations, which he brought to Committee and which he freely admitted had been placed on the statute book by a Conservative Government from 1979. In many respects, the Government pay lip service to regulation. They work the numbers game. They hope that no one will notice that, although they cut a series of regulations, many were duplicates. None of that penetrates the psyche of our ordinary business man and woman.

So it is with the order, as I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East. Is it privatisation? Can anyone tell us whether the order before the House is a privatising order? Is it a deregulation order? Is it designed to cut paperwork? Is it designed to help companies who send their reports regularly to Companies House? Is it to do with competition? Are the Government saying that there will now be competition in paperwork; that firms can compete to supply the services? They are not saying that either.

What is the order? Is it simply a weak, limp gesture of a Government who are falling in upon themselves with their incompetence, their uncertainties, their lack of will and their lack of belief in themselves?

To return to the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East, the Government have done in that organisation what they have in so many others; they have spread uncertainty in Companies House. They have spread insecurity, doubt and unease. That is hardly the way in which to instil a feel-good factor into an essentially skilled work force.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Surely one of the things that worries all of us is that, with a civil servant, who is held responsible by straightforward rules of conduct, the state has some protection for important aspects of information which are held at Companies House, and which affect every person in the country. If, for any reason, that procedure becomes not only privatised but open to all types of problems with confidentiality, frankly, many people will not have as much confidence in the system.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the two arguments she makes. First, the protection of the civil servant is lost, because the Government are trying to move civil servants from that profession into the private sector.

Secondly, my hon. Friend argues that there is confidentiality in the system. We suppose that, when the Minister puts contracts out to tender, replies will come from large firms such as Dun and Bradstreet, which will have to defend that confidentiality. We are not sure whether there will be a conflict of interest, let alone whether the confidentiality to which my hon. Friend referred will be protected.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Simply for the sake of the record, will the hon. Gentleman tell us what confidential functions he has in mind?

Mr. Bell: Most people know that a great deal of information that is passed to Companies House is of a confidential nature. The Minister has read the briefings on the subject that others have read. Although we agree that we want a great deal of transparency in the system, nevertheless certain information is treated on a confidential basis. I should be glad, in the terms of a Minister of the Crown, to refer that to my civil service, and give a proper answer in writing when the time comes.

The Government long ago abandoned the unskilled workers in our free market economy. What they are now doing, up and down the country, is abandoning the skilled workers as well, such as those at Companies House. Those workers carry, if not the mark of Cain upon their brow, certainly in their pockets the mark of the short-term contract.

When the Government talk about a feel-good factor, they should realise that they will never achieve it while skilled workers up and down the country are on short-term contracts, with the insecurity that that breeds in them. I imagine that that sense of insecurity—which has now been instilled in Companies House, as it has throughout the rest of the country—will come back to haunt the Government the closer we come to an early general election.

I mentioned the search room at the London end of Companies House. Its future and fate have, rightly, long exercised my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He wrote a letter to the President of the Board of Trade on 21 December 1994, after the announcement on the future of Companies House had been made in response to a written parliamentary question. He said:

> "It is not only the potential loss of job that matters, important though that issue is in an area of very high unemployment.
>
> It is the loss of the first rate service which is provided at the moment by Companies House.
>
> There is no guarantee that the level of service provided, especially to companies based in the City, will be maintained.
>
> Indeed there is every likelihood that under contracting out, the drive will constantly be to provide a basic service and nothing else."

It would be useful if the Under-Secretary of State would tell the House that the services will not decline through contractorisation. It would be useful if he could tell the House now that he intends to keep the organisation as it is and where it is. It would be useful if he could tell the House now that it is not his intention to reduce the London office to a deposit-only facility. Those are genuine questions asked by a Member of Parliament on behalf of his constituents, and demanded by the Opposition to reassure those who will be contractorised.

Whatever the ideological and doctrinaire basis for privatisation, it can hardly be extended to Companies House. My hon. Friends and I, and those who are following the debate, know that it is an enforcing body. It has the power to fine defaulters and to operate discretionary powers on behalf of the Secretary of State. I believe that the Minister touched on that in his opening statement. When the contractorisation is completed, Companies House will always be more of an arm of Government than a private enterprise. As Companies House has a monopoly over the collection and supply of certain sorts of company information, it is appropriate that it should remain in the public sector.

The Government are trying to create another private monopoly—not on the same scale as British Gas or electricity or water. The Government are trying to create, between now and 1996, a private monopoly or series of private monopolies out of a public monopoly. I have some sympathy with the Minister, who has had to come to the House today with the order. He has climbed the giddy heights of ministerial office in a short time.

As Longfellow wrote:

> "The heights by great men reached and kept
> Were not attained by sudden flight".

But the Minister has moved fast. However, having reached ministerial office, he must face the precipice of a defeat at the next general election.

When the Minister retires—I am not talking about his seat, but his post at the Dispatch Box—in the none too distant future, he may open his Red Box for the last time, put his hand on his heart and ask himself what he has done in his years in Parliament, and how he will be remembered as a Minister of the Crown. He may ask himself what he will say to the grandchild on his knee who wants to know what his grandfather did, not in the great war, but in the House of Commons, in Parliament and in a Tory Government. He will be able to say, truthfully and candidly "I contracted out the services of Companies House." What an epitaph that is.

It is by the small things in life that we know others. As the Bible states:

> "By their fruits ye shall know them".

[Mr. Bell]

But it is by the small things that the Government give themselves away. The order is the epitaph of a Government who have not so much lost their way, not so much misled the public, are not so much riddled with incompetency, as failed on their own privatisation front.

The Government of the day—a Conservative Government elected in 1979 on a privatisation programme reinforced in 1983—have come to the House with an order on Companies House that talks not of full privatisation or partial privatisation, but of contractorisation on a trial period. The Government have ended up privatising the search room of Companies House in City road, and the Scottish companies registry. What better epitaph could we want for such a Government?

4.55 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I pay tribute to the efforts of the staff of Companies House, who, for 18 months and two years, have campaigned unceasingly against the threat to their jobs and to the services that they provide. It is not only the staff and the Opposition who have opposed the privatisation measures. Is it not true that the Government's own advisers told Ministers that contracting out would be expensive and was not wanted, and that there was concern about supplying documents to the private sector contractor?

Can the Minister quote one unequivocal argument from the SRU report in favour of contracting out? The taxpayer has spent £283,000 for the advice, yet it is to be ignored. Is that the value for money that the contracting-out process is supposed to bring?

The customers of the services provided by Companies House have been almost unanimous in their support for Companies House remaining in the public sector and against the creeping process of privatisation. The SRU report—the Government's own report—states:

> "There is concern . . . about supplying documents to a private sector contractor, rather than to civil servants. This audience values the civil service virtues of impartiality, reliability and public service . . . Overall, large users' attitudes to contractorisation were that the case for making this change was not obvious".

Perhaps even more damning was the comment:

> "the overwhelming majority of those to whom we have spoken, as of those who have written to us, have a very positive view of what Companies House now does: they regard Companies House as providing an essential service efficiently and at modest cost and incomparably better than it provided a few years ago".

If that is the view of the people who use the services of Companies House, what is the purpose of altering and tinkering with the excellent service with which the business community is happy?

The argument, if there is an argument, must be on a value-for-money claim—that somehow we can obtain better value for money. The Government claim that value for money will be the deciding factor—the Under-Secretary made that claim earlier today. But does the Minister not agree that contractorisation will increase costs, because of the extra monitoring that has to be done to ensure that contractors do what they are supposed to do?

There are other add-on costs. New and elaborate procedures will have to be set in place at the interfaces between the contracted functions and those which are retained within the public sector.

For example, can the Minister tell the House the cost of the enhanced audit procedures which will be needed if remittance processing work is ultimately contracted out? Will incidental monitoring costs and those at interfaces be included in the Minister's value-for-money calculation, or will they be conveniently overlooked—in the same way as the consultancy costs of more than £250,000 have apparently been overlooked?

Companies House has earned the support of its customers because of its willingness to meet changing needs. That willingness for advancement continues, as the Minister has admitted already. Will not contracting out inhibit the changes and the innovations which are currently occurring?

How will the Minister proceed if a contractor cannot or will not agree to changes during the life of the contract? Will the Minister pay off the contractor and waste even more public money, or will he offer short-term contracts and bring in contractors who lack both loyalty and dedication—thus endangering the dedication and the loyalty of the staff who currently work within the public sector but who are now possibly expected to work for short-term contracts? Such questions understandably worry the customers of Companies House. If the Minister is concerned about those matters, he will withdraw the order this evening.

The overwhelming result of the Government's review of Companies House was a clear endorsement of the efficient, accountable and innovative work of its staff. The private consultancy firm SRU Ltd. found that there was no customer demand for wholesale privatisation—indeed, the business consumers of the services were very vocal in opposing any change. I believe that wholesale privatisation would have been carried out before now—the desire was there—had it not been for the tremendous effort on the part of the staff in campaigning and gaining support for their work.

Furthermore, wholesale privatisation would have required primary legislation, and it would have involved protracted debate in the House and in another place. During that debate, it would have become increasingly clear that the business community did not support the Government's policies, and that the Government majority could not be guaranteed in this place. Instead of an open and honest privatisation measure, we have a back-door, creeping privatisation in the form of contractorisation.

The order allows for the piecemeal contracting out of the services, and will involve about 30 per cent. of staff in Edinburgh, London and Cardiff. Why are the Government pursuing that policy when we have demonstrated that there is no demand for it? Twelve months ago, the President of the Board of Trade—the Minister's boss—promised to sweep out civil service jobs in an orgy of privatisation. In the Post Office, and in agencies such as Companies House, he has faced defeat. The case for the privatisation revolution has been tested and it has been found wanting, not least by the lack of public support throughout the country.

Tonight's order is not about efficiency or value for money; it is simply a face-saving device for the President of the Board of Trade, who has his eyes fixed upon the leadership of his party. The Opposition have no intention of saving the face of the President of the Board of Trade.

5.4 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I must probe briefly the question of in-house bids. Why will the Minister not allow in-house bids for any of the services that are to be contracted out? As the Minister knows, Companies House previously made an in-house bid for a contracted service—the directors register—which it won. In those circumstances, it is all the more surprising that the Minister has decreed that there will be no in-house bids for contracts under the order unless the staff who make the bids resign from the civil service if their bids are successful.

That seems to confirm the idea that the Government are preoccupied with reducing the number of people employed in the civil service. Ministers have made it clear that this measure is to be just the first part of progressive contractorisation. Is there not a risk that bids from outside will be artificially low and will be used as loss leaders by companies which have designs on getting other work in the future? If the Government were to accept unnecessarily low bids, the idea of a level playing field would be lost, as would any true value for money.

Relatively few companies which are involved in this sort of work could, on the basis of their existing activities, bid for the functions that will be covered by the order. Therefore, there seems to be an inherent danger of creating a private sector monopoly if the contract goes to any of the current leaders in the field.

Will the Minister reconsider his decision not to allow in-house bids for the services, or will he confirm that one of the main objectives of the process is to reduce the number of people employed in the civil service? Is he not concerned about the real risk of creating a private sector monopoly?

If he does not envisage the existing market leaders as the most likely bidders for the contract—taking up the point that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) made—how does he expect the technological advances, which have proved so successful in the recent past, to continue into the future? If contracts are short-term, how will high-quality service, to which several hon. Members have referred, be retained? Those questions must be answered, and it will be interesting to hear how the Minister will respond to them.

5.7 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I intend to concentrate my remarks on the Scottish registry. Edinburgh is obviously a very important city in Scotland, particularly as a financial and commercial centre, together with Glasgow and other cities. The Scottish registry in Edinburgh employs 46 staff, and it performs, in microcosm, all the functions of its larger counterpart for England and Wales. If the Scottish registry is contracted out successfully, we believe that the Government will use that experience as a testbed for contracting out or privatising all Companies House services at a later date.

Furthermore, the functions of the Scottish registry include discretionary powers which are presently held by the Secretary of State and relate to special dispensations—for example, allowing delays in the delivery of company accounts. The laws of Scotland are different from those of England and Wales, so the order will have a particular effect in Scotland.

The customers of the Scottish registry are overwhelmingly opposed to its transfer into public hands. Across all four user categories in Scotland, there appears to be a great uniformity of view. In summary, the view is sceptical—much as it is south of the border. Users' arguments against the contractor-run system in the illustrative proposition also fall along similar lines.

The arguments are as follows:

> "very impressed with CH progress over the last few years";
>
> "little scope seen for a private sector contractor to make further improvements";
>
> "much scope for someone ignorant of the business to make it worse; concern about the excessive rigor in the enforcement of civil penalties, and more widely about the substitution of commercial interests in cutting corners for civil service impartiality and objectivity; concern about the loss of direct customer access to the Registrar for Scotland in Scotland, and about the Registrar's potential loss of the pool of expertise he draws on among senior staff on the interpretation of the Companies Acts, notably in relation to the registrability of charges (the question was raised of whether the boundary between the public sector and the contractor could be moved to leave such expertise with the Registrar); strong belief that individual access should continue to be available as a matter of statutory right through a search room, in Scotland, to current standards; a strong belief that the issues of conclusive certificates (eg Certificates of Incorporation, Change of Name, Re-registration and Registration of Charges), the pursuit of compliance targets and ensuring that information is available to the public on request at all times should be the responsibility of a public official."

Those are the views of the customers of the organisation.

If the order is approved, it is likely that the regulation and the overseeing of corporate affairs in Scotland will be by a English facilities and management company, as there are no Scottish companies in the requisite field, according to my advisers. Companies will probably tender for the Scottish operation with an eye on the ball to take over the whole scheme at a later date.

Once again, Scotland is being used for an experiment, as we were with the poll tax. Here, we are being used in a political experiment, for a practice run before London and Cardiff, and we do not like it.

We know that the Government have abandoned the electorate north of the border, but the wishes of the companies, the firms, the business and the commercial interests in Scotland are another matter. I ask the Government to reconsider their attitude totally.

The measure also means that the key discretionary powers, including the timing of the delivery of company accounts, will be put in the hands of the private sector. Have the Government failed to learn the lessons of Maxwell and Blue Arrow? If the private sector cannot be trusted properly to regulate itself, how can the Minister propose allowing a successful bidder for the Scottish registry to regulate the affairs of other companies? Has the Minister never heard of a conflict of interest, or does propriety in business affairs no longer matter?

Finally, I ask the Minister to tell his future grandchild, "I was the man who had the courage to withdraw the order," bearing in mind the argument that was put up not just by Opposition Members, but by the whole of society, including the City of London. He should stop it on that basis and prevent the potential corruption of corporate regulations, particularly in Scotland.

5.13 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall be brief, but I want to pick up a couple of points that were raised by my

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

hon. Friends. They concern the support for the proposal outside, and the costs and benefits involved. The whole exercise is ideologically driven. If we look at it objectively, it does not stand up.

Last week, the Minister circulated to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who chairs the deregulation committee, this report by the Anglo-German Deregulation Group. It sets out a checklist of questions that need to be taken into account if a Government want to deregulate something. I shall mention just a few of them. The report asks:

> "Why is the legislation necessary? Is the legislation justified? . . . What are the economic costs and benefits? . . . What are the proposal's effects on business? . . . Which organisations have been consulted and what are their views?"

The British Government have put their hand to the document, but, if we substitute contracting out for deregulation, there are already many unanswered questions. I apply the last one:

> "Which organisations have been consulted and what are their views?"

to the proposal to contract out the services of Companies House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) mentioned the report that the DTI commissioned from SRU, which states very clearly that there is absolutely no support for what the Government are proposing. The Minister shakes his head, but let me refer directly to the summary of the report.

The consultants commissioned by the Government say:

> "We have taken soundings from over 150 organisations on Government proposals".

I should like to know how many of those 150 organisations support the proposal and how many are against it. The report states that there

> "is no significant user demand for such a move. Presenters and searchers are sceptical about possible gains and are concerned about the possible degradation of a vital public service."

The report continues:

> "Market concerns about value for money focus on quality standards . . . not cost. "

We heard earlier that, in the past five or six years, Companies House has turned the position around and is producing a gold-plated service that people value.

Finally, the consultants say:

> "The process of contracting out would be expensive and complex."

When the Minister replies to the debate, will he tell us what are the costs and what are the benefits that are flagged up in the document that he circulated to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight and myself only a few days ago?

5.17 pm

Mr. Bell: With the leave of the House, I am grateful for the opportunity to add to my earlier comments. The Minister asked me what confidential matters were covered by Companies House and, through my own civil service, I am able to advise him that they concerned enforcement.

I was glad to see the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, in his place earlier, as Companies House is in his constituency. I was sorry that he could not stay for the full debate and listened for only five minutes, but I am sure that he will read it all with great interest in *Hansard* tomorrow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) talked about value for money. He is perfectly right to say that, if one were to accept the Government's criteria for value for money, we would accept that, over the years, and certainly now, value for money is, has been and will be given by Companies House.

As the Minister said in his opening remarks, because of the changes made at Companies House, the agency and training arrangements were and have been independent of the Treasury for some time. It was a successful arrangement, which was helpful to all. Everyone knew where they were, and had a sense of security. Only since the reviews has the sense of security disappeared.

In a speech that was cogent and to the point the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) mentioned the in-house bid for a contracted service. He was right to do that, because in the past there has been a bid for a contracted service—the directors register. The in-house work force bid successfully for that. I understand that the Minister—he may contradict me or confirm this—is prepared to accept in-house bids on contracts under the order, but wishes the staff who are part of the bid to withdraw or resign from the civil service. That is a significant point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred to the protection of the civil service. There is a contradiction in trying to privatise a private function such as Companies House. It is run by civil servants and will be taken out, through contractorisation, into the private sector. Yet an in-house bid cannot, according to the Government, be allowed, because the staff would still be civil servants. The Minister might wish to take that into account when he reviews the process of tendering.

The debate may end a little earlier, and our right hon. and hon. Friends are waiting with bated breath in the Corridors of the House to rush in and vote on this significant—from the Government's point of view—measure. I see that the Government Whip has arrived to marshal the troops.

The arguments against the order may be summarised as follows. Contracting out runs contrary to the advice by the Government's own consultants. I made that point in my earlier remarks. Those consultants were engaged to reflect the views of users and customers, and users and customers were satisfied with the service. There was no grass roots demand for a contracting out, a privatisation, partial or public. Contracting out is a costly exercise, with public money being spent on monitoring the contracts and setting up new procedures at the interface, with functions kept within the public sector.

A view was expressed that contracting out will introduce the profit motive into what is essentially a public service. Indeed, the Minister spoke earlier of value for money. As a result of the profit motive, functions may not be carried out even-handedly or with adequate concern for the public good, which will lead to job losses and poorer service for customers, and will have an adverse effect on business confidence.

In all the privatisations of public sector monopolies, there has never been a proper accompanying regulation. The process of privatisation creates more problems on regulation than the actual privatisation. In privatising gas, electricity and water, no one foresaw the difficulties and the problems. The Labour party's submission is that this order, this contractorisation, this step to partial or full privatisation between now and 1996, will be extremely difficult for the Government to regulate, or even for them to have it regulated within the framework of their own Acts of Parliament.

The Minister said earlier that the discretionary powers of the Secretary of State, which are laid down in statute in the House, will continue whether Companies House is in the private or the public sector. How does one regulate or supervise such a privatisation or contractorisation?

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) made a bold point: the Minister should stand at the Dispatch Box and create history by saying to the House, "I am so convinced by the arguments of the Opposition that I am withdrawing this order and we are not going ahead. We will take into account the views and anxieties that have been expressed and the concerns of the work force." I do not believe that he will do that. I have a sixth sense that that will not happen.

The Minister will have to direct his constructive mind—I speak as a fellow member of his profession—and think carefully about how the contractorisation will take place and about the arguments that the Opposition have made. If he did that, in the spirit of democracy, something constructive might come out of the debate.

5.24 pm

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I am glad that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) made reference to the presence in the House of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, who has been in touch with me in relation to this issue during the time that the matter has been under consideration.

While listening to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, it was difficult to know exactly where he stood. He began by criticising the Government for not going further. In a way, I rather thought that we would have had an easier ride from the Opposition if the proposal today had been for full privatisation of all the functions at Companies House. That would truly be a face of new Labour.

The hon. Gentleman referred to this as a fag-end order. It was difficult to understand why he referred to matters in that way, until I had the opportunity to see a letter that has come from the trade unions at Companies House and was sent to all Labour Members. It invites people to write to the President of the Board of Trade, concerning this issue. It has an interesting last paragraph:

> "If you are writing to a Labour MP, insert the following paragraph. Can you stress the importance of this matter to the Labour Trade and Industry team?"

That seems to indicate that in spite of the fact that most of the Labour trade and industry team are sponsored by trade unions. In relation to this order, they could not work up much enthusiasm. That is clear from the remarks of the hon. Gentleman.

What were the hon. Gentleman's complaints? He complained about confidentiality, and tried to suggest that there are dark and secret papers, all held at Companies House, which some wicked contractor is going to put out into the public domain. The fact is that, even after taking advice, the best he was able to come up with is that somebody might be writing to Companies House to explain why they were late filing papers. That was the best he could put before us in terms of the confidential information that he says might go into the public domain if we were to proceed with the order.

After a time, the hon. Gentleman gave up altogether, perhaps because he recognised that both agency and trading fund status were opposed at the time that the Government introduced them, but that they have contributed to improving delivery of services at Companies House. The excellent performance of Companies House has been brought about as a result of reviews and changes that the Government have made in the face of opposition from Labour Members. The hon. Gentleman did not want to talk about Companies House at all then, but got into a diatribe about how the Government have not done enough on deregulation.

The hon. Gentleman offered to be the champion of small business and to help the Government in deregulating. He will know that I have a special responsibility for deregulation. I will note carefully his remarks in that regard in *Hansard*, and will certainly be looking to his support when the Government introduce a whole range of changes—as we intend to do—to alleviate the burdens on small business. Bearing in mind his strong remarks today, we shall be looking for support from Opposition Members. While, privately, it is possible that the hon. Gentleman would be supportive, I am not so sure that the same could be said of those who sit on the Benches behind him.

We heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), who was rather more bullish in his condemnation of the Government. He had taken a line from the same union hymn sheet. We know how inaccurate the trade unions in Companies House have been in the information that they have put into the public domain.

I had to deal in January with an allegation that the Government were sitting on a confidential report that had been leaked to the *Western Mail*, until we were able to point out to the *Western Mail* that the SRU report was in the public domain, had been in the House of Commons Library since December, and was in the public libraries in Wales as well.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Talking of trade union accuracy, when I wrote to the Minister asking how much the SRU report had cost, I was told that it had cost £189,000. Two weeks later, I received a letter saying, "Sorry, we made a mistake: it cost £100,000 more than that." There are other areas where we can look for inaccuracy.

Mr. Evans: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to take advantage of this opportunity to congratulate the Government on putting that information in the public domain.

The order reflects the Government's response to the SRU report. Much of what Opposition Members have said relates to a question with which we are not dealing. We have heard some quotations, but the report states:

> "We have taken soundings from . . . 150 organisations on Government proposals"—

let me stress this to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice)—

> "to contract out most Companies House . . . functions".

The order does not do that.

[Mr. Evans]

The statement by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 20 December reflected the report, and particularly a part of it from which no Opposition Member has quoted. Paragraph 6.9, on page 32, makes it clear that user preference was for Companies House to remain a public agency, but that that should include the right to contract out operations

> "that CH management consider can be better undertaken by specialist contractors."

That provision appears in the report itself, and it is the provision to which the Government are giving effect in the order. I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 139.

Division No. 122] **[5.31 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Timothy Wood and
Derek Conway.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D N
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian

Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stevenson, George
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in relation to the Registration of Companies) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

Local Government Finance

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I beg to move,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 13) (House of Commons Paper No. 286), which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.

The report sets out the proposed allocation of the special transitional grant to local authorities in England for the next financial year for expenditure on community care services. It also describes the main features of the grant and the conditions that the Government intend to attach to its use.

It is two years since the introduction of the community care reforms, which allow people to receive better-targeted care to meet their needs. Under the old system of community care, before the introduction of the reforms, people who asked their local authority for help would be fitted into a system of predetermined service provision.

We have turned all that around by requiring social services to assess an individual's needs and then to decide what service to provide. It is a complete change of perspective, putting the client first, changing from a ready-to-wear to a tailor-made approach. It is the right policy. It has been universally recognised as such. It is popular with local authorities that implement it and with the many individuals who benefit from it.

The improvements brought about by the community care reforms have been clearly recognised. Last December, the Audit Commission published its second report, called "Taking Stock: Progress with Community Care", on the implementation of the reforms. It says that authorities have become more sensitive to their populations' needs. They are promoting flexibility and exploring new options for service provision—new ways of doing things to make services more appropriate to the needs of the people whom they serve. We shall shortly publish our latest monitoring report, which shows the same picture—services that more accurately reflect the needs of users, more support for carers and innovative approaches to care provision.

Of course there is still more work to be done. We have always said that it would take some time for the full benefits of the community care reforms to show through. Such a radical sea change from service-led to user-led care cannot happen overnight. Both the Audit Commission's report and our monitoring report highlight sectors where further development is necessary. We shall be launching a community care development programme, which will take that important policy forward.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I sincerely thank my hon. Friend for seeing the Isle of Wight delegation not once but twice to discuss care in the community. Will he confirm that the development order provides the opportunity for the Isle of Wight's particular needs to be considered?

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to the way in which he has presented his constituents' case and carefully considered the allocation of resources for the Isle of Wight last year and for the coming year. I give him the undertaking that I gave to the delegation who accompanied him. If they will put their

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minds to finding new ways of considering the allocation of resources, and to new points about the identification of the island's particular needs, I should be more than happy to consider them, where they fall within my orbit, and to pass them on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, where they relate to his Department.

I pay tribute not only to the points raised by my hon. Friend but to what he has achieved in terms of the fire service allocations, which have been at the root of a number of the social service problems perceived in that island. Given the increase in resources this year, that gives the island's social services leadership the opportunity to bring, if it wishes, better financial control to the island's social services budgets, so that it can provide good services for all the people of the island.

Mr. Field: Would my hon. Friend be pleased to hear that, as a result of his comments, Isle of Wight county council has decided to spend up to its standard spending assessment for care in the community and social services?

Mr. Bowis: I am delighted to hear what my hon. Friend says about the island. It is a matter of record that, although the island's current political leadership has been complaining about the resources allocated by central Government for the island's social services, the budgets that it has produced have not required all those resources. Let me add that, in 1990-91, the Isle of Wight personal social services budget was £8.4 million; in the coming year, it will be £17.4 million, a substantial increase in anyone's mathematical book.

It is also our intention to give disabled people greater independence by the provision of direct cash payments in lieu of services, an exciting and far-sighted policy which has been unanimously welcomed. We shall be working out the necessary proposals.

The special grant report gives the amount of special transitional grant for each English local authority for 1995-96. The total amount of the grant is £647.6 million, a very substantial sum. The grant for 1995-96 is the third tranche of money that the Government have provided for local authorities' new community care responsibilities. That money is intended to cover the estimated costs of care of those people who, under the previous funding system, would have entered non-local authority residential care, funded by Department of Social Security benefits; but it is more than that—in 1995-96, it is £170 million more than that, or £170 million more than the DSS would have spent under the previous arrangements.

Thus, the Government have amply fulfilled their promise to fund community care fairly. In 1995-96, the total provision for local authorities' new responsibilities will be £1.8 billion. That is 44 per cent. higher than in the current year. It is a very large sum of money, but it is still only a small portion of the Government's total provision for community care, which will be a massive £5.1 billion, representing a 12 per cent. increase over the current year. That is on top of other generous increases throughout the decade. Since 1990-91, the funding that the Government have provided for community care services has more than doubled. These are impressive statistics indeed.

Yet some authorities appear to believe that the only money that the Government have provided for community care is the special transitional grant. To them I have to say that is nonsense. Local authorities have had community care responsibilities, and funding for those responsibilities, for very many years, long before 1993. Community care was not invented on 1 April 1993; that is when it was reformed. All the part III accommodation, the council meals and home support services, all the council respite and day care services were and remain social service community care responsibilities.

Beyond the ring-fenced element of the STG, it is, of course, up to local authorities to decide how much of their general funding they spend on community care, but they must not pretend that the provision that we have made for their new responsibilities is intended to cover all their responsibilities. One has to consider all the available resources and deploy them, and redeploy them if necessary, to cope with the demands on the service. It is, therefore, quite extraordinary for authorities to claim that they have run out of money for community care services. As I said, the total amount available exceeds £5.1 billion. That is what authorities should be focusing on.

The special grant report also sets out the conditions of payment of the special transitional grant. For 1995-96, as for the previous two years, we have required local authorities to reach agreements with their health authorities on hospital discharge procedures and on their respective responsibilities for long-term care. All local authorities have done so.

We have stressed that effective collaboration between health and local authorities is a necessary element in the success of community care. Our recent guidance entitled "NHS Responsibilities for Meeting Continuing Health Care Needs" reinforces that and the fact that the NHS is required to provide cradle-to-grave health care.

We have made it clear that health authorities must arrange and fund a full range of services to meet continuing health care needs. The NHS executive will actively ensure that the guidance is followed. That will be as welcome to local government as it is to the health services themselves and, indeed, to representatives of users of the service and carers.

We are also again using the grant to support the mixed economy of care by retaining the condition that requires local authorities to spend at least 85 per cent. of the social security transfer element of the STG in the independent sector. That gives stability and security to the residents of that sector and time for the independent sector to consider diversification if it wishes.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Will the Minister confirm that it is still Government policy to have a mixed economy of care? If it is, will he explain why his colleagues at the Department of the Environment, in their consultation document on the deregulation of local government which is the subject of consultation, propose that the statutory duty for the provision of part III accommodation for the care of the elderly should be removed and that it should no longer be a legal duty of councils to provide their own care homes? That seems to be a move away from a mixed economy of care.

Mr. Bowis: That is a debate for another day, but the hon. Gentleman does not make a fair point. We are looking for good-quality care at a reasonable price, irrespective of which sector it may come from. If local authorities believe that all their needs can be met in one or more of those sectors, the hon. Gentleman should not oppose that. If one can get better-quality care at a better price from the independent sector, the only person who could conceivably object would be an idealogue. I am not suggesting that the hon. Gentleman is an idealogue, but I am suggesting that, occasionally, some of his colleagues in local government are.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Minister should bear in mind the fact that many people make a positive choice to enter local authority care homes. In Wakefield, for example, each of the major estates has had a care home built since the last war. Many people who have lived in those communities choose to enter those care homes. My concern is that the Government are removing choice. "Choice" must surely mean the ability to select good-quality public sector care. Does the Minister put a price on that choice? It appears so.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the issue. The people to whom he referred are not choosing a home on the basis of whether it is managed by the council or by the voluntary or private sectors; they are saying that they should like to go into a particular home. Many authorities are finding that those homes can offer better-quality care if the management of those homes is put out to tender. That is perfectly fair.

The hon. Gentleman let the cat out of the bag by saying that people should be able to make a positive choice. People can have a positive choice only if they have a real and informed choice. That is not the case in many parts of the country. If people are given a choice at all, it is whether they would like to go into this council home or that council home. That is not a real choice. We believe that a range of options should be placed before the individual along with information about residential care, if that is what is deemed appropriate. The individual should then have a choice of home, irrespective of which sector it is in.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I do not want to pursue the matter for too long, but it is important to place on record our concern about the fact that the Government constantly say that private sector provision is cheaper. Has the Minister examined why that is so in some instances? Has he, for example, considered public sector investment in the training of many care staff who are subsequently recruited by the private sector? If we are to be able to compare like with like, the private sector should take the training of care and social work staff as seriously as the public sector. Would not the situation then be rather different?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is, in fact, further making my case. Backgrounds costs such as training, solicitors' fees and other costs are exactly the costs that are often omitted from the notional price of the council or state sector. They are often not incorporated in the price when the comparison is made. In the independent private or voluntary sector, all the costs of training and managing those homes have to be incorporated in the price which people pay. The hon. Gentleman may think that price is insignificant. He may say that it is not important. Indeed, it is not the only factor. Quality and price matter, and one looks for both.

When I was in Lancashire last week, it was put to me that using council-run residential homes rather than homes in the independent sector cost £93 per person a week more. There was a comparable price difference between using the independent sector and council-run domiciliary services. If those figures were added up—I cannot vouch for the figures, but I put them to the leader of Lancashire council and the chairman of social services and they did not in any way deny them—they could result in savings to Lancashire county council of some £15 million. The council could extend services to people in need with that £15 million. What is it doing? It is removing services from people who need home help and other services in their homes and blaming that on its lack of resources. The resources are there. The efficient use of resources is not.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): As my hon. Friend mentioned, a number of former council homes are now run by other organisations and are thus classified as being in the independent sector, under the terms that he has been discussing. Has he received representations from organisations representing private homes that complain that some local authorities tend to give preference to those former council homes at the expense of private homes, despite the fact that the quality may be inferior and the fees charged are often considerably higher? It is not a level playing field for all those in the so-called independent sector. Is my hon. Friend taking steps to put that matter right?

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have certainly had representations on exactly those points from hon. Members from all parties on behalf of many care home managers and owners. They are complaining that, in many cases, there is not a level playing field. They feel that, too often, contracts are placed for ideological reasons and that they are far too cosy for their previous owners and runners in the council sector for comfort and for justice to be seen to be done.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bowis: I shall in a second. I recall one case in respite care in which those who went to former council homes in a trust and therefore technically in the voluntary sector were paying some £375 a week for a service which, had they gone to private sector homes—which are probably more comfortable and certainly just as good—would have cost £300 a week. Again, it is a question not of inferior quality but of good quality at a lower price which means more resources are available for other people.

Mr. Allason: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the extraordinary disparity in Devon? It is not unusual for a local authority home there to offer a more expensive service, thereby incurring far more expenditure, yet, curiously enough, it does not reach the standard set by the private sector. What really irks the private sector is that the local authority is responsible for registration, supervision and the setting of standards which come nowhere near the standards already set in the private sector.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Our overall review on inspection this year will certainly want to look very carefully at the way in which the public sector is inspected. We require it be inspected to the same standard as that required in the independent sector and we need to be sure that that is not only done but seen to be done. We know what happens when homes fall below

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standard in the independent sector, but we do not always know what happens—perhaps we do—in the public sector.

I shall return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), because I omitted to tell him what steps are being taken in the matter to which he referred. The independent district auditors are responsible for value for money. It is time that more cases were submitted for their consideration.

I shall pursue the explanation of the minor change in the condition required of local authorities. The condition is cumulative and therefore bites on expenditure in the independent sector going back to 1992-93, the year before the reforms. For 1995-96, we have reduced the amount which we require to be spent in the independent sector from the 1992-93 figure to 50 per cent. That is a somewhat technical change, but it may be helpful to local authorities. Of course the condition involves the minimum necessary spending in the independent sector.

Many authorities now recognise that the future lies in becoming purchasers or brokers of care rather than providers. Indeed, many are already spending far more on independent sector services than the 85 per cent. of the transfer element of the STG that they are required to spend. They realise that services provided in that manner are often of lower cost and of higher quality. Indeed, that can be applied to all their services. The independent sector has been invaluable in raising standards of care and in increasing efficiency, yet there are still some foolish authorities that appear to retain an ideological bias against the use of that sector and would rather use their own, more expensive, provision.

Rarely a week goes by in which I do not receive representations of the sort to which my hon. Friends referred. Those foolish authorities should take note of what the Audit Commission said in its report "Taking Stock":

> "Costs that are unnecessarily high deny other people the care they need."

Those are very wise words.

Although the independent sector's involvement in residential care is well developed and established, its involvement in day and domiciliary care is much more patchy. To some extent, it is like the chicken and the egg. If local authorities do not invite it to tender, the independent sector cannot prove its value. We certainly wish to encourage authorities to consider making greater use of independent sector providers of day and domiciliary care. For that reason, we have asked local authorities to include in their next community care plans information on their plans to purchase independent sector domiciliary care. That will give the independent sector the information that it needs to develop its proposals in that area.

Mr. Hinchliffe: On the development of independent sector domiciliary care, does the Minister accept that one of the problems facing local authorities and one of the reasons for lack of development in that area, whatever one's view on it, is the total absence of inspection or registration arrangements? Is it not highly irresponsible of the Government actively to encourage more and more private companies and individuals to move into such a sensitive area without at the same time legislating for similar registration and inspection arrangements as those for residential care?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman knows, because I have told him on more than one occasion, that that is one of the issues that we shall consider in the general review and inspection during this year. He should remind the House that many voluntary registration and inspection schemes—I am sure that he has encountered them around the country—are being introduced with the good will of the independent sector, which would like its good name to be protected. Even without such schemes, local authorities have the power and, I should have thought, the duty to ensure that good-quality services are provided when placing vulnerable people in services. Surely councils already guarantee such services to people whom they place in domiciliary care. But we shall consider that in future.

Supporting people in their homes, wherever feasible and sensible, is, of course, one of the key objectives of the community care reforms. Under the old system, there was a perverse incentive for people to enter residential care whether they really needed it or not. We have removed that perverse incentive, by basing the provision of both residential and non-residential services on an assessment of need.

The assessment process is at the heart of the Government's community care policy. The assessments are "joint" assessments in the fullest sense of the word. A qualified social worker will be involved and, where necessary, so will other professional staff such as doctors and nurses. They will all have a part to play in deciding on the most appropriate services for each individual. The circumstances of carers, too, will be taken into account in deciding the outcome; so recently I was especially pleased to welcome the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill, which should bring into statute what we have already made clear is best practice.

Last year, we provided an extra £20 million in grant to encourage the development of home and respite care. Early reports show that that has been put to good use in many parts of the country. This year, we are increasing that sum to £30 million, and I hope that that will help to support carers. I take the opportunity to pay tribute, in which I know hon. Members on both sides of the House will join, to all carers across the country. Theirs is a difficult and demanding task, both physically and emotionally.

Today, the Audit Commission published a comprehensive set of indicators that can be used to compare different authorities. They showed wide variations in the level of councils' performance. Some of the biggest variations in social services arise in the provision of respite services for carers. For example, some authorities provide 10 times more overnight breaks for carers than others do. Of course that discrepancy may reflect different ways of specialising in providing respite care, and other authorities may use alternatives, such as sitting services, but authorities certainly need to investigate the differences.

We do not propose any change this year in the distribution formula. I emphasise the fact that we have clearly shown our commitment to community care and have made substantial resources available. The report provides for the distribution of additional funds to local authorities totalling more than £600 million for 1995-96. I commend it to the House.

6.11 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the special grant report. This is our only opportunity during the year to have a brief debate in Government time on community care—an issue of profound importance to many millions of people in this country.

I start by repeating the Opposition's strong support for the objectives of enabling older people and those facing physical and mental disabilities and mental illness to live their lives within the community in as normal an environment as possible. To the Labour party, community care is fundamentally a human rights issue, and we strongly support any attempts to deliver to people opportunities that have been denied to far too many people in the past.

As I have previously made clear, we have therefore offered broad general support for the Government's attempts to address the difficulties that arose directly from the previous system of paying Department of Social Security top-ups to people entering independent sector care or nursing homes. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 was aimed at unravelling the serious problems that stemmed from the massive expansion of private institutional care, which resulted in many unnecessary admissions of people who should have been enabled to continue living independently.

The Minister mentioned the perverse incentive, but that incentive was a direct consequence of Government policies. The arrangements that prevailed from 1981 to 1993 provide the best possible illustration of the impact of the market on the provision of care, when the models of care offered were often more suited to the business interests of providers than to the real needs of users. The end result was the investment of £10 billion worth of public money in the expansion of private institutional care at a time when official Government policy was to develop alternatives to models that had their roots in the poor law. In short, the market has taken us backwards.

In supporting the changes introduced in the 1990 Act, the Labour party has consistently expressed concern that the implementation of the changes has been adversely affected by the Government's prime objective of protecting business interests. That objective came over loud and clear in the Minister's speech.

During the debate on 1 March last year I criticised the Government for the serious difficulties caused to local authorities because the funding distribution formula was originally geared more towards ensuring the survival of private institutional care than towards addressing known local needs. I made clear our view that the Government had badly bungled the funding arrangements, and made the proper planning of community care year on year totally impossible for local authorities.

As the Minister will recall, I predicted that, as a direct result of serious errors in implementing the care changes, a number of authorities would face severe difficulties during the 1994-95 financial year. I have taken no pleasure in being proved right as authority after authority has publicly stated its inability to meet legitimate demand for services.

Those authorities could have been identified in March last year, and in November, with four months of the financial year still to go, I established that at least 12 authorities had exhausted their special transitional grants. They had raided base budgets and shunted money from a range of other sources. Some had increased the charge for services, but often they had still been unable to meet the needs identified through care assessments.

The result, as the Minister knows, is an increasing queue of users in the courts demanding judicial reviews of their case. From Gloucestershire to Lancashire, and from Islington to Wandsworth—a Tory authority that covers the Minister's constituency—service users are taking councils to court.

I know that the Department of Health is taking a close interest in that development—as well it might, bearing in mind the prediction by the Association of Directors of Social Services that if the court rules against Gloucestershire,

> "Every Local Authority in the country is going to find itself challenged".

I visited Gloucestershire a few weeks ago to speak at a conference, and I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Robert Parry, the chairman of the local carers forum, who showed me correspondence from the Minister and others in the Department expressing a belief that local authorities had been fairly funded. At the same time I met the local director of social services, Mr. Derek Mead, and I was struck by his comments on the court action in last week's edition of *Community Care* magazine:

> "The issue before the Court is what avenues are open to Local Authorities faced with a situation where there has been a cut in grants and a doubling in demands. Something somewhere has to give. We can't be told to meet people's needs whatever they are and then be given a budget which is capped".

The Minister must concede that demand for care services has exceeded all predictions. The Government have trumpeted the care changes as a new deal for users and carers, which is often not quite matched by people's experience. For political reasons their expectations have been raised, and the consequences are all too clear.

Alongside the Department of Health propaganda there are the equally important implications of the introduction of the market in health and its impact on community care. Some organisations, such as Values Into Action, have argued strongly that trust status has meant that local health policies, especially in relation to learning disability, have been in direct contradiction of the professed aims of the Government's community care policy.

In the context of the care of the elderly, the introduction of the market alongside the community care changes has been grasped by health purchasers as a heaven-sent opportunity to pass huge chunks of the traditional health role over to social services departments. When the Prime Minister said that the national health service would not be privatised while he lived and breathed, he ignored the fact that privatisation of the care of the elderly has happened both under his predecessor's Government and under his Government. In 1979 there were 55,139 care beds for the elderly in the NHS, but the number had dropped to 37,539 by 1993-94. In the same period, the number of private care beds increased from 26,095 to 134,510. If that is not privatisation, I do not know what is.

If anything, the process has quickened in recent times. The implications were rightly picked up by the ombudsman last year in respect of the actions of Leeds

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

health authority, but such examples have arisen across the country. The Minister will recall the survey that I published in December entitled "Passing the Buck", in which more than half the authorities that responded—some 43 councils—gave examples of cost shunting from health to social services. Cost shunting on to councils has been a major factor in the budgetary difficulties of the current financial year. I fear that it will also have a serious effect during 1995-96—the period to which the report that we are debating applies.

I know that the Minister will say that new guidelines on continuing care should deal with the difficulty, but they cannot restore to the NHS almost 20,000 elderly care beds that have gone from my constituency and many other areas. The fact that the Department of Health has failed to offer a clear national definition of the health care divide means that battles will continue over who is responsible for what.

We fear that the serious difficulties of the current year are likely to get even worse during the period to which the special grant report applies. The local authority associations predict that the current year's estimated shortfall in funding—the gap between the special transitional grant and known needs—is about £96 million, but under the next financial year's settlement set out in tonight's report it will reach £261 million. Their projections are that for 1996-97 it will reach £495 million and for 1997-98 £796 million.

We know that many councils have used base budgets and reserves this year to meet needs that could not be covered by special transitional grant.

Mr. Bowis: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government are putting a further amount of more than £600 million into the community care grant. He says that that is not enough. Is he committing his party, if it were in power at some time in the close future, to put in more? If so, how much?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am repeating criticisms that have been made to me by the local authority associations. They are in the best position to assess the level of needs. I am expressing the concern that they as providers—as people who are landed with the task of administering the new system—have expressed. Councils' projections of the total gap in funding in the current year were reasonably accurate.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead such local authorities or raise expectations unnecessarily in them, so how much would he give in addition?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I think that the Minister is aware that I regularly meet local authority colleagues from different political parties. If he will give me a few moments, I will set out the steps that I would wish to take in our approach to community care. I cannot quantify how much. As the Minister will obviously appreciate, the figures that I have mentioned are those that local authorities say are needed, where there is a gap. The gap is fairly apparent around the country in area after area. The Minister has to face the fact that his Department is directly involved in court cases. He must be aware of the problems that councils face.

The Minister is a reasonable man. He will concede that some councils have genuine difficulties in meeting the task that they have been landed with in implementing the care changes.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned a figure of £700 million in addition to what the Government have provided. He must either say that he would provide less than that if he was in government or that he would give that amount. If he would give that amount, I should like to have that confirmed. I should also like confirmation that it has been approved by the leader of his party and the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Minister should have listened to what I said a few moments ago. I said that I would expand on what my party would do. We have some important proposals to make to tackle the current crisis in community care. In particular, we would make much better use of existing resources than the Government are making with their policies, which directly impact on local authorities.

If I had been a Minister in the Department of Health between 1981 and 1993, I would have made much better use of £10 billion of public money than the Conservative Government have in respect of reinstituting the expansion of institutional care.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Perhaps I could give an example to the Minister of the colossal waste of resources. In my area, a health authority and a trust are mothballing provision in the public sector for long-term care of the elderly confused. After 14 days, the family at the side of the bed are given a letter about arrangements to go into the private sector, to be funded from the local authority's budget. This evening there are beds lying empty. Facilities that cost more than £1 million for the specific needs of the elderly confused in my area are not available as a result of the Minister's private care market and his ideology of driving the elderly into the hands of the private sector. Authorities are disbarred from using their own resources, paid for at the expense of the local authority care budgets.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend makes a strong point in the way that only he can. When the Minister talks of his ideology of privatisation, he uses the word "choice", but he means shunting public responsibility for care services on to the private sector. He should take responsibility for some of the problems that arise as a direct result.

I did not intend to use the letter that I have with me tonight, but I shall do so because the Minister has raised the issue of cost and because it reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). I have had passed to me by the office of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition only this week a letter which I know has also been passed to the Department of Health. It is about a lady in her eighties who is currently in a care home. She faces severe difficulties because her income does not meet the care fees on a week-by-week basis. I shall be only too happy to pass the letter to the Minister.

The lady has received from a group of solicitors in Northampton a letter which says:

> "Should the invoice not be paid on the due date then I have been instructed to issue a county court summons forthwith."

The relative who raised the matter with my right hon. Friend ends her letter by saying:

> "As I complete the final draft of this letter, there has been a change in Mum's health. She is now dying. Her health has been deteriorating for the last three weeks, but particularly for the last week. I hope that we can at least make sure that others will not have to face the problems described here, but suspect that this may only be the case with a change to a caring Government policy."

Such cases are brought to my attention every week and must be brought to the Minister's attention. He talks about the move to the private sector. Such cases are the reality of the care problems that face people in the private sector.

The Minister cannot deny the problem. He can look at the correspondence. I will happily copy it to him, but I believe that his Department has it already. That is the reality facing vast numbers of constituents of both Opposition and Conservative Members throughout the country as a direct result of the privatisation of care by the Minister's Government.

I shall continue to expand the point that I was making about the financial difficulties that face local authorities. I set out the projections that local authorities have made for the effect of current policy and the problems that they face in the next three financial years. We know that many councils have used their base budgets and reserves this year to meet needs that could not be covered by the special transitional grant. The 8 per cent. increase in gross personal social services total standard spending for 1995-96 is almost wholly made up of additional funding for community care in the form of the 1995-96 grant. Local authorities believe that the settlement effectively represents a cash freeze once the effects of additional resources for new community care responsibilities have been excluded. The increase in total standard spending is £0.7 million pounds and, at 0.01 per cent., is well below the average increase of 0.8 per cent. quoted for all services.

In that context, raids on hard-pressed base budgets in 1995-1996 will simply not be an option for many councils. I read with concern the worrying projections of the Association of Directors of Social Services arising from a survey of local authorities published early this month. It showed that more than 80 per cent. of social services departments will have to reduce their services during 1995-1996. The cuts range from 0.5 per cent. to 10 per cent. with an average of £1 million per authority, although one council is cutting £12 million.

To stay within budgets, there are proposals to raise strict eligibility criteria, to increase charge levels, to put tighter ceilings on individual packages of care and to reduce investment in domiciliary care. That is the reality of the next financial year from the point of view of those at the sharp end. I recognise that there will never be sufficient resources to meet all expressions of need presented to social services, but steps could be taken to address the serious difficulties that I have described.

There are steps that the Government can take to deal with the crisis that is facing personal social services. They must, first, take account of the impact of the NHS changes in terms of local authority budgets and bring to an end the obvious buck-passing process, which has had huge resource implications for councils. In my survey, I came across the case of a person in a coma who had been passed for community care from a hospital to a local authority, and people who were unconscious and on drips who had been referred for community care. That is what faces local authorities.

The Government must strengthen the continuing care guidelines and further protect councils from having to fund the care of people who should be the responsibility of the NHS. Only this morning, I addressed a conference of health and social services managers, councillors, chairs of health authorities and regional authority members. Their concern was that the guidelines are, frankly, meaningless.

The Government have not addressed some practical problems which are being faced at a local level. They must look at that, and ensure that the guidelines mean something. They must resolve the difficulties in terms of who does what in many local communities.

The Government must also look again at the calculations of future community care funding and its distribution. The Minister will be aware of the Association of County Councils call for research to be undertaken into the definition of the unit costs of community care service. There is a possibility of linking that with local needs identified in community care plans and other relevant information to lead to a much more satisfactory distribution of resources.

I repeat the point that I made in last year's debate and, indeed, in the previous year's debate: the Government should drop their dogmatic insistence that the bulk of the special transitional grant should be spent in what they term the independent sector. The Minister knows that there is clear evidence that that requirement is resulting in a significant number of unnecessary admissions to permanent care because independent sector domiciliary care is simply not available in many areas. That condition is wasting scarce resources, as well as resulting in a denial of an individual's rights to care within the community.

I made clear at the outset the Labour party's support for the principle of community care and our policies would take the process a good deal further, with choices for users and carers which they are denied at the moment because of the Government's market dogma. Choice for us means more than giving somebody a list of private carers.

Mr. McCartney: Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister an important question on an issue that the Minister ducked in his eulogy about Government policy? What will be the Government's position on funding if the courts decide to place on Gloucester and other local authorities a duty to fund care propositions? Will a supplementary grant be awarded by the Department? What arrangements has the Department made if, following the court ruling, local authorities have to act unlawfully or carry out the decision of the court in respect of the provision of the service?

Mr. Hinchliffe: It would be helpful if the Minister felt able to respond to that point, as he has had guidance from his officials on what response the Government might make. I am well aware that the Department of Health has been involved in the Gloucester situation, and the Department must be looking at what is happening elsewhere in the country.

In conclusion, our view of choice is somewhat different from that of the Government. To us, it means policies about the active encouragement of a continuum of care options from independent and semi-independent living to

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

individualised provision in permanent residential or nursing care settings. It means ensuring choice and a good quality of public sector services, as well as the voluntary sector and private provision.

We are pleased that progress has been made in community care, but a comparison of provision in Britain with that in some adjacent European countries shows that we are, frankly, light years behind. The problem is not just resources, but thinking, philosophy and attitudes. If our outlook is essentially determined by market dogma and if our central thrust is one of deregulation, we will continue to deny people the rights, freedoms and choices available to the majority. I hope that the Government will accept that our criticisms reflect what is being said to us by users and carers, and that they will respond to some of the serious points that I have made tonight.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to have the opportunity of joining the other two main parties on one matter. In principle, we also fully support the idea that lies behind community care. However, the Government must recognise that, in introducing the processes of community care, they have raised expectations which have failed to be met.

The Government must do something rapidly if they wish the principle of community care to continue to meet with the widespread acceptance that it had before it was introduced in practice. Community care has been widely accepted and implemented successfully in a number of counties. Interestingly, one may exclude Buckinghamshire from that number, and we all know that there are severe difficulties in the community care processes there.

Community care procedures were always bound to cost more than the previous procedures, and the Government let themselves down in not recognising that. Too little money has been allocated year after year for the proper implementation of those procedures and, sadly, that includes the budgets that are about to be set for 1995-1996.

Mr. Bowis: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, let me make a point which I know he would wish to answer. He is saying that inadequate funds have been allowed to resource community care. The additional special transitional grants which we are talking about today were, in the first year, £565 million, in the second year £1.2 billion and in the third year £1.8 billion. The total will rise to £2.2 billion in the fourth year. What figures would the hon. Gentleman put on it?

Mr. Rendel: I am not pretending that I can put a precise figure on that now. The principle was correct, but we must find the right amount of funding to make sure that that principle works in practice. It is up to the Government to make sure that those sums are met out of their finances. I have no doubt that, before the next general election, all of the parties will provide a proper menu with prices for all of the policies that they intend to implement in the new Government. My party will do that, and I hope that other two main parties will as well. They have not always done so successfully.

A number of problems are associated with the financing of community care. The first is a severe problem that has already been mentioned—it is clear that some services that were dealt with within the national health service have been transferred to the community care service without the equivalent funding being transferred along with them. That problem is causing difficulties for the elderly—a particularly vulnerable portion of our population.

The second problem is the way in which funding has been switched. Some £80 million was taken away from funding for the shire counties and provided for the metropolitan authorities, That has caused immense problems for counties such as Devon, Gloucestershire and the Isle of Wight. Numerous hon. Members who represent those areas have already mentioned those problems. It is important that we recognise that that switch caused a certain amount of chaos during the early implementation of community care.

Mr. Bowis: I happened to look at the figures for the hon. Gentleman's county of Berkshire and noticed that, as a result of that change, it received £800,000 more than it expected, in addition to the £1.6 million more than it had expected from the standard spending assessment review. Has the county had difficulty managing that additional income under his party's control?

Mr. Rendel: Sadly, Berkshire is under joint control, not under the control of my party. I wish that it were, but perhaps that will come about soon, as I understand that there is a good chance that some Conservative members of Berkshire council may be about to resign the Whip. Perhaps we shall take control rather sooner than the Minister might think.

My argument was not about Berkshire, but about shire counties in general. Some have done rather better than others. The point is that the switching of resources in such a sudden and unexpected manner throws procedures into difficulties. The shire counties that lost out not unnaturally found it very difficult to provide the community care resources necessary under the Government's new system.

I visited Devon recently and talked to some owners of private homes there. The switch has hit them hard. If there is a lack of resources and the money has to go to publicly funded homes—it would only cost more to shut them down in a hurry—that inevitably causes the private home owners difficulties, as they are without the clients whom they had expected, or without clients who have the funds to pay for their accommodation. The Government must recognise that, in many cases, they have caused problems for the private home owners. If those owners are squealing, perhaps they should turn to the Government.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Minister about overcapacity in the private sector? If I remember rightly, when the Government introduced the changes, they said that there was 40 per cent. overcapacity in the private sector, which they could not fund. That has led not merely to failure to win contracts—when those are available—but to the cost of repaying loans for refurbishment, or the capital cost of new builds, settling on private home owners. They are having to meet the bills for the capital that the Government encouraged them to borrow, with no income because of overcapacity in the market. They are unable to fund the loans by gaining contracts to care for the elderly. Should the Government not give some estimate of the number of private sector homes for the elderly that will have to close because of overcapacity?

Mr. Rendel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It would indeed be interesting to hear the Government's response. Perhaps the Minister will reply when he sums up.

The third problem that has arisen is that, under the Government's new system of assessing the needs of all those who require community care, we are moving towards a system based on need. The Government said so at the time and were right to do so. If one has a system that is based on need, however, one must provide the funding for it, or people will feel let down.

The fourth problem is the fact that local authorities have been forced to spend such a large proportion of their funding on the private sector. Interestingly, the arguments against have focused on choice and on the fact that funding must go into public sector provision because it is there now. One argument that we have not heard is whether there are hidden costs to local authorities when they move the provision of services from the public to the private sector.

The House will no doubt know that the Equal Opportunities Commission produced an interesting report on compulsory competitive tendering today, which apparently shows that the hidden costs have been roughly twice the size of any expected savings. It is clear to all of us who have been involved in local government that, while there are superficial savings in some cases, CCT often costs local authorities a great deal of money because of hidden costs, which are not necessarily obvious from their accounts but are nevertheless very real. The way in which the Government are forcing community care into the private sector may well result in hidden costs that they have failed to recognise. The costs are part of the reason why funds are insufficient to meet the needs of people in community care.

It is cruel of the Government, when assessing their needs, to raise the hopes of those who need community care, only to dash them by failing to produce the necessary funding. They are some of the most vulnerable members of our community—the very old, the very sick and people with severe disabilities. They cannot be expected to look after themselves and their own needs. The Government have played a cruel trick on them by introducing the community care system and raising their hopes, only to dash them because community care is not working as we all hoped that it would. The Government must fund the necessary community care resources in line with the identified need of the people concerned.

6.46 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I was astounded to read in the Audit Commission report that came out today that a very low number of elderly people in Stockport, of all the metropolitan authorities, are in residential care and being provided with care in their own homes. I found it difficult to understand because Stockport social services department spends well above the standard spending assessment. It suddenly dawned on me that the problem with the Audit Commission's figures is that many elderly people in Stockport are in nursing homes and, therefore, would not come under the category of residential care. They are in nursing homes as a result of the joint policy of the local authority and the local health authority for social services to be a health provider. The figures are misleading.

The difficulty when one receives an Audit Commission report is that one has to spend a considerable amount of time puzzling out what the statistics mean. If such reports continue to be published, I think that we shall find fewer people in residential homes in Stockport because one of the impacts of joint commissioning by the health authority and social services departments is that purchasing is targeted at those in greatest need. Residential care will inevitably be provided through the nursing sector because the people in greatest need will have health needs that can be provided only through nursing homes.

The Audit Commission provided an indication, not of the performance of a local authority, but of the purchasing trend because of the level of nursing and the health needs of elderly people. It showed how local authorities are turning into health purchasers.

I become disappointed when I hear the Minister talk about community care. Although he constantly says that the Opposition are guilty of the maxim that private is bad and public is good, he is guilty of always assuming that public care is bad, private care is good, and the only way to improve public care is to introduce a market mechanism. Essentially, that is what community care is about.

I sat as a councillor on a social services committee when we were deciding what to do with our residential homes because of standards being set by the Department of Health to improve the physical environment and the space to which people were entitled. Those standards were all good and proper, but the council was not allowed to borrow money to improve standards in the public sector. The council closed a number of residential homes because it did not have the money to improve standards. There was no fair playing field between the public and private sectors, as the private sector had access to capital borrowing and could therefore provide private homes to the standards set by the Department of Health, and the local authority ended up purchasing places in private homes. We all felt that it was a bit of a rigged market, which had more to do with the Government's ideology than with a genuine attempt at a partnership between the public and private sectors, which we would all welcome.

The Minister said that local authorities' responsibilities go beyond spending the community care grant. We understand that. May I illustrate the problem by explaining the position in Stockport? Stockport is a capped authority, and since the disaster of the poll tax, the proportion of Government grant to money raised by the council has increased enormously. Some 80 per cent. of the council's income is Government grant, so the Government have a stranglehold on the council's resources. Inevitably, that affects the council's spending and how it decides between priorities. For example, the Government's failure to fund the teachers' pay increase has meant that it has had to be funded from elsewhere in the budget. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Minister, but it is not rubbish.

Mr. Bowis: I did not say that it was.

Ms Coffey: Part of those funds are being taken from money that should be spent on community care. The council is unable to provide home helps, which are part of community care. In my authority, like all authorities,

[Ms Coffey]

the problem with the home help service is that it has been targeted at those in greatest need. Although people in greatest need require home helps, those in a little less need have no access to home helps because the council cannot provide home helps for them all. Effectively, therefore, the community care infrastructure is not preventive but targeted at those in greatest need. That is fine, but it creates problems.

A core issue in respect of community care is enabling people who live in their own homes and who become disabled or elderly-infirm to climb the stairs to the bathroom. Installing chair lifts in private housing is a big problem because the money comes from the urban renewal grant, so the application competes with applications for mandatory grants to renovate houses. If the council wants to make more money available for installing chair lifts, it must come from other budgets. If no chair lifts are available, elderly-infirm and disabled people cannot stay in their own homes and we therefore do not have the community care or choice which the Government talk about.

So let us not pretend that there are not enormous problems. I hear the Minister talk about the money which the Government give local authorities, and it seems like a lot of money. But when I see my constituents' problems, all I can say to the Minister is that, although it may seem like a lot of money, it is not sufficient to finance the community care procedures that the Government have introduced. The measure of the scheme's success must be whether community care can be delivered. My experience, and that of all my hon. Friends, is that it cannot. Local authorities are being turned into health purchasers to save the health authority budget. That was not the original intention of community care, which was essentially to provide a community infrastructure for people to stay in their own homes, not to buy privately the health care that should be provided through the national health service.

In case the Minister thinks that my view is unbalanced, may I raise a problem about which I have corresponded with him on behalf of private home owners? If elderly people who were admitted to a private home before 1993 and funded their place themselves now run out of money, they cannot be funded through the community care grant. They may receive a DSS grant but that will be less than the purchasing price within the private home. For elderly people to receive funding from the community care grant, they must leave that home. They cannot go into another home managed by the same organisation but must find a home managed by another organisation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: May I reinforce my hon. Friend's concerns? I discovered from a parliamentary answer recently that 78,500 people come into the category that she describes. It is a serious problem and I hope that the Minister will deal with it.

Ms Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend for that supportive comment.

As I was saying, elderly people who run out of funds must be evicted from a home in which they may have been living for five or six years, but if they go to a private home run by a different organisation, they will be funded out of community care money. Where is the sense in that? How does that care for elderly people? I understand that the legislation was framed to prevent abuse by private home owners, but its only effect has been to abuse elderly people. As the Minister knows, moving elderly people from one home to another puts them at risk—

Mr. Hinchliffe: It kills them.

Ms Coffey: As my hon. Friend said, it effectively kills them. I have corresponded with the Minister's Department about that matter but have not received an answer, so I am pleased for an opportunity to raise it in this debate.

We shall have no sensible idea of what community care funding is about until we resolve the problem of the respective purchasing roles of health authorities and local authorities for the health needs of elderly people. Although a recent Government circular told authorities that they must come up with a number of continuing care beds for elderly people and an appeal process will be put into operation, that issue is by far unresolved. The problem with the community care grant is that much of the money is, of necessity, being used to buy health care because the national health service has decided to give up caring for elderly people as that produces no profit.

6.58 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I have only a minuscule amount of time to speak, so I suggest that the Minister and I meet to discuss some of the issues.

I was part of the Audit Commission when it drew up its original report on community care. Although progress has been made, two matters are causing great difficulty and a third is now on the horizon. They need to be tackled. In some cases, they show a departure from what the Audit Commission originally envisaged.

First, obviously many authorities find that there is not enough money. The figure for Leeds appears generous if one compares it with other figures in the table, but Leeds is £3 million short of the money that it expected to receive. That is bound to have an impact on community care. For example, when reductions are made in the total budget, there is an increase in vacancies for social workers. That makes the assessment process much more difficult. Therefore, considerable difficulties result from a shortfall of funding. It is not a generous settlement, and it should not be considered generous.

Secondly, grave difficulties result from the restriction of 85 per cent. going to the independent sector. I am not dogmatic about those issues. Yesterday, I met people from my constituency who run homes for Registered Residential Care Homes. They expressed their anxieties about some of the other private care homes in the city which were not registered. They felt that I should inquire about them, and especially that I should examine whether people in those homes had control of their pocket money. They felt that control of pocket money added to people's status and their sense of having a little independence. They said that that happened in their organisation, but that some other organisations, for commercial reasons, took all the money at the start and allowed individuals little freedom to choose the way in which they used any of it. Anxieties about the quality and actions of some care homes were therefore expressed to me by other private care homes yesterday.

The third factor, which must be considered in future, is the likely impact of the Government's pronouncements about long-term care coming as a direct result of the

Leeds case mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). Obviously, in this country that will be a critical issue for the future.

When I lived in the United States, I found that people spoke about the American dream, but they also spoke about the American nightmare. The American nightmare was that all one's resources would be spent and used up on health care in one's old age, and that one would then be forced to rely entirely on a welfare system which, in the United States, is very poorly developed.

We are approaching a position in this country in which many elderly people realise that any long-term sense of security is being taken away from them by Government. They now know that, if they have specific afflictions that the health service says will not improve, they may be off into a private home and their original homes will have to be sold to pay for their upkeep. In that way, the American nightmare is coming to this country, and it is a cause of grave concern.

I do not know whether the Minister has met many local authorities which have difficulty meeting their community care budgets, but I should like the opportunity to have a proper discussion about some of the issues that I mentioned, which cannot be discussed properly in a short debate.

7.2 pm

Mr. Hinchliffe: With the leave of the House, I wish to make one or two brief arguments in summary.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made some important arguments in his contribution about the over-concentration on private provision of institutional care; fair arguments that apply, not only to Berkshire, but elsewhere in the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) made the important argument that local authorities are now health purchasers. That is a simple fact. Five or 10 years ago, they would certainly not have dealt with the type of cases with which they now deal. They are now health purchasers, but they are not funded as health purchasers. The Government must tackle that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) reinforced that argument by describing the impact of problems with long-term care. I am worried that the Minister's line has consistently been that local authorities should be able to manage. He believes that bad management is at the root of the problems faced by some of them.

I was very conscious of the remarks of Mr. Peter Stock of the National Users and Carers Group, who has written to the Secretary of State for Health, complaining that her Department's press release on an issue had manipulated the facts. I quote from *Community Care* of 9 March 1995. Mr. Stock said:

> "The document, which concentrated on remarks by John Bowis that a few councils were unable to resource their community care programmes because of bad management, did not reflect the group's views and had prompted him to consider resigning."

That is the users and carers group, which says that arguments about bad management simply do not wash. It is not the issue. Is it any wonder that directors, according to the same magazine, are outraged by Bowis's attitude to cuts? *[Interruption.]* Directors of social services are outraged; perfectly reasonable people, as the Minister well knows, are outraged by his attitude.

I say seriously that the Minister should recognise the very real difficulties that are arising in several areas. He must recognise that it is not about bad management. He should tackle a range of issues that cause worry and seriously affect users and carers in many parts of the country. I hope that he has listened to the constructive arguments that have been made from the Opposition Benches. I hope that he will respond to those arguments and consider some of those issues seriously.

7.5 pm

Mr. Bowis: Despite the attempt at a private assignation by the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), the debate has nothing to do with OutRage!

I welcome the general support that has been given from both sides of the House for the policy of community care. That was emphasised at the beginning by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) for the Labour party and by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for the Liberal Democrat party. I think that similar support was expressed by almost everyone who has contributed to the debate. I very much welcome that.

It would be wrong—and I do not intend to do so—to refer to any of the matters that may be before the courts now or shortly, so the House will understand why I shall not follow one or two hon. Members down that path.

We have heard references to cost shunting, and to the guidance that we issued, to which I referred in my opening remarks about continuing care. Despite the conference that the hon. Member for Wakefield may have attended this morning, I have to say that those guidelines have been very much welcomed by those who manage social and health care—by the Association of Directors of Social Services, by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, by the British Geriatrics Society and by those representing the carers and users, the National Care Homes Association. We have therefore made good progress in that.

We have heard reference to preserved rights cases. They are nothing to do with the report. That is a matter largely for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, but at the time the House—and I do not recall the Opposition objecting—gave the people who were resident in the independent sector at that time that special degree of security by giving them preserved rights. They did not have to go through the assessment procedures. They retained their rights to income support for as long as they needed it.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) made an argument about the additional safety net that we put in, which was not there before. That ensured that, if someone who was in a residential care home in the independent sector ran out of resources, the social services would have the power to pick up the case. As the hon. Lady well understands, the reason for the requirement that it not be in the same home was to remove any perverse incentive for any home to increase the rates to meet a top-up that was there. The actual rates are not a matter for the debate.

We have heard a great deal from Opposition Members of what I can only describe as hostility to the independent sector. We hear it again and again throughout the country. Conservative Members want quality and the best use of resources. Resources have been central to the debate.

[Mr. Bowis]

I have to say to the hon. Member who mentioned Devon that, in 1990-91, Devon received £63 million for its social services; in the coming year it will receive £135 million. I think that Devon can manage as long as it uses those resources well and efficiently; that was the message of the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission says that it has started well and that often, where problems exist, better financial control and better use of the independent sector are needed. The Audit Commission has also highlighted £500 million that could be spent on front-line services if local government managed its pay bills better. We have heard much from the Labour and Liberal parties tonight about resources and reference has been made to £700 million. But when I asked both parties to put on the table their pledge for more money in addition to what the Government spend and are prepared to spend, there was not a word. They will not give promises of additional resources; they merely engage in a political tease with people who are trying, responsibly, to use the generous resources that have been given for community care.

The report provides £647.6 million—real money and real resources. There is to be £5.1 billion for community care in the coming year and for personal social services a fraction under £7 billion. Those are fair resources and I look forward to working with the responsible leaders and directors of social services—the vast majority—up and down the country. I commend the report to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 13) (House of Commons Paper No. 286), which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Railtrack PLC (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 8th March, be approved.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 8th March, be approved.

That the draft Electricity Supply Industry (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th March, be approved. To be decided forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5).

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 21st March, be approved.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet:

1. on Wednesday 3rd May at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee;

2. on Wednesday 17th May at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee;

3. on Wednesday 14th June at half-past Ten o'clock to take Questions for oral answer and to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee;

4. in the Aberdeen Town and County Hall on Monday 26th June at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Tourism

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

7.10 pm

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I welcome the fact that we have a debate this evening on a key British economic interest—a sector that employs large numbers of people and represents an important source of wealth to this country.

I shall begin by giving a few key facts to set the tourist sector in context. It accounts for £33 billion of expenditure in the British economy—about 5 per cent. of our national income. It employs 1.5 million people and, perhaps even more importantly, the number of people employed in the tourist sector has grown by 25 per cent. in the past decade. That is why the tourist sector is part of the answer to the question: where will the jobs of the future come from?

We all know that, as an economy changes, employment in some sectors declines, and in other sectors it grows. The tourist sector is, overwhelmingly, one of growing employment and wealth creation opportunities. It is important to this country's economic interests and our constituents' job prospects for us to provide circumstances in Britain in which the tourist sector can grow strongly.

There are other important aspects of tourism. It is an industry that is geographically widely spread. It does not lead to great concentrations of people away from rural communities, small towns and provincial communities. It allows people to live where they want, and provides jobs in those communities without requiring people to move to places where they might not otherwise choose to live. The fact that the industry has a wide geographic spread is important.

The industry also provides attractive opportunities for the growth of small and family businesses. The success of the tourist sector over the past 25 years has been built on the success of small and family-owned businesses. It allows small business men and entrepreneurs the opportunity to build their own economic future through their own efforts.

As Secretary of State for National Heritage, I have a particular reason to attach importance to the tourist sector. Not only is it an important wealth-creating sector in its own right: it is also a key means of providing support to the national heritage, to the creative arts and to sporting activities in Britain. We in this country will increasingly be able to channel resources into our built heritage, theatres and museums. The tourist sector forms part of the answer to the question: where will the resources be found to develop those activities?

London's theatreland is the biggest concentration of English-speaking theatres to be found anywhere in the world. It is built on the number of visitors who buy theatre tickets in London. The pattern of sale shows that 60 per cent. of the tickets sold for London theatres are sold to people who do not live in London. Some visitors come from overseas to buy tickets for London theatres, and some come from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is a good example of how the interests of national heritage are reinforced by the tourist sector, and how we are able to use tourism to expand our commitment to the heritage sector.

It was that analysis that led to the creation of the new unified Department of National Heritage after the last general election. The Prime Minister's determination to see the links between the different aspects that now constitute the Department of National Heritage formed the logic for originally establishing the Department. Visitors are part of the support mechanism for theatres, museums, sport and the wide range of activities that are gathered together under the Department of National Heritage.

It is because I regard tourism as one of my key responsibilities and one of the key means of underwriting the development of, and delivering growth in, sport, the built heritage and the creative arts, that I have, since becoming Secretary of State, attached so much importance to the development of the Department's sponsorship function in relation to tourism. I want to dwell on my concept of sponsorship of tourism and the reasons why I attach so much importance to developing that aspect of my Department's work.

The House will be aware of the work that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has done in the Department of Trade and Industry. He has worked to develop the Department's sponsorship function and to ensure that the Department understands the sectors for which it is responsible. He has worked to ensure that the Department acts as an ambassador and friend in Government and, more generally, in the industrial sectors for which it accepts a sponsorship responsibility.

In exactly the same way, responsibility for tourism falls on the Department of National Heritage. For that reason I have established a specific division in my Department charged with the development of a sponsorship function for the tourist industry. That is why we have made it clear that we wish to attract secondees from the industry into the Department, to ensure that we are properly informed about the concerns and up-to-date developments within that key industrial sector.

An important part of a Department of State's function, when it accepts a sponsorship role for a sector of the economy, is to ensure that Government accurately understand how development is driven within that industrial sector. When the Government make decisions about a sector, both the industry and the Government have their own reasons for attaching importance to ensuring that the Government understand and are well informed about what is happening in that sector.

Too often, repeatedly, through long periods of our history, Governments have been inadequately informed about what is happening in a specific economic sector. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has set out to remedy that problem in the sectors for which his Department accepts sponsorship responsibility. I am setting out, in the Department of National Heritage, to remedy that problem as it relates to tourism, for which my Department accepts sponsorship responsibility.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My right hon. Friend says that he wants to know what is going on in the industry—presumably that covers the industry's concerns. Is he aware of the great concern in the south-west of England about the effects of revaluation of hotels, and particularly caravan and holiday parks? I am sure that that subject will be raised during tonight's debate.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of that concern and, if so, what representations is he making to his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who has

[Mr. David Harris]

responsibility for local valuation officers? The proposal is causing dismay in some sectors of the tourism industry, particularly in Cornwall.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite correct to raise that point. I am well aware of the concern, particularly as it relates to the revaluation of caravan parks. The revaluation of hotels is part of a much broader issue involving the effect of revaluation under the unified business rates system. No element of that system relates specifically to hotels, but concern is certainly concentrated around the question of caravan parks.

I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not answer directly his question about what representations I am making within the Government on the subject. I am old-fashioned enough to think that such matters are bound by the rules of collective responsibility. However, I assure him that I am well aware of the present concerns, particularly those of caravan park operators.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Has the Secretary of State's understanding of the industry's predicament been enhanced by the report of the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board that the Government's proposals for the privatisation of British Rail have evoked more widespread concern in the tourism industry than any other issue about which they have surveyed?

Mr. Dorrell: That view has been expressed by a large number of people. I would expect that anyone who is interested in the future of British tourism would want to see our railway system—indeed, our entire public transport network—develop in order to meet the demands of would-be travellers more effectively.

I have never understood how people can say in one breath that the railway system does not meet the needs of the travelling public, and in the next argue in favour of preserving the management system that has brought about that much-criticised state of affairs. Privatisation will improve the quality of the railway system and ensure that it matches passenger aspirations more effectively than it has done in the past.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): How can we match the aspirations of passengers who wish to travel on the sleeper from London to Fort William, when the train will no longer run after the end of May?

Mr. Dorrell: The key question is surely not whether it is absolutely essential to continue to provide a sleeper service which almost nobody uses, but how to ensure that those who want to travel from London to the north of Scotland can do so with maximum convenience. The evidence suggests that not enough people wish to take the journey to which the hon. Member attaches great importance, so it is not a reasonable economic proposition to continue to provide that service.

The hon. Gentleman should answer one question: if he wishes to continue to underwrite a service that the travelling public do not use, how does he defend that decision to those members of the travelling public who wish to use another service but who find that the resources that might otherwise be devoted to improving their service are being diverted to a service that the travelling public obviously do not want to use?

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): Why does the Secretary of State assume that London must be the gateway to the regions? Why should not Newcastle, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh or Prestwick be the gateway to London? Is the Minister aware that it is cheaper to travel on a return train ticket from Newcastle, Edinburgh or Glasgow to London than it is to travel to those centres from London? Why is the emphasis on London and not on the regions?

Mr. Dorrell: I was beginning to get concerned that my speech was being distracted to a debate about railway privatisation. However, the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) conveniently takes me to my next point. By developing the sponsorship function for tourism, I can champion the interests of that industry within the Government.

The Department of Transport also deals with tourism. In alluding to that Department, I was going to refer first to the Secretary of State for Transport's announcement today about tourist signs, but I will deal with that in a moment. The second point that I intended to make concerning the Department's responsibilities is precisely the one that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

In autumn last year, the Secretary of State for Transport announced the liberalisation of air transport. That means that, instead of flying directly to London—which was the usual route in the past—transatlantic flights can fly to Newcastle, Birmingham and Manchester on a liberalised basis. That avoids forcing people to fly to London when they wish to travel to Newcastle, Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow.

The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in assuming that I see London as the only gateway for tourists into the United Kingdom. Not only do I think that that is untrue, but the Government have taken action to reverse the prevailing situation whereby people are forced to come to London when they wish to go somewhere else.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I will resist the temptation to take up the right hon. Gentleman's points about rail privatisation, other than to say that the latest report from the British Tourist Authority contains a feature article with a photo and a caption which reads "Rail privatisation could hit overseas visitors". If it is clear to the Secretary of State that rail privatisation will benefit tourism, I am surprised that it is not also clear to the BTA.

On the issue of airports, will the promotion of the transatlantic trade stress the environmental advantages of using northern airports on transatlantic routes? Every plane that travels from London to the east coast of the United States flies directly over Liverpool and Manchester and, by using those airports, it would save 400 miles worth of fuel on the round trip.

Even those people who wish to travel to London, perhaps for a business conference, should be urged to fly to Manchester, spend a weekend in the lake district, Blackpool or the north as a tourist, and then catch the fast rail service to London. Surely that should be the way to promote Britain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House—although it should not be necessary to do so—that interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point; they should not be mini-speeches.

Mr. Dorrell: It is a fairly basic rule that, if one wants to expand a business opportunity—as I have said I wish to expand the tourism business opportunity—one must ensure that one meets the demands of one's customers. If people wish to travel to the regions of Britain to enjoy the Lake District or the city of York, I want to make it as easy as possible for them to get there. If they wish to travel to London, I want to make it easy for them to get there as well. I certainly do not wish to introduce a planning principle which requires them to land at Manchester and board a train.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Before the Secretary of State moves on, will he join me and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) in recommending to the Department of Transport that it make it slightly easier for visitors to reach Blackpool in the summer season? The M6 is currently chock-a-block with motorway cones as part of a road-mending programme which apparently will continue until August—despite the fact that it has been going on for at least a year. Will the Secretary of State join me in telephoning the cones hotline to suggest that it might have overlooked that problem?

Mr. Dorrell: As a regular visitor to the north of Britain via the M6, I empathise with the plea by my hon. Friend about the cones on the M6. The M6 maintenance programme will ensure that that motorway is able to offer a high-quality service to users in the future.

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): It is a bit late.

Mr. Dorrell: Quite a lot of the backlog of motorway maintenance was built up between 1974 and 1979, when the hon. Gentleman's party was responsible for it. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will plan the motorway maintenance programme to ensure maximum quality of motorway service when tourists are travelling to the north-west of Britain for their summer holidays. I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to take every opportunity to encourage them to do just that.

Before I leave the Department of Transport, I want to draw the attention of the House to the fruit of the sponsorship process—the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport about the liberalisation of tourist signposting. It is the result of a substantial amount of work by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who is responsible for deregulation within the Department of National Heritage, in pursuing the Department of Transport and making sure that that Department is aware of the interest throughout the tourist sector in improving signposting so that people are aware of tourist opportunities within Britain.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has today announced that there is to be a brief consultation on the details of liberalisation, but once those details have been decided, we shall widen eligibility for white-on-brown tourist signs and extend tourist signposting to hotels and restaurants, so that, as is the case in many countries on the continent, tourists will be able to rely on signposting not just to attractions, but to hotels and restaurants.

I hope that the House will welcome the liberalisation of rules that have become overly strict, with the effect of restraining the growth of a key sector. That is part of what sponsorship is about.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the welcome news about signs, will he work with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to liaise not only with the Department of Transport but with local authorities? There have been problems when local authorities restrict sensible signposting such as the proposed sign to wonderful Blackpool pleasure beach, which my right hon. Friend enjoyed only two weeks ago in the company of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and myself. The new road that is about to be opened by Lancashire county council with Government money apparently will not have a sign, even though it will be the most direct route. I hope that my hon. Friend will get rid of that silly regulatory approach.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that, and to stress the importance of liberalising the rules operated by the Department of Transport and encouraging a flexible attitude from local authorities. We shall be doing exactly that. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to put a picture on the side of the road drawing attention to the Blackpool pleasure beach and to the Big One. For those who enjoy the thrill of such rides, it is the highest and most thrilling to be found anywhere in the world.

I want to move on from the relationship with the Department of Transport to the slightly broader view of what I believe the Department of National Heritage can do as the sponsoring Department for tourism.

In addition to acting as the champion of the industry within the Government, the Department has a responsibility to set out the context within which the industry operates, and a clear view of what Government can do to assist the development and expansion of that key sector. That is why, six weeks ago, I published the document "Tourism—Competing with the Best", which sets out the Government's programme for the coming months in seeking to ensure that Britain takes advantage of the economic opportunities in the tourist sector.

First, the document sets out some of the issues which the tourist industry has to address. It states that our share of world tourism earnings has declined over the past 10 years, from around 6 per cent. in 1985 to about 4.5 per cent. now. We should aim to reverse that decline. Every time our share of those earnings declines, it represents a lost economic opportunity for Britain.

Secondly, having identified the fact that, although our tourist sector has been successful, it has not been as successful as other tourist sectors elsewhere in the world, the document sets out a programme of Government activity to address some of the reasons for that decline in our share of world tourist earnings.

[Mr. Dorrell]

If one asks visitors to Britain which aspects of the tourist experience in Britain they found attractive and rewarding and which aspects they found less attractive, one gets some fairly clear answers.

There is concern about the quality of information available to people when they book accommodation. That is why I announced in that document that we are to review the crown classification scheme to ensure that, when people book hotel space, they have access to the best-quality information we can provide about the accommodation. The market works effectively if the information provided to it is as accurate as possible. That is the purpose of reviewing the crown classification scheme.

The document also sets out the Government's commitment to fund a benchmarking project in the accommodation sector, to try to generalise good experience and good practice in the management of high-quality tourist accommodation. We shall be working in partnership with the CBI, which is concentrating on the larger end of the accommodation market while the Government concentrate on the smaller end. We are picking up on the experience of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in seeking to generalise good practice in the efficient management of that type of business.

The third project set out in "Tourism—Competing with the Best" is a commitment to improve the performance of our overseas marketing. We shall be working with the British Tourist Authority to ensure that we continually apply rigorous tests on the value for money of our advertising promotions overseas through the BTA. The BTA will be seeking to ensure that its own work is subject to keen value-for-money testing, and we shall seek where we can to mobilise private money in support of the promotion programmes of the BTA.

The fourth project in the document involves the additional £2 million of Government money, backed by £2 million from the BTA, totalling £4 million of Government money over the next two years, to promote London as a tourist destination and to draw it to the attention of the world tourist markets. That is not to cut across the point I made in reply to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings).

I make no apology for my view that we should be seeking to attract more visitors to London. London is one of the world's arts centres. It has more to offer the visitor than any other city anywhere in the world. It is an exciting place to visit, and offers a breadth of tourist experience that has no match anywhere in the world, and we shall be seeking to promote that around the world.

Finally, the document sets out our commitment to improve the accessibility of British holidays by improving the booking mechanisms and trying to address the concern we often hear expressed that it is easier to go into a travel agent on a high street and book a weekend or a holiday on the other side of the English channel than in Britain.

I make no pretence—indeed, I make a virtue of the fact—that the document is not an all-embracing plan for the tourist sector. I have made it clear in my introduction that I do not aspire to be—and it would be quite wrong for me to do so—chief executive of British Tourism plc. My job as Minister in charge of the sponsoring Department for the tourist sector is to create circumstances in Britain that are as favourable as I can make them for the continued growth of the industry, and for our share of world tourist earnings to grow again.

That is the objective we set. As a sponsoring Department, we do that, first, by ensuring that we properly understand the dynamic of the industry; secondly, by ensuring that the Government use the opportunities that are open to them to improve the conditions for the industry; and thirdly and most importantly, by recognising that the growth of the industry will be provided by the private sector entrepreneurs, the people who have made it the successful industry it already is and who can make it more successful still if the Government provide them with the right circumstances.

7.40 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I agree entirely with the Secretary of State about the enormous importance of tourism to our economy. I have to say, however, that he and the Government are betraying too much complacency and self-congratulation about the current condition of that sector of our economy. The reality is that the United Kingdom is losing its global market share of international tourism.

In the decade from 1983 to 1993 world tourism grew by 13.4 per cent. per annum; United Kingdom tourism grew by only 11.9 per cent. per annum. Although of course growth is welcome, the Secretary of State should not be complacent about the fact that tourism in the rest of world is growing faster than tourism here. Britain has a £3.5 billion deficit in its tourism balance of payments. That, of course, contrasts with Britain's surplus in its tourism balance of payments when the Conservatives took office in 1979. Had Britain retained its share of the world tourism market over the past decade, nearly 200,000 additional jobs would have been created in that period.

Tourism is, of course, important. It is our third largest industry. It is our fourth largest source of export revenue. It employs directly and indirectly, as the Secretary of State pointed out, 1.5 million people. There is concern about what is happening, and that was demonstrated by the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry only three days ago, when he told a conference in Cardiff:

> "A decade ago, 55 per cent. of holiday spending was at home. Today this has fallen to 45 per cent. and is still falling. The result is a balance of payments deficit in tourism".

He continued:

> "We are falling behind established industries"—

tourism—

> "in Europe."

That is the verdict not of the Labour party but of the director-general of the CBI.

It is also important to remember that tourism is not only vital for our economy as a whole but crucial for communities up and down the country. For particular towns, cities, resorts and areas, tourism is undoubtedly a major source of employment, and it becomes doubly important for people living in those locations.

What has the Government's response been to the loss of global market share? Over the past three years, funding to the English tourist board has been cut by some 33 per cent. We have been told by the Secretary of State, on several occasions, that he has gallantly made available an extra £2 million for tourism in London. That more or less matches the extra amount that the British Tourist Authority now has to spend abroad because of the decline in the value of sterling over the past two years, so £2 million is not enormously generous.

Then, of course, we have the time bomb that the Chancellor released in his Budget in November—the imposition of VAT on recreational transport. It is estimated that the total cost to tourism will be some £45 million per year. The increased cost to the people who run Alton Towers will run into seven figures.

Mr. Hawkins: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it has been made clear, in subsequent statements on the original Budget statement, that a recreational transport facility such as a preserved steam railway—I declare my interest as an honorary unpaid consultant to the Association of Independent Railways—that has a route running from A to B is exempt? Even some of the lines in pleasure parks—for example, Blackpool pleasure beach, which I have already mentioned—may be exempt if they run a sufficient distance.

Mr. Smith: That may help in a limited number of cases, but it does not remove the basic problem, which has been clearly identified by people in the tourist industry. They have said that the additional cost to tourism in Britain is £45 million, so we need to take the Secretary of State's £2 million with a pinch of salt.

In terms of marketing ourselves abroad, we do not do terribly well by comparison with some other locations. I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who has been working on these issues assiduously on our behalf for many years, for pointing out that the island of Aruba in the Caribbean spends more on marketing itself in north America than does the whole of Britain. If that is the attention that we pay to the marketing needs of our tourism, perhaps it is no surprise that we are losing global market share.

Then we come to the Government's recent document "Tourism—Competing with the Best". It was trailed with considerable anticipation. As soon as it came out, I seized my copy and read it through with the expectation that it would be the answer to our problems. It would help if it were available to hon. Members in the Vote Office—it is not. It would be useful if the Department placed some copies there. The Secretary of State is guilty of the understatement of the year when he says that it is not an all-embracing document. It certainly is not. There is virtually nothing in it. It has 20 pages restating the current position, with no new proposals at all.

I am particularly concerned that the passage in the document relating to the crown classification scheme for accommodation is so weak. Yes, it says that the crown scheme has its merits and that it can be improved. Yes, it says that it is

> "potentially a powerful weapon to raise hotel quality".

We then learn that the English tourist board is conducting a comprehensive review. Labour Members are very clear on this: we want a statutory grading scheme for hotel accommodation. Such a scheme operates well in other countries. The Government should have been much bolder in seizing the initiative. Tourism as a whole would have greatly welcomed that. The document is deeply disappointing.

While we are on the subject of the quality of accommodation, let me remind the House that Opposition Members believe in the establishment of a national minimum wage, which would help hundreds of thousands of low-paid hotel and catering workers. On average, male employees earn £297 a week, while women earn £207 a week. The overall adult rate is £328 a week. Low pay leads to low morale, and lower-quality accommodation.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): What does the hon. Gentleman think the hourly minimum wage should be—now, not at some future stage?

Mr. Smith: I will not be tempted down that path. It is the principle that is important, and it is the principle that Conservative Members have rejected. I hear them murmur that a minimum wage would put people out of business, but that has not happened in continental countries where a statutory minimum wage already exists and the quality of accommodation is better. Staff motivation is also better in those countries, and they are not losing their market share in tourism as we are.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Four years ago, York city council established a "York tourist employer of distinction" award for employers who pay above the going rate, train staff, go for quality, innovate and provide child care. In the first year, about 10 employers signed; now, employers are clamouring to do so. Two weeks ago, I presented awards to nearly 50 York businesses that wished their high quality of employment to be recognised. None of them is concerned about a possible minimum wage, because they are paying rather more than the rate that a Labour Government would set, whatever that rate might be.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has made the case very clearly. Conservative Members favour poor-quality accommodation and shoddy wages, under employers who are not prepared to pay the going rate for the job.

Mr. Simon Coombs: *rose—*

Mr. Smith: We believe in high-quality accommodation, a statutory accommodation grading scheme and a minimum wage.

At present, the responsibilities of the British Tourist Authority, the regional tourist boards, the national tourist boards and local authorities overlap. All are doing good work in their own ways, many despite tight financial constraints; but there ought to be a better way of co-ordinating that work. I looked for that in the Government's document on tourism policy, but it was not there. I wish that the Government would turn their attention to ways of rationalising promotional activities.

The Government should also do something about the state of our beaches and bathing water. One fifth of our beaches currently fail to meet mandatory standards, and two thirds fail to meet guideline standards.

Mr. Dorrell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government are doing something about that. Ten years ago, half Britain's beaches did not meet the standards; now, only 20 per cent. do not meet them. By the end of the decade, all beaches will meet the standards and £2 billion will have been invested in the process. Does the

[Mr. Dorrell]

hon. Gentleman want us to spend any more? Does he want us to do more than ensure that every beach meets those standards?

Mr. Smith: I would have appreciated the Secretary of State's point more if he had not omitted to mention that eight years ago, during the European elections, the Tory party said that all beaches would meet the mandatory standards within five years. Now, eight years later, one fifth still do not meet those standards. Of course progress is being made, but it is being made painfully slowly. Opposition Members have long argued that the water companies—whose primary responsibility this is—should be borrowing long to fund work that will last for 50 years, rather than placing virtually all the burden on today's customers. People living in the south-west feel particularly strongly about that.

Of course people do not come to Britain to sunbathe, but both international and domestic visitors like to stroll along a clear beach. They like to let the kids play in rock pools and paddle; perhaps they themselves like to go windsurfing or sailing. With the water and the beaches in their current state, that is not possible.

The state of our public transport networks also needs attention. In particular, the Secretary of State must not be so dismissive about the real concern felt by tourism about the prospect of rail privatisation. "Guidelines for Tourism to Britain", published by the British Tourist Authority in late 1993, puts it very clearly:

> "The impact of British Rail privatisation on tourism (and on the marketing of it) is . . . of particular concern to BTA. If the rail facilities currently offered to overseas visitors are discontinued and/or the network becomes more fragmented, complex and expensive . . . for these visitors to use, valuable tourism earnings could be lost to nearby competitor countries".

Precisely that complexity and fragmentation are being introduced to the public rail network by privatisation, which is bound to create further problems for the development of tourism.

The Secretary of State lightly dismissed the point about the Fort William sleeper, but it is a classic case in point. To travel on the sleeper, which I suspect the Secretary of State has never done, is to experience one of the great railway journeys of the world.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Not many people have done it.

Mr. Smith: In fact, those who try to book a place on the sleeper between now and the end of May will find that there is hardly a place left. People are only now learning of the existence of the service, because of all the publicity that has attended its threatened demise. If it had been marketed thoroughly and intelligently over the past five or 10 years, more people would have used it and we should have been able to retain that valuable service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has attacked the management of British Rail for failing to promote the service properly, but that is exactly the management model that he wishes to preserve. How does he reconcile the two arguments?

Mr. Smith: I have never argued that everything done by British Rail's management has been perfect, but it is not necessary to privatise British Rail to correct some its individual policies. The Government will not recognise that; what they will do is create a disaster from a service that works reasonably well, if imperfectly.

The Government should pay more attention to tourism's impact on the environment. The Council for the Protection of Rural England's recent report, entitled "Leisure Landscapes", raises serious concerns. The Government have not really begun to deal with them. Tourist activity and attractions do not need to be incompatible with environmental protection, but account must be taken, with careful planning, to ensure that they respect the needs of the environment in which they occur. Perhaps it would be sensible for the Government specifically to charge the English tourist board and the other national boards with the task of overseeing and of ensuring that that takes place.

On the Secretary of State's announcement today about tourism signpost deregulation, we are in favour of more signposting. Quite a number of tourist attractions could usefully be included among those that are signposted. We would strongly argue, however, that the familiar brown and white signpost format should be maintained and that it should not become a free-for-all. We do not want to see advertisements for McDonald's at every motorway turn-off.

Tourism related to sport is becoming increasingly important, but better information about sporting activities in Britain must be made available to people who would not normally automatically receive that information. It would be difficult, for example, for someone living in Europe to find out when and where test matches were taking place in Britain. Let us make that information more widely available.

Work can and should be done for Euro 96 next year. Many thousands of visitors will come to Britain for the football matches. Let us ensure that the people who come to the cities for the football matches will be informed of cultural and heritage programmes and other tourist activity. Again, little sign exists of the Government taking any initiative in that.

Finally, let us urge the Government to recognise that patterns of tourism and tourist activity are changing. There is more desire for activity-based holidaymaking. Visitors to Britain seek a wide range of activities. Some may want to visit Stratford, York, Cambridge and others of our fine heritage cities. Some may want to visit London's fashion shows and the Ministry of Sound. Others may want to enjoy the Edinburgh festival and, at the same time, discover some of Glasgow's delights. Others may want to walk the Pembrokeshire coastal path. They do not necessarily respond automatically to posters of beefeaters, the tower and London's red buses, the number of which is declining.

Marketing ourselves abroad, providing information about what is available and how to reach places, encouraging more people from Britain to sample the wonderful things in Britain and encouraging more visitors to explore outside London and the other honeypot centres are essential, important and rewarding tasks in the oversight of tourism in Britain. To be carried out, they require an overall vision and a sense of direction from the Government. At present, they are simply not getting that.

8.3 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): This is, I think, the fourth debate on tourism in the House since the last general election. I welcome the further opportunity to discuss this most important and growing world industry. Some of my hon. Friends are veterans of those debates. I welcome the newest arrival, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He has clearly mastered some elements of his brief extremely well.

One could feel some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman on a number of points. I want to say a word, as he would not let me say one earlier. In debates of this sort, the normal courtesy is to give way more than once to Back Benchers. As he did not, let me say to him that Conservative Members are not in favour of low-paid jobs; we do not want cheap labour. As the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) said, jobs in the tourist industry are not low paid.

Let me correct the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on one point. In Spain, which has a powerful tourism industry, unemployment, both among the population and among young people, is 5 or 6 per cent. higher than in this country, and Spain has a national minimum wage. The issue is where one sets the level. The hon. Gentleman simply refused to answer that question. As he knew that I was going to ask it again, he would not allow me a second bite of the cherry.

If one sets the level, for example, at half average male earnings in this country, it is estimated that 750,000 jobs, many of which would be in the tourist industry, would disappear. Employers, small hotels and many other small operations in the industry would also disappear.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Many Conservative Members were dying to make that point during the speech of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). In 1995, unemployment in Spain is up 33 per cent. because of the social chapter and the minimum wage. What would the hon. Gentleman say to hoteliers in my constituency who are having to compete with Spanish holidays costing £100 a week? Our hoteliers provide excellent service and accommodation at about £14 a night. What would the minimum wage do to those jobs? Please tell us.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend is intervening on a different speech from mine. I agree with him. Perhaps he will have an opportunity to intervene on other hon. Members who might want to try to convince us that a national minimum wage would help tourism.

Mr. Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Coombs: It is fair that I should demonstrate a willingness to give way.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman was, I felt, scaremongering when, without any justification, he tossed out the figure of 750,000 jobs being at risk if the minimum wage was set at half national average earnings. How many people in tourism industry earn less than that? How many jobs in tourism would be at risk? How does he make his calculation?

Mr. Coombs: I should resist the temptation to get into an employment debate. It is a fair question, but the hon. Gentleman must realise that, if we debate a national minimum wage, tourism will lose out. Perhaps, in the time-honoured phrase, we could discuss it outside the Chamber. I would be happy to give him the detail. At this stage, it would be more sensible if I moved on. I simply say that he has a point. Of course there are many lower-paid jobs in tourism, but those jobs that would be most at risk from a national minimum wage. Many of them would disappear.

The precise proportion of the 750,000 jobs that would be affected does not immediately occur to me. I do not think that I know it, but that is hardly the point. We must be wary of the minimum wage's effect on jobs in the industry.

Tourism is a well developed—some would say, mature—industry. Both the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the Opposition spokesman quoted figures showing how Britain has lagged behind other countries. The figures tend to overlook the fact that this country has a mature, well-established tourist industry, in which a large proportion of our fellow countrymen and women are already engaged. Tourism in countries whose growth has overtaken ours is often not as well developed.

I shall take just one example. Austria has overtaken us to move into fifth place. Until just three or four years ago, the Austrian border with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary was closed. Immediately after the changes in eastern Europe, movement in and out of Austria increased dramatically. Therefore, it is not surprising that the tourist industry of such a country which, incidentally, counts every movement from one side of the country to the other even if a person is merely in transit to a third country, has increased to such an extent.

I accept that there is a strong case for helping tourism in this country to grow. We should welcome more visitors although there is always a need to consider the environmental impact, especially in areas of the country that already receive large numbers of people.

Let us welcome the fact that there is agreement on some issues and debate the points raised by the Government's recent agenda for action. The document entitled "Tourism—Competing with the Best" is to be warmly welcomed. It is right that, like the report, we should debate the supply of and demand for the United Kingdom product. How can we improve that product and increase demand for it?

The report emphasises the need to ensure quality, whether in accommodation, the welcome that we give to visitors or the range of attractions on offer. I fully support the proposal in the report to develop benchmarking and best practice in accommodation. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was quick to denounce the idea of a review. Over the years, I have had to deal with the difficulties caused by the operation of two systems—the star scheme run by the Automobile Association and the crown scheme run by the English tourist board—and I can tell him that it is a difficult issue.

It would not be right for the Government or the ETB to launch straight into major changes without considering carefully how best to go about ensuring that visitors to hotels and other forms of accommodation have the best possible information about the quality of the product on offer. I hope that the review will be conducted quickly and that changes will be made, but I stress that it is entirely right that we should have the review in the first place.

There is a need to consider how hotels and small guest houses and boarding houses in seaside resorts are to find the funding to make the necessary improvements. The Welsh tourist board, which is still able to use section 4 grants,

[Mr. Coombs]

turned £23 million of public money into £171 million of private sector capital. That is a ratio of 7.5:1, and anyone who has dealt with development corporations over the years will know that that is not a bad ratio to achieve. I rather wish that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would reconsider the whole issue and find a way, not necessarily in the form of section 4 grants, to give greater encouragement to small hotels and boarding houses to improve accommodation.

The effect of that investment in Wales was to increase the number of jobs in the Principality by 39 per cent. in 10 years, which is a substantial achievement. Tourism is a major creator of jobs.

Accessibility and affordability are two other aspects of accommodation that need to be considered. The report does not mention access for disabled people. I fear that disabled people are sometimes the forgotten ones of the tourist industry yet, if one is to believe the remarkable figures in the recently published Touche Ross report entitled "Tourism for all", there could be an additional £17 billion of additional expenditure available every year in Europe if disabled people were able to go on holiday, visit attractions and stay in hotels.

I know that the Government have moved a long way on how to make life better for disabled people—only this week the House gave a Third Reading to a Bill that will make a big difference to them—but it is important that they are not forgotten in the industry or left behind. We owe it to them to make accommodation and attractions accessible and they, in turn, will spend their money, thus helping the industry to become bigger and better.

We need more budget-price accommodation, especially in London. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is right to emphasise the importance of encouraging people to visit London but they have to stay somewhere and not all are so wealthy that they can afford the prices of some London hotels. Budget-price accommodation is, however, also needed elsewhere in the country and is important to tourism.

A French company, Accor, owns the Ibis hotel chain. There is a successful Ibis hotel in my constituency, which is always full of people who cannot afford the higher prices charged by some of the supposedly better hotels. The chain gives a good basic service that is well appreciated. It would be nice if British financiers examined this corner of the market and found ways to support it.

Mention has been made of the rating revaluation. There is great concern in the industry about the effect that the latest revaluation is already having, especially, as has been said, on caravan parks. They are likely to be hit especially hard. I have heard increases of 50 per cent. up to 400 per cent. in rateable values mentioned. The revaluation is based on the period between 1988, when the economy was extremely strong and such businesses were doing very well, and 1993, when the country was only just beginning to come out of recession and the market was somewhat depressed in this as in other spheres. I strongly urge my right hon. Friend to carry on his secret negotiations with the utmost vigour. I know that he will.

I am delighted with the news given to me today by the Minister for Railways and Roads in response to a parliamentary question. The Department is to examine tourism signing. My right hon. Friend said that he and the Under-Secretary of State have put a lot of effort into this in recent years. I was very much involved in the writing of a report by the Select Committee on Employment in 1990, which drew attention to the importance of signing and the need to expand it. I therefore welcome today's announcement.

It has been suggested that the new signs will need a name. Just as the beacons at pedestrian crossings became known as Belisha beacons, perhaps we are today heralding the arrival of the Sproat or the Dorrell sign. We must wait and see.

I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that, as well as flexibility, there must be some of caution to ensure that the quality of signing is maintained. It is my reading of the press statement that the brown and white signs will be the basis for the consultation and that we should not envisage a plethora of ugly signs for burger bars. I believe that that point will emerge in the consultation.

Clearly, the lottery is going to make a difference to tourism. According to the latest figures, lottery proceeds are now more than £60 million a week. The lottery is on course for a total of £1 billion in the first year of operation, and we should congratulate Camelot on the effective and efficient way in which it has got it started. I think that Camelot and the lottery will go from strength from strength. If the £1 billion target is reached in the first year, £225 million will be available for arts, sport, heritage and the millennium fund—four out of the five good causes from which tourism stands to a benefit.

Sport has been first off the mark with the announcement of the first awards, but perhaps it is the least likely to benefit. I agree again, however, with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that we most certainly want to ensure that we take advantage of important international sporting occasions and boost tourism attendances.

The arts will benefit. The creative arts, inevitably, will see major capital investment, principally at a local level. Apart from London, that investment will primarily affect British tourists. I look forward to seeing a concert hall in my constituency one day. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may remember that after three days of the lottery I was able to tell him that enough money had already been raised to satisfy all the wants in my constituency. He did not answer me, which perhaps is not surprising.

The heritage stands to gain. My constituency is very interested in the idea of a railway heritage centre to boost industrial tourism, which is sometimes forgotten but is of key importance. The public sector will also benefit from lottery proceeds going to heritage.

Private sector heritage sites and historic houses will face a problem as a result of the regulation that provides that the lottery's proceeds can go only to public or charitable bodies. Privately owned historic houses will have to achieve charitable status to benefit, which will create considerable problems for many of their owners. The tax regime burdens the owners of historic houses and, as a result, dilapidation is continuing and the heritage is suffering. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not lose sight of that problem and will continue to look at ways in which help can be given to preserve our national built heritage that is in private hands.

Of the lottery's causes, the millennium fund will benefit tourism most. It will make a major contribution, especially in London. Several imaginative schemes are already being talked about. One thinks of the proposals for Greenwich, the Bankside power station and Kensington. I hope that those schemes might catch the eye of the commissioners, although I realise that we can spend the likely total proceeds many times over on excellent schemes ultimately presented to them. I hope that those who are responsible for disbursing all lottery proceeds in the four areas that I have mentioned will keep the impact on tourism very much in mind.

I welcome the additional funding for the promotion of London as a tourism destination. I also welcome the report of the working party on the future of the River Thames. New attractions are important, such as—potentially—the Battersea power station, if it can be sorted out. Indeed, dare I say, the Palace of Westminster is a great attraction to tourists the world over and sadly, we do not pay it enough attention. We take a rather negative attitude to the attractions of the Palace of Westminster as a tourism destination.

Such attractions, lying alongside the River Thames, are likely to lead to an increase in the use of the Thames. Access is crucial. New services, such as that recently introduced by Catamaran Cruisers, the Symphony and the Bateaux Mouches, which some hon. Members may have seen from the Terrace, need encouragement. We need new and refurbished wharves along the Thames to take advantage of one of the world's most famous and most attractive rivers. They can do it in Paris and we should be able to do it in London. I hope that we shall.

Having said a great deal about the way in which we can improve our product—I could have spoken for much longer, but my hon. Friends will want to add many other examples—I shall briefly comment on the selling of United Kingdom tourism. I very much welcome the proposal in "Tourism—Competing with the Best" to look at bookability. It cannot be right that in any typical high street travel agent there are 15 times more brochures for overseas holidays than there are for holidays in Britain.

I warn my right hon. Friend that the margins on overseas holidays are very much greater. There is a financial inducement to travel agents to sell overseas package holidays—it is how travel agents make their money. We shall have to run very hard to stand still if we are to turn around the decline in the share of holidays that British people take in the United Kingdom.

We also need to consider vertical integration of the travel industry—the joining together of tour operators, travel agents and airlines into single companies, enabling travel agents to concentrate their efforts on package holidays requiring overseas aeroplane trips. That problem will definitely confront the British tourism industry.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the decline in United Kingdom holidays is related to the fall in funding for the English tourist board, just as the fall in the United Kingdom market share is related to the rapid rise in promotional expenditure by many other countries. That is not to say that we have not spent a great deal or worked very hard to boost British tourism—we have, but the simple fact is that others have done more.

I pay tribute to the British Tourist Authority, which has made the most of resources, sometimes squeezed from the ruins of currency fluctuations which have left the pound with less purchasing power overseas, to promote Britain in its principal overseas markets. The United Kingdom is an attractive destination, but there are many others and we must work hard to maintain our share. Direct marketing from the millions of inquiries that we receive every year is an important way forward. The Welsh tourist board has also shown a lead in that area, which is bearing fruit.

Many of the issues to which I have referred are the responsibility of other Departments. In the course of my speech I have mentioned five issues on which my right hon. Friend has to engage in discussions with other Departments. It is not easy to be Secretary of State for National Heritage when one knows that, all around, people have other responsibilities and considerations to bear in mind. The Secretary of State is very much on the side of UK tourism and I rely on him to continue to do his best, as a sponsoring Department with a co-ordinating role. The success of the effort on tourism signing is a good indication that progress is being made.

Despite some of the doom and gloom and some of the figures which are used to justify criticism of their work, the BTA and BTB do a good job and we must ensure that they have the resources and the backing to do an even better job so that UK tourism will continue to go from strength to strength.

8.27 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am conscious of the constraints on time, so I shall try to be brief. In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State, even taking into account the fact that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat) holds the main responsibility, showed a less than committed approach to the tourism industry. His parliamentary private secretary getting upset is one thing that I am pleased about. The Secretary of State showed his lack of solid commitment to the tourism industry by, for instance, mentioning only Britain, in comparison with the breadth of knowledge shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who mentioning attractions for tourists in many parts of the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State compounded his approach by referring to the M6 taking him to north Britain.

Mr. Dorrell: No, I did not.

Mr. McAvoy: Yes he did. He referred twice to the M6 taking him up to the north of Britain. Of course the M6 goes to the north of England and certainly does not go anywhere near the north of Britain. Although that is a minor point, it epitomises the Secretary of State's approach to this subject.

As the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) said, the debate takes place against the background of Britain's reduced share in the world tourism market. Rightly and fairly, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the reduction in the grant to the English tourist board. I am afraid that the attitude that the tourist and travel trade is somehow not manly and not British, and that in order to work in an industry that people respect people have actually to make things, is not confined to the Government. The whole British nation, not just the Government, needs to change its attitude.

However, it is the Government's job to try to change that attitude, so that business and employment in the travel and tourist trade is every bit as valued as work in manufacturing industry. The Government fail to recognise the economic contribution made to the country by the tourist industry. It would serve us better if they did more to recognise and encourage that contribution.

[Mr. McAvoy]

When they try to change social attitudes towards work in the travel and tourism industries, the Government should ensure that the impact of those industries and their potential is understood across all Departments. They should help to develop a national strategy to integrate travel and tourism into their mainstream policies for job creation, export growth, infrastructure development and investment stimulation. There is a whole range of opportunities there for the Government to be involved in, and they should be doing just that bit more.

We should also ensure that the infrastructure is expanded. For instance, there should be more emphasis on expanding airports. Glasgow airport is a model of expansion within limited space—work that has been carried out by the BAA. Such activity should be encouraged.

The Government should also have a role in persuading schools, higher education programmes and career guidance schemes to cover travel and tourism, so that training for the industry has full access to public funding and job creation grants.

Of course transport is important, and airport departure tax, like all other taxes on travel and tourism, has a negative impact on a developing industry. Moreover, the impact of the privatisation of British Rail on rail services, especially to the regions of England and to the countries of Wales and Scotland, has not been fully taken on board by the Conservatives.

Anyone who comes to the United Kingdom as a tourist benefits the country as a whole. I certainly agree that London is a first-class attraction—but surely at some point the transport chaos, the traffic congestion and the time wasted in travelling will actively discourage people from visiting the city. However, there has to be a balance, and I strongly oppose any change in emphasis intended to fund London tourism better, to the detriment of other parts of the United Kingdom. A balance means spending in London, but spending in Scotland and Wales too.

The hon. Member for Swindon also talked about sport as an attraction. Some Conservative Members expressed ridicule when my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury mentioned the role of sport in attracting tourists into the country, but the hon. Member for Swindon did not associate himself with their attitude. I agree with him that sport can be a great attraction for tourists.

For example, there is no doubt that if we managed to get a new Hampden Park national stadium in Scotland for football and other sports, it would attract many tourists into Scotland and thus into the United Kingdom, and would help to secure us our share of the industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury talked about Edinburgh and Glasgow, and I shall spend some time talking about another part of the United Kingdom. I am very much in favour of Scotland, which I think has not been properly developed because of a lack of Government support to make it more attractive to tourists. Someone said earlier that people will not come to Scotland to get a sun tan. Nevertheless, Scotland has many attractions that could be a great draw and bring people into the country.

I shall now spend a few minutes on Northern Ireland; as a member of the Select Committee I have a particular interest in it. We should not neglect anywhere else in the kingdom, but Northern Ireland deserves a few minutes. The peace process in Northern Ireland presents the travel and tourism industries there with great opportunities and challenges. They could provide much employment, which as we all know will contribute to the peace process in its own way, by giving people a stake in their own country and giving them something that they can look forward to each day.

Between 1990 and 1993, visitor tourism to Northern Ireland grew at an average rate of 3 per cent. per year. Within that total, holiday visitors increased by about 5 per cent. That increase was achieved at a difficult period for the travel industry in general, and in spite of the problems that we all know were and are specific to Northern Ireland. The fact that, despite those difficult circumstances, the Northern Ireland tourist trade grew in real terms shows its great potential.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that one of the major growth areas in tourism to Northern Ireland consists of citizens of the Republic of Ireland, Eire, going there for their holidays?

Mr. McAvoy: That is right. It has been estimated that only 5 per cent. of the population of the Republic of Ireland have spent a night in Northern Ireland, so there is great potential there. And the potential goes two ways. So there is a practical basis for cross-border co-operation in the island of Ireland.

If we can achieve the peace dividend in Northern Ireland, that will present great opportunities, because there will be construction work and work in the hotel trade. As has been said, as well as the more luxurious type of hotel facilities, small businesses will be providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

All that needs support, and we need to give people who go to Northern Ireland as well as to other parts of the United Kingdom the benefit of a change in our attitudes to travel and tourism. There is hope—as I know, because during a recent Select Committee visit to Northern Ireland we visited some first-class structures and potential tourist attractions. One of those was the equestrian centre at Necarne castle at Irvinestown in County Fermanagh, where we met some young people involved in the hotel trade.

One young man, Stephen Conway, epitomised the change in attitude for which we hope. He is at Durham university studying travel, tourism and the leisure industry, although he originally thought of training as a teacher. That shows a realistic appreciation of the future job opportunities in Northern Ireland. Younger people may be a bit less inhibited in considering new ways of earning their living, and that says a lot about where we are going.

However, all that needs support, and the Government are reducing their support for the industry. I do not think that that is deliberately malicious, but it is short-sighted and shows their lack of recognition of the country's real potential for growth and earnings through the tourist trade.

8.38 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) said, we have had several such debates so far during the life of this Parliament.

I have a major interest in tourism, as I represent Eastbourne, Britain's premier seaside resort, in which some 6,000 jobs and more than £100 million are accounted for by tourism. I am also a regular columnist for *Travel Weekly*, so I take a considerable interest in the industry as a whole.

I wish to say a few words about the great British holiday and to what extent we can preserve and enhance it in the latter part of this century. Eastbourne was originally laid out by the then Duke of Devonshire. It was described as a place built by a gentleman for gentlemen. With the advent of the railway and the growth of sea bathing as a leisure pursuit, it developed as a resort. Later, perhaps up to the mid to late 1950s, we had the bucket-and-spade type of holiday, which I believe is still popular in resorts such as Blackpool.

Like every seaside resort, we have seen basic structural changes over the years. To survive and prosper, we have to move with the times. Things have changed. It has become easier to travel abroad. With the abolition of exchange controls and the growth of package holidays to the Mediterranean, people's pattern of holidaymaking has changed, perhaps irrevocably, in many respects. Figures from the British Tourist Authority show that just over half of the 58 million holidays taken last year were spent in Britain, compared with 86 per cent. in 1965 and a staggering 93 per cent. in 1955. If that trend continued, more people would take a holiday abroad than at home by the end of the century. Perhaps even more relevant is the fact that the average sum spent on a British holiday was £146 while on a foreign holiday it was £564.

With exposure to foreign holidays, people's tastes have inevitably changed. I have described the old bucket-and-spade week by the seaside. That no longer has the attraction that it used to have. Many resorts like my constituency have had to move with the times. They see that the modern visitor is more sophisticated. They look not only for good value for money but a more interesting range of activities. One such example in my constituency is the Butterfly Centre, which has been an enormous success. My hon. Friend the Minister had the opportunity to visit it during his visit to Eastbourne. It also has similar tourist attractions.

Linked with the range of attractions is the question of quality accommodation, food and so on. We had a discussion earlier about the national minimum wage, which is part of Labour party policy, even if the party is coy about the level at which it would fix the minimum wage.

I appreciate the difficulty of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I know his constituency intimately, having fought it in 1979, albeit unsuccessfully. It is a splendid constituency full of splendid people, but it is by no stretch of the imagination a regular and important tourist centre. The hon. Gentleman is labouring under the difficulty that he does not appreciate in a practical sense the problems that a minimum wage would bring. I invite him to come to Eastbourne and meet the hoteliers and guest house operators and hear from them at first hand how much they wish to see deregulation not only in the labour market but across the board so that their businesses can survive and grow. If the national minimum wage is imposed across the board we shall see job losses, especially in the tourist and leisure industry, and we will see businesses, particularly those on the margin, go out of business.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The only reason why I interrupt is that the hon. Gentleman does less than justice to the London borough of Islington. Camden passage, for example, has a wonderful array of antique shops which are regularly visited by large numbers of people who come to London. Sadler's Wells is also in Islington. The hon. Gentleman's comments about Islington clearly reveal that he does not know a great deal about a constituency and borough which he fought unsuccessfully. I now understand why he did not succeed.

Mr. Waterson: I was making the point not that Islington is not part of the exciting, vibrant London experience but that it is not, as a borough, a tourism centre in the same way as Eastbourne, any more than the hon. Gentleman's constituency could be so described by any stretch of even his imagination.

I move on from the national minimum wage to other exciting developments in terms of the product that Britain offers. A perfect example is the Centerparcs company, which provides modern, popular resorts dotted around the country, one of which I have had the pleasure of visiting.

The point that we must keep coming back to is the tourism deficit of some £3 billion or more. Inevitably, we are debating this evening the document "Tourism—Competing with the Best". I should like to add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to my hon. Friend the Minister and to everyone involved in producing that superb document. It sets out some important landmarks—signposts, if I may use that expression, to the road ahead for British tourism.

The report tells us that United Kingdom revenues from domestic and in-bound tourism came to £33 billion last year and that we had more than 20 million visitors from overseas. However, the problem is that although tourism may be the world's fastest growing industry, growth in Britain has been significantly slower than that in many of our competitors. As the report points out:

> "If Britain could restore the share to its 1980 level, earnings would increase by £3 billion."

That equates almost exactly to the size of the current deficit.

We have heard about the importance of increasing the quality of accommodation and value for money and the issue of benchmarking, which is so important. I am delighted that the Government have mounted the initiative in co-operation with the Confederation of British Industry because I see benchmarking as the way ahead. Not that we do not have a large stock already of excellent accommodation, but there is always scope for improving what we have and getting more.

Bookability has rightly come to the fore. It is easier to book a hotel abroad than one in this country. Once people stumble across a good hotel here, they tend to go back to it over and over again on the basis that they have found one with which they are happy. Although there are many books and guides, often with their own registration and

[Mr. Waterson]

points system, it is often a lengthy process to find an appropriate hotel in the area that one particularly wants to visit. The English tourist board has recognised that. John East and his colleagues have recently announced a strengthening of the crown scheme for grading hotels. It needs to be simplified as well as extended and made more accessible to the general public. Some 11,400 establishments are already inspected under the crown scheme in England. That makes it the largest scheme of its type.

We have discussed the role of London. That issue will have some £8 million devoted to it over the next two years. That will consist partly of £2 million pump-priming in the way of extra grant in aid from the Government. The gateway argument is a powerful one. I seem to recall that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State once referred to London as our international trump card. How right he was. I inject a note of caution into the pre-eminence given to London. It is important and a recognised part of the policy that visitors should be encouraged to go to London as well as to the various regions of the country, to Scotland, to Wales and so on. That is vital.

Inherent in the scheme must be a recognition that there is some differentiation between first and second visits. I draw that to the attention of people such as Sir John Egan who are involved in the scheme. Almost invariably, people who come from America or the far east or wherever want to visit London and possibly nowhere else on their first visit. On second and subsequent visits there is ample scope for them either to visit London only briefly and move on somewhere else or not visit London at all.

The report places emphasis on short-break holidays and additional holidays. It rightly says:

> "we believe there is potential for growth in the short break/additional holiday market."

Anyone can see that that is a fast-growing part of the market, particularly with the channel tunnel now in operation.

I would make the plea that the main family holiday of two weeks or more is still the one worth having. We have an excellent tourism and community services department in my constituency led by Ron Cussons, and I am indebted to Mark Smith, the tourism services manager, for some comments on the issue. He talks about the marketing of short breaks on the basis that while

> "spending on long holidays is now flat, real spending on short breaks increased by nearly 15 per cent. between 1990 and 1993."

That bold statistic fails to acknowledge the significance of the relative values of these different holidays, the effect of the recession and the return on marketing investment through additional business. The document shows that the value of the long-stay holiday business is three times that of the short-break market. Mr. Smith says that

> "it would be 23 years before short breaks were equal in economic importance to long stay holidays."

Figures set out in the Department's strategy document show the underlying trend for long-stay holidays abroad has been increasing since the low point in 1987, and that at a time of recession. It seems to me axiomatic that the long-stay holiday market is much more vulnerable to overseas competition.

It is important that we continue to recognise the importance of the traditional family holiday. Whatever the scope for expanding short breaks and the extra holidays which people can now afford, the main family holiday is the one which provides the most revenue to the resort. Bookability has a major effect on all of this, but we should remember that the market in UK holidays has always been predominantly direct-sell. There is scope for expanding the existing network of tourist information centres, but most people continue to book their hotels direct rather than through an agency.

Other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I shall summarise. The Department's document is an excellent, well-thought-out and thought-provoking contribution to the debate. It is not claiming to be a comprehensive blueprint for every aspect of the tourism industry. But, among other things, it brings us back to the crucial fact that unless we arrest the relative decline in domestic and in-bound tourism, we shall slip further behind the rest of the world. Instead of the tourism deficit reducing, we will see it yawning ever wider. That is why the document, and this debate, is so important.

8.53 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) paid tribute to the paper which the Government published six weeks ago and which inevitably forms the background to this important debate on tourism. However, the hon. Gentleman also put his finger upon what seems to me a damning weakness of the paper, which is its failure to mention the decline in the family holiday.

It was notable that the Secretary of State in opening the debate did not choose to describe or deal with the problem of the decline in long-stay holidays. The most attractive aspect of the Secretary of State's speech was that he made no grand claims about the Government's ability and willingness to do a great deal about the tourist industry. The document is suitably modest in its statement that it is not a comprehensive strategy for the industry, but the beginning of a process of identifying some key issues. That is certainly not to inflate the document.

What the document does—this is useful—is to describe the depressing relative decline suffered by the United Kingdom tourist industry in the past 10 years. Tourism's importance is beyond question, and that is accepted on all sides. In 1994, tourism provided 7 per cent. of all United Kingdom jobs—the UK's fourth-largest employment sector. Some 5 per cent. of GDP—an estimated £33 billion—was provided by tourism. Tourism, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, is due to become the biggest single industry in the world by the year 2000 and, in the 10 years from 1982 to 1982, it grew by 70 per cent.

It must be noted that the UK's world market share has fallen from 5.6 per cent. to 4.3 per cent. in 10 years, a drop of nearly 20 per cent. The Department admitted in the paper that Britain's growth has been slower than most of our European competitors, and that our share of world markets is falling. If Britain restored its share to the 1980 level, earnings would increase by £3 billion. That would be a considerable achievement, but there is little evidence that the Government have any clear view on the role they can play in bringing about such an increase in activity.

It was notable that the Secretary of State gave few examples of direct Government help to the industry. He spoke of an additional £2 million per annum to be given to help market London abroad in the next two years. It must be said that that is a modest amount to assist London in international marketing, and it cannot compensate in the slightest for the absence of a properly elected, local authority for London which could carry out promotional work abroad. It seems monstrous that this great capital city is alone in the civilised western world in having no city government. Tourism is undoubtedly suffering as a result. The inability to tackle London's traffic and transport problems must, in major part, be due to the absence of such an authority. The responsibility lies far beyond that of the Secretary of State—the sponsoring Minister—but I hope that he will at least recognise that he should throw his weight behind the movement to democratise London, as it is very much in the interests of the industry that he says that he sponsors that he should do so.

It is interesting to consider some of the examples of Government sponsorship of the tourist industry in the paper. Some seem patently ridiculous, for example, the reference to immigration, which states:

> "under the Citizens Charter, performance times exist to minimise the time a foreign visitor has to wait before seeing an immigration officer."

In a month in which the European Union has removed border controls, that seems simply to point up this country's deficiencies in welcoming foreign visitors as compared with our rivals in continental Europe. It will also leave a rather sour taste in the mouths of the ethnic minorities, many of whom have had the unpleasant experience of trying to bring their families here for some family occasion, only for them to be turned away at the frontier, unable to join the celebration.

The truth is that those so-called sponsoring examples are the dross and the spin-offs from other policies, for example the dubious claims of benefits from macro-economic policy, including economic stability and low inflation. No one doubts that such economic management, were it to persist, would benefit the tourist industry, but it is plain that the Government's economic mismanagement, resulting in the massive increase in taxation, in particular in value added tax, has had a peculiarly adverse effect on tourism and the comparative costs of staying in British hotels and eating in British restaurants and other establishments. The Government's economic mismanagement has put our tourist industry at a direct competitive disadvantage.

Nor have the Government in any way sought to offset the disadvantages caused by economic mismanagement by increasing direct assistance to the industry, through grants in aid, notwithstanding their recognition of the importance of the British Tourist Authority and the national tourist boards. The English tourist board has had its grant in aid reduced from more than £23 million in 1988-89 to £11.3 million in the present financial year, and it is expected to drop by more than £1 million more in the next financial year. The boards play an important role in providing leadership and as a catalyst in marketing and making possible the marketing of an industry which, of its nature, depends on small businesses, which are incapable of conducting effective marketing overseas on their own behalf.

The omission in the paper, to which I alluded briefly, is that it has written off the coastal industry and the longer domestic holiday. In the words of Mr. Peter Hampson, the director of the British Resorts Association, the Government

> "appear to have confused managed change with decline."

There is no mention of seaside or coastal resorts in the report and I find it odd that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) could praise a report that is so defective.

Mr. Hampson states that

> "the theory that coastal tourism has declined to a point where it is all but dead is nonsense, particularly when you consider that in both terms of volume and of value, the coast accounts for just under 50% of the UK's total internal holiday activity. It is the biggest sector by far".

The paper emphasises the value of short breaks and is promoting them as a new avenue for the tourist industry for the future, but the value of short breaks—I do not underestimate it—remains less than a third of that of long breaks, despite the fact that it involves three times as many individual holidaymakers.

It is questionable whether the Government have even got their sights properly adjusted. A major cause of the relative decline in UK tourism is the vast increase in the number of holidays taken abroad. The paper records that, 10 years ago, 55 per cent. of total tourist spending by the British was in the United Kingdom—today it is only 45 per cent. Certainly, United Kingdom citizens are more likely to take short breaks in the UK for reasons of convenience and, therefore, the longer-stay breaks are more vulnerable to foreign competition. Unless the Department of National Heritage is simply happy to surrender the valuable long-stay market, strong marketing support for that sector is essential for continued prosperity.

The Government have had the benefit of a commissioned report by Mckinsey and Company, which found that the most substantial opportunities to improve performance in the domestic market lie in reinvigorating the accommodation sector and making it easier book a British holiday. None the less, there is no evidence that the Government are willing to make additional public resources available for that purpose. Fifty-nine per cent. of inbound visitors stay in hotel accommodation, which accounts for 30 per cent. of their expenditure. In a recent survey, 30 per cent. of visitors said that their hotel did not meet their expectations, so it must be right to tackle that problem. I hope that the review of the crown scheme, which the Government admit does not work as effectively as it might, to alter the perception of British hotels, will achieve substantial improvements.

I mentioned briefly the impact of value-added tax on the tourist industry. What is the Government's attitude to the harmonisation of VAT? We suffer seriously from being so far out of line with other European countries. In January 1993, EC directive 92/77 agreed transitional arrangements on VAT that will remain in force until 31 December 1996. Those allow member states to apply a minimum rate of 5 per cent. to a limited list of services, including hotels. Although the directive seeks to harmonise VAT rates, if the United Kingdom detaches itself from that process, Britain's international tourism competitiveness is in danger of suffering a further serious blow.

It is high time that the Government stood up to the pressure of the Euro-sceptics, which appears to stand in the way of harmonising this country's tax rates with those of other European countries. The argument against differential rates of VAT in the United Kingdom which

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might be invoked to assist the tourist industry's comparative difficulties has been exploded by the Government's decision on domestic fuel.

This is a short debate and, although I am the only spokesman for my party, I shall not speak for too long as a number of other hon. Members undoubtedly wish to speak. I must allude, however, to one of the most serious threats to tourism that this country has seen for many a day: the appallingly misconceived and mismanaged privatisation of British Rail. Its consequences on the tourist industry are not speculative. It is already clear that great damage is being done to tourism by the plans that are being announced and the franchises being proposed by the franchising director.

There are other occasions to debate what can and should be done for British Rail. I merely allude to Sir Bob Reid's clearly expressed view that it was madness to separate Railtrack from passenger service operations. It will certainly be deeply damaging to tourism and the use of railways to the more sparsely populated parts of the country such as my constituency, which has already seen the withdrawal of special tourist trains during the summer months, at great cost to local business.

That is not merely the view of a local Member of Parliament retailing some odd facts; it is the considered view of the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Mr. Fraser Morrison, who was appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. In a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport, he made plain his concern and that of the body responsible for promoting tourism in the highlands. He said:

> "With no airport at Fort William, the sleeper and Motorail services give direct links into the area from the south. We already have reports from local tourist operators of holidays being cancelled due to the loss of the sleeper service."

The Department of National Heritage should raise its voice about that.

I ask the Minister, who has had knowledge of Scotland as a result of having represented a Scottish constituency for some years—one beyond the central belt—to recognise that that form of tourism is crucial in the development of tourism in the north.

The Minister must recognise that the numbers of people who travel in no way measure the input into the region that comes from sleepers and Motorail. Many of the people who travel by those modes of transport are long-term visitors who are going for a season's sport or to stay in the remoter parts for a long time. They bring into the region valued money, which is needed to sustain the fragile economies of the sparsely populated areas of scenic attractiveness.

The matter must not be dropped. Consultation should be embarked on properly, according to the statute, before the final dispositions for the summer timetables are made. It is a matter of the utmost urgency if there is not to be a sharp decline in tourism into the north of Scotland this year.

I believe that the industry is one of those with the greatest future, provided that it is handled with imagination and a willingness, not merely to point in a random way to some of the current problems, as I suggest that the report before us tonight does. It needs a strategy, but the Government have not evolved one.

I know that the Minister is aware of the importance of the arts and heritage in drawing people into this country. I am glad that new resources are entering the capital funding of some of our great artistic enterprises. However, I am deeply worried about the apparent impact that the national lottery is having on the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Vernons has withdrawn from the scheme to the maximum extent of which it is capable, and there are fears about what Littlewoods may do.

In a short time, the scheme has brought £300 million investment into the arts. It is especially valued in some of the smaller communities, where the foundation has, without any bureaucratic fuss or difficulty, sustained extremely important local heritage, artistic and sporting activities.

I beg the Government to look with favour on the proposals for an adjustment in the current Finance Bill to relieve the pools industry of a proportion of betting duties, to offset the great losses that it has suffered as a result of the introduction of the national lottery.

9.13 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) spoke for 20 minutes. He is perfectly well aware that four other hon. Members hope to speak before the winding-up speeches from the Front Benchers, which are due to begin in 12 minutes, at 9.25 pm. He would receive more sympathy for the causes that he championed—he seems to want to say everything that he can think of—if he had been a little more brief.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said that, if the Greater London council were restored, it would promote tourism in London. I believe that turning the old county hall into a hotel as soon as possible would do a great deal more to promote tourism in London.

London has already figured prominently in the debate. If one is trying to sell British tourism abroad and to market it—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) made an eloquent reference—one must attract people here. We cannot attract them with the weather, but the one thing that they have heard of is London. Whether they come from Chicago, Houston, Tokyo or Osaka, they have all heard of London. A few tourists might have heard of Edinburgh, York or Oxford, but hardly any will have heard of Stonehenge or Stratford-on-Avon, let alone places like Norwich and Lincoln. What brings people here to Britain is London. Once we have got them here, by attracting them through London, we can try to disperse them around the country.

London has a serious accommodation problem; it has a serious hotel problem. It has a great many excellent restaurants. In the past 20 or 30 years, the variety and standard of food in London have improved out of all recognition. Perhaps we do not make enough of that. But there are not enough hotels. They are expensive, quite a lot of them do not give satisfaction and many of them are dull and must be sparkled up.

We must get more hotels; more must be built. Unfortunately, our planning law consists of a system, under which people apply for planning permission for a particular design of building such as a hotel. A local authority either has to accept or to reject that application. There is no leadership over what sort of hotels are likely to obtain planning permission. Many of the architects have bad taste; they produce tall hotels with blank-looking exteriors and flat tops, except for excrescences such as the top of lift shafts. They are unpleasing to look at. Whenever someone proposes to build a hotel, it is difficult for the local authority to grant planning permission because the plan is normally so ugly that it is hotly opposed by everyone living round about. That is one of the reasons why London is short of hotels.

The demand for hotels is not met and hoteliers are able to charge exorbitant prices. That is why London has such a bad reputation in terms of value for money in hotels. It is important that something is done about that. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage will assure me that the Government are getting a grip and providing a lead.

The key to the problem is the south bank. There are places all along the south bank, not just at county hall, where hotels could be put. Let us have some attractive designs with sloping roofs such as one might see on an alpine hotel. People would not be so opposed to such hotels, which could be put along the river where they would have views of St. Paul's cathedral. In that way, we shall begin to meet more of the demand for hotels in London. We shall provide what is needed as a basis for the expansion of tourism, which is so important to this country in terms of the employment, income and tax yield to the Government that it generates.

9.18 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): This is a timely debate because only last month the Back-Bench Labour tourism committee was formed. The debate gives us the first opportunity to participate in discussions on the subject.

One of the themes being discussed in the Back-Bench committee is to see London as a gateway to the United Kingdom, while ensuring that the regions also get their share of the action. Nobody minds extra money being used to promote London, but the concept of a gateway must include avenues that lead to the regions. We need to ensure that the regions receive their share of the action because, as we have heard, there is a declining market share of tourism. We need to set that against the background of cuts in grant in aid to the English tourist board and argue again about the relevance and importance of section 4 grants.

The Government could take other measures—for example, they could examine taxation policies. There has been discussion this evening about the non-domestic rating revaluation from 1 April, and I shall give the Under-Secretary an example from my constituency. The rateable value of a small snack bar near the major oak in Sherwood forest has increased by 100 per cent. That clearly cannot be right, and all tourist businesses in Nottinghamshire face increases well above the rate of inflation.

We must also examine the question of value added tax on accommodation. The rate of VAT on accommodation is well in excess of the taxation rates elsewhere in Europe, apart from Denmark. If the rate of VAT were reduced, there is a real chance that the tax take would increase. Currently, some 50 per cent. of hotel beds are unoccupied and something must be done to address that problem.

I welcome the liberalisation to which reference has been made tonight. There have also been changes in policy concerning tourist signs. The Under-Secretary might care to address the issue of liberalisation in pubs. Children's certificates were available for the first time last month, but the system is not working properly. There are different benchmarks all across the country and there are many unreal expectations. If pubs are to move from the sawdust days to being places where one would be proud to take one's family, we must focus on that problem and establish proper criteria nationwide. For example, in Birmingham licensing magistrates will not award children's certificates during term time. That interpretation must be wrong.

We have been told that the Department of National Heritage is keen to talk to other Departments. It should consider extending daylight hours. That would be a real shot in the arm for tourism. Lighter nights would mean more leisure time in the evening.

I do not wish to be a tourist in my own county of Nottinghamshire, but I must say something about the new Millennicom project, which is a private-public sector initiative—the sort of thing that the Government are always promoting. Nottinghamshire is moving away from the old coal tradition to new information technology. The scheme will involve more than £1 billion over 10 years and could create 14,000 jobs in the area. There will be pavilions for new technology. It is a good scheme for the future which will transform the landscape. Nottinghamshire is changing from coal to tourism; tourism can be a part of our new future.

9.22 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): In the three minutes available, all that I can do is highlight some of the concerns that have been raised with me in a series of meetings with local hoteliers and representatives of tourism in my constituency. I have held three meetings in Penzance, St. Ives and Helston, which also covers the Lizard. At the top of the agenda was undoubtedly the topical issue of revaluation—a subject that I raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during his speech.

The issue has surfaced again and again in the debate. There is real concern about the measure, particularly among the operators of caravan and holiday home parks. I urge my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to take seriously the points that have been made by the British Holiday and Home Parks Association. I am willing to join with colleagues on both sides of the House to try to right a clear wrong. Valuations do not affect only holiday parks, as there have also been valuations on some hotels.

My second point—I underline what the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) has said—deals with value added tax. In all my years in the House, I have never believed that we have had the right structure for the promotion of the tourism trade. I illustrate that, as I have before in the presence of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, by pointing out that the West Country tourist board stretches from the Isles of Scilly in my constituency to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). That is an unmarketable area and there should be a radical review of the whole system of marketing and promoting holidays.

Transport is vital to areas that are a long way from London, such as my constituency. London certainly has a part to play. It must be the catalyst that brings in many

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people, but it is not the only centre of tourism in the United Kingdom. We must, therefore, have good transport links from the centre to the periphery. I am delighted that the sleeper—you have a vested interest in this, Madam Deputy Speaker—to the south-west and Penzance is safe for the foreseeable future, in my opinion as a result of privatisation.

We also need to develop flights right into the west country. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), a former Minister with responsibility for tourism, who proposed an idea which I back and on which we have been working—that Newquay airport should be developed for incoming flights. Nevertheless, he is the son of a late Bishop of Truro.

9.25 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I have fewer than five minutes to speak, which is more than for some and better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick, but I suggest that some hon. Members who spoke for a considerable time are very selfish. They know who they are and I hope they will bear that in mind in future.

I shall speak for a few moments about tourism in London. It is extremely important to the capital city. Last year, tourism earned more than £5.5 billion, 80 per cent. of which was in foreign exchange. Tourism ranks among the top three industries in terms of economic importance, employing more than 200,000 London residents and representing between 4 and 5 per cent. of the capital's gross domestic product. It is certainly one of our most significant industries, but one can voice many criticisms about tourism in London.

There is a scarcity of multi-language signposting around the capital city and a lack of announcements on the transport system that are understandable even to natives. There is an appalling lack of tourist information booths and offices in London. One gets the feeling that, all too often, tourists are regarded as a nuisance—a valuable nuisance but still a nuisance—and we must do far more to enhance standards of information, transport, accommodation and publicity.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) made some fairly inaccurate comments about my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the attractions of the borough of Islington, and I was able to correct him. He went on to compound his ignorance by talking rather disparagingly about the east end of London, where I come from, and suggesting that not even in the furthest extreme of my imagination could I say that it would attract tourists. He could not be further from the truth.

The hon. Gentleman should have been in Newham this morning when we took the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to see the city challenge part of Stratford and the tidal mill at Three Mills—a wonderful tourist centre which has been developed with Government money through city challenge and English Heritage and which will provide an enormous tourist attraction for people not only in the east end but throughout London, if people get to know about it.

Many things going on in the east end of London, as opposed to the centre, are worthy of being developed for tourism purposes. I wish that the hon. Member for Eastbourne were in his place. Having told us about delights of his area, he could at least have listened to other hon. Members speaking about the delights of their constituencies.

Today, a new tourist map was unveiled in the east end of London: "Tour East London—what to do and how to get there", a fold-out guide to east London which lists more than 150 attractions and has an illustrated hand-drawn map on the reverse to help visitors.

The map sets out heritage sites, museums and galleries and urban farms and gives examples of the best in contemporary architecture. It provides details of opening hours, admission charges, the nearest bus, rail, tube or docklands light railway services and information on facilities for the disabled. It includes suggestions of places to eat and drink and lists the area's theatres, clubs and cinemas, while shopping includes the famous east end markets such as the Columbia road flower market, the cosmopolitan food stalls in Ridley road and the Sunday flea market around Brick lane. I am sure that there were quite a few tourists there the other day to see Ronnie Kray laid to rest. Ronnie is no longer with us—if indeed he ever was—and he is probably now up in heaven pulling the wings off angels. I am not suggesting that we should regularly bury gangsters as a way of attracting tourists to the east end of London, but many people were able to look around and see that there are many things in the east end that are so much more attractive than the Krays.

The House should have more information about what is available in London as a whole. If hon. Members knew more about London, we would be far better able to inform tourists who come to this great capital city that London is not just about Westminster in the centre and that it stretches right out to the east end to the wonderful London borough of Newham, which I have the honour to represent in this place.

9.30 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): This has been a good debate but it has been too short. Some interesting and thoughtful speeches have been made. We heard a very long but thoughtful speech from the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) raised the importance of job creation in tourism and the potential of tourism in Northern Ireland. As a former Northern Ireland Minister, I fell in love with that beautiful Province. It is good that tourism is returning there in abundance.

Unfortunately, many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), and my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had to make very short speeches because of the lack of time. Indeed, hon. Members will be sad to hear that I have had to reduce my speech.

We seldom have an opportunity to debate tourism, so I am sure that I am joined by many of my hon. Friends and, indeed, others on the Conservative Benches, in being disappointed that today's debate should be held in what was described to me last week by one Minister as the "black hole" of the weekly parliamentary timetable. Perhaps that is one of the telling signs of the industry's lack of importance on the Government's agenda. Tourism deserves better treatment than that. It seems to run contrary to what the Secretary of State—I am glad to see that he has arrived back in the Chamber—said last Monday at Question Time. He said:

> "It is only right that the DNH should accord substantial importance to the sector."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 677.]

I am sure that all hon. Members present and all those who have spoken in the debate are like me—grateful that we have at least had an opportunity to debate tourism today. This evening's debate has served only to highlight further the differences of opinion between the parties on tourism, which seem to grow ever more pronounced. The contradictions in the Government's own message, or messages, are clear, and nowhere more so than in their document, "Tourism—Competing with the Best", which has been mentioned by many hon. Members, and the shortcomings of which were highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in his forceful and timely opening remarks. What a damp squib it has turned out to be, especially when one considers that the management consultants' input works out at £10,000 a page—or to put it another way, £150,000 of taxpayers' money. It told us nothing that the industry did not know already.

Admittedly, the document is useful to a certain extent. It at least acknowledges that the rosy picture painted for the past 15 years was false, as throughout that time we were losing market share. I shall not go over the figures that my hon. Friend gave the House, but we have gone from trade surplus to deficit in a big way. The figures are well known to the House.

Here is the fundamental contradiction: the document recognises the Government's responsibility for an industry that is diverse and fragmented and where co-ordination is difficult. At the same time, it states that the industry must solve its own problems—a point repeated by the Secretary of State at Question Time on Monday and again this evening.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury pointed out, the document is notable for its omissions—no mention was made of the contribution of local authorities, the importance of visitor attractions or of self-catering accommodation, and many others as well.

In his thoughtful speech, the hon. Member for Swindon raised many important issues, such as access for disabled people and the rating of caravan sites. Having spoken recently at the Home Parks Association conference, I know of the fears that exist, and it is right that they should have been expressed in today's debate. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that we must watch the tendency to provide tourism signposts, but let me also put in a plea on behalf of the motor heritage museum on the M40, which needs a signpost because it is a worthwhile attraction.

It is clear that the hon. Member for Swindon has not spoken to representatives of the industry in any great depth. I met some of them at last week's British travel trade fair. The vast majority appeared to be unhappy with the document that we have discussed, which is not comprehensive and does not constitute a real step forward. It demonstrates once more that the Government are simply not prepared to listen.

For example, the management consultants who did the background work found that a majority in the industry favoured a statutory grading scheme. Resistance to the idea came from the Minister and the Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has already spelled out the Opposition's strategy, and we have heard a number of speeches rejecting the statutory scheme. When will those hon. Members realise that the idea is not driven by ideology, as seems to be the case with everything that they do? It is on our agenda because, while appealing to common sense, it also happens to be what the industry wants. I believe that it will also prove a valuable test in overcoming the problems of bookability raised by a number of hon. Members.

At the British travel trade fair last week, I was invited to take part in a brains trust organised by the Tourism Society with about 200 representatives from local authorities, visitor attractions, tourist boards, travel companies and, most important, hotel groups. When the question of a statutory grading scheme was put to that audience of 200 by Ken Robinson, the society's chairman, all but one voted in favour of such a scheme. The British Incoming Tour Operators Association—a highly respected professional body that was represented at the event—has cast its vote in favour of the scheme. How can Conservative Members deny that strength of opinion? How long can that continue?

I understand that the British Tourist Authority is currently studying the effect of a cut in VAT on hotel accommodation and its impact on the industry. Nearly all our European competitors enjoy a lower rate than ours. Will the Government at least take the arguments on board when the BTA's report is published, rather than dismissing them out of hand? I hope that the Minister will refer to that in his reply.

I recently asked the Secretary of State for his views on VAT in a written parliamentary question. He replied dismissively, pointing out that our employers did not have to pay the costs of the social chapter, which has already been mentioned in the debate. Hon. Members who support that line are usually those who set great store by the Government's deregulatory approach. We agree that there is duplication and unnecessary regulation—much of which stems from the last 15 years of Conservative government—and we, too, want to cut some of it, but we also recognise that quality is what will give us a competitive edge. In tourism most of all, perhaps, that quality will come from the quality of service provided by well-trained, well-paid and well-treated employees. Do Conservative Members really think we will win back our lost market share by under-investing in staff who are made to work in poor conditions?

On a similar note to the VAT argument, mention has been made of the multiplier effect that applies to the Government's spending on marketing. Studies such as those completed by McKinsey for the tourist boards make the case very clearly, as do regional studies for Cumbria and other areas. More spending on marketing equals greater returns for the Treasury.

When it comes to bringing in overseas visitors, which our competitors continue to do better than us, as was pointed out by many of my hon. Friends, the Secretary of State should be looking at more than just the confines of his own Department.

In the case of Russian visitors, for instance, the Department should be looking to encourage the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to take a stronger line on visa allocations. It seems, according to the British Incoming Tour Operators Association, that the British consulates in Moscow and St. Petersburg are

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

processing visa applications very slowly. Because the officers are being so unrealistic with them, potential visitors are simply giving up and going elsewhere, spending their holiday money in our competitor countries.

I wonder what steps have been taken to alleviate that problem. I hope again that the Minister, when he replies, will at least say that he will enter into talks with Ministers in that other Department to find out whether that problem can be overcome. From my own encounters with industry representatives—I think that many hon. Members know that I frequently go around the industry—my impression is that people in tourism are most disappointed with the Government's lack of imagination and their failure to grasp the nettle of partnership action. That is increasingly what divides us and the Government, as was demonstrated by this evening's speeches.

The commitment to tourism of my hon. Friends has not gone unnoticed outside the House. Tonight, we have heard from the new secretary of the Back-Bench committee of Labour Members involved in tourism. The chairman of that committee is also in the Chamber. We had a meeting yesterday, which was addressed by John East of the English tourist board and Adele Biss, the chairwoman of both the ETB and the British Tourist Authority.

A little bird has told me—I am sure that the hon. Member for Swindon will want to know this—that there were five times more Labour Members at our meeting than Conservative Members at theirs two weeks ago. The fact that we have a keen Back-Bench committee demonstrates how seriously Labour Members take the industry.

Mr. Waterson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: I shall not give way because of the time, but if the hon. Gentleman can persuade the Leader of the House to give us more time for debates on tourism, I shall certainly give way on another occasion.

Throughout the country—in Brighton and Blackpool, to name but two towns which we will win next time—that commitment is being recognised. Labour's imaginative and committed approach has won friends in seaside resorts across the country. Seaside problems, which other hon. Members have already referred to, are another element missing from the Secretary of State's document, I might add.

Tourism affects all our constituencies these days. It is not just about seaside resorts, Stratford, Bath or Oxford. There are many other regions. Stoke-on-Trent is rapidly catching up on Stratford-on-Avon as a visitor attraction. Stoke attracted about 1.8 million visitors, bringing £75 million to the local economy last year. Thirty-eight per cent. of overseas visitors were there for the first time. That was a high figure, as I am sure that the House will appreciate.

In Manchester, the regeneration of the Castlefield area, the G-MEX and the Granada studio tour are all examples of tourism bringing jobs to places that some narrow-minded people would have said were unlikely areas for tourism growth. In Wigan, the constituency of another member of our Back-Bench committee, the success of Wigan pier is exemplary of the kind of strategy that can succeed in reviving the local economy. Bradford, Halifax and Dudley are all places where tourism has contributed and still has more to give. I could go on because the list is almost endless.

In that regard, the Government have recently emphasised tourism in London. As a north-west Member of Parliament, I welcome the fact that extra money is going to London. However, I ask the Secretary of State to do as much as possible to ensure that, once they do their two or three days in London, visitors are steered to other parts of the country.

In places such as the ones that I have just mentioned, tourism has a great deal to offer. In this, there is an element of the wasted opportunity that underlines tonight's debate. The 150,000 to 200,000 extra jobs that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to could have been squandered because our market share has declined over the past 15 years. That is an estimate by the English tourist board.

The Government have thrown up a smokescreen that runs to a 15-page document and a few conciliatory speeches, but we and the industry have seen through that smokescreen. Did the Government really think that they could hide the new £45 million tourism tax, brought in at the previous Budget, by putting value added tax on recreational transport? Perhaps they thought that they were doing just that when Customs and Excise glibly stated that making tourism in this country £45 million more expensive would have no effect on our international competitiveness.

The Government should tell that to the management at Alton Towers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, or to a number of other visitor attractions or to Sir John Egan who, as chairman of the Confederation of British Industry's tourism action group, wrote to me recently. He spoke of the

> "particular concern that yet again the tourism industry is being seen as a soft target for taxation purposes."

Likewise, does the Secretary of State think that £150,000 on management consultants can possibly start to make up for the £1.3 million that he cut from the budget of the English tourist board? In the absence of any real commitment to improving matters, these are the policies that have marked the Government's approach to tourism.

Finally, the Government and the Ministers on the Treasury Bench had better believe it when I tell them that Labour means business for the tourist industry. The further bad news for them is that the industry is beginning to realise that only a Labour Government will give tourism the recognition and attention that it deserves.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) said that this was the fourth tourism debate in this Parliament whereas, I think I am right in saying, we did not have one such debate in the previous Parliament. The fact that we have had four tourism debates is a tribute to the tourist industry and the importance that we now place on it.

The industry has a turnover of some £33 billion a year; it provides 1.5 million jobs; and produces something like 5 per cent. of the gross national product. This country had more than 20 million overseas visitors last years, which was a record. It was up 5 per cent. on the previous year and not only shows that the Government take tourism extremely seriously but that the industry itself is very successful.

The fact that we have had four tourism debates is a reflection on the power and influence of the Department of National Heritage now has. The Department was deliberately set up to give a voice in the Cabinet to aspects of Government policy which, important as they are—none more so than tourism—did not previously get enough of the House's time. I am, therefore, extremely glad that we have had this fourth debate, which is a tribute to the industry itself and to the Department, which has brought it to the forefront of consideration in government.

I shall deal with as many points as possible. I hope that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), to whom I gave a fair old bit of time in the BBC debate the other day, will excuse me if I do not accord him quite so much time today. I mean no disrespect.

I thought, however, that the hon. Gentleman was a little grudging about the deregulation of tourism signposting. Almost the last thing that happened before I entered the Chamber was that I received a note from the British Hospitality Association saying that the announcement was absolutely marvellous. I had another note from the Federation of Small Businesses saying the same thing.

I remember how I was attacked during the first of the tourism debates to which my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon referred about the fact that tourism signposting was so restricted. I said then that I was determined to do all that I could to get that changed, and now it has been changed—more proof of the influence of the DNH within the Government.

Some hon. Members spoke as though more signposts meant giant signposts and billboards for MacDonald's, restaurants and pubs, but that is not the case. The truth is that the traditional white-on-brown signs will be available for tourist attractions that need pointing out to encourage visitors.

I shall cite just one interesting former regulation. I am speaking from memory, but I think that this is right. Unless an attraction had 250,000 visitors a year, it could not have a sign. The simple response is how on earth is it expected to get 250,000 visitors if it does not have a sign? All that has been swept away and it is a real advance for tourism.

With regard to deregulation in tourism, I know that, over a year ago, the Department conducted a review of the tourism industry and identified, with the help of the industry, more than 100 regulations which had a damaging impact on the tourism industry. We are negotiating to get rid of as many of those as we can, with proper and important regard to safety. Tourism signposting, which has been announced today, is but another success in a long line of successes.

We were successful with Department of Social Security hostels and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) who did so much work. We sorted out the rather more comic, not to say grotesque, frothy beer fuss last year. Also, if I may mention an Opposition Member, I well remember that in the debate in July 1993, the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) made the very important point about how ridiculous it was that airlines from the United States which wanted to fly into Manchester were not allowed to do so unless they got a tick of approval from the British Government and the United States Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has now swept that away. The tourism industry is getting the help that it deserves from the Government.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury mentioned the 1996 European soccer championships. He made the point—fairly enough—that we should ensure that we tie into that terrific competition as much tourism interest in art galleries, museums and so on as we can. I have had a meeting with various members of the football authorities and the football supporters clubs to ensure that everything possible is done so that we benefit from tourism as much as we should when the football championships are here.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon made his usual extremely well-informed and thoughtful speech. I congratulate him on his tremendous work as chairman of the tourism group. I hope that the industry understands how valuable the group is in telling us about the grass-roots worries in tourism, which feed into the Government who try to do something about them.

My hon. Friend made one very important point about jobs in the tourism industry on which the industry as well as the House should grip tight. It is quite true that there are lower-paid jobs in tourism, but the industry provides 1.5 million jobs and if there were a minimum wage in the tourism industry, it would decimate those jobs; it would put out of work the very people that we want to put in work.

Having listened to the hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), few industries would have more cause to fear any future socialist Government. We would have a minimum wage and all the new regulations that the Labour party wants to impose. We would have statutory compulsory registration of hotels and guest houses. Has the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury any idea how much that would cost? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde says that much of the industry wants a statutory compulsory registration. Well, if so many in the industry want it, how come only 11,000 out of 225,000 small businesses in tourism have registered so far? If they think that it is such a wonderful idea, why do not they put their money where their mouths are? It is a very difficult and dangerous road to go down to say to people, "You must comply with the state scheme. You must pay hundreds of pounds to register." We would look at that very closely indeed, which is exactly what we are doing.

In the excellent document "Competing with the Best", the English tourist board said that it realised that the present crown scheme was not everything that it should be, that it recognised the value of information to tourists, whether through a crown scheme, the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club or whatever, and that it was looking very closely and urgently at what is the best way in which to improve and reform that scheme. That is right. It should not jump into something so controversial without looking at it properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned the disabled in connection with tourism, and that is a most important point. As he rightly said, there are tremendous economic benefits to be gained, as well as social benefits for the disabled themselves. My hon. Friend knows, although not all hon. Members may share his knowledge,

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

of the tremendous work of the holiday care service under the fine leadership of Mrs. Mary Baker, and of the co-operation that that service gets from the English tourist board, which runs a special tick scheme—that is, a tick opposite an entry means that there is access for the disabled to those premises.

My hon. Friend also talked about benefits for tourism from the lottery, and we could expatiate on that at great length. It is true that tourism as a sector does not automatically benefit directly from the lottery, but indirectly it benefits greatly. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury mentioned the European soccer championships, and sport gets 20 per cent. of the benefits.

There are also the arts, and the arrangement there mirrors what the Department of National Heritage as a whole seeks to do. The Department spends about £1 billion a year in encouraging just those features that attract tourism, although it does not deal directly with the industry itself. However, we give the English tourist board and the British Tourist Authority combined about £44 million, and if we add to that what the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland boards receive the sum approaches about £100 million a year—a serious sum. By the way, we are not at the bottom of the European league; we spend the same as France, and we are just about in the middle of the table for direct promotions.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) also spoke in the debate. Rutherglen is a constituency that I once knew well, as I had the same experience there as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) had in Islington. I agree with the hon. Member for Rutherglen that in the past many people thought that an industry that did not manufacture was not a serious industry. Well, tourism is a serious industry; it is growing into the biggest industry in the world, and I repeat that the Government are determined to everything possible to support and encourage it.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen also talked about airports, which are important too. As was mentioned in the previous debate, we have now managed to open to flights between the United States and the United Kingdom every airport in the United Kingdom, apart from Heathrow and Gatwick where crowding makes that impossible. That is a real advance in deregulation to add to the others that I have mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne talked about the damage that the minimum wage would do. Of course he is absolutely right. The idea of the minimum wage, on top of the fresh regulations that the Opposition intend to pour upon us if they ever get the chance, must be terrifying for the industry.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) described tourist boards as market catalysts, and that is exactly right. The industry itself must do the main part of the job. If we add up the handsome profits made in the past financial year by British Airways, the BAA and Forte, to name three major players in the game, they come to about £1.1 billion. Those are terrific success stories, but those organisations also pump their own money into tourism. It must not be forgotten that the biggest single contribution to tourism should and does come from the players themselves.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland also mentioned VAT on hotels. That is a vexed issue, but I think that the tourist industry slightly overestimates the loss of competitive edge caused by our rate of VAT, and is rather inclined to forget the advantages that they have to weigh against that. For example, food is zero-rated in this country, whereas in France it is not. We do not labour under the social chapter, and so on. So it is difficult to strike a fair balance, but the hon. Gentleman is right that it is a serious problem.

The British Tourist Authority has produced a report on the subject, which has been sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—this week I believe, but certainly in the past few days. My right hon. and learned Friend will consider the report and will shortly make recommendations.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the splendid work that is done by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the damage that could be done to it by the effect of the success of the lottery on the pools companies. That is an important point. It is certainly true that the pools have suffered as a result of the lottery. Not only the pools have suffered. Amusement arcades and anything that depends on disposable leisure income such as bingo and many other activities have suffered. I hope that we will be able to ensure a continuing flow of funds to the arts and sport from whatever appropriate source.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), whom I just have time to mention—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am afraid that the Minister does not have time.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

CARERS (RECOGNITION AND SERVICES) BILL

[Money]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Mr. Barry Field be added to the Liaison Committee.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Belize

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise in the House the subject of the United Kingdom's relationship with Belize, a tiny central American Commonwealth country with an enviable tradition of democratic government and an excellent record on human rights. My theme is that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in the cautious process of distancing itself from this former British colony, at a time when, in the interests of the United Kingdom and the Belizeans, we should be working closely with them. For our country, there is an element of unfinished business while Belize's independence is overshadowed by an unfounded territorial claim by a powerful neighbour.

I begin by expressing my reservations about the reduction of the British garrison which has been deployed there since 1948, the year when my hon. Friend the Minister was born. Some of us who followed the matter closely at the time of the reduction will take some persuading that the reduction was not largely led by the Treasury.

I visited our brigade-size force in Belize a few years ago with the officers of the Conservative Defence Committee. We were all impressed by the role that our service men performed there, and the wonderful training facilities that they experienced. Here was one part of the world where low-flying training presented no problems.

The so-called saving of some £9 million was a small one, and there was clearly a downside. I appreciate that the political and security circumstances in the region have improved, partly following Guatemalan recognition of Belize in 1991 as a sovereign state. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister, who has stayed out of bed to reply to this short debate, will know, this is not the full story.

Indeed, my hon. Friend's predecessor wrote to an hon. Member of this House last April expressing his concern that

"recent Guatemalan attitudes have unnecessarily raised the profile of the territorial dispute."

He rightly raised that matter with Ministers in Guatemala last March. My hon. Friend the Minister will have been told of the disgraceful scenes at the Athens, San José, meeting last year, when Belize was not able to attend as an official observer. I hope that the Minister will make sure that our EU partners regularly make statements supporting Belize's position.

Guatemala has not given up its claim to all Belize. Last year, Guatemala restated that claim and deposited the appropriate documents with the UN. Guatemala does not recognise the existing border or the present border markers. It talks about the territory of Belize being at present "occupied", as if it were talking about the west bank. Guatemala publishes erroneous maps in which Belize is shown as a province of Guatemala.

That is unacceptable international behaviour, but it is not just a dispute between two foreign countries, as the United Kingdom had previously agreed that border. For 10 years, there have been documented cases of the Guatemalan military directing settlers into Belize. These settlers—as is the custom—have been slashing and burning areas of jungle indiscriminately in a designated national park.

Perhaps more than half the settlers have now gone back over the border, but there have been indications that, in recent years, the Guatemalan army has been resisting repatriation. It has told officials in Belize that, if they try to put those people back, they will have to deal directly with the army. Experts are not sure whether the Guatemalan defence forces are entirely under political control.

We are talking about an unstable country in the throes of a nasty civil war and with a callous and brutal disregard for human rights. The Guatemalan army is the largest in the region, with supplies from the United States, including radar which covers much of Belize. The Belize defence forces lack proper radar.

It is amazing to be told that Guatemala has not been prepared to accredit a Belizean ambassador in Guatemala, although Guatemala does have an ambassador in Belize. One wonders whether the forthcoming presidential elections in Guatemala could produce a right-wing leader who could seek to unite the country by taking a strong stand over Belize. If so, the Foreign Office could be caught on the wrong foot.

A letter in November 1993 from the British Prime Minister to the Prime Minister of Belize committed the United Kingdom to playing its part in protecting Belize in the event of a military threat. However, the words "in principle" were seen as weakening the previous commitment—probably justifiably so. As we know from the south Atlantic conflict, sending weak and uncertain signals as to our likely response can be dangerous. I submit that we need to strengthen our assurances so that there is no element of doubt. I am sure that that is the view of many Conservative Members.

Since 1 January 1994, the United Kingdom has not been responsible for the security of Belize. Our forces are down to a company strength, and are there for training only. They have no authority to intervene if any problems arise.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Bearing in mind the fact that Belize is a member both of the Commonwealth and of the UN—which the Falklands was not—does my hon. Friend think that Guatemala has the message absolutely fair and square that any interference in Belize would be met with a strong response—led by this country, but shared with the UN and the Commonwealth?

Mr. Townsend: I hope that that is right, but my hon. Friend may pick up some reasons why I am more cautious that he is.

British forces in Belize have only three Gazelle helicopters, and a good case can be made for introducing to Belize one large helicopter—such as a Puma—which could expand the range of jungle training, as well as having other uses. The Belize defence force is improving, although it is still very small—even including the reserve forces. It has only light weapons, and it cannot be expected to contain a major invasion force.

International intervention, including air power, would be essential at an early stage if there should ever be an invasion. Britain has assisted with the development of the Belize defence force through the provision of loan service

[Mr. Townsend]

personnel, training, equipment and advice. I hope that we will hear tonight that that programme of assistance will continue. I wish that we could help them with their radar systems requirement.

The British garrison used to provide some assistance in counter-narcotics operations. Drug trafficking in Belize remains a problem. We should remember that some of those drugs are destined for western Europe. What assistance, if any, will we be giving the authorities in Belize this year and next in that regard? Post-cold war, that is just the sort of new task that our forces should be taking on.

Can my hon. Friend confirm that a Royal Navy frigate will continue to call there regularly? I believe that the local forces have only one naval patrol vessel, for a considerable coastline.

Belize's outstanding public sector debt with the United Kingdom totals about £16 million, all of which is owed to the Overseas Development Administration. For a small and comparatively poor country such as Belize, paying off those debts is a big strain on the economy. Because Belize is honourably making the payments, it does not qualify for debt relief. I understand the argument, but perhaps it is a little unsympathetic. Can nothing be done?

Last year, Her Majesty the Queen visited Belize—it was a triumph for her. Belize would welcome more high-level visits at this phase of its history. I am sure that the Minister will be anxious to see for himself that charming and friendly Commonwealth country. Our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has been there recently. I hope that my hon. Friend will also make a point of receiving the high commissioner for Belize before too long.

Belize feels that it falls between two stools when it deals with Whitehall. The Department of Trade and Industry tends to view it as a Caribbean country, while the Foreign Office emphasises the central American angle. Could not the approach of the two Departments be brought into line?

The main British Council office in the area is established in Jamaica. Naturally, Belize believes that the council should reopen an office in Belize, which would be of great assistance to central America. Is that a suggestion that the Minister feels able to support?

Belize has benefited under our bilateral aid programme. Will the Minister inform us of the Government's intentions?

The Minister will be well aware that the banana crop represents an impressive source of revenue for Belize. Its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dean Barrow, wrote to our right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture in December about obtaining a just share of the important European Union market. I am told that Belize is very disappointed that it has been granted a quota of only 40,000 tonnes in the new EU quota system. Pipeline investment is in place to produce 100,000 tonnes.

In late 1993, before the decision was made, the then Prime Minister, George Price, submitted a report alerting the British Government and the European Commission. That report demonstrated the need for a 100,000-tonne quota. So far, no adequate adjustment has been made above 40,000 tonnes. There is serious concern that Belize might have to throw away many thousands of tonnes of export-quality bananas, having no prospective alternative buyers. I hope that the Minister will either comment briefly on that topic tonight, or write to me in due course when he has had a chance to look into it.

I have put to the Minister the concern which I and a number of my colleagues feel about our relationship with Belize. I am a strong supporter of the Commonwealth, as the Minister knows. At the same time, I am a strong supporter of our European Union policy. I do not believe that they often conflict. Belize is a small and friendly Commonwealth country, and I hope that we shall go out of our way to emphasise our commitment to it and, at the same time, to the Commonwealth.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I welcome the opportunity to reply to this debate on a quiet Thursday evening. I particularly welcome the subject that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) has raised.

Britain's relations with Belize go back a long way. The original British settlement was established in about 1638. From then on, the main activity was logwood cutting for the European dye industry. It was not until the treaty of Paris in 1763 that Spain conceded to British settlers the rights to engage in the logwood industry. That was reaffirmed by the treaty of Versailles of 1783 and the convention of London of 1789. In 1862, Britain designated Belize as a British colony, and called it British Honduras. It has been known as Belize since 1973.

When Guatemala became independent in 1821, she claimed that she had inherited the previous Spanish title to British Honduras. However, in 1859, Guatemala signed and ratified the UK-Guatemala treaty in which she recognised the existing boundary between Guatemala and British Honduras. In 1939, however, Guatemala denounced the 1859 treaty and claimed Belize. In 1945, the Guatemalan Government wrote into its new constitution an article to the effect that Belize was an integral part of Guatemalan territory.

Although Belize had become self-governing in 1964, the Guatemalan claim delayed the setting in train of constitutional procedures leading to full independence. In 1980, the United Nations General Assembly called on Britain to convene a constitutional conference to bring Belize to early independence.

The constitutional conference was duly convened in April 1981 and, the following September, Belize became an independent state recognised by all nations except Guatemala, which maintained its claim. Following independence, a British garrison remained in Belize, with the full support of the Belizean Government, to counter any external threat to its security.

Recent years have been momentous in Belize's independent history. In 1991, the United Kingdom, our European partners and the international community as a whole welcomed recognition of Belize as a sovereign independent country by President Serrano of Guatemala. During 1992, the Guatemalan constitutional court and congress confirmed recognition of Belize. However, they did not renounce certain territorial claims on the country. That is of continuing concern to us, and we have been encouraging the two sides to reach agreement.

Increasingly, Belize's presence and role in the central American region has become fully accepted, including its attendance at central American summit meetings. I am glad to report to the House that, at the 11th annual ministerial meeting between Foreign Ministers of the European Union and central America, which I attended in Panama City on 24 February, Belize took part as an observer for the first time, and was represented by its distinguished Foreign Minister, Dean Barrow. Britain, and therefore the Foreign Office, played a crucial role in ensuring Belize's participation in that meeting. I recognised its presence there, as, subsequently, did a number of other countries, particularly Mexico.

My hon. Friend referred to the political prospects in Guatemala. The presidential election is due this autumn. So far, no candidates have declared themselves, so we cannot predict the outcome. We shall of course work with whoever is democratically elected.

It was against the background of that much-improved security in central America and Guatamala's recognition of Belizean independence, to which I have already alluded, that the Government reviewed Britain's defence relationship with Belize and the role of the British garrison. That was done in full consultation with the Government of Belize.

In May 1993, the then Minister of State, Foreign Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), informed the House that the garrison, which had been deployed in Belize since the year of my birth, would gradually reduce, during the following year or so, into a training operation for British troops, and that Belize would in due course assume responsibility for its own defence.

At the same time, we affirmed Britain's readiness to play a part in any consultation that the Belizean authorities might request about Belize's future security. We also undertook to maintain our programme of assistance to the Belize defence force and to sustain and improve the force's capability, and we gave an assurance that Belize would continue to be a beneficiary under Britain's bilateral aid programme.

In a joint statement with the Government of Belize during his visit in September 1993, the then Minister for the Armed Forces set out our plans for the garrison in fuller detail. It is gratifying to report that, since then, our plans have been accomplished in conditions of stability for Belize and for the region as a whole.

Belize assumed responsibility for its own defence on 1 January 1994. The reduction of the garrison was completed in September 1994, leaving a training team of about 100 permanent staff, including locally employed civilians, who are based at Airport camp.

I emphasise that the reduction of the garrison was a response to a much reduced external threat to Belize's security. In addition, the regional context is generally much more benign. Against that backdrop, it was natural for Belize, as a sovereign state recognised by the entire international community, to assume responsibility for its own defence.

However, those changes have not undercut Britain's defence links with Belize—far from it. There are regular company-strength deployments to Belize to take advantage of the resident training presence. There have been training deployments by RAF Harriers. We are also committed to maintaining our programme of assistance for the development of the Belize Defence Force.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davis: If I am to answer my hon. Friend's questions in any detail, I need to press on.

One and a half million pounds worth of equipment was donated to the defence force when the reduction of the British garrison was completed. British Loan Service personnel contributed to its training. We also sent short-term training teams to train the Belize defence force in specific skills, as well as arranging training courses in Britain for its key members. Ten defence force members will receive training in Britain this year.

Most of that training is financed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's United Kingdom military training and assistance scheme, for which I am responsible. I am glad that, in response to the importance attached to helicopter support by the Belize defence force, also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence makes available a number of flying hours for the defence force each month.

My hon. Friend mentioned Puma helicopters. The Government of Belize have never asked for Pumas, which I should tell him would involve a significant infrastructure cost, and there is no British defence requirement for them in Belize. He also mentioned the Royal Navy frigate. He is right that that Royal Navy frigate has called at Belize regularly, and I can tell him that it will continue to do so.

As hon. Members know, Britain's close and friendly links with Belize, the only member of the Commonwealth in central America, go much wider than defence links. They are perhaps symbolised by Her Majesty the Queen's visit last year to Belize, one of her realms. Ministerial visits are frequent, and included a visit to Belize in May 1994 by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who is the Chairman of the House of Commons Defence Committee, visited Belize last month at the invitation of the Government of Belize.

The British aid programme is a practical expression of the British commitment to Belize's development. We expect to spend more than £5 million this year, which is about £30 for every Belizean citizen. Capital projects now completed include a new terminal building at the international airport, and the Big Falls bridge on the southern highway.

A number of road projects are under way or being planned, including the Stann creek valley road, which covers a 23 km stretch in a major citrus-growing area; an emergency resealing programme for 11 miles of the northern highway; the resurfacing of 66 miles of the northern highway from Belize city to the Mexican border; the appraisal for the resealing and rehabilitation of the western highway; and the construction of the southern highway, at a cost of £7.5 million.

We are co-operating with the World bank to improve the quality of primary education through curriculum and examination reform and teacher education. We are also about to enter the fourth year of a forestry planning and management project in support of the Belize tropical forestry action plan.

[Mr. Davis]

In the social sector, we are funding a community development project and a drug demand reduction programme—my hon. Friend rightly mentioned drugs. Our forward programme includes help with the introduction of value added tax and with the establishment of a social investment fund, which the World bank is supporting as a poverty reduction measure.

That bilateral programme is augmented by our multilateral aid through donors such as the European Community, which is building a new 112-bed hospital for Belize City. We are committed to maintaining a substantial aid programme for Belize to help the country meet the challenges of the 21st century.

My hon. Friend made some important remarks about the Belizean economy. The British aid programme makes a worthwhile contribution to Belize's steadily growing economy. Despite the withdrawal of the British garrison, the Belize economy grew by an estimated 1.6 per cent. in 1993-94. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Belizean Government on their resolve in recently introducing an austerity budget designed to correct the current fiscal deficit.

My hon. Friend said that Belize has not been granted debt relief. Judged by agreed World bank criteria, Belize's debt burden is manageable, but if Belize sought to restructure its debts, the Paris Club would consider the case for debt relief on its merits, provided that Belize agreed a programme of economic reform with the International Monetary Fund. However, Belize has not, at least at this point, approached the Paris Club.

The economic links between Britain and Belize are increasingly based on private sector trade and investment. Its growth and success is the best assurance of Belize's continued economic progress. Major British investors in Belize include Barclays bank, Fyffes—of course, in bananas—the Commonwealth Development Corporation and Shell.

Britain is Belize's third biggest trading partner after the United States and Mexico, its neighbours. Our exports were almost £12 million in 1994. Principal exports are chemicals, industrial buildings, beverages, manufactured materials, food stuffs and generating equipment. Our imports from Belize, which totalled almost £40 million in 1994, included sugar, bananas, citrus, honey, vegetables and clothing.

My hon. Friend mentioned bananas. I cannot give him a definitive answer to his question today, but I shall, as he asked me, write to him on the matter, as I understand that it is of considerable significance to Belize.

My hon. Friend also asked me about the treatment of Belize as a central American or Caribbean country by ourselves and the Department of Trade and Industry. Geographically, Belize is clearly a central American country. We are pleased that it is increasingly participating in regional activities there—that is part of the effort that we have made in the past few years. But, as a Commonwealth country, Belize has much in common with countries in the Caribbean. It benefits from a substantial British aid programme and preferential access to the European market under the Lomé convention. There are advantages in the two approaches, and I should not play them down.

It is against that background of regional stability and co-operation, and increasing prosperity in Belize, that I am glad to welcome the good relations established between Belize and Guatemala. Those good relations are due to a constructive approach on both sides, and will, I hope, eventually lead to a final settlement of the territorial dispute between the two countries. Meanwhile, it is encouraging that the problems that occasionally arise on the long frontier between Belize and Guatemala are successfully resolved by good will and flexibility on both sides—a process to which I hope we can contribute in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 31 March 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Education Cuts

9.34 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On Wednesday, thousands of people came here from Derbyshire to lobby against the education cuts, exercising their democratic right to lobby. They handed in petitions and gave me other material; for example, yesterday I sent 800 letters to the Secretary of State for Education about the education cuts.

There are 13,207 signatures on the petition. Some of them lap over into the constituency of Bolsover, because North-East Derbyshire district covers part of that constituency. However, there must be at least 12,000 signatures from my constituency, representing well over 15 per cent. of the constituency population.

The petition reads:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble Petition of the residents of Derbyshire sheweth that
>
> Government policies threaten standards of education in all Derbyshire schools and that this can only lead to increased class sizes, fewer text books and other resources; plus teacher and staff support redundancies. These policies will also seriously and adversely affect education opportunities of existing and future pupils. We support the campaign to call upon the Secretary of State to address this matter urgently.
>
> Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Prime Minister and his Government not to impede this Petition.
>
> And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

The petition is signed by Steven O'Brien of 68 Springvale road, Danesmoor and the other petitioners whom I mentioned earlier.

To lie upon the Table.

Proceeds of Crime Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

DESIGNATION OF OFFENCES IN RESPECT OF WHICH MAGISTRATES' COURTS MAY MAKE CONFISCATION ORDERS

'Schedule 4 to the 1988 Act (Offences in respect of which magistrates' courts may make confiscation orders) shall be amended by inserting at the end of Part I—

"and insofar as they are tried summarily:

Enactment	*Description of Offence*
Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 (c. 48)	
Section 107	offences relating to the infringement of copyright
Section 198	making, dealing with or using illicit recordings
Trade Descriptions Act 1968 (c. 29) Section 1	offences relating to false trade descriptions
Trade Marks Act 1994 (c. 26) Section 92	offences relating to the unauthorised use of trade marks etc.".'.

—*[Mr. John Greenway.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.36 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

There has been much talk in the news this week about the film industry. Indeed, during recent months there has been a great movement towards supporting the British film industry with funding from, perhaps, the national lottery. That has certainly been very much in the minds of many hon. Members. Today, I believe that we could take steps significantly to help the British film industry by adding my new clause to the Bill. It deals with the growing problem of the counterfeiting of videos, films and, as I shall show, many other items of intellectual property.

The new clause would make counterfeiting and copyright infringement, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, the Trade Description Act 1968 and the Trade Marks Act 1994, offences that courts could take into account when making confiscation orders under the Bill and under the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The offences would be added to schedule 4 of the 1988 Act.

My hon. Friend the Minister has been extremely helpful when considering this matter, as has been my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam). However, my hon. Friend the Minister will doubtless say that my aim could be achieved not by adding my new clause to the Bill, but by statutory instrument. As I understand the position, part I of schedule 4 to the 1988 Act lists all the relevant Acts and the offences to which that Act applies. Part II says that the list can be amended by statutory instrument. Is that the best route or should we add the new clause to the Bill? As I understand it, if we add the new clause to the Bill, all the offences could be dealt with by any magistrates court or Crown court, but if we deal with them through a statutory instrument under part II of schedule 4 to the 1988 Act, offences could be dealt with only in a magistrates court. That is the advice that I have

[Mr. John Greenway]

been given. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister and others who may be listening to the debate will want to reflect on that point.

Piracy of videos, music cassettes and compact discs is a growing problem in the United Kingdom. The Federation Against Copyright Theft—FACT—and the British Phonographic Industry estimate that, every year, the cost in lost sales to their industries amounts to £250 million and £20 million respectively—a staggering amount of money.

It is widely recognised that, when bootleggers are caught, the punishments do not fit the crimes. The fine is often £100 and can be as little as £20 for a first offence. Video piracy is a low-risk, high-reward business. Approximately 20 per cent. of the illicit material that is seized in raids conducted by FACT consist of videos that have not received a certificate from the British Board of Film Classification because they are deemed unsuitable for home viewing. Those videos include two films in particular—"The Exorcist" and "Driller Killer". That is another feature of the sorry tale with which we must deal. Such films are unsuitable for home viewing and they are available at car boot sales and Sunday markets. I suspect that no one is choosing who should be allowed to buy those videos.

The scale of the operation is mind boggling. From various raids that FACT has undertaken with the police, the industry has discovered that, for a typical counterfeit operation, 100 duplicating machines might be working 24 hours a day, producing 6,000 videos a week, from which the revenue amounts to about £60,000, or £3 million per annum. When that information was first presented to me, I misread it. I thought that about 100 video machines were being used to duplicate videos around the country, so we were talking about 6,000 videos a week and £3 million worth of counterfeit goods nationally. I thought, "What is the problem" until it came home to me that those figures related to one operation.

I do not wish to fall foul of the rules of the House, but I want to show you, Madam Speaker, this photograph of a raid in Kent, which my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) attended with Kent police. You can see all the machines. Another photograph shows all the counterfeit video covers. Another one shows a garage and boxes full of all the copies ready to be shipped out to the Sunday market. There are more pictures of the video machines. They were part of just one counterfeiting operation. Those photographs show the scale of the problem.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): We are suitably horrified by what my hon. Friend has shown us. He told us about one operation, but has he any idea how many other operations of a similar nature are going on around the country? Can he give a guesstimate?

Mr. Greenway: I shall make a guesstimate later, but, if I do not stick to the order in which I want to present all the facts, I might miss something out and there is much important information. I share my hon. Friend's concern. She is right to point to the fact that such activities are taking place on a wide scale.

9.45 am

Another factor causes grave concern. I want to dispel the myth we are dealing only with a few out-of-work young lads operating in what we might call the Del Boy economy around London or in some of our inner cities, and that they are doing nobody much harm by making a few bob on the side pirating the odd video or cassette. It is well known that such operations have strong links with organised crime, especially pornography, drug rackets and even terrorist activity. They all have proven links with video piracy.

Last night, I was speaking to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) about that matter. You will recall, Madam Speaker, those halcyon days of the Select Committee on Home Affairs when my right hon. Friend was the chairman, and how we discovered, for example, on our visits to Northern Ireland, how such operations were helping to fund IRA terrorist activity. I pay tribute, in particular, to the tremendous work that the Royal Ulster Constabulary has undertaken in trying to stop those rackets and the proceeds of crime going towards terrorist activities.

Where does one obtain pirate videos and material? Sometimes, one can pick them up in retail outlets because dealers are tempted by the low prices, but the majority of pirated or counterfeit videos are sold to the public through the non-retail trade, especially car boot sales and Sunday markets. It is just a little aside, but that is an another example of why we need—and I say this passionately to my hon. Friend the Minister, who I know shares my concern—to reconsider the law on car boot sales and some Sunday markets. I hope that we will be able to return to that matter before the year is out.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the confiscated proceeds of crime that he has mentioned could be put towards more stringent criminal enforcement so that we could crack down on Sunday markets and car boot sales and nip such crime in the bud?

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Whether there should be some hypothecation—if that is the right word—of where the proceeds of crime go is a more general matter for the Bill.

Again, I am delighted that you are in the Chair this morning, Madam Speaker, because you were with us in Washington when we were shown the 12-seater tourer bus that had been seized by the Washington drugs squad from drug traffickers, and how it used the bus in its campaign against other drug traffickers. I know that such solutions do not go down well with Home Department officials, but it is a tempting thought that we should be able to use such equipment and especially, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) said, some of the proceeds to help crack down on crime. I hope that, when the Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) has introduced is put on the statute book, and when confiscation of the proceeds of crime significantly increases, that will help my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in fighting the Treasury over his budget to cut crime. That is an important matter.

I deal now with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). She asked how big the problem was. In 1994, the Federation Against Copyright Theft seized 1,020 video recorders, 156,500 tapes, 500,000 inlays and 61 television sets in 1,747 searches. Inlays are vital because they are the picture sleeves that make the buyer think how terrific it is that he can buy a copy of "The Exorcist" , "I Spit in your Groove" or "Driller Killer". When one thinks that not all searches are successful because the counterfeiters get to know that the police or the federation are coming and shift their stock accordingly, one gets some idea of the scale of the problem.

The federation works closely with the police and trading standards officers and institutes about 150 criminal actions a year at its own expense. The majority of these actions are undertaken by way of a summons under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

It is FACT's experience that penalties in the Crown court average about £1,000 a summons, although the maximum penalties available under the Act are unlimited fines and/or two years' imprisonment. Under the Video Recordings Act 1984, the maximum fine available is £20,000. These sums must be viewed as derisory when compared with the value of infringing material that may be seized during a raid because it is not uncommon for that material to be worth more than £1 million.

What is the point even of a maximum fine of £20,000 if the counterfeiters have made £1 million from their operation? They pay the £20,000 and then go and start all over again. We have to seize the £1 million, which is why it is right that this matter is being discussed in connection with this worthy Bill.

The federation, trading standards officers and local Members of Parliament are all constantly applying pressure on the judiciary to enforce the maximum penalties available to make their efforts more effective in combating video piracy, but the fact is that even the maximum penalties are not enough—we have to get after the loot.

The British Video Association and the British Phonographic Industry, which deals with the record business, strongly support the Bill and especially the new clause which would certainly make the Bill more applicable to the bootleggers and the pirates who damage their industry. The BPI is the trade association that represents the majority of United Kingdom record companies whose recordings are widely pirated. It estimates that piracy costs the United Kingdom record industry about £20 million a year. The BPI is active in fighting such piracy and took more than 900 actions against pirates last year.

Whereas a dozen or perhaps 20 films are extremely popular at any one time—of course, they have been financed by the film industry, which is a big business—there are many hundreds, if not thousands, of recordings available on the high street, but a great many copies are not necessarily sold. We should think of the musicians, some of whom are barely scratching a living or trying to make a future in the industry, whether in popular music or in performing the classical repertoire which, I have to say, is more to my taste. The pirating of copies is a serious problem for them.

What I am saying, in effect, is that this is not a victimless crime as some people suggest. The victims are often young musicians who are trying to make a career and for whom the royalties from the proper sale of recordings are so important.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that record and film companies spend part of their profits on encouraging young talent and enabling people to make their mark in those industries? If those profits are reduced because of pirate copies of recordings, might it not mean that opportunities for young talent could be diminished?

Mr. Greenway: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but, in fact, it is worse than that. The extent of pirating and counterfeiting might make record companies decide that it is not worth making certain records in the first place. This is, I understand, a particular problem in some categories of popular music. I do not know enough about it to say which categories, but I understand that some are of very narrow interest. I suspect that the people who might like to listen to such music—those in the 18-30 age group—frequent Sunday markets and car boot sales.

I shall now detail what happened when a major bootlegger was prosecuted. I am told by the BPI that one of the major known criminals working in this area pleaded not guilty when tried in a magistrates court but was found guilty and given a 12-month suspended sentence for two years. The counterfeit stock in his possession at the time of his arrest was forfeited, which is fair enough, but he was not fined. He was simply ordered to pay £500 towards legal costs, despite the fact that a conservative estimate of his annual turnover was in excess of £500,000.

The man had been dealing in bootleg product for a number of years, and it has recently come to the attention of the BPI—I am grateful to Sarah John, its director of legal affairs, for giving me this information—that this character is now back in business. That is the heart of the problem. If the courts had the powers to confiscate what they estimate to be the proceeds of crime as set out in the Bill, it would have been much more difficult for that person to have got off so lightly.

I must explain that this problem does not apply only to the film and music industries. This week, I had a letter from Gillette Management Inc. which reads as follows:

> "I am writing to confirm that, as a major UK manufacturer of consumer products, Gillette fully supports"

the new clause which, it says, will help it enormously in combating counterfeiting. It continues:

> "As a leading UK manufacturer of shaving products (through its operating subsidiary, Gillette UK Limited with factories in Isleworth and Reading) and writing instruments (through its operating subsidiary, Parker Pen Company with a factory in Newhaven), Gillette has suffered frequently in the past from the importation of counterfeit products into this country. Counterfeiting has the effect of seriously undermining our UK manufacturing base and any strengthening of the law . . . which increases the penalties for counterfeiting and discourages the import of counterfeit products, is to be encouraged and has the full support of The Gillette Company."

When one thinks of the areas in which Gillette and Parker Pen operate, one can immediately see that such behaviour must apply right across the board. Throughout the entire commercial and industrial life of this country, people are counterfeiting products or pirating products before they are released. I understand that not long ago there was a scam about ladies' perfume. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) will no doubt be able to tell us a little more about that when they speak. The case for action is abundantly clear.

10 am

I shall mention two other important features which are a cause of grave concern. If I deal with the less serious issue first, it will whet the appetite of the House for the second point, which is infinitely worse. The lesser case

[Mr. Greenway]

gives a clear indication of the sort of people with which we are dealing and, as I have already mentioned, the contact that they have with organised crime. The premises of the Federation Against Copyright Theft, FACT, in Middlesex were recently fire-bombed and it is constantly being threatened by some bootleggers.

The second matter of grave concern arises because of information supplied by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North. I pay tribute to him for the way in which he has brought the matter to our attention. Indeed, he apologises to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for being unable to attend today's debate. My hon. Friend tells me that bootleggers often copy over violent and pornographic films, which they will then sell to anyone with cash. Just imagine a two or three-hour video of a pornographic film, on which 1 hour 40 minutes of "The Lion King" was recorded, that a video sleeve of "The Lion King" was put on the box and that it was sold at a Sunday market for a fiver to some kid who had just been paid for his paper round. He would take the video home, pop it in the machine and 1 hour 40 minutes later, when "The Lion King" finished, he would be watching the most horrendous pornography and bestiality.

Were he present, my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North would tell the House that he had seen this material with his own eyes as a result of a raid. While we in the House may plead on behalf of British business, British commerce, film makers and musicians who are losing out to pirates and bootleggers, such irresponsibility in the distribution of filth which youngsters may see is the most overwhelming reason why we need to take action.

The House has a chance this morning to put the matter right, to say to the pirates and the bootleggers that the final curtain is coming down, the videos are being switched off, it is the end of the show and that we shall take away their money and ensure that their dreadful business is brought to a sudden end.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said that we were discussing the new clause at a particularly appropriate time in the film world. I think that he was referring to this week's Oscar ceremony. Perhaps I may take this opportunity to mention that in my constituency we have a British Oscar winner, Peter Capaldi, who has also made a great contribution to our life locally. He has accompanied me to a local school where he encouraged young people to consider the possibility of a life in acting, film and theatre. I pay tribute to his tremendous achievement and to that of all our British Oscar winners. They deserve our congratulations.

I very much welcome the manner in which the hon. Member for Ryedale introduced this most important subject. There is no doubt that the illegal bootlegging industry is causing a tremendous problem and is making a huge amount of money. I shall pursue a number of the points that the hon. Gentleman raised. When he spoke of some of the videos that have been seized, he said they were unsuitable for home viewing and mentioned some of the work in which the Select Committee on Home Affairs had been involved—some of it when you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were a member of that Committee. I was also a member of the Committee, although, sadly, not at the same time as yourself.

I was reminded of some of the related inquiries that the Select Committee made into the link between video violence and juvenile crime and also—it is closely related because it sometimes involves the same individuals who are definitely involved in organised crime—into computer pornography. The hon. Member for Ryedale gave the graphic example of events in Washington and some of the sophisticated proceeds of crime that the industry has wrought.

I shall take this opportunity gently to remind hon. Members and the Minister that one of the amendments tabled by the Opposition to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill—in fact, I tabled it—related to confiscation and forfeiture with regard to computer pornography. It would have facilitated the confiscation, when convictions were made, of the very computers used by criminals to make their appalling computer videos and images. The amendment would have donated that sophisticated equipment to the police, who frequently—I have heard this from senior police officers—have to use equipment which is not as sophisticated as that of the criminals that they are rightly pursuing. I hope that Minister will again consider our plea and not reject it as, sadly, he did during the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill.

The hon. Member for Ryedale was right to talk about some of the discrepancies. The maximum fine under the Video Recordings Act 1994 is £20,000, which is a derisory sum when one considers that £1 million worth of products may be seized during a raid. That is why we should use our best endeavours to stop such activity. The hon. Gentleman was also right to mention the effect on business and, sometimes, on children as a result of this trade.

I understand that the Minister may suggest that the Bill does not the need the new clause to enable the pursuance of this illegal activity and that we may approach the problem through another means, perhaps by statutory instrument. I shall certainly listen to that very carefully. I shall also be interested to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), the promoter of the Bill. Clearly there is cross-party support for the fact that something has to be done about this deplorable trade. At this stage, we must probe and pursue the question of what is the best method. We and, I am sure, the hon. Member for Ryedale would need strong assurances from the Minister that there was a way in which to achieve our aim if he did not accept the new clause. We shall listen carefully to what the Minister and the hon. Member for Exeter have to say.

Mr. Streeter: I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on this important new clause. The House owes my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) a debt of gratitude for tabling it. He described graphically the Del Boy economy. I am tempted to say, therefore, that only fools and horses would vote against the new clause, but I shall resist that temptation.

The important message that we must send out from the House this morning, especially to young people, is that crime must not pay. Too many young people believe that crime does pay. The Bill, on which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), is sending a clear message that we will hit criminals where it really hurts—in their pockets—by confiscating the proceeds of their crimes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale described the losses of more than £250 million per annum to the huge film and recording industry. He is right to table the new clause in an attempt to deal with the perpetrators of these crimes. I take the point that the money would be spent, at least in part, by the film and recording industry on encouraging young talent to come forward and on encouraging the creative people in our midst. How much better it would be for the money to be spent on them rather than on the life-style criminals who cock a snook at the system and perpetrate those offences.

I want now to develop the point which I made in an intervention about the way in which we could use the money that we confiscated from those who commit offences. There is a powerful argument for ensuring that the proceeds confiscated are used in law enforcement. That is an especially powerful argument because we recognise that the outlets for pirate videos and pirate recordings of all kinds are car boot sales, Sunday markets, and so on. It is difficult to police such outlets because they are so widespread.

There has been a great explosion of car boot sales in all our constituencies. On Sunday mornings, it is difficult to drive along certain roads because there are so many cars parked. Understandably, people enjoy the opportunity to buy a bargain; no one begrudges people obtaining a bargain. These markets are difficult to police because there are so many of them. Would it, therefore, be appropriate to ensure that the cash that may be taken from these criminals under the powers in new clause 1 is used to ensure that more officers are made available to go around the markets and car boot sales so that they can confiscate some of the pirate material and trace it back to source?

We cannot blame ordinary members of the public for purchasing this material and for trying to buy a bargain. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale made the point that many purchasers are young people. My own children enjoy going with their hard-earned pocket money to Plympton market and to the car boot sale on Peacock meadow in Plympton. They sometimes come back with videos and recordings which they have bought for a few pounds. They do not know whether those purchases are pirate recordings. We cannot blame young people. We must apprehend at source those who sell these items and we must trace them back to those who are creating them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale gave graphic illustrations of the dens of iniquity which produce the recordings. He described the racks of video recorders and copying machines. Once access is gained to the garages, basements and cellars where the machines are kept, there can be no argument about what the machines are used for. The difficult point is locating them in the first place. Here again, there is a powerful argument for more resources being made available so that we can track down these places of subterfuge—the underground recording studios.

I hope that we can think seriously about ensuring that the confiscated proceeds are used for further and better law enforcement. I recognise that some will squeal that we are hitting people too hard through the Bill. They will say that the families of criminals will suffer. I believe that we can judge whether we are getting our law enforcement measures right by the amount of squealing from the libertarians. Unless the libertarians and the wishy-washy do-gooders are squealing and protesting, we have not gone far enough. That is one of the ways in which we can judge a measure. I am delighted to hear that one or two people are beginning to voice their concerns about the Bill. If we do not yet hear the usual cacophony of noise from the wishy-washy do-gooders, we may not have gone far enough. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter will consider that point.

I am keen to ensure that the confiscated proceeds of crime are used to crack down on crime; the money should be used for law enforcement. I hope that we see an end to the despicable trade which my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale described so graphically. I am concerned about the fact that people record over existing porn videos. A few weeks ago, there were cases in the newspapers of families whose children were watching videos, only to see at the end some disgraceful material, which had no doubt come in from the continent. We do not want that to happen. I believe that the House will get behind the new clause as it has got behind the Bill.

10.15 am

Mr. John Greenway: My hon. Friend has reminded me, with his reference to the fact that the original videos may come from the continent, of a point that I did not make earlier. Some people may wonder why people copy on to pornographic videos. As I understand it, it is cheaper to buy the pornographic videos than to buy blank video cassettes. The quantities are so great that the pirate operators can pick them up for almost nothing. Alternatively, there is no market in which the porn videos can be got rid of.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. It may be a reflection on the value of the material recorded on the cassettes that it makes them worth less than new, empty cassettes. My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I am grateful to him for the new clause. It has my full support and, I am sure, the support of the House generally.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): The wishy-washies, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), seem to be coming on to our side. I understand that one of the original suggestions for confiscation came from the Howard League for Penal Reform.

I strongly support the new clause. I listened to the debate on Second Reading with great interest. In retrospect, I am surprised to discover that the categories included in the new clause were not included in the original Bill. We may hear later whether there was a good reason for that.

Crime must not pay in any circumstances and crime must be seen not to pay. The idea that we can continue to read stories about criminals disappearing and going to live the high life on the Costa or in even more exotic places is unacceptable, not just in itself but because of the appalling example it sets which gives the impression that crime can pay.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made points on Second Reading about the professionalism of crime today and the extent to which money can be made. The areas covered by the new clause are those in which a large amount of money can be made—what might be called business-style crime which the Bill aims to restrict. It is a sort of white-collar crime—or, more accurately, grey-collar crime, because of the shady characters and racketeers involved, who use pseudo-business techniques but deliberately stray on to the wrong side of the law.

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

Crimes such as those covered by the new clause are, or should be, at the centre of the Bill. That is because copyright crimes of all varieties are often closely linked with more mainline crime—crimes of violence, gangsterism, syndicates and international crime such as money laundering. They are all interconnected, and it would be fatal to imagine that copyright crime is somehow set apart from the rest and is not so bad, or that it is merely carried out by a few men straying into unacceptable business practices. It is far more than that. There is a seamless link between all those forms of crime.

Indeed, it could be said that copyright crime is more heinous in its effect and in its links with the worst forms of crime than the old-fashioned idea of the safe blower, or even street crime, which is often isolated from the huge sums of money connected with international crime syndicates such as the Mafia. The crimes that we are discussing are certainly not like that.

Many people who go to a market or buy a video from under a service station counter—that is another way in which counterfeit videos are often sold—might think that they are doing no more than involving themselves with the output of a form of minor crime. They may have in their minds a picture of some fellow with a video recorder who has bought another, linked them together and copied a film from one to the other. They assume that there has been only a minor technical breach of the law, involving only small amounts of cash.

If someone thinks that, he has not looked deeply into the "business" practices behind such crime. Huge distribution networks are often built up and massive amounts of money are involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned the sum of £250 million, and even that is an estimate; there could be even more money involved in such improper activity.

It is easy for a small group of people to set up a bank of video recorders, and one does not have to use one's imagination to work out where many of the recorders may have come from. They then link them together and start reproducing videos at a phenomenal rate. The machines run automatically and can be left to run for 24 hours a day. The raw material—the second-hand videos on which the counterfeit material is recorded—is also easy and cheap to get hold of. The challenge is not the technical side, though to some people that may seem the difficult part, but the distribution, and we have heard examples of how easy that is, too. There are massive profits to be made from counterfeiting. If the Bill does not thoroughly ensure that those profits are liable to confiscation, there will be a gaping hole in it.

I want also to draw the attention of the House to software counterfeiting. I am not an expert in copyright law, and I am not sure whether the statutes specified by the new clause catch software counterfeiting. I hope that they do. If it is not covered, it should be brought within the Bill in one way or another, for the simple reason that it is even easier than video counterfeiting. It is far quicker to copy a programme from a computer or a disk on to another disk. That can be done in a matter of seconds, or at least minutes, and it can also be done imperceptibly.

When one video is copied on to another, there is bound to be some loss of quality, unless one has access to a digital machine, and those are hardly available today. The more one copies, and the further the generation of copy, the lower the quality is; with software, there is no loss of quality whatever, so, for forgers and counterfeiters, it presents an even more attractive possibility. It is easier, cheaper and quicker and one can go on doing it for ever.

There is not yet as big a market for software as for counterfeit videos, but potentially the market is much bigger. There are means of distribution that can even do away with the need to market a physical product. Material can be sold down telephone lines—downline, as it is called. That sphere of activity must be brought firmly and definitely within the scope of the Bill.

Finally, there is the illicit use of trademarks. All hon. Members must know that it is easy to buy counterfeits of expensive jewellery and watches—the name Cartier comes to mind, and I mentioned that a few weeks ago in another debate. In the far east, one can walk into virtually any watch shop and buy for less than £20 a perfect replica of a Cartier watch, the original of which would cost £7,000 to £8,000.

There is a whole industry in the far east producing such material, and I do not doubt that there is probably a whole industry in this country too, if it could be found. The products are counterfeit—beautifully done, but illegal. There are huge profits to be made there, too. It is a matter of considerable concern to proper manufacturers. A few months ago, I saw a wonderful photograph of a steamroller running over a massive mountain of confiscated fake Cartier watches. The thought of all those beautiful watches being squashed under those huge wheels was rather frightening, until one realised that luckily they were not genuine.

That mountain was only the tip of the iceberg—if I may mix my metaphors. It is vital that no holds are barred in the battle against such crime, for crime is what it is. A huge industry would receive a hammer blow if it were absolutely clear that counterfeiters and others responsible for the crime would have their assets confiscated so that, at the end of the day, there was no profit in it.

The new clause will toughen a law that, rightly, is tough anyway, and will strengthen its purpose. It will inflict another hard blow on the criminals who profit by breaking the law at the expense of others. For my constituents and for me, that blow cannot be hard enough.

Mr. Heald: I am glad to have the opportunity to make one or two remarks on this important new clause. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) made an important point when he said that people often think of bootlegging and similar offences in the recording industry as a Del Boy crime—something reasonably comfortable, but the sort of offence that falls into the category of "something that fell off the back of a lorry".

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Like a Labour party policy.

Mr. Heald: Yes, or perhaps like some of the more Gump-like remarks made by the people on the Opposition Front Bench.

There is more to the crime than that, because bootlegging is stealing from our most important industries. It is also stealing from the people who benefit from the profits of those industries and from the consumer. Since the 1960s, popular music has probably been one of the most successful British industries—*[Interruption.]* One of my hon. Friends is muttering that he would not listen to all of it, but groups such as the Beatles, and now Take That, are well-known popular music artistes—[Hon. Members: "Trendy."]

Mr. Streeter: Or the Bay City Rollers.

Mr. Heald: I think that the Bay City Rollers are a bit passé. Those groups have done tremendously well for Britain, which has gained thousands of jobs and great credit from the music industry.

In the film industry, we may only have occasional winners, but what good films they are, such as "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Chariots of Fire".

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman points to some of the wonderful achievements of the British film industry. Does he agree that it is disgraceful that the Government have not given the industry much more support? If the Government listened to the British film industry—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I suggest that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) does not follow the hon. Lady down that road, as it is very wide of the new clause we are debating.

10.30 am

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not allowing me to be tempted down that route.

People may wonder why Conservatives are making such a fuss about bootlegging. Although the Conservative party is the party of freedom, free expression and freedom of trade—it is also the party of freedom from high taxes, which may explain the point made by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche)—it has always been the party of freedom under the law, and that is pertinent to the new clause.

Mr. John Greenway: If bootlegging and piracy were stopped, the film industry would be financially secure, and the question of Government support would not arise.

Mr. Heald: That is an extremely good point. It is not just the industry and the performers who benefit if profits are left in the company, but the consumer. The effect of taking all that money out of the record and film industries must be that the prices of videos and recordings are unnecessarily high. Everyone suffers from bootlegging.

There are many young artists in all fields who may be waiting for a talent scout to find them, but the record industry may not be able to afford pay for talent scouts. If the industry cannot pay for training, recording, making samples, quality assurance, marketing, and having the best producers in Britain, the country, British trade, businesses, individuals and consumers suffer.

Bootlegging is one of the worst offences in a way, because it not only undermines something which is extremely good in Britain but permeates our society when people start to talk about it in Del Boy terms. It is corrupting to think that that sort of theft—which is stealing from all of us—is acceptable, and it is time to put a stop to it.

Part of the concept behind the Bill is that if a person continues to commit offences, the law will come down on him like a ton of bricks. In America, that is described as "three strikes and you're out", and the same principle must apply here. It must be right for life-style criminals who continue to offend and damage Britain are hit, and hit hard. I welcome the new clause, as it is doing something extremely important to protect us all.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): First, may I give a warm welcome to the introduction of the Bill as a whole? I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) decided to choose the Proceeds of Crime Bill as his private Member's Bill. This is the first opportunity that I have had to make remarks on the Bill. This country is crying out for something to be done about criminals who are living off the fat of their proceeds—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but her remarks may be anticipating the Third Reading of the Bill. We are looking at one simple new clause.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your remarks, but I felt that it was essential to point out the broad picture before moving on to specific points—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have specifically told the hon. Lady that that is not acceptable.

Lady Olga Maitland: I stand corrected. The new clause is welcome and important. All of us are proud of the British film industry, and also of the music industry which has produced excellent classical and popular work and we will not stand to see those valuable industries undermined by crime.

I have had some personal experience of the availability of counterfeit videos. Before Christmas, my 13-year-old son decided to go to Camden market to trawl for Christmas presents. On a stall at the market he found an array of videos, including—for £5—"Four Weddings and a Funeral". He brought it home, and was pleased as punch—so pleased that he decided to go back the next day to get some more copies. The stallholder had bunked off with the profits, but other stallholders were around. He bought more copies, wrapped them up and gave them as Christmas presents.

We watched one of the videos. I suspected that it had been suspiciously cheap, but how was a young child or any purchaser to know of the source of the video? When the picture came up on the screen, it was clear that it was not a first-class, first-print video. The opening shots were rather awkwardly presented, and there were black margins on the screen before the film finally got into full cry. It was clear that we had been cheated and conned. There is no way in which a customer can get compensation after being diddled in that way.

I was lucky that my son was not distracted by another kind of video that he could have bought. The availability of pornography is terrifying, and it corrupts everybody—not necessarily the young. We do not need it in our society, and I wish that there was some way in which we could stop it. We did manage to put a stop to pornography coming over the television airwaves through the control of the Red Dutch television programme—

Mr. Duncan: Red Hot Dutch.

Lady Olga Maitland: Red Hot Dutch. None the less, it is not just pornography that I am concerned about. I am also concerned about the spread of counterfeit

[Lady Olga Maitland]

videos which promote violence. These cheap and violent videos are extremely damaging to our society. They have a particularly damaging effect on emotionally vulnerable people who may be easily disturbed. In the end, society pays a heavy price as such a person could lose control.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on giving a graphic description of how counterfeit videos are produced. I had been aware of the method following discussions with police, but his remarks were a salutary lesson in the ease with which counterfeits can be produced and the amount of profit involved. To think that one producer alone can make £3 million out of one lock-up garage is terrifying. It is impossible to estimate the full scale of the industry in the United Kingdom—it is beyond belief.

Another important point that my hon. Friend made was that behind those innocent-looking videos—some are less than innocent-looking—there are serious racketeers at work. As my hon. Friend pointed out, IRA-Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland has funded its terrorism with such racketeering. I have had several conversations with the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Belfast on just that point. If we could find a way of clamping down on such crime, we would be saving people's lives in the long run. We should not work on the basis that as we now have a ceasefire in Northern Ireland the urgency is not so great. The urgency is always there. When we see how the money goes into weapons and arms, we must realise just how serious and important the new clause is.

Counterfeiting has funded killing machines not only in Britain but throughout the world. I was worried to read in the Home Affairs Select Committee report on organised crime just how international counterfeiting has become and how it has invaded Britain. An interesting submission was made to the Select Committee on just that point by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association and the Police Federation.

The Committee examined some of the principal threats that have come from organisations such as the Chinese triads, who operate in Britain. The Committee was told that it was extremely difficult to assess the real extent of their activities, but that it was known that the triads had a high degree of responsibility for counterfeiting. The problems that have to be countered in trying to beat the Chinese triads include the insular nature of the Chinese community, the wall of silence that exists, the distrust of anyone who is not Chinese which makes the organisation impenetrable, the background of fear over many generations about the triads so that no one dares talk about them and the vicious and public nature of the attacks or retribution which promulgate the fear of triad societies. But the triads are just one organisation promoting counterfeit crime which the police are trying to crack.

The Select Committee also looked into the Caribbean criminals, who have caused great concern. In other countries such as Japan, criminal gangs are rich with illicit funds. Such gangs have invaded our country. The Italian Mafia—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady for a third time, but I must return her to the substance of the new clause under consideration.

Lady Olga Maitland: With the greatest respect, I am trying to illustrate how important the new clause is. I am also trying to show that counterfeit crime is not only endemic in Britain but is being introduced from overseas and is operated here from just such sources. If you will just give—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Passing reference is one thing, but a general and thorough review of these matters is not germane to the new clause.

Lady Olga Maitland: Obviously, I bow to your judgment, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We should take the international aspects of counterfeit crime seriously because they have a bearing on counterfeit crime in Britain. The point was made earlier that counterfeit crime is not merely a harmless little boyo activity in Sunday markets. That boyo working at a Sunday market is often part of a nationwide organised criminal gang. For that reason, we have to take it very seriously.

On the more general point, counterfeiting is not just about films and recordings. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) talked about other forms of counterfeiting. He was right. Whether we are talking about cheap reproductions of clothing—designer clothes, for instance—perfumes, watches and a whole host of different things, we have to recognise that it is a major crime which should have been included in the Bill in the first place. Now is the time to make sure that it is given the due consideration that it deserves.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I have considerable sympathy with the new clause. I, too, am well aware of the concern that trade organisations and others have expressed about counterfeiting and copyright infringement. While a tremendous amount of the debate has concentrated on videos and the record industry—the music industry, I suppose we should call it now that there are CDs, tapes and so on—I am glad that my hon. Friends have mentioned other counterfeit products such as watches and designer clothing and shoes.

Many colleagues have also mentioned that counterfeiting is not—I shall have to use the expression so as not to be the only one not to use it in the debate—just a Del Boy type of crime. It is not just people who make a few copies for their friends and run off another few to sell to someone else. I suspect that many people think like that because most people start in that way, before it becomes heavy and organised, making just a few copies or a copy for their own use.

10.45 am

What Member of the House or what child these days does not buy a CD or album, as we used to call it, of greatest hits and inevitably find that they like only half, if they are lucky, or even just a third of it? So if one wants to listen to some music in the car, one ends up making a compilation tape. I suspect that every youngster has started on the first step of what could be a counterfeiting career by doing something perfectly legitimate—namely, copying music for personal pleasure. I cannot imagine anyone in the House who has not made a compilation tape. Well, I imagine that my hon. Friend the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household does not sit with the headphones on listening to a compilation tape of Wet Wet Wet.

It is probably because counterfeiting has such innocent beginnings that people tend to think that it cannot be a real crime. In every home in this country it is possible to reproduce music on to a tape. Those whom we are trying to get at today are those who massively reproduce material to sell it on and pass it off as something else. I was interested to read in one of my woodworking magazines last year about the man who invented the wonderful Black and Decker workmate. With its corporate muscle, Black and Decker has spent about £10 million worldwide trying to protect the copyright of that simple but brilliant machine from counterfeiters throughout the world.

When children cry out for the latest designer clothing or those designer shoes or trainers which cost £70 or £80 and still last no more than a month, it is no wonder that many parents are tempted, with screaming children in hand, to go to the market and pick up a £10 pair of apparently designer trainers. We can all have great sympathy with parents in those circumstances. If I read today's press correctly, I suspect that there will be a big market in Manchester United counterfeit strips as it has changed its strip for the seventh time in three years and charges £70 a time. That is good for Manchester United, but not so good for the parents who will feel obliged or pressured to buy a new one each time.

There is a large industry out there. We are also aware that America is concerned that some countries in the far east have massive state-run factories which mass-produce counterfeit equipment. The message that must go out is that this is a crime. I liked the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) described it: it is theft—theft from the consumer, from the people who invented the original product and from the businesses involved. There can be no doubt that such activities represent a significant threat to legitimate businesses and, as we have heard disturbingly today, that they are a source of income to professional criminals. It is because I am concerned about the links with pornography and organised crime that I have initiated an on-going interdepartmental consultation exercise.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale will understand, the Home Office is not primarily responsible for the legislation that has a bearing on this problem. Clearly, it is sensible to ascertain an estimate of the number of cases that would arise from this proposal and whether the additional court costs and other costs can be met. I agree with my hon. Friend that the best way forward is probably not by means of an amendment to the Bill, which could create an unwelcome precedent. I am grateful also to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for making the matter clear in the Standing Committee on Wednesday when I was not able to be present. The use of an order made by the Secretary of State, which is already anticipated in part II of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, is probably the best way forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale asked some questions about the powers of the Crown court and magistrates courts. The Crown court has the power to make a confiscation order in respect of any offence listed in schedule 4 to the 1988 Act or, if it is not listed, in respect of any indictable offence—that is covered by section 71(9) of that Act. Magistrates courts can make a confiscation order only in respect of schedule 4 offences. They cannot make an order for any summary, or triable-either-way offence unless it is included in schedule 4. If we make an order and include summary or triable-either-way offences, which we could do, it would mean that the Crown court could still make a confiscation order if a triable-either-way offence is heard in the Crown court.

The interdepartmental consultation exercise is under way, considerable progress is being made, and I should be in a position to make known the outcome of our deliberations shortly. I certainly expect to be able to do so before the Bill completes its parliamentary passage. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale will consider that an important safeguard from his point of view and a measure of my good faith. I assure him that the Government will consider very sympathetically the addition of these offences to schedule 4 by means of an order.

I am afraid that, for the reasons that I explained, it would be better to use existing order-making powers. Since I have assured my hon. Friend that I am looking sympathetically at the matter and since I should be able to inform the House before the Bill has completed its parliamentary stages—with that important safeguard built in—I ask him not to press the new clause to the vote, but to leave the matter to the order making powers.

Sir John Hannam: This debate has touched chords in the House and will do so throughout the country. The scale and extent of the offences that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) identified are known to pretty well every family in the country because of the measures that he pointed out and the examples that my hon. Friends have given in the debate.

I recall the pornographic videos that were displayed to Members of Parliament representing the Devon and Cornwall constabulary area, including my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), before we introduced legislation to deal with that type of obscenity. As has been described today, people are using the old pornographic videos, which no longer have any value, as cheap material for recording children's videos. That is a very disturbing example and the sort of thing that we really must deal with.

The thread running through the debate is that we are dealing with big crime and that is the sort of crime with which the Bill seeks to deal. Criminals are able to get away with it. They might have to pay a small fine or serve a short prison sentence, but until my Bill is enacted, any confiscation orders that might exist can be expunged.

This is an important debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale introduced it in the manner to which we are accustomed from him. He covered all the important areas. I listened to the remarks of all my hon. Friends and of the Opposition spokeswoman, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), with considerable interest because I have been involved in copyright matters. I am very sympathetic to the view that we must take action to close that gap.

[Sir John Hannam]

The motives that underlie the new clause certainly have my support. Like my hon. Friend the Minister, however, I have reached the conclusion that the Bill is not the best forum for dealing with the matter. It is a question, not of whether the offences should be included in confiscation orders—there is no doubt about that—but of how best that can be achieved. As hon. Members will know, specified offences can be brought within the reach of confiscation powers under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 by adding them to schedule 4, as my hon. Friend pointed out. The 1988 Act lays down a procedure for amending schedule 4 by statutory instrument, which is a quicker and more straightforward way to amend it than an amendment by primary legislation, which the new clause is.

In 1990, schedule 4 was amended by statutory instrument to deal with the problem of acid house parties, from which large illicit profits were being made. Given that precedent, and the simplicity of established procedures for amending schedule 4 by statutory instrument, I am inclined to think that that is the right way to deal with this type of counterfeiting and copyright infringement offence.

Mr. John Greenway: This is the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, but it is clear from what we have heard this morning—and from the support that I have received from my hon. Friends—that there is support throughout the House, but particularly on the Conservative Benches, for ensuring that the provisions of his Bill cover the types of crime that we have been discussing. He will want the Bill to cover such offences. Is he satisfied, from the discussions that he has had with our hon. Friend the Minister, that we shall get that statutory instrument and that when we leave the House today we shall be able to tell people in the film and record industries that we have been successful and that although the legislation will not be on the face of this Bill the Government are going to act?

Sir John Hannam: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that I have every confidence that the outcome will be the same for the serious offences under discussion as for other types of crime that have been brought within confiscation law through the statutory instrument procedure, such as acid house parties.

Some months ago, when I was first acquainted with the problem, I brought it to the notice of my hon. Friend the Minister. He responded immediately and encouraged me by saying that he would be considering the matter and that a review would take place. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that that would be the best route for dealing with the problem. I hope that it will not take too long.

I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister announced that we are to have a clear statement on this important matter before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament. While I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale for exposing this important subject, I hope that he will feel that the right way forward is to seek leave to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. John Greenway: We have had an interesting and thoughtful debate on the matter and I am most grateful for the support from my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, other hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) for the proposal that I brought before the House. Without question, the issues must be resolved quickly.

My hon. Friends the Minister and the Member for Exeter have given an assurance that they want those matters covered in legislation. I have listened carefully to their commitment and their assurance that those matters can be dealt with satisfactorily through a statutory instrument. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to introduce that statutory instrument as quickly as possible so that those offences are listed in part I of schedule 4 of the 1988 Act.

With the benefit of those assurances and the considerable airing that we have given the subject this morning, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

It being Eleven o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Serious Fraud

11 am

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement setting out the way ahead for the investigation and prosecution of serious and complex fraud.

This issue has now been the subject of two official reports: the Graham report, received in March 1994; and the report by a committee chaired by Mr. Rex Davie, formerly of the Cabinet Office, delivered to me at the beginning of February. The Graham report was published last year. I have today placed copies of the Davie report in the Library.

The key issue focused upon by the Davie Committee was whether to develop and build on the existing structures, or whether to merge them into one organisation and, if so, whether that organisation should be based upon the Serious Fraud Office or the fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service. The clear advice of the Davie committee is that the existing structures should be retained and that the role of the police in SFO cases should be clarified. The Davie report makes that principal recommendation against a merger, and nine subsidiary recommendations. I accept them all.

The report emphasises the fact that fraud covers a wide spectrum, from the highly sophisticated banking and commercial frauds involved, for example, in the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International or the Guinness cases, to relatively straightforward deception. That broad range requires an effective, proportionate and flexible response. For the heaviest cases, the Davie report endorses the regime based upon Lord Roskill's report in 1986, which brings together the investigation and prosecution of fraud by a multi-disciplinary team of lawyers, accountants, both in-house and from the private sector, and the police, working at all stages under the aegis of a specialist prosecuting authority—the Serious Fraud Office. But intermediate cases can properly be handled by traditional police methods leading to prosecution by the less resource-intensive fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service, and a substantial number of lesser cases should also continue to be prosecuted locally in each Crown Prosecution Service area.

I should emphasise that, despite the often misguided criticism to which the prosecuting agencies have been subject, the Serious Fraud Office and the fraud divisions of the CPS have made real advances since they were set up in the 1980s. In its seven years of existence to date, the Serious Fraud Office has brought to trial 141 major cases involving 309 defendants, of whom 191 have been convicted. More significantly, in over 75 per cent. of the cases brought to trial by the SFO, at least one person has been convicted, usually the principal defendant.

The Serious Fraud Office has a current case load of some 50 cases of which, on average, 20 have been brought to trial each year. At the intermediate level, the police in London and throughout England and Wales consult closely with the fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service, London or provincial, in significant fraud cases prior to charge; and between them the two divisions have currently just under 100 cases being tried or awaiting trial in the Crown court. Each fraud division comprises a team of 15 lawyers, supported by in-house accountants, together with a very substantial input from independent counsel, usually brought in at an early stage of any case going forward to prosecution. This system is less resource-intensive than the Serious Fraud Office but nevertheless provides a specialised service on a multi-disciplinary basis. Each CPS area also handles a number of fraud cases locally, again working in close co-operation with the police and counsel.

At whichever level cases are handled, high levels of expertise, experience and attention to detail are essential. The primary conclusion of the Davie report was that the broad structure of each organisation should remain unaltered. Its subsidiary but nonetheless important recommendations are as follows. It provided a revised set of criteria for determining whether cases should be handled by the Serious Fraud Office or the Crown Prosecution Service. Those criteria, which the report concludes should lead to a heavier case load for, and some enlargement of, the Serious Fraud Office, should be published. The allocation of resources as between the two prosecuting authorities in relation to their case load should be kept under review and the Serious Fraud Office should continue to adopt a flexible approach when deciding precisely how their cases should be handled.

The role of the Joint Vetting Committee, established following the Graham report to consider the allocation of cases, which do not fall clearly to the Serious Fraud Office or the fraud divisions, should be strengthened to allow consideration of policy issues and the Association of Chief Police Officers should be fully represented on the Joint Vetting Committee when policy issues are discussed. The role of the police in Serious Fraud Office cases needs to be clarified, perhaps in a memorandum of understanding.

Finally, there should be closer co-ordination between the two prosecuting agencies to encourage a pooling of expertise, a common approach to policy issues, and improved arrangements for the interchange of staff to broaden their experience and provide for enhanced career development.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, the Director of the Serious Fraud Office and I all welcome the constructive measures suggested in the two reports. They bring to an end what has been a period of uncertainty for both organisations and provide a sound blueprint for future improvements. There can be no room for complacency, but it can be said with confidence that, without the present structures and organisation, many of the heaviest cases successfully brought to trial and conviction would never have been tried at all. Once the constructive recommendations of these two reports are in place, the ability of both organisations to perform their heavy tasks will be significantly enhanced. The Government are wholly committed to the effective and efficient prosecution of fraud at all levels. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I welcome the Davie report and the Attorney-General's conclusions. While I would not necessarily have devised the Serious Fraud Office and maintained a fraud division of the Crown Prosecution Service at the same time, a shotgun marriage now is not the best way to proceed.

There is no single measure of the effectiveness of a prosecuting authority and we are not in the business of knocking either the SFO or the CPS for knocking's sake. Does the Attorney-General accept from my experience

[Mr. John Morris]

that both the SFO and the fraud division of the CPS handle complex and difficult cases, and that the number of convictions is not necessarily a yardstick by which to judge their effectiveness?

As regards the Attorney-General's responsibility, will he satisfy himself that both authorities make the widest use of counsel of experience, including those usually defending, and instruct them to consider the further lightening of indictments, what can be done to limit the breadth of evidence, and concentrate on prosecuting the prime wrongdoers rather than trying to catch every tiddler, thereby simplifying the difficult and onerous task of jurors?

As enormous costs are frequently at stake, will the Attorney-General convey to the Lord Chancellor the need to ensure the strongest pool of competent judges to try those cases, and perhaps to signify their qualities properly? That perhaps is often the heart of the matter.

Will the Attorney-General reconsider his remarks about the need to clarify the role of the police in the SFO—a masterly understatement, if ever there was one? I have read the Davie report, which speaks of a much more serious position. It refers to "confusion and uncertainty" in direction of investigations, says that

"relations work in the majority of cases"

and mentions

"the need to resolve current tensions."

It is a masterly understatement to speak of clarifying.

Does the Attorney-General share the anxiety of some commentators that for a time there were few, if any, references from the London police forces to the SFO? The Graham report notes:

"The recent trend of provincial forces collectively to refer more cases than the two London forces is contrary to the expectation that the more likely place of incidence of serious fraud is in London."

Has that now changed? Will he personally ensure the greatest participation by the police in the SFO? Is it good use of scarce talent for the police to serve in the SFO at a very high level for a relatively short time and transfer to more mundane duties, including traffic, very soon after?

Will the Attorney-General make a further report to Parliament on what will be achieved by better co-ordination between the SFO and the fraud division in allocating cases? The report refers to "confusing overlap". Perhaps we might know, as a significant increase in the work of the SFO appears to be intended, what proportion that is likely to be. Will he also ensure that the alarming finding that there is little contact on professional questions between the CPS and the SFO becomes a matter of history?

The use of new methods of recording evidence and new technology has helped juries in their difficult task in some recent complex cases. Will the Attorney-General ensure that resources are not denied to the SFO to make the task of juries easier?

The Attorney-General: First, may I thank the right hon. and learned Gentlemen warmly for his welcome, and his recognition of the value of the Serious Fraud Office and the fraud divisions of the Crown Prosecution Service? He and I are in entire agreement about that important matter and we share the opinion that Davie has correctly identified the way ahead.

I accept that both organisations have a complex and difficult role. No one should underestimate the strain on everyone involved—the investigating police and accountants, counsel who presents the case and, indeed, the judge—of those heavy cases.

The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) is right that one must seek experienced counsel to present those cases, that the indictments should not be overweighted by an excessive number of charges, that they should be well focused on the principal suspects and the principal aspects of the case, and that they should not be diverted on to minor and subsidiary matters.

I agree that the selection of the judge is of huge importance. The House should pay respect to the enormous burden on the judge in trying a long case of that nature. There are two key factors in those cases; clear, comprehensive and comprehensible presentation by the prosecution and a clear absorption by the judge, who must keep the case steady, prevent it from being unduly interrupted by unnecessary technicality and then present the case clearly and fairly to the jury in his summing-up. It is a heavy task, for which we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the judges who work so hard to carry it out.

An important argument in the Davie report is that the role of the police needs to be clarified in the SFO, so that the police who work there, who have an immensely important role to play—I say that with great emphasis—have a line of accountability that they fully understand and which enables the Director of the Serious Fraud Office, with his heavy duties, to have clear control and direction of cases under his command.

For a time, there was a reduction in the number of cases coming forward in London. There has been a pick-up. The exact reasons for it are difficult to deduce, although it may be something to do with the recession.

It has been suggested that the police should spend longer periods in the Serious Fraud Office. I have taken a close interest in that matter for about 14 years, since I was first parliamentary private secretary to Sir Michael Havers, long before those offices were set up.

It is specialisation, it is the fact that one knows the game of fraud as well as or better than the fraudsters, that makes an excellent investigator and prosecutor. That applies to the police, and they must be given an opportunity to build up that long-term expertise.

In answer to the final questions of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon, yes, we shall maintain a close watch on the way in which those matters develop. I am sure that the subject will come up in questions, rightly, from time to time. The shift to the Serious Fraud Office must be considered case by case. We are not dealing with supermarket products here; we are dealing with decisions carefully tailored to heavy cases.

The lack of contact in the past between the SFO and the fraud divisions of the CPS is something that I wish to be changed. Before the report was produced, I had the opportunity to visit and talk personally to the great majority of the lawyers and accountants who deal with those prosecutions. They are anxious for closer contact. They seek an enhanced career structure. I am determined that we shall give it to them.

Technology is of great importance. In a recent case, the judge praised the way in which 17,000 documents were kept on computer and might be brought instantly to the attention of the jury, greatly enhancing the management of the case.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Does he agree that, with the increased prevalence of technology, especially throughout the banking and financial services world, the opportunities for fraud are greatly increased? Does not that demonstrate that the only effective way to discourage those people is to create the certainty that they will be detected and successfully prosecuted? He is right to draw attention to the importance of skills.

I make a plea that the skills in the police are not undervalued by the police themselves, and that there is a proper career structure for police officers working in the Serious Fraud Office, so that their expertise and experience is not wasted by their being returned to other duties.

The Attorney-General: I agree strongly with what my hon. Friend has said. He is a former police officer, and I know, from my several visits to the SFO and the CPS fraud divisions, the huge role that the police do and should play in those matters. They deserve clear lines of accountability and a proper career structure, so that they can play a maximum part in those heavy and important cases and thereby help to show the fraudster that crime does not pay and that it does lead to the condign punishment that it deserves.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am willing to give a cautious welcome to the statement that has been made. I think that the decision to build on the existing structures is the right one, but does the Attorney-General accept that there remains a good deal of uncertainty and disquiet in the public's mind about the process? Can he confirm that the existing structures must be built on and developed, as he said, so that the public confidence that we need can be established? The jury is still out on the SFO. Although today's announcement will go a long way to dispelling public disquiet, work still needs to be done.

Do any of the Davie recommendations deal with the Attorney-General's role in monitoring the process in future? That was mentioned earlier and it is an essential part of building the confidence in the system which the public are entitled to feel about it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that we owe a debt of gratitude to judges who conduct such cases. Are they sufficiently trained, however, to digest and break down the evidence that is put before lay members of the jury, so that those juries can make sensible decisions? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman have urgent discussions with the Lord Chancellor to satisfy himself that judges receive the training that is adequate for the task?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman makes a number of good points with which I agree. I am grateful for his welcome of the conclusions of the Davie report. He is right to agree that we should build on the existing structures.

The hon. Gentleman may say that the jury is out on the SFO or the fraud divisions of the CPS, but they deal with heavy cases. If any of them go wrong it generates a huge amount of publicity. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that to achieve a conviction in 75 per cent. of SFO cases, usually of the principal defendant, is no mean achievement. A certain number of interested people like to run down the prosecuting authorities, perhaps in the hope that they will be less effective in turning their gaze in certain directions.

As for my role, I can tell the House that I and my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General, who has 30 years of prosecuting experience, including such heavy cases, take a close interest in the operation of both organisations, with the assistance of the Directors of the SFO and of Public Prosecutions and we will continue to do so.

The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise not only the burden on judges, but the importance of training. I shall keep in close touch with my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor on such matters.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the SFO has now acquired unique specialist skills and experience? Many cases, such BCCI, Barlow Clowes and Guinness, would not have come to trial without that knowledge and its ability to get behind the defences of some of the most sophisticated criminals in the country.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend also agree that the other area in which the SFO has scored recently is in the presentation of cases? At Oxford recently, Judge May stressed that the way in which 17,000 court documents could be presented by the SFO using computer screens was a fantastic aid to the jury and saved a lot of court time. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, having achieved all those improvements and having that knowledge, it is more likely in the future that criminals will be detected and successfully prosecuted by the SFO than before? Is not that a tribute to its work?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend makes a number of good points. It is typical of us in Britain that we often run ourselves down when the rest of the world is praising us. The members of the SFO and the CPS are in great demand overseas, as are their directors, because the rest of the world wants to know how to organise its serious fraud prosecution and prosecution processes generally. My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that, going back to the early 1980s, fraud cases took enormously longer to prosecute. I remember one of the Lloyd's cases, known as the Gang of Four case, which took about seven years to come to trial and which did not lead to a conviction. The speed and efficiency with which that sort of matter is now investigated, in tandem with the Department of Trade and Industry, is a sea change from those days. It is a remarkable thing to be able to draw up any one of 17,000 documents, as required, with proper indexing, word recognition and so on. That is the way ahead; my hon. Friend is right to point to it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Attorney-General aware that, by making a narrow statement on the Davie committee report, he has missed a great opportunity to remove from the public's mind the idea that there are two standards of justice in Britain? It seems extremely odd that he has not used this opportunity to explain why some of those millionaire crooks, like Levitt, the Maxwell brothers and others, can get legal aid while they hand around at court. Some of those cases take a month of Sundays, but the people involved manage to live off the public purse and finish up with a few hours' community service.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Why has the right hon. and learned Gentleman not used today as a chance to explain how the prosecution of such cases will be sped up even more? He should have said that the SFO will explain how the treatment of those in the City, who are making money hand over fist at Baring Brothers and the like, and who have not been brought to justice, will compare to the justice meted out to the little old lady who takes a tin of pilchards from Marks and Spencer and gets locked up within a month?

The Attorney-General: I am not going down the road of commenting on individual cases, particularly any that may be currently before the courts. I invite the hon. Gentleman to take an unusual course and to praise what everyone else in the House has been right to see merit in. The steps that we are taking and the steps that we have taken through the SFO and the fraud divisions of the CPS have done and are doing exactly what he wants. It is ensuring that a high standard of justice will bring the spotlight, indeed the searchlight, to bear on the activities of fraudsters and will bring them to justice far more effectively than before.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The public could be forgiven if they thought that all fraud cases are either handled according to a conspiracy theory, which seems to be the theory of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), or the cock-up theory, which is often presented to the public by the press. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is rather encouraging that, of the cases that the SFO brings to court, it gains convictions in three quarters of them, frequently of the principal fraudsters? That is particularly meritorious in the light of the complexities of the matter. Does my right hon. and learned Friend consider that what he has announced today will further strengthen the idea in the public mind that fraudsters will be caught up with and properly dealt with by the competent authorities?

The Attorney-General: I agree with my hon. Friend. One can make all sorts of interesting stories in the press. The really interesting story today is that one does not lightly get away with serious fraud. If a case does not lead to prosecution for any reason, even a humanitarian one, where the case is stopped because the defendant is thought to be at danger of his life, as happened in one important case, that is described by some newspapers as a fiasco. That is simply not true. I am not so complacent as to say that there are not lessons to be learned from some past cases—there are—but my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the high conviction rate that has rightly been achieved as a result of attention to detail and the focusing of expertise.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There is a clear need to be tough on serious fraud, but it is not clear whether the cautious Davie report goes far towards doing that. There is also a need to be tough on the causes of serious fraud. Does the Davie report touch those areas by starting to deal with the problems of our rip-off society? Does it offer any suggestions that other Ministers should be involved because of concerns about the way in which the Government have led society in the past 15 years?

The Attorney-General: I would not describe this as a cautious report. A report that has the courage to say, in the face of often immoderate criticism, that it is not necessary to pull everything up by the roots, is a brave report and right.

As for standards in society, the message that I am delivering loudly and clearly is, "If you think you can get away with fraud, you are wrong. We will not put up with it in today's society." We are putting in place highly effective measures to bring wrongdoers to justice.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I join in the general welcome given to my right hon. and learned Friend's statement. Does he agree that the cause of crime is criminals and the cause of fraud is fraudsters, whatever the Opposition may think? Does not bringing fraudsters to justice in serious fraud cases usually involve a difficult and complex undertaking, which must be supported by a prosecuting team with the right level of specialist skills and experience?

Should not we view the performance of the SFO against that background? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that convictions at a strike rate of 75 per cent. of cases suggests that some worthwhile progress has been made? There is also good value for money because the SFO's budget is only about £20 million, which must be seen against the much greater cost of loss and damage caused by fraud. Should not we now give the SFO wide-ranging public support in the important task that it is undertaking?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend is right. He mentioned the cost of investigating and prosecuting serious fraud cases through the SFO as being just under £20 million a year. Professor Levi of Cardiff university, in a recent study, pointed out that that cost should be viewed against the direct loss involved in the SFO's current case load of some £6 billion. It is money properly focused on the worthwhile target of bringing guilty suspects to justice.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): My right hon. and learned Friend is right to point out the relative success record of the SFO in its prosecutions. However, are not many of the cases so complex and complicated that it is increasingly unrealistic to expect the jury system and the individual members of a jury sufficiently to understand the details of the issues involved to have the confidence to convict? Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider introducing legislation that would allow many of those uniquely complicated cases to be transferred to decisions by judges, rather than by jury, and so enhance the SFO's future success rate?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend rightly makes an important point. It is one on which we focus careful attention from time to time. The point about serious fraud cases and, indeed, most fraud cases, is that while they are complex in execution, they tend to be quite simple in concept—really just hands in the till. The big task is to present the case clearly so that something that the fraudster hopes is buried in tonnes of paper or lost in the interstices of a computer is actually laid clearly before the court. The main burden falls on the prosecution and the judge, and if they can do an effective job juries seldom fail to understand the case in the end. I do not close my mind to my hon. Friend's point, but I think that I have put my finger on the key issue.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the Davie report that the key task for the SFO is consultation with senior police officers to ensure that the essential role of the police in large cases is properly defined?

The Attorney-General: Yes, I do. It is right that the report should not funk that important question. As the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) pointed out, in most cases the police work effectively with the SFO. However, there are tensions. It is difficult to work for one organisation when, in a sense, one's loyalty is owed to another. I look forward to tackling the problem with the SFO and CPS Directors and with the police commissioners, to help them to find a satisfactory resolution from the highest level downwards.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would be helpful to the public if they could understand more of the workings of the SFO, bearing in mind the fact that it employs highly skilled, highly efficient people to tackle very organised crime?

The Attorney-General: Yes, I agree. Indeed, the SFO holds an open invitation to any hon. Member to go and see how it carries out its work. It is fairly impressive to go through its floors, to meet the people who spend a major part of their careers focusing on such an important area and to see how computers can bring the documentation under control so that cases can be marshalled to ensure that something that is immensely complex to start with can be shown in its true light and, if it be the case, its true criminality.

Proceeds of Crime Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 2

CONFISCATION RELATING TO A COURSE OF CRIMINAL CONDUCT

11.35 am

Sir John Hannam: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 22, leave out 'four' and insert 'two'.

The clause, which is the cutting edge of the Bill, was examined carefully in Committee. As a result of that detailed scrutiny, I undertook to reconsider whether the first trigger in new section 72AA(1)(c)(i), which requires four convictions on qualifying offences in the same proceedings, should be lowered.

This is an important issue because the trigger enables a court to apply the assumptions provided for in the clause. I remind the House that the Bill would empower the courts to assume that all property that had passed through a defendant's hands during the past six years had come from crime.

In accordance with my undertaking in Committee, I have given the matter careful consideration. The amendment would enable a court to make the assumptions contained in the clause when the defendant stands convicted of two convictions in the same proceedings. Hon. Members will recognise that this amendment is identical to the amendment tabled in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), which we discussed at some length. I am pleased to be able to respond favourably today.

As I said on Second Reading, great concern is expressed by my constituents—and, I am sure, by the constituents of other hon. Members—about the enormous profits made by those who indulge in a criminal life style. The law already provides tough measures against drug traffickers and terrorists, so it would be most unfortunate if other sorts of criminals, such as those we have discussed this morning, were able to continue to enjoy their profits because we had not set the trigger at the right level.

Obviously, we would not want the new powers to be used unfairly or in unviable cases, but hon. Members will note that they are discretionary. I am sure that we can rely on the discretion of the prosecutors and the courts to bring the powers to bear only where it would be proper to do so.

I believe that there is sufficient justification to change the first trigger from four qualifying offences in the same proceedings to two such offences. I hope that the change will find favour on both sides of the House.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Member for Exeter has tabled an important amendment, which goes to the crux of the Bill. It is a difficult judgment to make. There were extensive discussions on the matter in Committee—perhaps rather deliberately overlong. Both the Minister and the hon. Member for Exeter felt that there was a difficult balancing act in deciding precisely how to phrase the triggering mechanism.

It is absolutely right that we are keen to catch those people who have cleverly evaded the law for some considerable time. We know that many serious criminals

[Mrs. Roche]

who are involved in organised crime may not have any previous convictions, and that those who do have previous convictions that go back some years. They probably do not have many convictions when it comes to the "successful" period of their organised crime. It is important, therefore, to consider the triggering mechanism. It is also right, however, that when we consider the balance, we are fair and reasonable, as the hon. Member for Exeter said.

During our deliberations, the hon. Member for Exeter said that he was anxious that assumptions should not be made in trivial cases because he did not want the new powers on forfeiture to fall into disrepute. I would echo those remarks. In general, if the Bill tightens up the law and catches that class of criminal, that will be considered seriously by Labour Members.

I should like to issue a little warning note and probe the matter in some detail. At the end of what I hope will be a short debate, perhaps the hon. Gentleman and the Minister will give us an assurance about the nature of the discretion. How will that discretion operate? What will the guidelines be? How will they be made? We are concerned to get the legislation right. It is important that opportunities exist for monitoring and review, so that we can be absolutely assured that the Act is working well, that any changes work well and that the people involved in serious crime, whom hon. Members on both sides of the House want the law to catch, will be caught. At the same time, however, we do not want to catch people in the net who have no place there. My hon. Friends and I look forward to hearing those assurances from the Minister and from the hon. Member for Exeter.

Mr. John Greenway: For the second time this morning, I find myself passing on apology to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, from one of my hon. Friends—on this occasion, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). As has been mentioned, he skilfully moved an identical amendment in Committee. I confess that, when I went to the Committee sitting that morning, I had not given a great deal of thought to his amendment, but the more I listened to his arguments, the more convinced I became that it was an important amendment and one that we should make to the Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough could not be here to do it himself, I was determined to table the amendment. When I saw the published amendments, I was delighted to find that the amendment that I had tabled had at its head the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter rather than mine. That clearly showed that he had done what he had promised to do in Committee, which was to go away, talk to Home Office officials, think about the matter and come back on Report and give his verdict. I am delighted that his verdict is that we should make the change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough put his finger on the issue right at the start of his speech in Committee when he asked, "Why is four the magic number?" It seemed a good question. If you, Madam Deputy Speaker, think this matter through yourself, I shall imagine this scenario. A real villain goes before a court and the opportunity exists to seize the proceeds of crime—which is the matter at the heart of the Bill. The jury decides that not enough evidence exists to convict him of all the charges on the long list before it, and it might decide to convict him of one, two, possibly three, but not four. The measure, therefore, seems sensible.

Another reason exists as to why the figure should be two. Clause 2 tries to establish a pattern of offending. May we just remind ourselves of what, in effect, the clause says and the general arrangement? The question of whether four or two offences are taken into account arises only if it is the first conviction of the person concerned. If, however, he has been convicted previously, only one offence is needed to trigger the measure. Whether one offence triggers it on two occasions, or whether two offences trigger it on one occasion, the principle is the same. That speaks for itself. It is a common-sense approach to establish that pattern.

11.45 am

Another reason exists, however, as to why the amendment is right. As was clear from the earlier debate on new clause 1, we are dealing with an attempt to target the serious professional organised criminal. We have just had a statement about the Serious Fraud Office. The matter involves that organisation as well. The police service and the Crown Prosecution Service have a difficult enough job securing convictions. Organised criminals are not the sort of people who put their hands up in court and say, "Okay, guvnor, it's a fair cop. You've got me bang to rights. I plead guilty and don't be too hard on me because I've got my mum and three kids at home to support." We are dealing not with such people but with people who run criminal operations as a business. They will undoubtedly be trying to ensure that they are not convicted of anything.

Mrs. Roche: I take the hon. Gentleman's argument. Clearly, we are dealing with the sort of people who, to use the expression that was used when I practised at the Bar, would not put their hands up and admit to the crime straight away. We are talking about a trigger of two offences rather than four. However, a defendant who might have pleaded guilty to both offences may decide, because of the trigger, to plead not guilty to avoid confiscation coming into effect. That is a slight concern. I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's reassurances on that point.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Lady makes a good point, but the answer to that is that four offences are worse than two. The danger is that a defendant would plead guilty to two offences but not to four or five. We must give the courts and the criminal justice agencies all the flexibility that they need to deal with any eventuality.

For organised criminals to be convicted at all is a huge mountain for the system to climb. It is illogical that we should say that there must be four mountains. I accept the point that two offences are laid down in the measure to establish a pattern. One offence may trigger the measure on two separate occasions or two offences could trigger it on one occasion.

I must explain why I am not especially worried that there might be abuse. We can legislate all we want, but, at the end of the day, it is the courts that will implement the law. I have no doubt that judges will need a great deal of persuading that it would be right to use the provisions in the Bill every time some Johnny-come-lately appears in court having at long last been convicted of a couple of offences and they are asked to make an order to confiscate every penny in his bank account. I think that the courts would be very cautious in the use of these provisions and would want to be sure that there were good grounds for making the type of orders provided for in the Bill.

It must be right, however, that we give the courts the necessary flexibility and choice. I think that we can rely on the judgment of the courts in every case to use the powers sensibly, but, unless the relevant number of offences is two rather than four, few opportunities will arise for the powers to be used.

I support the amendment and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter was successful in persuading the Minister that it should be accepted.

Mr. Merchant: I, too, see no rationale for making it a requirement that four convictions rather than two offences should be the trigger. Even now, I do not really understand how or why the figure was arrived at.

On a superficial level, one might be tempted to suggest that one conviction alone should be sufficient. After all, the intention should be to confiscate the assets of anyone who is involved in criminal activity and who has profited from it. However, I understand that the Bill is aimed specifically at those who build their lives on crime and who are involved in long-standing and often complex crimes. For that reason, I accept that a trigger of one offence would be too restrictive and that we should insist on a requirement that shows a continuity of crime, as it were. In that sense, two would be the minimum number, so I think that the amendment has got it right.

It is often clear to a court that a person convicted of a crime has been involved in criminal activity for a long time. That may not be obvious at first in the charge or even in the hearing, but it will emerge during the case itself, especially when examination reveals that the person has large assets behind him that could not come from anything other than crime.

Drugs are an example in point. People are often charged with a drugs offence which may be small in cash terms. However, when their entire background is examined, it may be found that they have accumulated huge reserves of money resulting from their involvement in crime for many years. The Bill aims specifically at those sorts of people—those involved in continual crime. For that reason, I think that two offences should be ample.

For various technical reasons, a person may be charged with one or two specimen offences even though it is clear that he has carried out a number of identical crimes. It is important that he should not escape the Bill's provisions simply because there were only two specimen charges and the trigger was four offences.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) supports the amendment. Having read the report of the proceedings in Committee, I do not quite understand why she complains that the debate on what she has admitted is an important matter lasted 45 minutes or why the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) objected at the time.

Mrs. Roche: If the hon. Gentleman reads the account of the first morning of the Committee stage and the following week's deliberations, he will realise that there was a deliberate attempt to filibuster, which we consider to be a great pity. Some Conservatives did not want another private Member's Bill to be debated. That was a shame, especially as the Bill was so warmly welcomed by all parties.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I trust that we will not have a post mortem on the Committee proceedings.

Mr. Merchant: I shall certainly not get drawn into that. I was saying that I welcome the Opposition's support for the amendment and was questioning why the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green suggested that a 45-minute debate was excessive for what she admitted is an important principle. I hope that the House will support the amendment.

Mr. Streeter: I must confess that I am not fully persuaded that the amendment is entirely right, and I look forward to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) or, indeed, the Minister, being able to reassure me. I am not against reducing the number of offences from four to two, but why is there a qualifying hurdle at all? I hope that I can be satisfied on that point.

It is right to give the courts the maximum power to confiscate the proceeds of crime. I am concerned about the cases involving a defendant who may have committed only one offence but where that offence may have been involved numerous acts of criminality over a long period. The example of conspiracy, which was mentioned in Committee, is the obvious one that comes to mind. The offence is technically one crime, but it will have involved a series of criminal acts over a long period. It is important that prosecutors are not prevented from opting to prosecute on a charge of conspiracy simply because it would not necessarily trigger the confiscation provisions—in other words, getting over the hurdle of the two offences being brought before the court.

I feel strongly that the balance of our criminal justice system must be weighted increasingly against criminals. There is concern that for too long—due no doubt to the liberal intellectual thinking of so many in the Home Office in the past 30 years—the balance has too often been weighted in favour of the criminal, especially the professional criminal. I suppose that I should declare an interest in that I am a partner in a law firm, although I have never practised criminal law. However, I know that the regular and persistent offender, as soon as he is tapped on the shoulder by Her Majesty's constabulary, will turn to his brief. There is nothing wrong with that, but every trick in the book is then employed to ensure that there is no conviction.

If there is any doubt about where to draw the line on the confiscation of the proceeds of crime, we should draw it in such a way as to allow the courts maximum discretion and flexibility. We have to show criminals that crime does not pay and we need to hit them where it hurts.

Some concern has been expressed about the impact on the families of criminals if we confiscate too much of the proceeds of crime. It has been said that the sins of the father should not be visited on the second and third generations. It is unrealistic none the less to attempt to insulate families of criminals from the consequences of their parents' acts. Often, families take the benefits. With lifestyle criminals, of which we have heard, families are quick enough to take the benefits such as swimming pools, Spanish villas and so on. We should not draw back from imposing on them too the burdens of their actions. It is an inalienable law of the universe that children benefit or suffer from their parents' actions. I hope that the line may be drawn in the right place so that we may give courts the maximum ability to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

[Mr. Streeter]

12 noon

None the less, I recognise that, in some instances, there needs to be an opportunity to spell out to a criminal that whereas in life everyone deserves one chance at least, on a second occasion, much more severe consequences would befall him. I am attracted to the system of sentencing which was introduced by the Republican governor in California, Pete Wilson, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) referred, of three strikes and out. A criminal may get one chance and be sentenced for that crime and perhaps again on the second occasion the punishment fits the crime. But if that criminal re-offends to the extent that it is his third conviction, irrespective of the sort of crime, are not we entitled to draw the conclusion that the person is a persistent, habitual offender and should be punished ever so severely?

I am especially attracted to that proposition because I have learned that the police in Plymouth reckon that 80 per cent. of crime is caused by 1 per cent. of the population: persistent, hardened, professional offenders. We need to target those people in our fight against crime. That is what the Bill and the amendment is all about.

I welcome an approach to criminal enforcement that targets habitual, persistent offenders. To that extent, the amendment goes some way to satisfy me that we are moving the walls in on such people. I need to be reassured that we need such a qualification at all. Why not give courts the maximum flexibility to confiscate the proceeds of crime?

Lady Olga Maitland: I warmly support this amendment. My constituents in Sutton take a very tough attitude toward crime. They see no reason why anybody should get away with it, or why there should be any degree of soft treatment. Therefore, why do we need such a trigger mechanism? My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) had a point. If we are too prescriptive, we could let the bad one get away with it. My instinct tells me that we entrust so much to the courts that the power of discretion is definitely worth considering because there is no evidence that it would be abused.

I read the Committee proceedings of the Bill and saw that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) asked what was magical about four offences rather than two, to which we never really got an answer. I think that the court would quickly establish that evidence of two convictions would be sufficient for anyone to appreciate that there was something quite serious at fault. Moreover, you can bet your bottom dollar that for every crime committed by very sophisticated, hard criminals who specialise in organised crime, dozens more never come to light. Therefore those one or two convictions on his record are simply the tip of the iceberg. The pattern is well established.

In seriously considering this amendment, we should question why we should not go the whole way. Why have it at all? We want to put out a clear message to all the organised criminals that there is no safe haven and that they cannot try to protect themselves in technicalities of the law because the law in the end will get the better of them. The public will not stand for it. My constituents will not stand for it. They are mortified when they read stories of high-class, or what I call low-class criminals, leading a high life overseas on fat profits. We have an opportunity to get at those people, ensure that they do not escape and that in the end they serve a penalty which fits their crime.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for tabling the amendment which, as we have discussed this morning, would change the first trigger in clause 2 from four to two convictions in the same proceedings. I point out that it is changing one of the triggers in the Bill because we do not want the message to go out from the House that there are two strikes before one is bankrupt. That is not the case. This trigger mechanism—if the House agrees—will be amended from four offences to two, but the other mechanism in the clause means that the lifestyle proceeds of a criminal can be taken from him if he is up in court on one offence and convicted and has been previously convicted in the former qualifying period.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends for making some pretty forceful speeches in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has been mentioned. If I remember correctly, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) also made an important and telling speech in which he invoked the great train robbers.

Mr. John Greenway: That was me.

Mr. Maclean: I apologise. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) invoked the great train robbers, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North built on the idea. To be fair, Opposition Members also asked us to look at the issue. My hon. Friends pointed out in powerful speeches the anomalies that may arise when a conviction of four relevant offences in the same proceedings is required before the assumptions are applied. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter discussed with me whether we had the right level. As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter and I said in Committee, it was a matter of judgment. My hon. Friend thought that the figure of four was relevant, so did the Government, but my hon. Friend has pressed us to consider another level.

Why did we arrive at the figure of four? We arrived at it because we thought committing four offences had to be indicative of a continuing course of criminal conduct. I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton and for Sutton and Cheam have said this morning. There must be something in the water in places called Sutton to make my hon. Friends so robust in their attitude toward criminals, which I welcome.

My hon. Friends asked why we should not get rid of the trigger mechanism and why we should not take it down from two to one? I think that they may have thought, although they did not say—perhaps some other hon. Members may be under this misapprehension—that a criminal can be allowed to burgle or steal once and hang on to the goodies and that it is not until he is convicted a second time that the courts may confiscate anything. That is not the case. At the moment, the law allows us quite rightly to take back the goodies from burglary, robbery and theft. We can confiscate assets to the value of the goods which have been stolen for a single offence.

In this Bill, we are considering a new power to say that in addition to taking back the goods stolen or the value of the assets stolen or defrauded or whatever, we shall apply an assumption in law that everything else that the criminal has—the cars, the swimming pools, the house, the money in the bank account—are also ill-gotten gains.

One needs to show a pattern of offending behaviour before, in all fairness, one can apply those assumptions. It is no good saying that someone who has been convicted of one crime was probably responsible for others. We cannot go on gut feelings that someone may have been a criminal; we must rely on the convictions before the court. If someone is convicted of only one offence, it is right to take back from him the value of the goods involved in the theft or crime, but it is not right to apply an assumption and to say, "In addition, chummy, we are going to take everything else you own because you probably got that from theft as well." That would be unfair. That is the counterbalance to the argument that four is too high a level. I believe that one is too low a level. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter in setting the trigger at two. It is, of course, only one of the two triggers in the Bill.

The amendment will provide the prosecutors and the courts with additional flexibility and additional discretion about which cases are pursued; that discretion is important. Obviously, there will be cases in which it is not appropriate to apply the assumption. That is taken into account by the proposal's discretionary nature.

The Home Office intends to be closely involved with the Crown Prosecution Service in the formulation of guidelines. We shall ask the prosecuting authorities to monitor, over a set period, the kinds of cases that are being dealt with under clause 2. Clearly, we expect the powers to be used when police inquiries show evidence of persistent offending. We should, however, bear it in mind that the powers cannot be used just at the whim of the police or at the whim of the CPS. The assumption in the Bill can be triggered only by notice by the prosecution. After the prosecution has given notice, the courts have the final say on whether the assumption will apply in a particular case.

We do not want the powers to be used in trivial cases. There may be various ethical and moral reasons for that; there are also some pretty sound financial reasons. Much as it might please me, my hon. Friends and, perhaps, the victims of burglary to believe that we could clean out the video and the telly from the home of the burglar who stole them from us, there would be little tactical point in doing so. We would be cutting the taxpayer's nose to spite our faces if we had to spend a few thousand pounds on CPS fees, lawyers' fees, accountants' fees and court fees. Inevitably, there will be a cost in going after the assets of lifestyle criminals. I see no merit in spending £5,000 or £6,000 in such costs just to get a few hundred pounds back, although it might give us pleasure to think that the criminal was paying a proper penalty.

The way in which to deal with such criminals is through the fines, penalties or imprisonment they face. I want the powers in the Bill to be used where there is a net return for the taxpayer. I want the powers to be used when we get much more back than the money we spend on going for the lifestyle criminal's proceeds. That is a sound investment for the Treasury and for all involved in fighting crime.

I welcome this short debate; I am glad that it has been shorter than the debate in Committee, although the points made then were valid and sensible. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) is right. This issue goes to the heart of the Bill. Our short debate this morning has been terribly important. I welcome the amendment and I welcome the support it has on both sides. I commend it to the House because I believe that it strengthens the Bill significantly and it enjoys the Government's full support. I look forward, when the Bill has gone safely through another place without amendment, to giving maximum publicity and attention to these provisions. I hope that we may not have to use them in some cases; I hope that they will scare lifestyle criminals witless. They will know that they will not profit from their ill-gotten gains. They will realise that it is not just the money that they have stolen, but all the rest of their property and goods which could be taken back unless they can prove that they have got them honestly.

12.15 pm

Sir John Hannam: I am grateful for the support for the amendment shown by hon. Members on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend the Minister has covered most of the points raised by hon. Members. We are toughening up the Bill, which was the desire of the Committee. In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), we are dealing with the triggering of assumptions. Other clauses provide details of the various protections built into the proceedings.

We have dwelt pretty constantly on the major criminal who is, obviously, our main target, but we must not forget the smaller lifestyle criminals whose operations affect our constituents. They are often on the receiving, or rather the giving, end of smaller, but hurtful crimes committed against them. They are anxious that our legislation also deals with such criminals. We are after those perpetrators of remunerative crime as well as the major criminals.

We have removed the £10,000 qualification figure. The court will be allowed, on occasions when it feels it to be necessary, to take action and to confiscate the proceeds of smaller crimes. That is the balance that we have been seeking to achieve. I hope that the House will see the amendment in that light and that it will accept it.

Amendment agreed to.

Sir John Hannam: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 29, leave out 'both' and insert 'all'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 4, in line 32, leave out 'and' and insert—

> '( ) it is an offence which was committed after the commencement of section 2 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995; and'.

No. 14, in clause 16, page 23, line 7, leave out subsections (5) to (7) and insert—

> '(5) Section 1 above shall not apply in the case of any proceedings against any person where that person is convicted in those proceedings of an offence which was committed before the commencement of that section.
>
> (6) Sections 8(1) and 9 above shall not apply where the offence, or any of the offences, in respect of which the confiscation order was made was committed before the commencement of section 1 above.'

Sir John Hannam: The amendments deal with an important point. They are intended to secure the Bill

[Sir John Hannam]

against a possible challenge under article 7 of the European convention on human rights which prohibits the imposition of a heavier criminal penalty than could have been imposed when the offences took place. The amendments take account of the recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Peter Welch. It was held that the confiscation order under drug trafficking legislation was a heavier penalty.

The amendments provide that the enhanced confiscation orders envisaged under the Bill will apply only when the offences in respect of which such orders are made are committed after commencement. I am sure that hon. Members will understand that it has been necessary to consult widely and closely with the Government on the implications for the Bill of the recent judgment by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of the convicted drug trafficker, Peter Welch. It would be appropriate for me to look to my hon. Friend the Minister to inform the House about the detailed background to the case of Mr. Welch.

In general terms, however, the amendments are intended to ensure that the provisions are, as far as possible, protected against an application similar to that made by Mr. Welch under article 7 of the European convention. In other words, the intention is to ensure that the Bill, when it comes into force, will not impose a penalty on the defendant that is heavier than that which could have been applied before the Act came into force. That was the key element of the European judgment. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Member for Exeter has stated, the amendments are intended to take into account the Welch case. As I am sure hon. Members will recall, Welch won and Britain, unfortunately, lost the case in the European Court of Human Rights on what I consider to be a technicality. Britain was ruled to have penalised Welch, who was convicted of serious drugs offences, by making a confiscation order under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 despite the fact that his crimes were committed before the Act came into force. Article 7 of the European convention on human rights provides that no one convicted of a crime shall suffer a higher penalty than one applicable at the time the offence was committed.

Britain argued, rightly in my view and in that of my hon. Friends, that a confiscation order was a method of recovering ill-gotten gains, not a penalty and, therefore, that the law could be applied retrospectively. Unfortunately, that line of argument did not gain favour with the court.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), who pointed out in Committee that the Bill might fall foul of the court's decision. He was right, and it is also right that the hon. Member for Exeter has gone away, consulted and come back with the amendments.

I regard the European Court of Human Right's ruling as extremely bad and unfortunate. As the shadow Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), said at the time, the decision was alarming. He said:

> "This decision is a bad one, which the British public will find almost impossible to understand. It is entirely right that those who profit from drugs ought to be hit in their pockets."

The amendments are necessary to ensure that once this important Bill is enacted, as we hope it will be, it is not challenged, but we should continue to point out that we are talking not about penalties—much though some of our language, when we talk about the life-style criminal, may imply that—but about recovery of assets. We ought to continue talking in that vein, because that is what the Bill is all about.

There are no additional penalties; we are simply recovering ill-gotten gains from people who through their crimes have gained substantial amounts of money and property. That is what the legislation is all about, so it is right that we continue to stress that fact. However, we must make sure that the Bill is not open to challenge; therefore, the hon. Member for Exeter has the Opposition's full support for his amendments.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter for tabling the amendments, and I shall certainly assist him by taking the opportunity to set out the Government's views. Like many of Her Majesty's subjects, and like the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green and many other hon. Members, the Government learnt, with considerable dismay, of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in the Peter Welch case.

As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, the court came to the wrong judgment on a technicality. I can only conclude that it was a pretty cockeyed judgment. I assure the House that, although we support the amendments to ensure that the measures in the Bill do not fall foul of any potential similar judgment in future, that does not mean that we think that the Government were wrong originally.

The hon. Lady is right to insist that the powers to confiscate the ill-gotten gains of drug traffickers do not constitute a financial penalty. If I wanted to penalise them, I would say that they should spend their lives in prison; that would be the penalty. But taking back their ill-gotten gains would not be part of it. In our view, confiscation is not a penalty. However, the European Court of Human Rights came to a different conclusion, and that is why it is now sensible to amend the Bill.

As hon. Members will know, the Government have introduced legislation promptly since 1986 to enable the courts effectively to confiscate the proceeds from those who traffic in drugs. Our legislation has been praised by other countries, and has often been used or adapted as a model for other countries' drug trafficking laws. Our laws are tough, and deliberately so. It is therefore most unfortunate that the European Court of Human Rights did not feel able to accept the United Kingdom's reasons as to why a contravention of article 7 of the European convention on human rights had not occurred in the Welch case.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall explain the background to the case in some detail so that there can be no misconceptions by those outside or those who report our proceedings today. The power to make a confiscation order under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 is based in some respects on the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986, now consolidated in the Drug Trafficking Act 1994. Both statutes enable a confiscation order to be imposed on anybody charged after commencement of the legislation, even where the offences that led to the charges were committed before the legislation came into force.

The inevitable consequences of the present provisions in the Acts that I have mentioned are that a few—I stress that there are only a few—cases will have arisen in which a person was charged after the confiscation legislation came into force and a confiscation order was made on the basis of offences committed before commencement.

I understand that when the 1986 and the 1988 Acts were introduced, my predecessors were mindful of the provisions of article 7, and had no desire to violate it. However, the view was taken that the purpose of the confiscation order is not to punish offenders but to deprive them of the property that they should never have had in the first place.

In that light, it was considered that the confiscation legislation did not involve the imposition of a retrospective criminal penalty, and that its propositions accorded fully with article 7. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green for stating that the Opposition entirely agree with that. I am always slightly nervous when I find the Opposition in agreement with me, and myself welcoming the Opposition's agreement, but on this occasion our unity is strength.

For the reasons that I have explained, we did not believe that confiscation of ill-gotten gains was a retrospective criminal penalty. That was reasonably considered by the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg. Welch committed drug trafficking offences in 1986, before commencement of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986. Some of the charges against him were not laid until 1987, however, by which time the legislation had come into force, with the result that when he was convicted in 1988 the court rightly proceeded to make a confiscation order against him.

The European Court of Human Rights considered that in the particular circumstances of Welch's case the confiscation order imposed on him in 1988 was a penalty, and that that penalty was heavier than was available when the offences were committed in 1986. As a result, according to the court, there had been a violation of article 7 of the convention.

In reaching that conclusion the European Court emphasised four principal characteristics of a confiscation order in England and Wales, which, in its opinion, tended to point to the penal nature of the measure. Those four characteristics were: the assumptions provided for by the legislation as to the illicit origin of the offender's property; the fact that confiscation orders are calculated according to gross proceeds, as opposed to net profits; the role of imprisonment in default in enforcement of confiscation orders; and proportionality—the possibility of a relationship between the extent of the order and the degree of the offender's guilt.

Some of those characteristics apply also to confiscation orders under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, both in its original form and as amended by the Bill. I have reached the conclusion that a confiscation order under part VI of that Act might also be regarded by the European Court of Human Rights as a penalty. Consequently, the new provisions in the Bill may result in the creation of a heavier penalty than is available at present.

As it currently stands, the Bill contains the same commencement provision as earlier confiscation statutes and it gives courts the power specifically mentioned by the European Court of Human Rights to make the assumptions, which is not currently available under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. One cannot therefore exclude the possibility that certain provisions of the Bill will create a heavier penalty than would currently be imposed, and that that penalty may be imposed in a few cases where proceedings are instituted after the Bill comes into force but where the offences were committed beforehand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter was right to table amendments to deal with the issue, and the Government support them. His amendments will ensure that any provisions in the Bill that might give rise to a heavier penalty will apply only where offences with which a person has been charged are committed after commencement. Amendment Nos. 2 and 3 specifically prevent the assumptions from being made unless all the qualifying offences for both triggers are committed after commencement.

12.30 pm

Amendment No. 13 is directed at the provision abolishing the £10,000 limit. Hon. Members will recall that a confiscation order cannot be made at all at present under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act unless the defendant's benefit and the amount of realisable property available for confiscation both exceed £10,000. For the purposes of article 7 of the European convention, a confiscation order cannot be regarded as available in such cases at present. Therefore, the same risk of violation arises as with the triggering offences that attract the assumptions. The provisions of clause 1, which provide for the abolition of the £10,000 limit, will therefore apply only where a person has been convicted of offences committed after commencement.

Amendment No. 14, to clauses 8(1) and 9, relates to the provisions on imprisonment in default and the addition of interest to unpaid confiscation orders. A confiscation order will continue to be expunged by the service of imprisonment in default unless the offences in respect of which the order was made are committed after commencement. Similarly, interest will not be added to a confiscation order unless the offences leading to the order were committed after commencement.

I apologise for making such a lengthy intervention, but it is important that the Government's position on this matter is made clear. I thank the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green for her support for the amendments, which will protect the Bill. Having heard the Government's views on the extraordinary judgment by the Strasbourg court, I hope that the House will my support hon. Friend's amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 3, line 32, leave out 'and' and insert—

> '( ) it is an offence which was committed after the commencement of section 2 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995; and'.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Sir John Hannam: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 3, line 46, leave out from 'court' to 'in' in line 1 on page 4 and insert—

> '(i) to be held by the defendant at the date of conviction or at any time in the period between that date and the determination in question, or

[Sir John Hannam]

(ii) to have been transferred to him at any time since the beginning of the relevant period,

was received by him, at the earliest time when he appears to the court to have held it, as a result of or'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 6, in page 4, line 3, leave out from 'his' to 'in' in line 4 and insert

'since the beginning of the relevant period was met out of payments received by him as a result of or'.

No. 7, in page 4, line 35, after 'section', insert—

' "the date of conviction" means—

(a) in a case not falling within paragraph (b) below, the date on which the defendant is convicted of the offence in question, or

(b) where he is convicted of that offence and one or more other offences in the proceedings in question and those convictions are not all on the same date, the date of the latest of those convictions;'.

No. 8, in clause 5, page 8, line 10, after 'apply' insert

'(subject to subsection (8A) below)'.

No. 9, in line 13, at end insert—

'(8A) For the purposes of any determination to which section 72AA above applies by virtue of subsection (8) above, none of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section shall be made in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'

No. 10, in clause 6, page 9, line 47, after 'apply' insert

'(subject to subsection (6A) below)'.

No. 11, in line 50, at end insert—

'(6A) For the purposes of any determination under or for the purposes of subsection (3) above to which section 72AA above applies, none of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section shall be made in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'

No. 12, in clause 7, page 11, line 1, at beginning insert

'subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

No. 13, in line 18, at end insert—

'(3A) Where—

(a) the court is under a duty to make a fresh determination for the purposes of subsection (3)(a) above in any case, and

(b) that case is a case to which section 72AA above applies,

the court shall not have power, in determining any amounts for those purposes, to make any of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'

Sir John Hannam: As the Bill stands at present, a court is permitted to assume that property that has passed through a defendant's hands in the past six years has come from crime. The purpose of the amendments is to permit a court to make a further assumption that property held by the defendant has also come from crime.

The amendment brings the assumptions in the Bill fully into line with those in the drug trafficking legislation. I should mention that the Bill as originally drafted reproduces three of the four assumptions provided for in the drug trafficking legislation. In so doing, it allows the court to look only at property that has been transferred to or spent by the defendant in the past six years.

The other assumption in the drug trafficking legislation—that property held by the defendant has come from crime—is presently omitted from this legislation on the principle that the existing assumptions are sufficient to allow the courts to confiscate the proceeds following a continuing course of criminal conduct. The courts should now have the power to make that fourth assumption provided for in the drug trafficking legislation.

If the provision is omitted, the result might be that proceeds evade confiscation. For example, there will be cases where property can easily be shown to be held by a defendant at the time described in the amendment where there will be no trace of transfers or expenditure by the defendant in the past six years. For example, a defendant may own a large manor house and estate yet have been technically unemployed for several years. The court can assume that that property has come from crime, unless the defendant can show to the court's satisfaction that he acquired that manor house legitimately. We anticipate that the court will use that assumption only in particularly serious cases.

Amendment Nos. 7 to 13 are technical amendments which are consequential on the new provisions. Their main purpose is to ensure that in the revaluation of cases provided for in clauses 5 to 7 the court assumes that property held by or transferred by the defendant came from crime only if that property was held or transferred before sentence. That is a sensible safeguard, and I commend the amendments to the House.

Mrs. Roche: The amendment is in the nature of a tidying-up measure. It brings the Bill into line with the drug trafficking legislation. It seems entirely right that, if the prosecuting authorities can make assumptions that lead to certain conclusions about the habits of life-style criminals, they should not be stopped there but should be allowed to continue. The amendments would allow the court to assume that property held by a defendant at the time of his or her conviction or at any time up to the time of the court's final determination have indeed come from crime. I understand from the hon. Member for Exeter that that is the intention of this group of amendments. If that is so, they certainly have our full support.

We can all envisage circumstances in which proceedings take place and property is mysteriously disposed of during the trial, at the time of conviction or at the time of sentence. The property is no longer there. If it is a fairly complex matter, as some of these matters are, some time may elapse between the commencement of criminal proceedings and the court's final determination. It would surely be entirely wrong that the court could not look back at that period.

I have one question which may well be for the Minister to answer. Given that this is such an obvious measure, why was it not in the Bill in the first place? I accept that we live in an imperfect world and that we always have to consider human fallibility, but it seems that this is one measure that could have been taken in the first place as it brings the Bill into line with previous legislation.

Mr. Maclean: The amendments will strengthen the assumptions that the court can make about the illegal origin of the defendant's property. As the Bill stands, the court will be able to assume that only property that passed through the defendant's hands in the six years before the institution of proceedings came from crime. The amendments will enable the court to assume that property held by the defendant at the time of his conviction or at any time thereafter up to the time of the court's determination has also come from crime. The amendments bring the assumptions in the Proceeds of Crime Bill into line with the drug trafficking legislation.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green asked me a pertinent point. She will be aware that the design of the Bill is slightly different from other legislation. The aim was to deal with life-style criminals. That is why we picked the trigger four rather than the trigger two or no trigger at all. When we made legislation dealing with a different type of criminal and sought to take the proceeds of life-style criminals, we made parts of it slightly different. That seemed appropriate at the time. I accept responsibility. Having looked at the matter again, I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, take the credit for having the wisdom to bring the Bill more into line with the drug trafficking legislation. It is important that we make those changes.

I was impressed when I visited recently the south-east regional crime squad and met the fantastic police officers who work on serious crime. In one case, a person has now been convicted and awaits sentence. He last came to the attention of the police officially when he was released from prison for robbery in 1979. He came out of prison apparently without any assets and went back to a small council flat. Since then, he has had no convictions whatever. It looks as if, up to his conviction a few weeks ago for serious drug offences, his assets have increased to half a dozen mansions scattered over south-east England. I hope that, as it is drug trafficking legislation, even if he is charged with only one offence, which he has not been—I believe that he has been charged with a few—if the prosecution so wishes and the court makes the assumption, it will be possible to get at all his assets.

For some of these life-style robbers there is a very long gap between convictions. Some of my hon. Friends have pressed me to extend the six-year period to 10 or 15 years. Again, a judgment has to be made, and that might be going back a little too far.

Amendment No. 7 defines "the date of conviction" for the purpose of clause 2 and is necessary because the new assumption about property held by the defendant considers property held at the time of conviction or thereafter and not at the time that proceedings are instituted. Before the amendment, the Bill considered only property transferred to a defendant before the institution of proceedings or any expenditure in the relevant period.

The amendments to clauses 5, 6 and 7 are also technical and consequential on the new assumption that has been added to clause 2. That clause, as amended, could have an unfair effect in revaluation cases, since the court without a compensating amendment would be able to assume that property held by the defendant between conviction and the revaluation is the proceeds of crime. In revaluation cases, the intention is that the court should be able to make the assumptions in respect of property received by a defendant before conviction and should also be able to take into account property received by the defendant after conviction. Where property is received by the defendant after conviction, it must be demonstrated that the property in question was received from relevant criminal conduct carried out before conviction. The court should not simply be able to assume that it was.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter explained, the amendments will bring the assumptions provided for in the Bill fully into line with those in the drug trafficking legislation and, for those reasons, his amendments have the Government's full support.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 4, line 3, leave out from 'his' to 'in' in line 4 and insert

'since the beginning of the relevant period was met out of payments received by him as a result of or'.

No. 7, in line 35, after 'section', insert—

' "the date of conviction" means—

(a) in a case not falling within paragraph (b) below, the date on which the defendant is convicted of the offence in question, or

(b) where he is convicted of that offence and one or more other offences in the proceedings in question and those convictions are not all on the same date, the date of the latest of those convictions;'.—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Clause 5

REVIEW OF CASES WHERE PROCEEDS OF CRIME NOT ASSESSED

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 8, line 10, after 'apply' insert

'(subject to subsection (8A) below)'.

No. 9, in line 13, at end insert—

'(8A) For the purposes of any determination to which section 72AA above applies by virtue of subsection (8) above, none of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section shall be made in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Clause 6

REVISION OF ASSESSMENT OF PROCEEDS OF CRIME

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 9, line 47, after 'apply' insert

'(subject to subsection (6A) below)'.

No. 11, in line 50, at end insert—

'(6A) For the purposes of any determination under or for the purposes of subsection (3) above to which section 72AA above applies, none of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section shall be made in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Clause 7

REVISION OF ASSESSMENT OF AMOUNT TO BE RECOVERED

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 11, line 1, at beginning insert

'subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

No. 13, in line 18, at end insert—

'(3A) Where—

(a) the court is under a duty to make a fresh determination for the purposes of subsection (3)(a) above in any case, and

(b) that case is a case to which section 72AA above applies,

the court shall not have power, in determining any amounts for those purposes, to make any of the assumptions specified in subsection (4) of that section in relation to any property unless it is property held by or transferred to the defendant before the time when he was sentenced or otherwise dealt with in the case in question.'—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Clause 16

SHORT TITLE, INTERPRETATION, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 23, line 7, leave out subsections (5) to (7) and insert—

'(5) Section 1 above shall not apply in the case of any proceedings against any person where that person is convicted in those proceedings of an offence which was committed before the commencement of that section.

(6) Sections 8(1) and 9 above shall not apply where the offence, or any of the offences, in respect of which the confiscation order was made was committed before the commencement of section 1 above.'—*[Sir John Hannam.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

12.42 pm

Sir John Hannam: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am proud to have had the opportunity to guide the Bill through the House. As I embark on what may for me be the last lap, I must express my thanks for all the kind support that I have received from both sides of the House throughout proceedings on the Bill. It has made the journey thus far a good deal smoother than it might otherwise have been, since the subject matter of the Bill is not entirely straightforward, as I would be the first to admit. Hon. Members have commented on the complexity of what appears, on the face of it, to be quite a simple Bill.

The Bill has not emerged entirely unscathed from its passage through the House and I will comment briefly on the amendments. First, we changed the long title to allow for clause 14 to be inserted.

Clause 1 amends the Criminal Justice Act 1988 substantially and has not been amended. Clause 2, which deals with the confiscation of the proceeds from persistent offending, is at the heart of the Bill and has been much debated, especially in Committee. It has been amended so that the court can apply the assumptions where the defendant is convicted of only two relevant offences in the same proceedings instead of four. The assumptions have also been strengthened and brought into line with drug trafficking legislation.

Clause 2 has also been amended so that it will apply only when the triggering offences are committed after the Bill comes into force. That amendment is intended to ensure that it conforms with our international obligation and takes into account the decision of the European Court of Human Rights which was issued immediately after the Second Reading.

Clauses 3 and 4 are unaltered. We have made technical amendments to clauses 5, 6 and 7. Those are consequential on the new provision in clause 2, which allows the court to assume that property held by the defendant has come from crime. The purpose of those technical amendments is to prevent unfairness, about which we have been anxious during the Bill's passage.

Clauses 8 to 13 are unchanged. Clause 14 is the new clause that amends the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990. It was introduced to provide a more effective enforcement of external forfeiture orders. Clause 15—formerly clause 14—has not been amended. Clause 16—formerly clause 15—now provides that certain sections of the legislation will apply only where offences are committed after it comes into force. That is a result of the Welch case in the European Court of Human Rights. It has also been amended consequential to clause 14.

As hon. Members will see, the changes that we have made have not affected the Bill's basic structure and thrust. The Bill is now even better and more valuable than when it started. It sets out to strengthen our protection against criminal conduct by extending the courts' powers to confiscate the accrued gains of life-style criminals in all types of crime. If crime is seen to pay, there is a continuing incentive to commit offences, even with the risk of a prison sentence. Whether a life-style criminal is engaged in theft, fraud, pornography or whatever, if he or she stashes away and launders the proceeds of crime ready to pick them up after completing a sentence, that criminal will be deterred and victims reassured that justice prevails only if we seize those illegally gained assets.

By removing the £10,000 threshold, abolishing the expunging of confiscation through a prison term, and providing the fullest powers of search and investigation of criminal assets, the Bill takes the important steps needed to win the fight against crime. I am therefore proud to commend the Bill to the House.

12.48 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The House has never been divided on the Bill. Although we have had a number of votes, the House has generally accepted the amendments put forward. Throughout Second Reading and in Committee we have never disputed a matter to the point of dividing the House. However, the Bill has changed and the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) has done a service to the House in introducing this measure. I am still doubtful about why a private Member's Bill was necessary, given that the Government support the measure. Nevertheless, it is the hon. Gentleman's choice and the Bill has undergone various procedures.

What upsets me about our procedures is that Standing Committee C, which is the only Standing Committee that can discuss private Members' Bills, spent three weeks discussing this Bill. I know that time must be spent discussing Bills and that, even if probing amendments are tabled, they serve a purpose and help to shape a Bill's development, but a sittings motion could have been passed to allow the Bill to go through Committee much more quickly.

The Committee's third sitting lasted for 18 minutes. Those 18 minutes took up an entire sitting day and presented a grave problem for hon. Members with important Bills further down the queue. The hon. Member for Exeter is aware of what one of those important Bills is, because he has supported it. It is the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, although that is not the only important Bill in the queue.

Sir John Hannam: It is fair to point out that the Committee's third sitting would have lasted much longer if the important new clause, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale was due to present, had been proceeded with and not withdrawn on that day. It could have been a long debate because, as we have heard this morning, that new clause dealt with an important matter. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) should understand that, although that sitting finished within half an hour, it was expected to last much longer.

Mr. Barnes: I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said. I nevertheless consider that I am entitled to feel aggrieved about procedures that have been followed, and especially about the work in Standing Committee C. It is not merely the Proceeds of Crime Bill that has taken longer than it should have done in that Committee when there was no dispute, and when there was adequate agreement between parties on both sides of the House to seek to progress with the measure.

I wanted to place those matters on record, rather than to say anything about the nature of the measure before us. I appreciate that the House has reached agreement about the measure and there will obviously be no Division on Third Reading.

12.50 pm

Mr. Merchant: I shall speak briefly in support of the Third Reading of the Bill.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on bringing the Bill to the House and successfully piloting it through its stages. He deserves great credit for doing so, and I hope that he receives that credit publicly, because that tough piece of legislation obviously builds on the public's expectations of action.

Confiscation is tough in itself, but confiscation of assets acquired over a period, which are presumed to have been the proceeds of crime, is an even tougher step to take, although it is absolutely right. It should be borne in mind that the Bill incorporates in its clauses proper defences for people who can show that those assets were not illicitly gained.

It is perhaps a sign of the times that that hardening of the law is so widely accepted. Time was when such a suggestion would have produced a series of objections from all quarters. It struck me that today even the Opposition were beginning to sound like parts of a Conservative party conference.

Mrs. Roche: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is no new departure? If he casts his mind back, he may recall that the previous legislation on forfeiture and confiscation received the whole-hearted support of the Opposition, especially as regards the proceeds of the dreadful trade in drugs.

Mr. Merchant: I am not so certain that the Opposition were always so keen on fighting crime as they now purport to be, but I am happy to accept the hon. Lady's remarks about the drugs trade at least.

Increasing crime has created a massive public backlash against a perceived weakness of the law and the courts, and that anger is understandable. It is caused not only by fear but by the juxtaposition of those who live law-abiding lives and note what gains they receive and those who appear to be getting away with a life of crime and obtaining much greater gains.

There has been a demand for tougher punishment and a demand to ensure that people do not profit from the proceeds of crime. Other legislation tackles the first issue, but the second issue is adequately and thoroughly tackled by the Bill. It is not over-simplistic, and it is important not to be so in tackling crime.

However, the Bill precisely tackles the problem. It is not about the yob who gets drunk and thumps someone; it is not about a teenager with a personality difficulty who goes astray; it is not about the pathetic habitual criminal who finds that he cannot get away from a life of crime. The Bill concentrates on the professional criminal. It concentrates on the successful crook and fraudster. It concentrates on the racketeers, on the people who cock a snook at society and in many cases acquire massive fortunes—large houses, pools, yachts, foreign villas—who live on the in my view rather inaptly named, "costa crime".

Those criminals may try to live an upper class life-style, but they do not practice upper class crime; they involve themselves in the violence and intimidation that one encounters at all levels of the criminal fraternity. The Bill strikes against some of the most evil gangsters, against the cold and calculated decisions made by some to profit from crime, against the Mr. Bigs, against the criminal fraternities and organisations and especially against international crime. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made a good speech about that type of crime on Second Reading and it is regrettable that it is becoming ever more prevalent in Britain. We can see the effects of it in Italy and the United States.

I am delighted that the Bill has reached its Third Reading. I hope that it will pass into law quickly, so that proper measures can be taken against those who have profited from crime. Punishment is important, but it is not enough. It is also important to make criminals realise that the price of their behaviour is not worth paying. They should realise that they will be caught up with eventually and that crime does not pay. The Bill will ensure that that happens and for that reason I am happy to support it.

12.55 pm

Mrs. Roche: It will not surprise hon. Members to learn that I welcome the Bill, as I did its Second Reading. My hon. Friends and I also supported it in Committee. It is right that life-style criminals should not profit from their gains and that legislation should be brought into line with that currently enforced against drug traffickers.

This is a particularly topical week in which to have the Bill's Third Reading, because we have learnt that the risk of becoming a victim of a home burglary has trebled from one in 32 in 1979 to one in 11 last year. Similarly, a person's risk of being a victim of violent crime now stands at one in 64 whereas it was one in 213 in 1979. Unfortunately for my constituents, the figures for London are even more alarming. Only yesterday the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys revealed huge increases in burglaries from its general household survey which, unlike Home Office statistics, collects the details on all burglaries whether or not they are reported.

The Opposition believe that the criminals who burgle our constituents' homes and jeopardise their safety should not profit from their actions. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) should note that it is right to say that the Labour party is not only tough on crime and

[Mrs. Roche]

the causes of crime, but on the proceeds of crime. We have demonstrated that by our continuing support for Bills of this nature.

One of the concerns that I raised on Second Reading was that the proceeds of confiscation should be used to fund crime prevention. Where possible, the money that is confiscated should go back to the victims—those who lost a great deal through the crimes of others. Where that is not possible—in many instances, due to the passage of time, it is almost impossible to identify the victims—the money should go towards crime prevention. As I said on Second Reading, just 0.2 per cent.—a tiny proportion—of Britain's spending on the criminal justice system is devoted to crime prevention. Numerous reports have called for better crime prevention policies and many schemes cannot be implemented due to lack of funding.

This week, the Government announced 120 successful bids for closed circuit television schemes. That is welcome, but only seven of the excellent bids from London were successful. The unsuccessful bids included one for a CCTV scheme for Wood Green high road. It had the support of Wood Green traders and businesses, Hornsey police and Haringey council in my constituency. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for making a special plea for that excellent scheme. We are still absolutely flabbergasted that it was unsuccessful and do not understand why. It is, however, one of many worthwhile schemes that should be supported. It would be fine and fitting to think that money confiscated from criminals as the proceeds of crime could be rechannelled to prevent further crimes.

I have already spoken about a particular CCTV bid in my constituency, but I also know that there is great concern among the Jewish community, which also put in bids for CCTV for Jewish schools. Unfortunately, I believe that not one of those bids was successful. As hon. Members will know, unfortunately there are many security fears within the Jewish community. Many Jewish schools, with the encouragement of the police, put in bids that were unsuccessful. I should declare an interest because I was a pupil at a Jewish school which, while I was there, had occasional security alerts and risks.

We are coming to the end of this stage of the Bill's passage through this House, so it is right to congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on the courteous and expert way in which he handled the Bill in Committee. I am a comparatively new Member of Parliament, but I believe that he has followed the very best traditions of the House. On behalf of the Opposition, I offer him our warmest congratulations. I also pay tribute to the sponsors of the Bill, including my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Ms Coffey) and for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who served in Committee. We wish the Bill well in its passage through the other place.

G. K. Chesterton once said that it was not true to say that thieves had no respect for property. He felt that they had a great respect for property: they respected it so much that they wanted it to become their own property so that they could more perfectly respect it. The Bill's purpose is to thwart that aim and we support anything that can achieve that purpose.

There is a well-known adage that crime does not pay. Unfortunately, for too many criminals crime pays very well indeed. The Opposition are happy to support a Bill to ensure that wealth accumulated through crime does not profit the perpetrators. We believe that in the 20th century criminals should not be rewarded for their crimes. For that reason, we give our wholehearted support to the Bill.

1.2 pm

Mr. Maclean: I reiterate the Government's gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for agreeing to take forward this important Bill. I know that that gratitude is shared by the whole House and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) for the warm tribute that she paid to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend has remained unfailingly calm and considerate in the face of what he rather generously described as provisions which are not entirely straightforward. The concept of what we wanted to do, and what my hon. Friend has achieved in his Bill, is very straightforward. However, because of the nature of the amendments that we have to make to previous legislation, the Bill is very complex. Indeed, I am relieved that I did not have to take the lead on it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the masterful way that he took the lead and for his unfailing courtesy during the Committee stage.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). He knows that in every private Member's Bill Committee there will be Back Benchers, from both sides, with their own agendas. However, if he looks at the Committee proceedings he will recognise that most of the probing amendments that were tabled have ended up being accepted because they were eminently sensible. Contrary to what may happen with some private Member's Bills, where a number of spurious amendments are tabled but never accepted, most of the amendments tabled to this Bill were accepted.

The Bill was given a thorough scrutiny in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter was right to point out that it is only because our hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) twisted our arms for a debate on the Floor of the House today, and because I agreed seriously to consider our statutory instrument making power, that our hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale agreed to curtail our discussions in Committee last Wednesday. The improvements that have been made to the Bill should ensure that enforcement authorities in the courts have at their disposal some worthwhile powers to use against life-style criminals. I want briefly to dwell on those important changes.

We have given wholehearted approval to the amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter which lowers the first trigger in clause 2 from four convictions in the same proceedings to two. Let no one underestimate that change. It represents a substantial strengthening. We agree with hon. Members who have drawn attention to the fact that convictions for four offences in the same proceedings may mean that the sort of criminals that we are all aiming at will escape. A defendant may, for example, be convicted of only three offences in the same proceedings; that, to say the least, would be most unfortunate.

Amendments have proved necessary as a result of the European Court of Human Rights judgment in the Welch case. The Government agreed to those amendments with considerable reluctance, but I reassure the House—this is the important point—that the substantive provisions of the Bill remain unaffected by those amendments. The assumptions in clause 2 will apply, looking back six years from the date of the offender's conviction. All that the amendments do is to provide that the triggering offences must have been committed after the commencement of the Bill.

It is worth reflecting on some of the clauses that have not been debated today—for example, clauses 3 and 4, which provide for statements by both the prosecution and the defendant. That will do much to ensure that confiscation orders are made for the true value of the benefits that have been obtained. The police will welcome the new powers in clauses 12 and 13. Both in Committee and in the House today, hon. Members have mentioned how adept criminals are at concealing and laundering the proceeds of their crimes. It is vital that the police are given the same powers to obtain financial information from banks, and to have search and seizure powers in relation to the proceeds of crime generally. The law allows them to do that in relation to the proceeds of drug trafficking.

All too often, despite all the information available to it, the court manages to confiscate only the tip of the iceberg. All too often, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green rightly said, a crime is seen to pay. It is important that the criminal should not be able to conceal the proceeds and get away with it. Clauses 5, 6 and 7 will give prosecutors new powers to go back to court and seek a revaluation of the proceeds if new evidence comes to light.

It only remains for me to repeat that the Government are deeply grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter for steering the Bill so ably through Committee and through the House today, for listening to my hon. Friends, and for making sensible amendments to the Bill. Last year, various sections of the big Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 received much media attention. I do not think that the media or, perhaps, my colleagues in the police service have fully realised the extent and effect of the Bill before us today. They may have seen that it was a private Member's Bill and how terribly complex it was, but perhaps failed to pick up how sexy it is deep down.

I hope that, after the Bill returns successfully from another place, becomes an Act of Parliament and begins to bite, a wave of fear will go through the criminal fraternity. It will say, "Where on earth did this measure come from? Who invented this? We didn't know this went through." My hon. Friend will take the credit for that. It is a pity that he cannot also take a percentage of the assets belonging to the individuals who have been robbed and burgled and that we shall recover, as it would be a sound investment.

The message should go out from the House today that a powerful weapon has been created in the Bill. That weapon will be used effectively not just against drug traffickers and terrorists—we have provision to do that—but against every criminal who wants to profit from the proceeds of crime. We can get at their assets. We can destroy their life style. The Bill will ensure that, for a great many of the nastiest criminals in society, crime does not pay. I commend it wholeheartedly to the House and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter yet again.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Regulation of Diet Industry Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.9 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is important to put it on record that when I introduced the Bill last year I was completely overwhelmed by the response and the support that it received. I received great support from the media, national newspapers, women's magazines, the medical profession, eminent nutritionists such as Dr. Tom Sanders of King's college, the Advertising Standards Authority, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and an active organisation called Diet Breakers founded by Mary Evans Young. Most important, I was also bowled over by the support that I received from thousands of women, and a few men, who have tried dieting, sometimes for years, and have either poured money down the drain and regained any weight lost after a couple of years or damaged their health, sometimes seriously.

It was the health hazards of dieting that first caught my interest as a Member of Parliament. A few years ago, two young girls and their mothers visited me at one of my weekly advice surgeries. Both girls, who were very young, were suffering from serious slimming illnesses. One of them had decided when she was 11 years old that she was too fat. She wanted to look like the skinny models on the catwalks and in girls' and women's magazines. She set about starving herself to fulfil her aim. She did so secretly, without her parents knowing.

For at least two years, her anxious parents fretted about her weight loss, listlessness and mood swings. Only when it was almost too late did they find out what the truth. They then sought help because she was suffering from severe anorexia nervosa. The girl, who is now almost 17 years old, is still ill. She does not have periods and doctors fear for her fertility. There have been many well-publicised extreme cases involving young women who have been slimming. Some have ended in death. I shall deal with slimming diseases in a moment.

Further investigation on my part led to the discovery that we have an epidemic of dieting in the United Kingdom and, indeed, in the western world. In this country, 90 per cent. of women diet at some time in their lives. At any given time, 50 per cent. of women are dieting, including girls as young as seven and eight and women as old as 75.

I also discovered that a multi-million pound diet industry operates in this country—it is worth about £1 billion a year. We spend about six times the gross national product of the Gambia on gimmicks such as patches, tablets and various courses and cures, trying more often than not to be unhealthily thin while many people in the developing world are dying because they do not have enough food and subsequently suffer starvation.

Sadly, many of the people who diet do not need to do so. The vast majority have absolutely no reason to diet. I teamed up with Diet Breakers and Mary Evans Young because I liked their positive approach to the subject. So much about dieting is shrouded in secrecy and misery and depends on people's insecurities. Diet Breakers was like a breath of fresh air. It opposes the diet industry by and large and opposes what it calls the tyranny of thinness

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

which has gathered so much momentum in this country. Diet Breakers and Dr. Thomas Sanders of Kings college, who wrote the very good book "You Do Not Have To Diet", gave me considerable help when I was drawing up my Bill to regulate the industry. I would like to record my thanks to Mary Evans Young and Tom Sanders.

Mary Evans Young is bringing out a book that I hope will offer help to thousands of women who are going through the misery of dieting. "Diet Breaking: Having It All Without Having To Diet" is an excellent book. It is a fresh approach and full of common sense. Let us hope that many people read it and that the young, especially, have access so it.

My Bill would regulate the diet industry by requiring weight-loss centres to display prominently a health warning that rapid weight loss can be dangerous to health. All weight-loss companies would have to provide consumers with a card which clearly outlines the risk of any rapid weight loss. Anybody selling such products or running a clinic would also have to disclose any additional charges because too often the consumer buys a product and then discovers that extra charges are incurred when the diet programme is devised. There are many cons in the industry.

Most importantly, my Bill would also require that all weight-loss pills, potions and patches are brought under a medicines Act and, of course, that medicines such as amphetamines and amphetamine-type pills are not given to aid slimming. I very much welcome and congratulate the Minister on his press release on 29 March, which was presumably in response to concerns being expressed in the media, by organisations such as Diet Breakers and, indeed, by hon. Members. The Minister said that a move to ban the use of certain amphetamines and amphetamine-type drugs as aids to losing weight would be shortly under way.

The press release says:

> "The Medicine Control Agency, an executive of the Department of Health, is to start consultations with a view to restricting the use of such drugs, under section 62 of the 1968 Medicines Act, under certain circumstances."

I know that the Minister has taken an interest in the matter. He clearly and rightly describes in his press release what is so wrong when he says that a number of doctors have set up slimming clinics to prescribe amphetamines, which are addictive drugs, as an aid to weight loss.

Such drugs have dramatic and devastating effects when they are dished out to some women. There have been reports, as the Minister said, of people being damaged mentally and physically by the drugs and of them leading to addiction and psychosis. There have also been reports of hair loss, palpitations and other side effects. I welcome the press release. The Minister has taken a positive move and I hope that that ban does not take too long to implement.

I should like to tell the House about some of the many hundreds of letters that I have received since I started looking into the industry and, in particular, into the use of drugs which are dished out like sweeties in some of the clinics to which the Minister referred. I shall not give the name of the person who wrote this letter, but it says:

> "Dear Mrs. Mahon,
>
> I have been meaning to write to you for some weeks following a report on the BBC news about your involvement in trying to have the slimming business regulated. The enclosed newspaper article can only describe to some extent my experiences in what I can only describe as a year of hell."

That person goes on to describe how she was horrified by the side effects of the pills, which appear, she said,

> "to be generally well-known among the medical profession",

yet doctors still give them out.

An article from *Woman's Journal* which my correspondent enclosed talked about experiences similar to her husband's. *Woman's Journal* also outlines a couple of cases that I think are worth putting on the record. One concerns a woman who was brave enough to give her name—Susan Weeks, aged 34. She was a stone heavier than she would have liked to be. Five years ago, six weeks before her marriage, she decided to lose the extra stone before her wedding day. She saw an advertisement in the yellow pages for a local slimming clinic and she made an appointment. In her words:

> "I only saw the doctor for a few minutes. He just asked me a few questions, weighed me and gave me two sorts of pills, plus a vitamin supplement and a diet sheet. On the day I married I was the thinnest I'd ever been. I also felt terrible—hypersensitive, panicky and weak. I put it down to stress, but I knew it was the pills and that diet. When I came back from the honeymoon—nearly back to my old weight and feeling really well—I saw the remaining pills and flushed them down the loo."

Other experiences did not end as positively as that.

A well-documented case, which the *Daily Mail* highlighted fairly well, was that of Christine Malik who died the day after taking pills prescribed to help her lose a few pounds before her holidays. Another woman was not even seen by a doctor before she was given diet pills, although they were a controlled drug described as amphetamine-like and chemically related to ecstasy. As a result, the clinic was searched and two arrests were made. That woman was given the pills although she was not even seen by a doctor. That is an example of the dangerous practice now taking place.

I also put on the record another case which came to me from Mary Evans Young of Diet Breakers as we were collecting evidence and information for the Bill. The case concerns a woman called Mandie who is 5 ft 10 in tall—she is quite a tall woman—and weighs 12 stone. She is 22 and works in a factory. She writes:

> "My one wish is to be able to forget dieting and stop worrying about my body size. I have been dieting non-stop for as far back as I can remember. My mum has always dieted too, and so after I received a few jokes about my size at school, I decided I would follow suit.
>
> I began to get paranoid and one of my earliest memories of how miserable worrying about my body size is quite funny. I was in the junior school (so I was younger than 11) and besotted with horses like many young girls at that age."

She was very much in love with horses. The letter continues:

> "The walls of my room were covered in horse posters and religiously, every night before I got undressed, I would pull the top two pieces of Blue-Tak from the wall so that the horses' heads faced towards the wall and they couldn't see my body as I undressed! Then, before I got back into bed every poster was put back again. This ritual was repeated for years."

It is really, really sad that a young girl is so obsessed with how she looks and with her image that she resorts to that when she is less than seven years old.

The letter continues:

> "Until recently, dieting had become just a part of my life. Every Monday I began a new diet. Although I was not huge I didn't like myself and my body because if you are told something often enough, you start to believe it. Anyway, I got more miserable and tried more and more diets. With each one I lost weight initially, but after sticking to it for a short while I put on everything I had lost plus

> some more. I hit rock bottom, became very depressed and would cry for no reason at all. Going out became really hard for me as I was ashamed of myself and couldn't bear to be seen in public. Eventually I got some counselling and as a result I have come to realise that my problems stemmed from the pressure on me to be slimmer than my healthy natural body size."

Mandie's experience is the experience of thousands who are daily bombarded with images of unhealthily thin models on the catwalks. Magazines are full of pictures of size 10 women, but we all come in different shapes and sizes; we are not all alike.

When I was young Marilyn Monroe was my role model, and I used to take bottles and bottles of stuff called Weight On in a desperate attempt to put on a few pounds. Later in life I developed gallstones, much to the surprise of my doctors, who said that sufferers were usually people older and fatter than myself. I am pretty sure that all that stuff that I poured into myself contributed to that illness.

So there was pressure even then, although it is far more intense now than when I was younger. A lack of self-esteem and a desire to look like those whom the image-makers portray as beauties makes many young girls dissatisfied with their bodies. And that now applies to boys, too, because sadly the fashion industry is targeting boys. All those advertisements showing boys in slim-fitting jeans are part of that process.

Diet Breakers undertook a survey to establish the patterns of dieting, and asked where the pressure to diet comes from. The survey, which was extremely interesting, covered 516 women, and 45 per cent. of them answered that the pressure came from the media and from the fashion and advertising industries, whereas only 15 per cent. said that it came from doctors.

When asked what part of their bodies they felt most negative about, 25 per cent. said stomach, 15 per cent. thighs and 15 per cent. bottoms. When my Bill of the same name was before the House last year the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) said that the diet industry provided a useful back-up service for the overstretched national health service. The statistics that I have quoted show that argument to be flawed, although well before the survey, common sense also showed that it was flawed.

Those figures show why the diet industry's chief guru, Rosemary Conley, gives her books titles such as "The Hip and Thigh Diet" and "The Flat Stomach Diet". But Mrs. Conley's own health has not always been good. Like me, she has had gallstones, which is a common ailment among constant dieters.

The survey also asked for the reasons why people could not accept themselves as they were. Low self-esteem was mentioned by 32.5 per cent. of respondents. In other words, that multi-million pound industry is exploiting women's low self-esteem by promising them success, not only in losing weight but with the implied new life that is supposed to go with it.

The Diet Breakers survey also asked, "Did your mother diet?" The results show that dieting runs in families. That has been my experience too. People write to me about it, and one woman in particular sticks in my mind. She said that she had stopped going to Weight Watchers because she had had to rethink dramatically about dieting. She had been taking her 11-year-old daughter, who was very slender, with her to Weight Watchers, and had noticed that even she was becoming interested in losing pounds as a way of life. I found that quite frightening and very honest, and I was pleased that the woman joined Diet Breakers.

Sixty-four per cent. of the respondents aged up to 41 said that their mothers had dieted too, whereas 72 per cent. of respondents aged 60 and over said that their mothers did not diet. That too is an interesting statistic.

Dieting has become an unhealthy national epidemic. We have been encouraged to believe that a diet for losing weight is the same as a healthy diet, but the two are completely different. A healthy diet means being able to enjoy food without feeling guilty. Only then can people develop a well-balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle. Eating what one fancies and stopping when one is full is natural and healthy.

The diet industry, with its gadgets and gimmicks, its meal replacements and low-calorie dinners—we have all seen them—does not teach people to develop a healthy relationship with their bodies and their food. That is why the British Dietetic Association supports my Bill.

Another element of the diet industry rip-off is the so-called "meal replacement" such as biscuits, bars, milk shakes and "healthy" ready-made meals. Those products can cause people to lose weight too quickly, which means a loss of lean tissue and a lowering of the metabolic rate. They can cause people to have poor nutritional value, as most of the products are high in fat and sugar. All the biscuits and bars are low in protein, and we need protein to live for any length of time.

Many of the meal replacements are not significantly lower in calories than many snack foods. They also encourage unhealthy eating habits because of their emphasis on biscuits, sweets and high-fat snacks. They are also enormously expensive, and people are getting ripped off. They are much more expensive than buying fruit and vegetables and having a balanced and healthy diet.

We have also mentioned the diet pill part of the industry, and I am pleased to say that the Royal Pharmaceutical Society—the professional body of pharmacists—supports what I am trying to do. It says that the marketing of products and the claims made for them are a matter of concern. The society believes that the products should be subject to the controls of the marketing of medicinal products.

In addition, the society is concerned about the widespread and inappropriate use of appetite suppressants, and the extent to which these are supplied through slimming clinics to customers who may be unaware of the effects of the medicines. Another young woman who had taken slimming pills told Diet Breakers about what happened to her, and I received similar letters during my campaign.

The young girl said that the first diet pill that she took made her feel dizzy and unwell. She went back to the clinic, and was given a different bottle of pills. These made her hair grow thin and start to fall out. She was worried, stopped taking the pills and returned to the clinic, where it was suggested that she try a third type of diet pill. She took those and her hair regrew, but this time it was permanently grey. She was only 23 years old.

Some 5,000 children in this country are being treated for eating disorders on the NHS. Children as young as seven and eight are dieting and feeling that they are too fat. As legislators and people interested in health, we must

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

teach children to be positive about their body image. The Department of Health is trying to promote healthy eating in its documents on health, and we must teach children that they can look attractive if they are a different shape from the person sitting next to them, or if they have more weight, are taller or have longer arms. Those differences do not mean that a person cannot be attractive and important.

The all-pervasive arm of the diet industry reaches out. The recent survey by Diet Breakers showed the effect that mothers had on their children, but there is also evidence to show that the attitude gets into the classroom. There are now sponsored slims being held in classrooms, and that is irresponsible. "Home Alone", a children's film recently shown on television, was sponsored by Diet Coke, but healthy children who are getting plenty of exercise and who have a healthy diet do not need Diet Coke. It is the subtle introduction to the diet mentality that is worrying. People are losing their right to be viewed and valued for who they are and for their personality.

On 6 May this year it is international No Dieting Day. I have to give it a plug before I finish my speech. It is important that people get together and support each other. No Dieting Day has now become international. We have contacts with people all over the world who have been on the treadmill of dieting and want to get off or celebrate the fact that they are off it.

People throw the accusation at us that serious slimming diseases such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia are complex and simply dieting does not bring them on. I have done some work on eating disorders. The Eating Disorders Association is made up mainly of parents or people who have suffered slimming illnesses. They all say that all serious slimming illnesses start with people dieting. There may be other causes, although I am not medically qualified to say yes or no. The Eating Disorders Association says:

> "Exciting, new, and miraculous diets, promising weight loss with minimum effort or discomfort are featured every week in various women's magazines, followed by pictures and recipes for delightful, easy to bake treats. As a result, many women worry continually about what they can and cannot eat and it is not surprising that so many turn to dieting."

Most people with eating disorders start by dieting. They start by reading how they should look and how they should not look.

Rachel Bryant-Waugh, the principal clinical psychologist working on slimming diseases at the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond street has written an excellent article which goes through the complexities of slimming diseases. I do not pretend that such illnesses are caused simply by dieting. She says:

> "Predisposing background conditions include cultural factors such as the current obsession with slimness . . . and possibly factors related to family, school or work."

I pay tribute to a woman whose daughter killed herself recently. Her story was in the *Mail on Sunday* magazine. She wanted to speak out about her daughter Karen's suicide. It must have been incredibly difficult for her to speak out. Mrs. Ros Frewer told her story to the press because she wanted to warn other parents to watch out for such problems. The young woman had been starving herself. She was bulimic. She had seen a GP and a counsellor, but had kept the illness secret. She was a lovely girl with her whole future in front of her.

Mrs. Frewer said:

> "It's clear that Karen desperately wanted to be thin. In fact, she was an attractive, fashion-conscious girl, who hovered between sizes 12 and 14—a long way from fat, but she couldn't see it."

The image makers got to her. She decided that she could not cope with how she was.

The British Dietetic Association, which supports moves legally to regulate the diet industry, says:

> "Western society tends to see 'thin as good' encouraging many people, especially women to 'diet' unnecessarily."

It goes on to say how many women diet. It points out that

> "only 16 per cent. are obese ie have a body mass index of 30 or more. This may be detrimental to their physical and psychological health".

It will be more detrimental to them if they do not go to a doctor and reduce their weight properly. It can positively harm them if they go on extreme diets or use patented slimming medicines or potions. Such medicines are ineffective with someone who has a genuine problem of obesity.

State registered dieticians are well-qualified people. They will tell you that it is a healthy diet that matters. It is not all these gimmicks and quacks.

I cannot sit down without paying tribute to the media. It is most unusual for Members—especially Opposition Members—to pay tribute to newspapers such as *The Mail on Sunday*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*. I must also pay tribute to *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Bolton Evening News*, the *Yorkshire Post* and Central Television, Scottish Television and the Kilroy-Silk show. I apologise if I have left out anyone who has mounted a major campaign. In the past few years, all have responsibly looked into clinics and the Jack-the-lads who are peddling all sorts of rubbish and nonsense and highlighted some of the extreme end of the market. We should say congratulations.

Women's Realm, which has been responsible for selling some of the foods in the past, produced an excellent article not long ago, entitled, "Made ill by diet doctors." I have only received one bad report from a newspaper—Maggie Drummond in *The Daily Telegraph* suggested that I only had half a brain because I was taking this issue seriously. The fact that only one journalist failed to recognise that the issue is serious is not bad going and the press should be congratulated.

The proposals in the Bill are fairly modest. The Minister is going to tackle the most wicked side of the diet industry, but I want to go much further. I might introduce another Bill later this year, as I want to add the provision that anyone offering weight loss or spot reducing services and advertising them to the public should have to register annually with the Department of Health and submit the following information. Such services should be provided by trained and qualified personnel, who also provide counselling as well as weight loss services. Ingredients and nutritional information should be provided for any food, formula or drug products sold or provided as part of a weight-loss programme so that everyone can see what is in them.

If the service has been on offer for a year or more, a record should be kept of the number of clients in the previous year who successfully achieved weight loss according to the programme's goals. Information on the total number of clients served in the previous year should be provided and, in the case of diet clubs, a breakdown between new members and those rejoining because they have failed. We should also know how many clients have reported medical problems linked to the weight loss service.

Every person, firm or corporation registering pursuant to the legislation would be charged a fee so that the service would not cost the Department of Health anything. The Department should compile the information and make it available to the public in a report every year.

We are going for healthy eating and we recognise that what we eat when we are young often dictates our health in later life. A healthy diet is good preventive medicine and could save the national health service a lot of money. The Department of Health could periodically review the records of firms and corporations advertising weight-loss services, to verify the accuracy of the information submitted. Those aims are fairly moderate and could be worked into another Bill.

The Advertising Standards Authority has tightened its code of practice, which is very welcome, and I was interested to see recently that a company in Birmingham had been fined £15,000 for selling misleading slimming aids. Vitahealth Ltd., which supplies the aids by mail order, was charged with six offences under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. I am pleased about the fine because there are no miracle pills or slimming cures—I will not go into the worst excesses now as I did so when I moved the Bill. They do not exist. Nothing replaces exercise and healthy eating. We should accept how we feel about ourselves. Fat, thin or indifferent, we all have something to offer.

The fourth international No Dieting Day on 6 May will give us a good opportunity to promote and celebrate good health and self-acceptance. People from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Norway will participate. The other weekend, I took part in a radio phone-in to a live Australian chat show which was dealing with this matter, and the Australian health department is taking the matter extremely seriously. Common sense recognises that peddling ill health works to the cost of the health service.

We shall hold a press conference in the House of Commons on 3 May; I shall present a further early-day motion, which I hope will have all-party support; and a book by Mary Evans Young will be published on 20 April. So good things are happening. I hope that the Minister will act quickly against the peddlers of misery in slimming clinics. I commend the Second Reading of my Bill to the House.

1.45 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on introducing this important Bill. It deals with a matter that has always worried me, and I am delighted that the hon. Lady is acting while we have stood around waving our hands in anguish and concern.

The time has come to stop peddling quack remedies and to bring an end to the neurotic obsession with dieting, which began not in recent years but some 70 years ago. It gathered speed after the memorable phrase by the late Duchess of Windsor, who said that one could not be too rich or too thin. I do not mind being a little too rich, but she put on the map the idea that, if one wants to be successful and smart and to make one's way in the world and attract good-looking men, such as we have in the Chamber today, one must be extraordinarily pencil slim to the point that, ultimately, it is dangerous to one's health.

We must pay serious attention to this matter. I applaud the plea by Dr. Tom Sanders for more common sense about eating habits. He said that we should bring to an end the soothsayers of slimming pills and magic potions and return to a sensible approach to our lives.

I am sorry that I did not have a chance to meet the Diet Breakers organisation. From what I have heard and read, it sounds as though it is doing excellent work in breaking a myth. That myth has built a billion pound industry in this country alone. In America, which is the founder of many of our cultural developments, it is a $50 billion industry. That is an export to this country which I am happy to send back.

The Bill wisely does not try to tackle too much. If one goes for a limited area, one has a chance of getting it into operation. I congratulate the hon. Lady on suggesting that we should bring a little rationality into our lives and ensure that people understand the risks involved. I agree that risks must be properly advertised so that people understand that rapid weight loss can be dangerous to their health. Likewise, any book, recording or video that is promoted on that subject must carry a health warning, as customers should know not only the benefits but the risks. The customer is entitled to know the timetable of those diets. They appear to be never-ending.

The customer also needs to know the charges. If there is one industry in which an enormous scam is going on, it is the diet industry which is making a fortune having promoted itself through a host of media.

The *Daily Mirror* conducted some research about the clinics that promote those different drugs and diets. It sent out some researchers—I have to say, anonymously—to investigate what was on offer. The *Daily Mirror* described how a researcher, Kate,

> "visited . . . the Kings Private Clinic in Paddington Street . . . she was charged £25 and given a six-week supply of ionamin. She wasn't told that the drug can cause nervousness, nausea and insomnia."

That is highly dangerous.

> "At Dietmania in London's Harley Street, she was given a three-week supply of ionamin for £50 and told not to worry about side-effects.
>
> Another researcher, Sue, visited the Swiss Cottage DIET Clinic in North London, where they gave her a one-week supply of duromine for £13, with a limited explanation of the side-effects.
>
> At the Medical DIET Centre in Harley Street she was not given any drugs but was charged £50 for a consultation and single sheet of paper"—

talk about an easy way to make money.

The terrifying thing is that, as the Consumers Association, which has investigated the industry very carefully, says,

> "Anyone can set up a clinic. And although you need to be registered to buy the drugs and prescribe them . . . there is concern that"

there are clinic doctors operating in the field who are not registered.

We must be sure that patients and people understand the harmful effects of those appetite suppressants, the diuretics and thyroid hormones. Some people definitely must not take those potions, especially people with heart diseases, high blood pressure, asthma, epilepsy or glaucoma and those who are pregnant.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

All those are serious warnings that the industry has spun out of control. We should listen carefully to people who have studied the industry and who utter health warnings of their own. For instance, I draw the attention of the House to the words of Peter Bazalgette, the executive producer of the BBC's "Food and Drink" programme, who has studied the matter for a long time. He says:

> "It's heartening to see scientific research mustered to join the attack on our appalling 'dieting' mania. The triple tyrannies of the diet, fashion and health industries have conspired to give us a wholly misleading idea of what a healthy weight is. In fact, we now know that the plump live longer than the very thin."

There is hope for us all.

I refer again to Professor Tom Sanders, because I think that he has managed to strike the key note on the topic. He is the professor of nutrition and dietetics at King's college, London. He said on one occasion:

> "The health risks of obesity are often exaggerated compared with other lifestyle aspects such as smoking and drinking. It does increase the risk of diabetes and arthritis. But the health risks of plumpness are negligible: it may even offer advantages to women. The evidence against weight cycling isn't sufficiently compelling to deter the very obese or people with metabolic conditions such as diabetes from controlling their weight."

As time is getting short, I simply want to place on record the support that I give to the hon. Member for Halifax.

I have noticed the way in which our culture has spread dieting mania throughout the country, especially among the young. There is barely a teenage girl who has not said to me, "I am dieting." I have a lovely daughter of my own, aged 19. She watches her weight, but I would be extremely angry with her if I found her going down that obsessive road. It led one or two of her friends to suffer from anorexia, which is the curse of the modern age and, in a sense, of prosperity. One would never find people of the third world opting to diet in such an obsessive and extraordinary way.

We need to enhance education about healthy eating and healthy living habits. It is a curious paradox that today's teenagers are far larger than their parents. They are all giants. One need only visit any university to see that they are bigger people than those in older generations. That is why they should not try to judge their ideal weight according to standards set in the past. They all weigh in at a bigger, healthier weight than their predecessors. That is all the more reason why we should tell them to accept that weight and be proud of that. It will guarantee that they have healthy lives unless they wreck them by falling for the media hype of the diet industry, which, frankly, has conned thousands and thousands of women to profit the pockets of those who run that industry without offering any benefit to others.

I have one word of advice. Let us go back common sense. I believe in moderation, but a little bit of what you fancy does you good.

1.55 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I came to the House this morning to support the Proceeds of Crime Bill. I am also interested in a number of other Bills before the House, should we discuss them today. When I noticed from the Order Paper that the second Bill set down for consideration was the Regulation of Diet Industry Bill, I saw red, because anything that starts with the word "regulation" has that effect on me.

When I got a copy of the Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), I noticed that it was sponsored by a further 11 hon. Members, all of whom could be described as luminaries of the trendy left. I therefore began to smell an appalling rat.

When I looked at the names of the 11 sponsors, two things came to mind: first, they are all enthusiasts for the description of being politically correct and, secondly, not a single one of them is in the Chamber now to support the Bill. When I looked down the list of sponsors, I also thought that some of them were structurally challenged, but you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I said who I meant, which would, indeed, be ungallant.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Halifax, however, because her speech was an extremely useful opportunity to air the subject of slimming and the dangers that can arise in far too many circumstances. In that sense, the debate is useful.

I approached the debate with some trepidation, because I have just come from the Members' Dining Room, having had a good lunch. I thought that I could get into immense trouble if I spoke, particularly when the menu in the Dining Room offers an array of hefty puddings, including syrup pudding, coconut sponge, bread and butter pudding, jam roll and chocolate sponge. A diet of such puddings would almost have the diametrically opposite effect of the general meaning of that word on those who consumed them.

I agree with the hon. Member for Halifax that it is far better to rely on fresh vegetables, salads, fruits, good red meat, good healthy eating and a lot of exercise. The House will not be surprised to learn that, with my French name, I adopt that approach.

I have considered the Bill in detail and I should like to draw the attention of the House to a number of its clauses and subsections. Clause 2(1)(a) requires that any person in the diet industry should

> "ensure that at any premises where he carries on his business a notice is prominently displayed stating that rapid loss of weight is dangerous to health".

That is an extremely broad generalisation, because in a number of cases—only medically qualified people could state it case by case—it may be beneficial to lose a lot of weight. It would be rather dangerous to put up such broad-brush notices as that suggested by the subsection.

Clause 2(1)(b) also requires that a person engaged in the diet industry should

> "cause any book, recording or video work which he produces to carry a notice stating that permanent loss of weight is unlikely and cannot be guaranteed".

That is a broad statement, which could not be said to be the case. It is wrong to produce a propaganda statement in such a generalised form.

After all, far too often a certain product is advertised on our television screens—time and again, it is thrust down the throats of the British public. It is presented by a young salesman with a winsome smile and using warm words. He even comes from a Tory family. The product he sells is very dubious. It includes advertising slogans such as being tough on crime and the causes of crime and other similar soundbites. Should we necessarily attach to the product the description that that is unlikely and cannot be guaranteed? With that product, I would certainly say that because of the Labour party's record over the last few decades. Therefore, we must be careful about obliging people to put a description on a particular product.

Clause 2(1)(c) requires that other notices should be displayed, for example, to outline clearly

> "the benefits and risks of loss of weight"

or to provide

> "an estimated or actual timetable for any diet which he"—

the practitioner—

> "proposes that the customer should follow".

Surely much of that is common sense, so I wonder whether it should be included in a notice, a booklet or in straight medical advice, which we receive from our doctors if we are worried.

It is important that the House ensures that a Bill such as this draws a careful distinction between the overwhelming majority of responsible doctors and the minority of quack doctors. We must not throw out the baby with the bath water by tarring good, responsible doctors—of whom there is a vast number—with the same brush as those quack doctors who are guilty of disgraceful and unscrupulous behaviour.

Quack doctors are nothing new; we need only go back through the centuries to see the many quack remedies which existed and which, in fact, are an absolute disgrace. Queen Elizabeth I covered her face with a white material that had a lead base because it was deemed to make her beautiful. All the lead did was to corrode the body. Many of the ancient quack remedies were stuffed with lead components that had a disastrous corrosive effect. It was all done in the interests of so-called good appearance.

We do not have to go back through many decades to recall women squeezing themselves into corsets to produce a wasp waist, with all the damage that that did to internal organs. The wish to look good can be extremely dangerous, but to produce broad generalisations that will sweep up the good doctors as well as the quack doctors, to whom we are all opposed, is a bad idea.

The hon. Member for Halifax introduced a ten-minute Bill last year in which she gave examples of products. She said that for one cream it was claimed that

> "all one has to do is to lie on one's back, rub the tummy and the fat will disappear."—[*Official Report*, 29 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 816-17.]

She advised people not to try it as it did not work. That is likely to be true, because it seems to be far too easy. Some of the more generously proportioned hon. Members would immediately resort to it if it were that easy. We come back to the old adages such as, "There's one born every day" and "A fool and his money are soon parted".

We must proceed with caution on the Bill. After all, we already have remedies against quack medicines. A good example of that was given recently when the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), proposed a ban on a number of products that make use of amphetamines as slimming aids. My hon. Friend is operating under section 62 of the Medicines Act 1968. His proposal is subject to consultation, but he has rightly drawn on the advice of highly qualified medical practitioners. He is exercising an Act that has already been passed by the House and that deals with products that are clearly demonstrably harmful.

As we go through the Bill, we immediately identify a considerable number of points on which we should act exceedingly cautiously. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) referred to her concern about her daughter having an obsession with slimming. I have a similar concern with my own daughters, but, so far, they seem to have exercised a remarkable amount of common sense.

We need common sense. We need to eat less and to do more exercise. A number of hon. Members can be seen teetering to and fro around the courtyard on their bicycles. How much better it would be if so many more of us in the population did likewise. We need to rely on legislation that provides conditions by which we can obtain the necessary ban on individual products.

If I were to give any advice to the House, I would say that if the Bill receives a Second Reading today after sufficient consideration by hon. Members, it will need careful consideration in Committee.

2.5 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on her speech, on her extraordinary success in raising public concern about the issue, and on securing the debate today. The measure is remarkably practical. It seeks to impose some minimal standards of responsibility on an industry that, in part, flagrantly exploits the anxieties of vulnerable people.

The Bill's provisions cannot simply be parodied as busybody interference. As the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) reminded us, it is extremely important to safeguard the Bill's proposals against misrepresentation. The Bill does not propose a new regulator—no Off-Fat is proposed—or any cumbersome bureaucracy. No one reading this short Bill could possibly argue that its propositions are unreasonable. On the contrary, its proposals are so obviously fair and sensible that the diet industry will have to demonstrate why on earth it is not prepared to adopt the proposed practices. An industry it certainly is, and one which grows fat on stimulating millions of fit and healthy people into believing that there is something wrong with the way that they are.

People come in all shapes and sizes, but the slimming industry wants to turn us all into Barbie dolls. Its targets, of course, are overwhelmingly women—and increasingly, young women. Estimates suggest that, at any time, about 50 per cent. of women are on a diet of some sort. As the incidence of unhealthy weight is about 16 per cent. of the population, it follows that about a third of all women are being induced to diet for no good reason. In doing so, they put about £1 billion a year into the pockets of the diet industry.

Many young girls are tortured by anxiety about their weight anyway. To some extent, that is a normal part of adolescence and growing up. But instead of encouraging girls to love their bodies, whatever their shape or size, the diet industry perniciously feeds on those anxieties, occasionally with tragic results. At present, 125,000 women suffer from bulimia, 70,000 suffer from anorexia nervosa, and the number is doubling every decade. Great Ormond Street hospital has seen a fourfold increase in the number of children treated at its eating disorder clinic.

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

There are two main strands of opposition to the Bill. The first is that we already have all the regulation that we need, primarily in the form of the Advertising Standards Authority. The other is that the diet industry is performing a valuable public service in tackling a plague of obesity, with its attendant health risks. Neither of those claims stands up. The Advertising Standards Authority monitors only advertisements, whereas the Bill refers to the conduct and practice of so-called dieting experts at their slimming centres and clinics. Nor could that authority deal with the numerous magazines whose editorial content is an endless assault on the normal shape of normal people.

Obesity certainly exists, but it is not cured by miracle diets. On the contrary, the evidence is that the preoccupation with unnatural slimness is itself the cause of a great deal of physical as well as psychological illness. It cannot be a coincidence that the number of people reported to have a serious eating disorder has grown so rapidly over the past 20 years. Of course, not everyone who starts dieting ends up with an eating disorder, but everyone with an eating disorder started by dieting.

There is all the difference in the world between public health policies which promote healthy eating and a diet industry which promotes an obsession with dieting. Yesterday I bought a batch of magazines from the corner newsagent, which were on sale to all and sundry. They promise, "You can be 14 lb lighter in four weeks" or "Lose a stone in a month" and offer "50 top tips for the new you". What can possibly be wrong with requiring the sellers of this stuff to warn readers of the risks attendant on such promises?

The diet industry thrives on its failure. American figures show that 97 per cent. of the people who diet put any lost weight back on and probably lose self-esteem in the process. The industry spends 13 per cent. of sales revenue on advertising, endlessly stimulating demand for a product that seldom works.

The Minister's announcement that the prescription of amphetamines for slimming is to be banned is very welcome, as is the promise of stiffer penalties for doctors who breach the rule. Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States have stricter regimes for regulation than we do.

There is clearly a strong measure of cross-party support for the Bill and a belief that action must be taken. I hope that, as an expression of that determination, the House will give this practical and important Bill a Second Reading.

2.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on introducing this important Bill, which certainly merits discussion.

I welcome something that we seldom hear from the hon. Lady, namely her praise for the Government's initiative on amphetamines. She also praised many parts of the media, which is something she also does but rarely. She included the *Bolton Evening News*, my excellent local newspaper, which did an enormous amount of work on this subject some months ago and came up with numerous examples of people who had been damaged by slimming mania and specifically by amphetamine or amphetamine-like substances.

The Government are concerned that industry, including that which claims to aid weight loss, is properly regulated. We are also concerned to ensure that consumers are not misled by inaccurate or misleading claims about products, that they have sufficient information to make an informed choice and that the products themselves are safe. Our philosophy is therefore very much in tune with the good intentions of the Bill in as much as both seek to protect the public.

I understand very well the concerns that have prompted the Bill, but I am confident that when I have explained the broader picture surrounding the whole issue hon. Members will question the necessity of the Bill's provisions.

Obesity among men and women is a serious and growing problem in this country. People's personal appearance is a matter for them, of course, and the Government would not seek to influence such choices, but when people's personal weight becomes a risk to their health more generally it becomes a matter of concern to the national health service. Obesity contributes to raised plasma cholesterol and raised blood pressure and is a risk factor for both coronary heart disease and stroke—two major causes of premature death in the UK—as well as for diabetes, gall-stones, as the hon. Member for Halifax mentioned, arthritis and a number of other less well known conditions.

For that reason, the problem of rising obesity as it is clinically defined has to be addressed, which is why a target for reducing the prevalence was included in the coronary heart disease and stoke section of the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation". At the time those targets were set, the figures showed that 8 per cent. of men and 12 per cent. of women were obese. The latest position, portrayed by the recent report from the Health Survey for England, showed that those figures have increased to 13 per cent. for men and 16 per cent. for women. Regardless of whether the two sets of figures are exactly comparable, they show a fairly alarming increase.

Perhaps it would be helpful at this stage if I defined exactly what we mean by obese, which was touched on by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). It is a matter of having a body mass index of greater than 30. If I may explain further, body mass index is calculated by dividing an individual's weight, expressed in kilograms, by the square of his or her weight in metres.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): Height in metres.

Mr. Sackville: I am so sorry. I should have said height in metres. It was worth having a Whip within earshot.

Just to clarify matters for hon. Members who do not understand those European terms, obesity would therefore mean a woman of 5 ft 6 in having a weight of more then 13 stone or a man of 6 ft having a weight of more than $15\frac{1}{2}$ stone. I will not try to define what my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) described as structurally challenged, but perhaps he will give us his own definition of what he may have meant.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I felt that it would be excessively cruel to ask which of the sponsors of the Bill could be referred to as fat, and "structurally challenged" seemed fashionably correct on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Sackville: Well, now we know.

It is important to make the distinction between the term clinical obesity and people whom the Bill seeks to protect—victims who believe that they are overweight when very often they are not at all. I have already explained that there are good medical and health reasons for concern about being overweight. I should also point that the problem of increasing obesity is not confined to this country but is prevalent throughout the developed world. It is a serious problem with no easy solutions and for those reasons, as I have already mentioned, we must address it.

The nutrition task force was created to devise a strategy for achieving the diet and nutrition targets in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper, which included a target for obesity. It was proposed that, in the first instance, attention should be particularly directed towards the prevention of obesity. As overweight and obesity result from taking in more energy from food than that expended on physical activity, exercise is required to address the problem. The nutrition task force also agreed that action to achieve the targets should be considered jointly with the physical activity task force.

People could be forgiven for thinking that if the problem is caused by eating more than one needs for daily activity, the solution is simple—to eat less and to be active. We know, however, that it is not so easy as it sounds. One of the main contentions behind the Bill is that diets, in the sense of diets for weight loss, do not always work. Many diets help people to lose weight, but the problem lies in keeping the weight off in the long term. That is why the two task forces decided on a preventive approach both to help to prevent the population as a whole from getting fatter and to target help at those groups of the population most at risk from obesity.

As a first step, a symposium of experts was convened last year. Those attending were asked to suggest courses of action to prevent further rises in levels of obesity. The symposium considered trends in obesity in the United Kingdom, the factors controlling energy imbalance and the potential contribution that might be made by local authorities, schools, industry, the NHS and everyone else concerned. Consideration is currently being given to the future course of action to be taken within the task forces for improving dietary habits, together with the strategy of the task force on physical activity aimed at increasing levels of physical activity. One important point that we have identified is the need for more research into long-term solutions.

To turn to the central matter of the Bill, we must always make the important distinction between medically desirable weight, which forms the basis of Government advice, and cosmetically desirable weight. What is commonly portrayed as being cosmetically desirable is often thinner than what would be considered medically desirable. It is also true that the long-term efficacy of relatively short-term proprietary slimming products has rarely been demonstrated. Just as it is not healthy to be overweight, it is not healthy to be underweight. By not eating enough for the body's needs and becoming underweight, people may not be getting all the nutrients that they need from their food and they run the risk of suffering ill health as a result.

I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Halifax said about the pernicious influence of the fashion industry, especially through magazines and television. Obsession with weight has been a problem at various times in history, but it is probably much more of a problem in the age of the mass media, with the power of television and the power of attractive and cleverly presented magazines. I remember reading in the press of a recent survey which said that a certain percentage—it may have been 60 per cent.—of women reading a well-known mass weekly magazine became severely stressed after three minutes of looking at the various role models in front of them. Whether or not that is an exaggeration, there is no doubt that there is a powerful wave coming all the time, particularly at women, telling people that they need to be thinner. We must consider such attitudes dangerous.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) mentioned putting an end to all this and to the various quack medicines and products. I am not sure that we shall be able to put an end to them. We are really asking people to change their attitudes to themselves. We are asking for a complete alteration in the way in which people look at themselves, in their relationships with others and in their self-esteem. That is a very tall order and I am afraid that it is a problem much wider than the provisions in the Bill.

It makes sense, therefore, for people to try to be sensible and to maintain a healthy weight in relation to their height. The best way to do that is simply by eating a healthier diet and by participating in some form of regular exercise. That message form the cornerstone of Government advice on the issue. However, those ideas, especially those concerning diet and exercise, are not welcome to a large part of the population, and although enormous activity has been generated over the past two or three years by our White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", in the end we still need an enormous shift in national attitudes to get people to realise that their health and how they look after their bodies is to some extent their own responsibility.

Even in terms of the Bill there needs to be a great change in the way in which people view themselves and their weight. The Bill's use of the term "diet" suggests that it should be interpreted as a food regimen for weight loss, but diet should really be considered as involving the way in which we eat in everyday life. Diet is not something that we go on or off, but a vital part of our whole lives.

It rather worries me that the Bill appears to be based on the premise that a large proportion of the people professionally involved in slimming, other than medically qualified practitioners, are various sorts of charlatan. Although we know that many people active in the slimming industry could be described in that way, we must be careful to distinguish between good and bad advice. The activities of many professionals well qualified to advise individuals on diet and nutrition would undoubtedly be restricted. Dieticians and nutritionists are obvious examples, but there are others who play a vital role—

Mrs. Mahon: May I point out to the Minister that the dieticians and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain support the Bill? Most of the professionals involved with dieting support it.

Mr. Sackville: I appreciate and welcome that fact in terms of the spirit of the Bill, but we must be careful when we talk about the slimming industry. I have had some experience of that this week following an announcement that I made about amphetamines.

We must be careful not to lump everybody into the same pot. Dieticians, nutritionists and others with a role to play in assisting people with dietary matters—such as pharmacists, nurses, midwives, health visitors, dentists, practitioners of other profession allied to medicine, or health promotion specialists—are all active in giving people the right advice about diet and exercise, and sometimes about weight loss. In order to help to achieve "The Health of the Nation" targets a project team from the nutrition task force has drawn up a core curriculum in nutrition for the education of health professionals, which was published last year.

The Bill does not refer to the activities of a group of people who, as many hon. Members have said, are especially culpable—doctors who set up private slimming clinics so that they can prescribe addictive amphetamine-type products to assist with weight loss. As the House knows, I have announced that we are considering a ban on amphetamine-type slimming pills under section 62 of the Medicines Act 1968, and intend to consult on the topic. We are considering action because we know that many qualified practitioners are prescribing inappropriately, although legally, slimming pills which were not designed for people who are, or who believe themselves to be, slightly overweight. The pills contain substances licensed for various purposes, including treating people with moderate or severe obesity, as defined earlier in my speech. In terms of the Bill and also the proposals which I announced this week, we must make sure that there is a distinction between people who are properly using certain substances to help people with a real clinical problem, and those people who are using it to make money and prescribing entirely inappropriately.

The Bill proposes that any book, recording or video produced would need to state that permanent weight loss is unlikely and cannot be guaranteed. I am sure that hon. Members will not need me to describe the regulatory machinery that such a provision would entail. The Act resulting from any such Bill would also oblige anyone giving advice to provide—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 28 April.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

BREAST CANCER (NATIONAL PLAN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 April.

TRANSPORT OF ANIMALS FOR SLAUGHTER BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [20 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 21 April.

ENERGY SAVING MATERIALS (RATE OF VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [20 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 21 April.

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time.

Motion made and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Austin-Walker.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee on Friday 21 April.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. John Horam be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Peter Thurnham be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Wood.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 4th April, the Speaker shall put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995 not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings thereon; and the said Motion may be entered upon and proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—[*Mr. Wood.*]

Pesticides

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): This debate relates to the dangers to health caused by the use of lindane, but it also concerns other pesticides in the organochloride and organophosphorus groups which are increasingly used in the home, agriculture and manufacturing. One example to which I shall refer at a later stage is permethrin, which was sprayed on 8 October 1991 in the Grays benefit office where my constituent Cassy Stanton worked. She was in the early stages of pregnancy. I shall return to her case in a moment.

As well as Cassy Stanton coming to my surgery, I was prompted to raise the issue of these chemicals by articles in the journal of the agricultural workers section of the Transport and General Workers Union, of which I am a sponsored Member of the House. I was also prompted by the effective and legitimate lobby by the Greenetwork, and influenced by a number of broadcasts, including Central Television's "Earth Dwellers Guide" which was presented by Philip Tibbenham on 21 August 1993, Channel 4's powerful "Dispatches" programme on 30 November 1994 and a number of small, but not unimportant, items broadcast on "Farming Today". These broadcasts, together with the contents of other programmes, have prompted me to raise the issue of lindane and similar pesticides in the House.

Since my debate appeared on the Order Paper, it has surprised but reassured me to realise that many hon. Members are worried about the matter. Many hon. Members from both sides of the House have approached me in the past few days. My hon. Friends the Members for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) would have been here for the debate, but for overriding pressing commitments in their constituencies.

It is also significant that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has recently asked questions from the Liberal Benches about the matter. Last, but by no means least, the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) has consistently and vigorously drawn attention to his anxieties about the dangers arising from the widespread use of agricultural pesticides over a number of years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) approached me last night and drew to my attention the fact that he had an Adjournment debate on the use of lindane on 28 February 1989. It followed the tabling of early-day motion 143, signed by 117 hon. Members. In that debate he was supported by the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse). Significantly, on that occasion a reply was given by the Under-Secretary of State for Employment. I raise that point because responsibility for and interest in lindane ranges across Departments. In the past few days I have tabled questions to the Departments of Employment and of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department for Education and the Department of the Environment. Arguably, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster also

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

has responsibility for lindane when he has his science hat on. That is important in view of my desire to persuade the Minister that the Government have not got to grips with properly examining in a range of programmes the extent of and dangers implicit in the use of Lindane and comparable chemicals.

Lindane is a potent insecticide and a dangerous organochloride. It is in the same family as DDT and has similar properties in as much as it is absorbed and accumulates in body fat and inevitably gets into the food chain. Such chemicals do not easily break down in the body. They are highly persistent.

As members of the public and as workers, we encounter Lindane in a number of forms. It can be odourless and colourless. It can be a solid, a white powder, a liquid or in the smoke-bomb fumigator variety. It is used in soil treatment against insect pests. It is used in the production of animal feeds. It is widely used in sugar beet production areas.

Lindane or similar chemicals are used in sheep dips, and workers are involved in what is described as bucket chemistry because they have to mix their own chemicals. The use which particularly caused me anxiety on watching the broadcast was in timber protection. Often, lofts are sprayed with lindane as a condition of mortgages. I point that out to the Minister and ask him to pause and consider that many of us simply do not know whether we are exposed to the chemical. We go into pubs, schools, homes or any other variety of buildings which might have been sprayed recently with lindane or comparable chemicals. We would not know that we were so exposed.

We absorb lindane by breathing the gas and vapours. It goes straight into the lungs and into the bloodstream. Fine dust can follow the same route. Larger particles are trapped in the nasal passages or the mucus escalator of the bronchial tubes. It is not necessary to have direct contact with the chemical. It can be swallowed because food and water can be contaminated directly by exposure to lindane. Lindane can be absorbed into the air. It mixes with food and water.

Lindane can also be absorbed by touching the product. I am particularly concerned about unskilled and untrained workers who have to handle the product in the timber industry or in the application of the pesticide to timbers in lofts.

One amazing fact is that, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the use of lindane in lofts where bats might reside is forbidden, because it might kill them, yet there is no similar embargo on its use where human beings congregate.

Lindane accumulates in body fat and can stay there a long time after exposure. While I acknowledge that, as is the case with many diseases, some people are more susceptible or sensitive to the effects of chemicals than others, and that some people suffer no ill-effects, nevertheless far too many people have experienced one or more of the following disorders following exposure to lindane.

One of the most serious is aplastic anaemia, which is a form of leukaemia and is a killer. There is substantial evidence to show that lindane also causes damage to the nervous system, and provokes headaches, convulsions and loss of limb movement, as well as mental illness, anxiety, depression, memory loss, vomiting, sore eyes, urticaria—raised red areas on the body—oedema, which is an abnormal accumulation of fluid in body tissues that causes swelling, diarrhoea, and loss of appetite. Lindane also probably contributes to anorexia and irritable bowel syndrome. It clearly aggravates respiratory diseases and can cause nasal inflammation, sores and breathing problems. Long-term tiredness, which is sometimes diagnosed as myalgic encephalomyelitis, is also attributed to lindane exposure. The final disease on that list is epilepsy.

The constituent to whom I referred earlier subsequently gave birth to a child who suffers from CHARGE, which is a particularly sad and painful handicap. In such children, only part of the retina functions and in some cases, there are problems with the iris. The children also suffer from heart defects and blockage of the nasal passages due to bone material or a membrane and their growth is retarded. In male infants, the genitals are not properly formed and do not develop. They also suffer from ear abnormalities.

The Department of Health has been furnished with a considerable body of evidence and I believe that it shows that CHARGE is, at least in part, caused by the exposure of the mother between 35 and 45 days from conception to lindane or other chemicals of the same family, such as permethrin.

Lindane has been banned or is severely restricted in some countries, including New Zealand, Sweden and Finland. Forty years ago, doctors in the United States drew attention to the association of lindane with the bone marrow disease aplastic anaemia, in which the bone marrow stops producing blood cells that fight infection and the platelets that stop bleeding. As I said, that can be a fatal condition. Subsequently, the United States, which has vigorous environmental laws and agencies, banned the use of lindane as a wood preservative and pesticide for domestic use.

The hon. Member for Holland with Boston has also drawn attention to the link between breast cancer and lindane and I think that the evidence is compelling. Sixty-five per cent. of the milk that we buy contains small quantities of lindane and it has even shown up in human breast milk. British and American scientists now point to lindane as a factor in the high incidence of breast cancer in the United Kingdom. When lindane was banned in Israel in 1978 it was reported that the death rate from breast cancer among women under 35 fell by a third. I do not believe that that is a coincidence.

In Britain, however, we are told by the various agencies—and hitherto by Ministers—that the amount of lindane in our food is within acceptable safety guidelines. Experts who were interviewed for the "Dispatches" programme believe that even the minutest amounts of lindane are unsafe in the human body and that, ingested over long periods, the pesticide has a cumulative and extremely damaging effect on the body. Part of that programme focused on the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the constituency of the hon. Member for Holland with Boston and has one of the highest rates of the disease in the country. It is also an area where lindane is widely used for sugar beet production, which dominates that county.

On wood treatment—which was the subject of the earlier Adjournment debate in 1989—the Minister must bear in mind the fact that many contractors do not advise or counsel their customers to vacate treated rooms for up to 48 hours.

That is the industry's guideline on the appropriate period for a room treated with lindane to be in quarantine. I think that 48 hours is woefully inadequate, but ample evidence shows that, for a variety of reasons, be they selfish and commercial or sheer ignorance, contractors do not advise their customers about the prudence of vacating rooms treated with the product even for that period.

The London Hazard Centre believes that rooms should be vacated for not days but weeks, and the Building Research Establishment has shown that lindane can build up in the air for a month or more after treatment. Many public and commercial buildings, to which we are all exposed, are treated, but no warnings are given about whether we should enter. Clearly, pregnant women are particularly, although not exclusively, vulnerable and, where lindane has been applied or sprayed, warnings should be given by regulation. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 are being flouted and ignored on a widespread scale. Many contractors, employers and customers are not advised of the hazards and risks, or the need for protective clothing when lindane is being applied.

The veterinary medicine directorate and the pesticides safety directorate, which are supposed to advise and counsel the Government, are letting us down. I do not doubt the Government's good will in this matter. However, they should pause, take a step back and set up an inquiry that is independent of their existing advisers. Although those two directorates are not puppets of Government, they have been extremely weak, if not craven, inasmuch as they probably must follow the wider Government policy of not sending "the wrong signals to industry". The problem is that they are, to a large extent, both licensing and surveillance authorities so they have a vested interest in not proving that they have previously made a mistake in authorising licensing of an unsafe product.

The United Kingdom does not appear to have a duty of care with regard to regulations covering pharmaceutical and chemical products, as exists under common and civil law. We have no freedom of information Act, so companies can claim commercial confidentiality and refuse to release their research data. That is unacceptable. We need full disclosure of research data from producers and marketers of such products. Another problem is inappropriate and inadequately applied regulations. Testing by the producers of those products provides for safety clearance to start at the point of a product first being sold. Surveillance and evaluation frequently stop thereafter, whereas monitoring and examination should continue throughout the period of public use.

Extensive public concern exists about lindane and similar chemicals used in agriculture, manufacturing and the home. People have no confidence in the existing regulatory procedure. Public confidence is extremely important, so I hope that the Minister will make a name for himself and make one of the briefest speeches in an Adjournment debate by simply saying that he will examine not only the matter that I have raised but the evidence from all interested parties and individuals. He should examine evidence particularly from those who, although they may have suffered illness or even death, are not included in the statistics because many producers and manufacturers of those products have settled with them out of court. As a consequence of those settlements, cases of death and serious illness are not being fully examined or reported to Government.

A line should be drawn, and the Government should give some expedition to independent re-examination of the matter.

I cannot help feeling and anticipating, although I hope that it will not be the case, that the Minister will use more or less the same brief as his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), used in 1989. If he does, may I draw attention to the fact that on that occasion the Employment Under-Secretary said:

> "Discussions about"

those chemicals

> "are taking place within the European Community, and the Government"—

that is the United Kingdom Government—

> "have proposed across the board controls on the use of wood preservatives throughout the European Community."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1989; Vol. 148, c. 258.]

What has happened to that initiative? Years have passed, and now is the time for a line to be drawn. Now is the time for the Minister to make a name for himself in Brussels, and to say that the United Kingdom will not tolerate this any longer. It is time for him to say that we shall severely restrict the use of lindane and comparable chemicals and ban its use in the home, as have Finland and Sweden.

This is not another "food scare". It is not a party issue, as I have demonstrated. It is a matter that causes widespread anxiety throughout the communities in the United Kingdom. I should like the Minister to respond accordingly.

2.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on obtaining the debate, and on his courageous attempt to spell out ME in full. After two and a half years, I continue to have difficulty.

The hon. Member for Thurrock is right that there is widespread anxiety about pesticides and about many medicines and other substances, but I have to tell him one or two things in opening.

First, we have probably the best regulatory system in the world. When the hon. Gentleman says that there is no confidence in it, I reply that, if there is no confidence in the system, it is because certain people who have an interest in shaking confidence in it, through often ill-researched and fairly irresponsible television programmes and so on, have gone out of their way to do so. The members of the committees that regulate medicines, pesticides and similar matters include some of the leading experts in the world, with enormous international and national reputations to maintain. I defy the hon. Gentleman to give me evidence that there is any covering up of facts.

Secondly, if some of the material that I shall give the hon. Gentleman today is the same as that which has been used before, it is because the facts have not changed. I can only state the facts as we understand them.

Lindane, sometimes known as gamma HCH, is an organochlorine pesticide, as the hon. Gentleman knows, which has been used to treat animals with external parasites. It continues to have an important role in killing pests on crops and treating wood to prevent pest infestation.

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

The media have stated, and it has been stated elsewhere, that in some countries lindane has been banned. I understand that it has even been claimed that the United Kingdom is the only country that continues to use it. That is absolutely not so. Figures from every country in the world are not available, but in most developed countries, including the UK, lindane continues to be accepted for limited use, as an agricultural pesticide and for wood treatment.

Lindane has been withdrawn from use as a pesticide in seven countries—Indonesia, Kuwait, Morocco, New Zealand and St. Lucia and two European countries, Sweden and Finland. The House will note that the list does not include Israel. That is because lindane continues to be accepted for use there, and the high levels of lindane reported to be found in Israeli food were due to its use as a cattle louse treatment whereby it was directly applied to the cattle. That use has, indeed, ceased.

Such use is not permitted in the United Kingdom. The use of lindane as a veterinary medicine was licensed under the Medicines Act 1968 by Ministers acting on the advice of the Veterinary Products Committee. Licences for sheep dips were revoked in 1984, and the last licence for other veterinary uses lapsed in 1991.

In this country, the advertisement, sale, supply, storage, and use of pesticides is subject to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. Ministers approve pesticides under those regulations and those approvals set out the crops on which the pesticide may be used and the conditions of use. The statutory conditions of use are displayed on the label on the pesticide packaging. The agricultural inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive monitors the application of those regulations and can prosecute those who fail to comply. The penalty on conviction in a magistrates court is a fine of up to £5,000 or an unlimited fine on conviction in a Crown court.

Further control is exercised through the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) Regulations 1994. Anyone putting into circulation any product listed in the regulations which contains pesticide residues above the limits specified in those regulations can, on conviction, be fined on the same basis as the fines set for a conviction under the control of pesticides regulations. Both those controls are intended to protect the health of people using pesticides or who are exposed to them in any other way.

In the United Kingdom, the Government are advised on pesticide approvals and revocations by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, a statutory body consisting of independent medical and scientific experts representing all the relevant specialisms related to human toxicology, environmental safety, agricultural, horticultural and other uses of pesticides. They have the necessary qualifications and experience to understand the research and interpret its findings on the safety and efficacy of pesticide use. Ministers must take the advice of that committee before they approve or revoke the use of any pesticide. I assure the House that the Government pay careful attention to the committee's advice and have always acted on it.

Before any new pesticide is approved or when the approval for any existing pesticide is reviewed, the potential exposure of the users and people eating food that might contain residues is carefully assessed. Approval is not given if those exposures are likely to cause harmful health effects. As well as the evidence of exposure and of food residues that companies must provide when seeking approval of their products, the Government have established a residues monitoring system under which food is regularly surveyed. Similar considerations apply before the statutory Veterinary Products Committee advises Ministers as to whether a product should be licensed.

Of course, as I have explained, lindane is no longer licensed for use in this country as a veterinary medicine. The evidence is that lindane residues in cows milk, which are primarily due to traces of lindane in their feeds, are falling. Indeed, when found, they are around the limit of detection. Such levels are well below the internationally agreed acceptable daily intake, a level that would not be expected to cause harm to health even over a lifetime of exposure.

While the effect on human health is of paramount importance when considering the approval of a product for use, other considerations must be taken into account as well. The fact that it is withdrawn in one country may have no bearing on its use in others. Countries have different pest problems, different climates and different environmental and agricultural considerations. A product appropriate for one country may simply have no use in another. Breast cancer rates alone, in countries in which lindane is no longer used, give no indication of whether or not there might be a causal relationship.

Some concern of late, mentioned in the programme "Dispatches" and elsewhere—the hon. Member also referred to it—has arisen because more women without a family history of breast cancer are developing the disease.

The Government are concerned about the high incidence of breast cancer and that is why we have established the breast screening programme and made the reduction in mortality from breast cancer a major target of our "Health of the Nation" initiative. Certainly a family history is one of the known risk factors, but there are others, for example, late childbearing, not having children, early menarche, late menopause, obesity and repeated exposure to ionising radiation. The reason for its high incidence in developed countries, however, remains unknown. There is a wide geographical variation in both incidence and mortality and the populations with the highest risk of developing breast cancer are those in western Europe and North America.

Much has been made of the high rates of breast cancer in Israel in the early 1970s and of the dramatic increase in breast cancer mortality rates from 1976 onwards. If lindane had a causal relationship with breast cancer, however, mortality rates would be expected to remain high for several years after the withdrawal of its use. That is because breast cancer takes several years to develop.

What actually happened in Israel is a rather different story. First, the so-called dramatic decrease in mortality rates for breast cancer began shortly before the drop in pesticide exposure. The Israeli researchers, Westin and Richter, noted that phenomenon. Lindane was withdrawn from use as a louse treatment in 1978. Secondly, and more tellingly, it was only the deaths from breast cancer that declined at that time, not the incidence. There is no evidence of a sharp decrease in the number of women in Israel who developed the disease; on the contrary, in the 25 to 34 age group, the relatively small number of cases stayed much the same, but in the age group 35 to 44, there was a steady rise in breast cancer incidence in the period 1976 to 1986.

In most developed countries, including Israel, the statistics follow a familiar pattern—an increasing number of women developing this dreadful disease, but also a decrease in the number of deaths. The most likely reason for the rise in incidence and drop in death rates is the improvement in treatment and public awareness—for example, earlier detection.

I emphasis that if there were any reason to think that the use of lindane or, indeed, any other manufactured product was the cause of such a widespread and serious disease, we would have no hesitation in withdrawing it. But there are, unfortunately, only a very few cancers where we can say with any certainty that they have a particular extraneous cause.

Unfortunately, in the time available I cannot deal with all the points raised about lindane. I want to reiterate that in this country we have an excellent system for approving pesticides and for licensing veterinary medicines. Under both systems, the Government are advised by independent statutory committees which, I have to tell the hon. Gentleman, are respected around the world as being the best. We listen to those expert committees and if they tell us that a product is likely to harm people, we do not let it get on to the market.

Lindane has been carefully considered, certain uses have been reviewed and the agricultural pesticide use is presently under review. We can rest assured—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 3 April 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Cycle Paths

1. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent consultations he has had over the routing of cycle paths within London. [15688]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): My Department attends regular meetings with London borough councils and representatives of cycling groups to discuss development of the 1,200 mile London cycle network.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Admirable though it certainly is to provide and extend cycling facilities in London, is it not absolute nonsense in a Labour-controlled borough such as mine for more than £300,000 to be spent on a new track which has brought chaos to residents, car drivers and bus drivers, dismay to the police and, above all, danger to cyclists? Should not Merton council have ensured proper consultation and worked towards practical pedalling rather than posture politics?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend forwarded to me correspondence from Councillor Margaret Brierly, who expressed on behalf of residents in Raynes Park in my hon. Friend's constituency concern about the way in which that particular part of the cycle route had been implemented. The case underlines the fact that, however desirable cycling may be—I am grateful for my hon. Friend's endorsement of the principle—it is vital that local authorities proceed on the basis of proper consultation with residents so that we get sensible value for money out of the exercise.

Airline Subsidies

2. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the amount of subsidy from national Governments to their national airlines within the EC; and if he will list the latest available figures for each member state. [15690]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Since 1991, the European Commission has approved £5.3 billion of state aid from member states to their national airlines. Almost half this aid was awarded to Air France. The UK Government have opposed all these subsidies.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that figure is outrageous, not least because half of it goes to one airline? Will he undertake to publish the details of the subsidies to every other airline in Europe? Does he agree that, apart from being worried about the record of fraud and mismanagement that go on in the Community, many people in Britain will be dismayed to think that others whose livelihoods and jobs depend on the free market which we are supposed to have joined will seriously question the purpose of what they are in unless that free market is established?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that, since 1991, Sabena has received £450 million, Iberia almost £600 million, Aer Lingus £170 million, TAP of Portugal £710 million, Olympic Airways about £1 billion and Air France about £2.4 billion. All that distorts the single market, as my hon. Friend says. All of it is unfair to British Airways and other British carriers, which compete without the benefit of state aid and do so much more effectively than most of the airlines that receive state aid. It is also unfair to the passengers. For all those reasons, the Government have opposed all those state aids. I assure my hon. Friend that I will continue to be robust in the future, as we have been in the past.

Railways, London

3. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to promote greater usage of London's surface railways. [15691]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): In London, as elsewhere, giving the private sector the opportunity to operate existing services and introduce new ones is the best way to bring about the further improvements to services which passengers clearly want to see and to attract more passengers.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister not recognise that imaginative management of London's railways would provide far greater passenger opportunities on many underused freight lines or underused passenger lines, such as the Barking to Gospel Oak line? Is he aware that the principles of the internal market mean that, to save Railtrack from paying penalties, re-routed freight trains are sent down the Barking to Gospel Oak line, passenger trains are cancelled and passengers are taken off the trains and told to take a bus? Railtrack does not therefore lose any money from its freight income, but it inconveniences the passengers, who receive no compensation because that line is not included in the compensation package.

Mr. Watts: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that £300,000 has been contributed towards refurbishment of stations on the Gospel Oak to Barking line. As for rail freight, he will be pleased to learn that the freight companies were vested successfully this weekend. I believe that in the private sector they will offer greater innovation and better marketing and secure an increasing share of traffic for rail freight at the expense of road freight.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I recently travelled from West Ealing to Greenford and back using British Rail. Many passengers travelling in both directions to whom I spoke said that the service was extremely good and comfortable. Will my hon. Friend make absolutely sure, however, that the service from Ealing to Paddington is maintained at all times?

Mr. Watts: The franchise for the Thames services is not in the first eight, but I am pleased to hear what my hon. Friend's constituents think. I am sure that he shares my confidence that, as franchises are offered in the private sector, we can expect improvements in the standard even of those services that people already find satisfactory.

Mr. Meacher: Is it not clear that, although the Government have a so-called national roads programme, they have no national rail programme whatever—unlike every other major European country? When will the Minister understand that the private sector will not stump up capital for either crossrail or Thameslink 2000 until the Government give a lead by being prepared to invest public money in them?

Is it not also clear that the Minister has been forced to cut the roads programme, but he is still not prepared to invest in alternative public transport systems because the Tory party retains a deep visceral hostility to investment in the public sector?

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has oversight of the entire rail network, rather as the Highways Agency has oversight of the trunk road and motorway network.

I note the hon. Gentleman's scepticism about Thameslink—a scepticism that I do not expect to be borne out by the results of the feasibility study conducted recently by Railtrack and British Rail. The hon. Gentleman is so welded—I mean wedded—[*Laughter.*] That was a slip of the tongue, but perhaps my tongue found a better word. The hon. Gentleman is welded to the idea that nothing is worth while unless it is subsidised by the taxpayer. He seems to ignore the great successes of the private finance initiative, which is delivering more important rail and other transport infrastructure than the public purse could ever deliver. He continually wishes to place further burdens on taxpayers, rather than using the skills and finance of the private sector.

Dr. Twinn: I thank the Government for their commitment to London's surface railways. Is my hon. Friend aware that in constituencies such as mine, in Enfield and Edmonton, surface rail is very important because we have no tube services? Does he agree that private investment in British Rail provides the best opportunity of guaranteeing an improved service for my constituents in the future?

Mr. Watts: I entirely agree that opening up rail services to investment and management by the private sector provides the best guarantee of improved services well into the future.

Railway Works Compensation

4. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to proposing changes to the laws on compensation for people and businesses affected by (a) underground and (b) overground railway works; and if he will make a statement. [15693]

Mr. Watts: The relevant legislative framework—which was most recently extended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991—is kept under review.

Mr. Hughes: When the review is next considered—and the matter is urgent—will the Minister take account of two specific problems? They arise from the Jubilee line works, welcome though those are.

First, a change of plan has meant that people who invested on the basis of an undertaking that they would not suffer disruption have suffered such disruption. Secondly, and more important, some small businesses—such as those in Borough high street, by London bridge—are on the verge of bankruptcy, not because of a reduction in the value of their premises but because the works surrounding them have caused trade almost to disappear. Will the Minister examine the problem as a matter of urgency? It is affecting many businesses and individuals.

Mr. Watts: As the hon. Gentleman will realise, compensation arrangements for particular schemes such as the Jubilee line extension are a matter for discussion between London Transport and those who consider that they have been adversely affected. I understand that some traders are negotiating with London Transport about compensation in connection with the construction works, and I am sure that that is the right way for them to proceed. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London is present, and has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Brooke: Given that all the new underground routes planned pass through the constituency of City of London and Westminster, South and as those who are sited above them, either commercially or residentially, suffer blight in general and personal disruption in particular, will my hon. Friend bear constantly in mind the fact that the routes of those lines are more likely to be smooth if there is a sensible system of compensation that everyone recognises?

Mr. Watts: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the Minister consider the position of people who are faced with compulsory purchase and who have negative equity on their properties, particularly commercial properties? Such people are forced to sell their properties at a time when, given the opportunity, they would not have sold but would have waited so as to recover their investment. Will the hon. Gentleman look at that serious problem?

Mr. Watts: Yes. The hon. Gentleman raises a difficult point which we will look at sympathetically when there is a further review.

Mr. Dunn: Will my hon. Friend please consider extending compensation to farmers and market gardeners in Kent whose crops will be damaged and visually destroyed by chalk dust emanating from the construction of the channel tunnel rail link?

Mr. Watts: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents who feel that they may be so affected will make full use of the statutory provisions available to them.

Car Safety

6. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that standards higher than the European Union crash standards for cars are promptly introduced. [15695]

Mr. Norris: No. It is vital that crash test standards are set within the context of the European Union.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Does the Minister not realise that more improved, stringent tests could save up to 90,000 lives across Europe and 9,000 lives in the United Kingdom and that the motoring organisations are concerned about the recommendations being too loose?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right. When we reach the stage 2 standards, they will offer the prospect of substantial life saving. Of course these test standards have to be introduced on a sensible time scale which allows the manufacturers to develop products that are set to the stringent standards. I underline that I think there is general agreement throughout the House that the construction standards must be properly set within the framework of the European Union. They offer British manufacturers the opportunity of knowing the standard to which they build so that they can sell their products throughout the Union.

Commuter Trains

7. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to increase the number of regional commuter train services. [15696]

Dr. Mawhinney: Privatisation can be expected to bring improvements to regional commuter train services as well as to passenger services generally. The Government also welcome the support that local authorities have given to developing local services in their areas.

Mrs. Knight: My right hon. Friend will be aware that among the proposals of the Greater Nottingham rail strategy is one for a line that crosses the county boundary into Derbyshire and for additional small commuter stations at Ilkeston, Sandiacre and Long Eaton in my constituency. What action can his Department take to forward that proposal, as it utilises better the existing midland main railway line, to the benefit of commuters?

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes, I am aware of the proposal and of my hon. Friend's support for it. Any application to the Department for funding would need to be accompanied by a full appraisal that demonstrates that the scheme would provide value for money and better prospects for relieving traffic congestion, perhaps by encouraging transfer from private cars, rather than having, say, an express bus service. We are open to such a proposal and would look carefully at it should it emerge.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State reflect on what would happen to commuter services into Edinburgh from Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy if rust were to take hold on the Forth bridge? If that happened, one impregnated lattice structure would make it impossible to use that bridge, which is vital to the area north of the Forth. It is also the greatest monument to British engineering of the 19th century and is the picture postcard image of Britain. What are the Secretary of State's responsibilities in this matter?

Dr. Mawhinney: Certainly, the hon. Gentleman is right. I share his appreciation of the engineering feat that the bridge represents. It was part of the best of 19th century engineering in Britain. I have no reason to believe that any of the hon. Gentleman's concerns are well founded. As he will recall from evidence that I gave to the Select Committee on Transport, we are asking some experts to have another look at the bridge.

Mr. Rowe: My right hon. Friend will know that the chairman of one of the main banks has said that he expects there to be 50,000 redundancies in the banking world. There has been a host of similar developments during recent years. Will my right hon. Friend share with the House, either now or on a subsequent occasion, the Government's latest thinking on the effect that technological change will have on commuter patterns over the next few years?

Dr. Mawhinney: First, I have no responsibility for banks. Secondly, the technological change to which my hon. Friend referred will not happen just in the future; it is happening now and it is being reflected in our policies as we seek to develop the railway industry in the private sector and to make the best use of developing technology in this country's other transport infrastructure.

Rail Modernisation

8. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long Railtrack's feasibility study team has been analysing whether to modernise the rail network. [15697]

Mr. Watts: At any time, Railtrack will be assessing the merits of a range of investment projects.

Mr. Cunningham: Given the shambles since November on the Euston-Coventry-Birmingham line, and in view of what happened today, will the Minister give an undertaking that he will speed up the modernisation proposals, that he will investigate what has been happening on that line since November and that he will abandon the privatisation proposals? Although the staff give of their best, they are demoralised by the privatisation proposals and, consequently, the railway line between Euston and Birmingham is a shambles.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman's comments about the effects of privatisation are total rubbish. However, I shall reflect on what he has said about the problems on the line to which he referred.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend ensure that there is an urgent examination of the west coast main line? Is he aware that many of us would like to use it regularly but do not because it is so unreliable? I happened to use it this morning for the first time in months and I was delayed by two hours. There was total chaos. It is a wholly unacceptable position.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the upgrading of the west coast main line is probably the biggest of the upgrading projects being considered. The first phase project study was completed in December. A couple of weeks ago, I announced that the Government had given approval for the letting of the contract for the development of a new signalling system, which is at the heart of the upgrading proposals. The release of funds that will follow will provide funding for the core investment programme that the line most urgently requires.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Minister aware that whenever Members of Parliament raise questions about services at risk, especially services to the peripheral, more remote areas—for example, sleeper services—Railtrack or the franchising director says that their future is a political decision? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the buck must eventually stop with the Department of Transport in respect of those services and the costings on which their future is to be based?

Does the Minister agree with the announcement by the director of Railtrack Scotland that should the sleeper services be axed in any part of the country, that would reflect badly on and tarnish the privatisation exercise?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman should stop arousing unnecessary fears in the minds of his constituents and those of hon. Members who represent Scotland. He well knows that sleeper services to the west country and to Scotland will be safeguarded, for the very first time, by their inclusion in passenger service requirements.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend remind those scaremongers who complain about the potential consequences of privatisation that wherever industry has been privatised, that has resulted in much greater investment and much better quality of service? That will be as true with the railways as it is elsewhere.

Mr. Watts: Yes, indeed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred earlier to the contrast between British Airways in the private sector and the nationalised airlines of some of our continental partners.

Mr. Meacher: Does it not show the Government's priorities that they still refuse to fund a penny of the £1 billion required for the desperately needed modernisation of the west coast main line, while at the same time they are quite prepared to shell out £5 billion sweeteners in debt write-offs and capital allowances to ease the privatisation of the railways? Is it not absolutely clear that the Government are far more interested in funding their dogma than in providing higher-quality services for passengers?

Mr. Watts: What it shows is that the hon. Gentleman does not think that any investment is worth while unless it is paid for by taxpayers. The first stage of the upgrading of the west coast main line can be funded in the private sector, so I find no reason why he continues to argue that taxpayers should pay for the upgrading. It can be funded without dipping into taxpayers' pockets.

Airspace Restrictions

9. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the use by EU countries of restricting airspace as a means of restricting competition. [15698]

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the Government's policy to oppose any measure that unduly restricts competition in the air transport single market.

Mr. Steen: When British Midland was given enough slots to become the second British carrier to fly to Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels, fares dropped by about a third and the percentage share of passengers using those services went up from about 40 to 60 per cent. Will the Minister therefore consider using, if not public money, then money raised from the private sector, to invest in the necessary technology to provide new and additional slots out of London? In that way, additional British carriers could fly on the other trunk routes—which have only British Airways here and the state airline at the other end in Europe—and so provide increased competition and reduced fare prices to the consumer.

Dr. Mawhinney: If my hon. Friend is talking about flights in Europe, he will be pleased to remember that the 1993 liberalisation package, behind which we were a major moving force, has provided opportunities precisely to enable greater competition and greater access for British carriers to the transfer of passengers in other European countries. If he is talking about services beyond Europe, I assure him that, as we pursue bilateral liberalisation arrangements with other countries, we always seek to enhance British carriers' prospects.

Mr. Stevenson: Does not the Secretary of State agree that one of the greatest restrictions on airspace is its reservation for military use both in this country and in the European Union? Does that not restrict commercial carriers in obtaining the additional slots that they require? Has he assessed that position recently? If he has, will he advise us on the outcome of that assessment? If he has not, is he about to assess the position?

Dr. Mawhinney: There we go again: anything to reduce the country's defence capabilities finds an echo on the Labour Benches. But perhaps that is not surprising from the party that has just brought forward a new rewording of clause IV, which inadvertently happened to omit NATO from its words.

Air Services

10. **Mr. Spring:** To ask Secretary of State for Transport what efforts are being made to liberalise air services to and from the United Kingdom. [15699]

Dr. Mawhinney: The United Kingdom played a lead role in bringing about the liberalisation of air services in the European Community, which came into effect on 1 January 1993, and about which I have just spoken. Outside the Community, we shall continue to seek to liberalise air service agreements on a bilateral basis.

Mr. Spring: Although I welcome the discussions between the UK and the United States of America, does my right hon. Friend hope that new practical and liberalised arrangements will emerge that are of benefit to both countries?

Dr. Mawhinney: I appreciate my hon. Friend's question and I am encouraged by the progress that has been made in those discussions between the United States and the UK. I pay tribute to Secretary Peña who, with me, agreed an agenda for those discussions. We have made good progress. They have been genuine negotiations. The talks will recommence in Washington on 10 April and continue until 12 April. I am hopeful that an arrangement will eventually emerge that will benefit the travelling public both in the United States and in the UK.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

11. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy in respect of the objective for the channel tunnel rail link announced by the former Secretary of State in 1991, with special reference to economic regeneration in east London. [15700]

Mr. Watts: In selecting the easterly route for the channel tunnel rail link, the Government recognised the potential that it offered to encourage regeneration in the east Thames corridor, now known as the Thames gateway. Such regeneration remains an important objective for the rail link project.

Mr. Timms: May I remind the Minister that when the former Secretary of State made the announcement in 1991, he was explicit that his commitment was to regeneration in east London, where it is most needed and where, as the Government's own figures confirm, the levels of urban deprivation are highest? Do the Government remain committed to regeneration specifically in east London, as announced in 1991, through the rail link project?

Mr. Watts: I am confident that the whole of the Thames gateway will benefit from the rail link project. I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for inviting me to view the proposed site of the Stratford station, which I did recently on a very wet day—it was probably the only time that anyone has described me as a wet. However, the enthusiasm of the promoter group was undiminished by the weather. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the question of the station at Stratford is still open and we shall reassess it in the light of the bids from the four consortiums, which are undergoing assessment.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: May I remind my hon. Friend that the reference was to the east Thames corridor and that we in north-west Kent are therefore grateful for the decision immediately to proceed with the Ebbsfleet station, which will bring considerable regeneration and also make more viable any opportunities that Opposition Members see in respect of east London?

Mr. Watts: It is gratifying that hon. Friends and hon. Members representing both sides of the Thames recognise the value of this project to regeneration prospects.

Cyclists and Pedestrians

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to improve provision for cyclists and pedestrians. [15701]

Mr. Norris: The responsibility for making safe provision for cyclists and pedestrians rests principally with local highway authorities. They are able to bid for appropriate funding in their annual transport policies and programmes submission to the Department of Transport.

Mrs. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that three quarters of all journeys are less than five miles long and that, at present, only 1 per cent. of them are made by bicycle? What is he doing to ensure safe networks on which parents are prepared to let their children travel and to encourage more people to cycle?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Lady is right, although it is about 2.5 per cent. of all journeys in this country that are made by cycle. That compares with an average throughout Europe of about 15 per cent. Although our road safety record generally is excellent, the prospects of being injured as a cyclist are substantially higher in this country than in some countries where cycling is more central to local transport provision. The hon. Lady is on to a very good point which I have strongly endorsed myself. The mechanisms for delivering what she seeks are the TPP submissions from local authorities which are being guided by the Department in its transport supplementary grant guidance to ensure that, when packages are put together by local authorities, they include a significant cycling element.

Mr. Robathan: I am delighted that my hon. Friend supports cycling, but will he hold discussions with his colleagues at the Department of Health and the Department for Education to encourage schoolchildren to bicycle or walk to school? We are told that children are getting fat and unfit because they sit on their backsides too much and do not take exercise; we are told that they are getting unhealthy and developing asthma because of air pollution; and we can all see the congestion for ourselves. This is a very serious issue, and I hope that my hon. Friend will respond accordingly.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right. Cycling is environmentally sound and healthy and it is a thoroughly desirable form of transport, but most people would not exactly relish the prospect of challenging a 40 ft articulated lorry for priority on the road. The reality is that we have to create conditions in which thoroughly un-lycra people such as me might be tempted to improve their health substantially by cycling. My hon. Friend's enthusiasm is legendary and much to be welcomed.

Manchester Airport

13. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the future ownership and funding of Manchester airport; and if he will make a statement. [15702]

Dr. Mawhinney: I have received a number of representations about the future ownership and funding of Manchester airport from hon. Friends and others. I believe that the airport's future would be better served in the private sector.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that local authorities should allow pension funds to pay for tarmacking the second runway at Manchester airport so that councils are free to spend more on schools and caring for the vulnerable?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend will understand that I am not in a position to comment about the second runway for obvious reasons, but I strongly endorse his view that the flexibility and investment that Manchester airport needs and of which, on the basis of its past history, it could make good use, is much more likely to come effectively from the private sector, thereby freeing up resources for the council to use in other ways as my hon. Friend pointed out.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I think that the Secretary of State made a mistake because Manchester is a highly efficient airport, which is growing every year and is not only providing high-quality management but contributing to the very best in the region. I thought that the Secretary of State was in the business of trying to sell off those broken-down bits of British Rail that his friends want for other reasons.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to confirm that Manchester is indeed a good airport, but I believe that it can be even better—and it is much more likely to be better and to provide the increasing range of international services that people want if it is given the opportunity to be in the private sector. I point the hon. Lady to the British Airports Authority. No doubt when the Airports Bill was going through the House she was against that as well.

Mr. Fabricant: While I agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that Manchester airport is very efficient—I often fly there and enjoy the facilities—does my right hon. Friend agree with the comments made by Samuel Goldwyn junior when the Select Committee on National Heritage visited him in Los Angeles in a very unpublicised trip last year, when he said that public subsidies make for lazy film-makers? Is that not also the case with airports?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am pleased that we have agreement across the Floor of the House that Manchester is a good airport. I think that we also have agreement across the House that it can be an even better and more significant airport. Unquestionably, that will happen if it gets into the private sector. I hope that that decision will be taken locally because I am sure that that is the best place for it to be taken, but I would not rule out the possibility that that decision might have to be taken centrally at some time in the future, on the basis of legislation.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Secretary of State accept that Manchester airport's success is due to the fact that for 50 years it has been an example of municipal enterprise and that politicians of all political parties in Greater Manchester have nurtured it and built it up? Having achieved such a success, which even the Minister concedes, why spoil it now by taking it away from the local authorities?

Dr. Mawhinney: It is encouraging to know that the Labour party, despite all its warm words and clichés, has not changed its instinct for the public sector over the private sector, irrespective of the benefits that the latter can provide. We have heard that view from the Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), and from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on the Back Bench. All we need now is for it to be confirmed by the Leader of the Opposition and we shall have a clean slate.

Roads (Environmental Impact)

14. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress to reduce the environmental impact of road transport. [15703]

Dr. Mawhinney: A wide range of measures has been introduced to reduce the environmental impact of road transport, within the Government's overall aim of sustainable development.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Secretary of State confirm that included in that statement there is a genuine interest on the part of Government to reduce the development of asthma in children and in the population in general? Will he give an assurance that new motorways will not be built near infant and junior schools? Does he agree that there has to be a distance of half a mile, or a mile, between a motorway and a school to ensure the health and safety of children in our schools?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the importance that the hon. Gentleman attaches to clean air. I hope that he will accept that, in the nine months that I have been in this job, I have tightened vehicle emission standards on two occasions and have paid particular attention to putting in place arrangements that will add to those already in place as regards cleaning the air. As to new roads, I understand that the hon. Gentleman has a genuine concern about the A1(M) and proposals for new routes, the effect that those might have on the Ferrybridge-Pontefract corridor and whether the route ought to go to the east of Knottingley. He will appreciate that a variety of issues have to be taken into account in making such a judgment. He has made one of those points very eloquently today. I hope that he will accept that a number of others have to be borne in mind before a final decision is reached.

Mr. James Hill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the M3 has been an outstanding success, as its use by the public has cut out many huge traffic jams of the past? None the less, the environmental side needs some attention. As a result of the sheer construction of the gap, almost 1,000 contractors' caravans are still in place. Should not a little environmental detail now be approached to make the M3 a real success?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree with my hon. Friend that the M3 and the whole motorway network have been a success. Some motorways have been a little controversial at the time of construction but, as people reflect on what we now have in place, they agree that the system is to the great advantage of the travelling public, business and industry. I hear what my hon. Friend says about the environmental aspects of the M3 and I will report his concern to the Highways Agency.

Ms Walley: In view of the measures which the Secretary of State says are so important, when will he take full account of the report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment and the report of the royal commission? When will environmental appraisal be at the root of all road schemes and transport policies? When will he introduce air quality monitoring, both nationally and as a requirement for local authorities?

Dr. Mawhinney: I should have hoped that the hon. Lady would know that, since 1985, environmental assessments have been at the heart of decisions on whether new roads should be built. The SACTRA report made it clear that induced traffic consequences of road building happen only on some roads but could not say in advance which roads those would be. It recommended that we should do more research to pursue that matter further and I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that we shall do so.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many economists are employed by the National Audit Office. [15738]

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office employs some 550 staff, who either have accountancy qualifications or are training for them. Of those, 60 have degrees in economics, although none are full-time professional economists. The office conducts a wide range of studies. When specialised advice is needed on relevant economic issues, the NAO uses external experts.

Mr. Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend ask one of those highly trained individuals to discover why we have computer-readable passports but inadequate computers at ports of entry?

Sir Peter Hordern: I am familiar with the report to which my hon. Friend refers and I understand that the Public Accounts Commission has already considered it. It shows the good work which the National Audit Office does for the House and for Parliament generally in inquiring into administration rather than policy. It has also revealed that the index of suspects, which has some 340,000 names on it, is held in a manual that is updated by hand every day. It is hoped to move to a computer index soon, though some hon. Members may consider that that should have been done before.

TRANSPORT

Airline Subsidies

15. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking within the EU to resist the payment of illicit subsidies to (a) Air France, (b) Iberia and (c) Olympic Airlines. [15704]

Mr. Norris: The UK has opposed the granting of state aid by national Governments to Air France, Iberia and Olympic Airlines, and we have applied to the European Court of Justice to annul the Air France decision.

Mr. Waterson: Will my hon. Friend take an early opportunity to remind his opposite numbers in Europe that, to use Lord King's words, within less than a decade British Airways went from awful to awesome as a result of privatisation, cutting overmanning and achieving more efficient management, and that if their national airlines cannot achieve that without massive subsidies they should be allowed to go out of business?

Mr. Norris: I listened closely to what my hon. Friend said and I think that his words will resonate throughout the House and outside. State aid merely shores up inefficiency, distorts competition and undermines European airlines' ability to compete in world markets.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

20. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the public subsidy likely to be required to (a) construct the channel tunnel rail link and (b) operate services on it. [15710]

Mr. Watts: The level of public sector support for the construction of the channel tunnel rail link will be determined by the competition currently under way to select a private sector promoter for the rail link. The Government do not intend to subsidise the private sector operation of international services.

Mr. Prentice: Is the Minister aware that Eurorail, whose chairman is Lord Parkinson, has put in a bid to construct the rail link? Is that not strange and remarkable behaviour from the noble Lord, given that he spiked the project five years ago, when he said that it should receive no public subsidy whatever?

Mr. Watts: I do not find it in the least strange that any one of the four consortiums should have put in bids to build the link.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Bearing in mind the fact that the north Kent line is subsidised, along with the other commuter services in the London area, is not one advantage of the channel tunnel rail link that it will cut commuting speeds from Gravesend from 50 minutes to 19 minutes on the high-speed rail link?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend has pointed out one of the important domestic benefits that flow from the construction of that link.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Visitors' Refreshment Facilities

28. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what plans he has to make refreshment facilities available for visitors. [15718]

Mr. Paul Channon (Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee): In its first report of 1992-93, "Refreshment Provision for Line of Route Visitors", the Catering Committee recommended that the area currently occupied by the Westminster Hall cafeteria should be converted to a visitor centre, but that that should take place only when a suitable alternative has been found for the present lunchtime users of that cafeteria. The House agreed the report on 12 July 1994.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee for that reply. I am glad to hear that some progress has been made. Is he confident that when I am visited by children in the future, as I was recently by 80 children from Arbury county primary school of Cambridge, those children will be able to sit and eat their sandwiches inside instead of having to go outside and eat them in the rain?

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree that that is very much to be desired. The Director of Works is currently preparing design options, which will have to be considered by the various Committees of the House. The serious problem is that between 400 and 450 people already have meals in the Westminster Hall cafeteria. Some suitable alternative must be found for them before much else can be done.

Mr. Dunn: As one of the bars to extending facilities in the House is the lack of space, is my right hon. Friend aware that a number of rooms are currently used by policy advisers to the Labour party and are therefore now redundant?

Mr. Channon: Perhaps my hon. Friend would be kind enough to refer that matter to the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee.

Dining Room Bookings

29. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make

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financial provision for the publication at monthly intervals of a list of dining room bookings, giving the names of organisations and hon. Members. [15719]

Mr. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The provision of such information is a matter for the Catering Committee, following the implementation of the structure set out in the Ibbs report.

Mr. Prentice: May I urge the right hon. Gentleman to make suitable representations to the Catering Committee? As the Nolan committee is examining the interests of Members of Parliament, their parliamentary consultancies, and so on—about which there has been tremendous public concern—is there not a case for greater transparency and openness, so that people outside know exactly which Members of Parliament are booking how many rooms for outside organisations?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman can urge the Catering Committee, as no doubt he did before it gave a parliamentary written answer on that very subject on 1 February at columns *671-72*. He has also no doubt urged his hon. Friends on the Committee, on which the Opposition are well represented by the hon. Members for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan).

Energy Efficiency

30. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what has been the cost of energy efficiency measures in the parliamentary estate in the last three years. [15720]

Mr. Beith: The amounts spent specifically on such measures were £32,000, £168,000 and £130,000 in 1992-93, 1993-94 and the current financial year.

Mr. Steen: I just wonder whether enough is being done to reduce the burning of fossil fuels and whether the House is doing enough by setting an example of how we behave in that respect. Bearing in mind the fact that we have a tremendous predominance of staff—many people think that we are overstaffed—in the Palace and its surrounding accommodation, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it should be possible to get some of those employees to go round turning the radiators down, so that rooms like mine do not reach a temperature of 82 deg F, as it did last week, which is more suitable for a sauna than for an office?

Mr. Beith: I very much agree with what the hon. Gentleman has to say. The House has already achieved a saving of 7 per cent. in gas and electricity consumption and is on course for a target of 15 per cent. by 1996. It hopes to achieve a major reduction in fossil fuel burning by installing a combined heat and power plant in the Norman Shaw buildings and has various technical devices by which it seeks to avoid excess heat being produced. However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right that Members and staff can draw attention to practical means of cutting energy waste.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the right hon. Gentleman bear it in mind that brilliant toys which somehow or other do not work are very dangerous, and that at present the House has a great tendency to have a series of lights which click on very effectively after one has passed out of the corridor that they are meant to illuminate? That is not only exceedingly dangerous, but will cost a fortune in compensation when someone is hurt as a result.

Mr. Beith: I understand that automatic sensors can lead to considerable energy savings and that they are used in the House in places where it is thought safe to do so—not, for example, where there are steps or stairs. However, if the hon. Lady or other hon. Members know of places where their use could lead to danger, they should refer them to the appropriate authorities.

Services

31. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee how much it is planned to spend on House of Commons services in the coming year; upon which main projects; and if he will make a statement. [15721]

Mr. Channon: The estimates for the House of Commons administration and works services for 1995-96 were laid before the House on 23 March 1995, making provision of £73.3 million and £49.9 million respectively for the two votes. Major projects are identified in the annual reports of the Commission.

Mr. Greenway: May I ask my right hon. Friend to find room in that £82 million of expenditure to apply for planning permission for the Terrace marquee, so that it may be open all the year round instead of only eight months a year? *[Interruption.]* Is my right hon. Friend aware, and is the House aware *[Interruption.]*—perhaps the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) is not—that that facility is popular, and that it can be used all the year round because there is heating in it? Might it be used to accommodate the children and other people who want to eat their sandwiches at some times of the day?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend's interesting suggestion has met with a mixed reception from the House. He may like to refer the matter to the Chairman of the Catering Committee who, I am sure, will be only too anxious to consider it carefully.

Mr. Benn: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this year is the 700th anniversary of the summoning of the first Parliament by Edward I, on 27 November 1295? If there is money available for projects, should it not be devoted to improving the facilities for those who visit the House? We still call them "strangers" rather than "electors", so we have not even caught up with 1832, and we still allow them to freeze in the streets when they come to visit Members of Parliament.

There are facilities in Westminster Hall. The security arguments are much less compelling than they were, with the end of the cold war and with the ceasefire in Northern Ireland. We really should treat the people who come to see Members with a lot more care and respect, over and above the changes that the right hon. Gentleman announced today for some eating facilities in the Westminster Hall annexe.

Mr. Channon: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and several other hon. Members earlier raised points akin to his. The Director of Works is preparing proposals. I should be misleading the House if

I suggested that that will happen quickly, but I take note of the fact that an influential and large number of Members wish to press ahead with it at the earliest date.

Disabled People (Access)

32. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what further representations the Commission has received about financial provision for access for the disabled to the Palace of Westminster. [15722]

33. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps he is taking to improve financial provision for disabled access to the Palace of Westminster. [15724]

Mr. Beith: Following the comprehensive review of disabled access carried out by the Accommodation and Works Committee, projects have been included in the works programme shared between both Houses. Provision of about £240,000 was made in the previous financial year and £372,000 has been approved for the current year. A list of the completed and planned items of work has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Thurnham: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this building is an obstacle course for the disabled, and that it is high time that it was improved?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is right. When the building was designed, thought was not given to the way in which disabled people might obtain access to it, and much work is going into discovering ways in which that can now be achieved. The expenditures that I have described are part of that process, but there will be much more as the Accommodation and Works Committee considers the matter further.

Mr. Corbyn: Can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that, when that money has finally been spent, the whole building will be fully accessible to all the people who come here who suffer from any type of disability?

Last week, when there was a large lobby for the Disability Discrimination Bill, the staff in the building were helpful to those who came. Nevertheless, it is humiliating that someone who comes in a special vehicle has to get special permission to park it and someone to take them from their car up to the Lobby, and then they have to go up in a goods lift to get into the Gallery, where there is limited space for them.

Frankly, the manner in which we treat people who come to this House belongs in the 18th century or earlier. I have been a Member for 12 years, during which the question has been raised time and time again. Yet there are still no proper facilities for people who suffer from disabilities. They are grossly discriminated against by this House.

Mr. Beith: The sums that I have already described will be only part of the process. I have already indicated that more proposals will be needed to achieve the objective described by the hon. Gentleman—if, indeed, we can ever achieve perfection in a building which was not purpose-built with the concerns of the disabled in mind, as I believe our new building over the way will be. The staff of the House have made every effort, not so much to provide special permission as to give special and appropriate assistance. A variety of measures is being considered to ensure that disabled people may have access to all parts of the building.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Lockerbie

37. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee on the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [15728]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have no plans to propose the setting up of such a Committee.

Mr. Dalyell: Is not the appalling truth that the highest echelons of the United States Government and the Crown Office simply do not want to confront the truth about Lockerbie? Had they done so, would they not have been far more assiduous in carrying out their duty under Scottish law to investigate any leads which might result in the exculpation of the two Libyan suspects or, indeed, any other suspects? They simply have not carried out their legal duty under Scottish law in following the leads. I will not say that they have been bone idle, but they have not carried out their duty. In those circumstances, will the Lord President tell us what wretched excuse is now being given for not going ahead with the second best, which is a Select Committee of this House?

Mr. Newton: On the first point, I can only say that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate remains satisfied that the evidence supports the charges against the two accused and against no other individuals. On the second point, I shall simply say that there have already been numerous inquiries into the Lockerbie disaster and it seems to me that the appropriate course is to seek to pursue the case which is to be mounted against the two people who have been accused, rather than to engage in further inquiries.

Parliamentary Broadcasting

38. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the current level of parliamentary broadcasting. [15729]

Mr. Newton: Parliament makes available coverage of all the proceedings from the Chambers of both Houses and some Committees. The use made of that material is a matter for editorial and scheduling decisions by the broadcasters. Most viewers see coverage of Parliament in daily, national or regional news programmes. There is also some live coverage and a number of daily or weekly programmes using parliamentary material.

Mr. Mackinlay: Has the right hon. Gentleman noted that there has been a fall in the amount of coverage given by television to proceedings in this Chamber? Is it not partly because of the restrictions placed on broadcasters, which prevent panning shots and reaction shots—for instance, to the comments that I am making now—and the need for greater access and editorial freedom to enable broadcasters to show the totality of the proceedings in this Chamber, rather than just the person who is speaking? Will he also bear it in mind that the Committee Rooms in which a number of important Committees sit do not have cameras? Those Committees should be reported on television, but it is not possible because the technology is not there.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will know that some relaxations in the rules covering the use of reaction shots were introduced in 1991. The Select Committee on Broadcasting, which I chair, took a further look at the rules recently and felt that the necessary consensus did not exist, either in the Committee or in the House, to justify further changes at this stage. Given the amount of coverage that is devoted to occasions when the rules are at their most restrictive, I rather doubt the hon. Gentleman's assumption that such rules inhibit coverage.

Mr. Michael Brown: What powers has the Broadcasting Committee to take action against broadcasting organisations when they flagrantly break the rules that this House has set? For instance, in an incident not long ago Channel 4 News used slow-motion shots of this House when a Division was taking place. What action can be taken when the rules are broken?

Mr. Newton: The Broadcasting Committee could propose a range of actions to the House. In that case, the matter was taken up with the television companies concerned; they have said that they accept that what happened was outside the rules and I would not expect it to recur.

Business Questions

39. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what new proposals he has to improve business questions and answers. [15730]

Mr. Newton: It is not, alas, in my power to improve the questions. I continue to work on the answers.

Mr. Flynn: As a third of the time devoted to business questions is wasted on the meaningless ritual of asking for debates and then having them refused, and as a large amount of the time for points of order is equally wasted, when Members try unsuccessfully to persuade Madam Speaker that their patently bogus points of order are genuine, should we not follow the example of the Indian Parliament, which has introduced a period known as "zero hour" when Members can raise issues of concern without necessarily seeking replies to them, although they sometimes get them? That would avoid wasting time but would still fulfil the function of allowing about a quarter of an hour each day when Members can raise important and urgent matters.

Mr. Newton: First, I would raise an eyebrow at the hon. Gentleman's nerve in asking that question, as I have with me a list of subjects that he has raised at business questions in the past few weeks. Secondly, as it happens, I have arranged a zero three hours for next Wednesday morning.

London Airports (Transport Links)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): With permission, Madam Speaker, I would like to make a statement about surface links to airports around London. I wish to propose measures designed to promote the imaginative use of rail and other transport infrastructure in a way which will more readily meet the diverse needs of both private and business travellers.

The MII, AI(M), MI, M40, M4, M3 and M23 are the arteries which link some of the country's major regions to the nation's capital. In turn, they are connected by part of the M25. They also serve London's three major airports: Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. In addition, these airports have rail links to the centre of London. Trains run from Stansted to Liverpool Street, and from Gatwick to Victoria. A surface rail link from Heathrow to Paddington is under construction, and the airport is already connected to central London by the Piccadilly line.

Demand on this infrastructure is already heavy, and set to increase. The Government have been considering how best to meet this demand for travel through into the next century. Our position on airport development has been set out already in our response to the runway capacity in the south-east—RUCATSE—report. This envisages further exploratory work being done at Heathrow and Gatwick. The Government also indicated that they would initiate further studies of surface access to the airports. I now wish to tell the House what we have in mind.

It is already clear that there is existing rail infrastructure which, if developed, could provide better access to and between the airports. However, no detailed work has been undertaken; nor has there been any rigorous examination of the opportunities this might provide.

In addition, BAA has announced that it has commissioned a £500,000 study to investigate ways of linking Heathrow airport into existing rail and other public transport networks. In parallel, and subject to legislation and a successful outcome to the tendering process, work will commence on a high-speed rail link to connect the channel tunnel to St. Pancras.

The M25, between junctions 12 and 16, has been extended from a three-lane to a four-lane motorway. Despite this, congestion persists at various times of the day. This circumstance led the Government to decide that the capacity of the road should be expanded further. My predecessor announced, in July 1993, that the Government would take to public inquiry a proposal for link roads between junctions 12 and 15, and would launch a consultation on junctions 15 to 16.

The principle which underlay that judgment has not changed. On this, one of the busiest stretches of motorway in Europe, it is essential that people, goods and services should to be able to move efficiently. This national artery makes a major contribution to the competitiveness of our country, whether it is through the transportation of goods or ease of access to our national airports. I reaffirm that we attach maximum importance to safeguarding this economic interest.

However, a number of factors have changed since my predecessor's announcement. Railway privatisation is now making good progress. Responses to the franchising director have shown that a significant number of private operators see a genuine commercial opportunity to attract new customers on to the railway.

The success of the private finance initiative, similarly, has released energy and innovation in developing imaginative public-private sector partnerships, with a sharper focus on the customer. I believe that this energy can be harnessed in opening up the possibility of greater and easier interchange between air, road and rail services in the south-east, to the benefit of the travelling public.

There have been other changes. We have a developing understanding of the relationship between road building and road use. Issues arising require further study. Furthermore, the Government have been reflecting on the appropriate balance that should be struck between road building and environmental factors.

I have considered how best to bring together in the medium term the economic imperative with these changed circumstances. In particular, I have examined whether there is an acceptable development, short of building link roads, which would be sufficient to meet all our objectives.

Any such development would need to accommodate projected traffic growth into the medium term and create the opportunities for extending complementary rail and coach services. At certain times of the day, 20 per cent. of the traffic on one stretch of the M25 is airport related. In exploring new interrelationships between surface and air travel, it makes sense to move forward on a measured basis, bearing that in mind.

Taking all these factors into account, I have decided that we should not proceed with the M25 link roads, and I shall be withdrawing the draft orders. Instead, we propose to widen the existing carriageway of the M25 to five lanes in each direction between junctions 12 to 14 and 15 to 16, with six lanes in each direction over what will be the most heavily used stretch, between junctions 14 and 15. That widening would occur mainly within the existing highway boundaries, thus minimising the need for extra land purchase.

That proposal, together with new traffic management arrangements, would accommodate projected traffic growth, on the basis of existing assumptions, for at least the next 15 years. We shall publish environmental statements on the proposal, together with an assessment summarising the technical and economic analysis.

In addition, I shall set up an interdepartmental group of officials chaired by the Minister for Transport in London, drawing on expert advice as necessary and including BAA and key rail operators. It will examine in depth the opportunities for rail services to link the existing rail network with the airports and the airports with one another. It will examine the possibility of privately financed intermediate road and rail interchange on the arterial motorways, which might include airport check-in facilities, and will consider whether the interaction between road, rail and airport infrastructure might provide scope for expanding services.

The study will have the following terms of reference: to examine the opportunities for improvements, in particular privately financed improvements, in access to and between London's main airports by rail and through road traffic management measures, assessing in particular the extent to which they could relieve future pressures on the M25 and associated radial motorways beyond the capacity of the new dual-five/dual-six-lane proposals.

[Dr. Brian Mawhinney]

The public inquiry on terminal 5 is due to start on 16 May. The decision to proceed with widening the M25, rather than with link roads, will enable the inquiry to start work with complete clarity about my Department's intentions.

Hon. Members will wish to know what effect the decision will have on access from the M25 to the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow. My Department has published orders for a spur from the link roads giving direct access to terminal 5. The arrangement will need some modification in the light of the decision that I have announced: subject to more detailed design work, I expect access to the proposed fifth terminal still to be by a spur from the widened M25.

I hope that the House will accept that my statement represents a new, exciting and important step towards providing rail, coach, road and air services in ways that are designed to enhance opportunities and that are more closely tailored to the needs of individuals, business and industry.

The artificial separation of roads, airports and public transport in this context could inhibit the imaginative and far-reaching options that may be available to assist travellers and promote our economy. That is especially so when the private sector stands ready to join us in partnership.

The decisions that I have described present us with an unparalleled opportunity to reshape transport provision in this part of the country for the 21st century. We intend to grasp it. I believe that such action will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I say immediately that we welcome the decision by the Secretary of State to abandon the Government's madcap scheme to build a 14-lane M25. This is a monumental U-turn, from a scheme that should never have been envisaged in the first place. But will the Secretary of State recognise that even the partial 10 and 12-lane motorway which he still envisages will be very expensive, and will rapidly fill up with traffic?

As the Government's plans to build link roads around three quarters of the M25 have now been entirely scrapped, why has the Secretary of State said nothing about the knock-on effects on the south-east? Why has he not also announced, on the same criteria, the scrapping of plans to widen the M4 to 12 lanes, and the M3 and M23 to eight lanes? Will he accept that the same logic requires him to reconsider the future of the Birmingham northern relief road, the Birmingham western orbital motorway, and the M62 road widening?

Will the Secretary of State recognise that his statement today leaves the Government's transport policy in tatters, because, while roads are being cut, he still says little or nothing about proposals for alternative public transport systems? Why has he made no commitment to crossrail? Why does his statement contain no mention of any progress on Thameslink 2000? Is he not aware that the Government's dogma about bus deregulation prevents the counties from promoting the buses which could play a major role in reducing congestion on the M25 and elsewhere?

Why does the right hon. Gentleman make no mention of the closure of slip roads at peak traffic times, which is well known to be a major source of increased congestion? Will he also confirm that the Government's own planning procedures in the late 1980s mean that a massive number of traffic-generating developments are still likely to be built around the M25? Is he aware that estate agents estimate that more than 37 million sq ft of offices have been given planning permission in the M25 area? What strengthening of planning policy guidance 13 does he propose to prevent an explosion of traffic generation as a result?

If the right hon. Gentleman really believes in public transport, why has he made no mention of improving orbital rail links to Heathrow and around south-west London in support—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did."] The right hon. Gentleman is strong on feasibility studies and is always for the future, but there are no concrete proposals in his statement. Why is there nothing about the "swoption" scheme which has been developed by the boroughs precisely for this purpose? Why has he made no commitment to improving orbital public transport, in particular by electrifying the north downs line and by giving buses or coaches priority on the M25?

The right hon. Gentleman stressed linking the rail network to airports, particularly Heathrow, but he made no mention of funding, even though the BAA's airport departure tax for a single year—£315 million—would pay for the rail link to terminal 5 and the west. Why has he given no support to the piggy-back rail freight services, which would allow lorry trailers to travel on road wagons and which would reduce congestion in the south-east and elsewhere? Is he aware that the initial route from Scotland and the north-west midlands to the channel tunnel is already feasible for less than £100 million, and that that is less than the cost of the junctions 12 to 15 road widening?

Is the Secretary of State aware that further big road investment west of London contradicts the south-east planning strategy endorsed by the Department of the Environment, which promotes development east of London? Does he accept that both today's statement and his earlier response to the RUCATSE report lack any proper balance, not only between east and west London but between regional airport development and an over-congested south-east, which simply cannot accommodate market-driven expansion of demand for road and air travel indefinitely?

Today's statement is a thin apology for the market excesses of the 1980s. The Tories had warm words for public transport, but no mechanism for delivering them and no guarantee of adequate Government support, without which private finance will not be forthcoming. Labour will plan public transport and produce a national transport programme based on clear objectives and targets to replace the national roads programme, which has for too long been dictated by the Conservatives' friends in the roads lobby.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman did not mention cycling. I was waiting for that.

I start by thanking the hon. Gentleman for his broad welcome for my statement. That is a good start. After that, he lost the House, but that was probably understandable. Let me try to pick out some of the bones of the points that the hon. Gentleman made and respond to them.

First, as I made clear in the statement, the proposal to move to D5, with D6 between junctions 14 and 15, will accommodate the projected growth in traffic on the M25 for at least the next 15 years, certainly when coupled with traffic management arrangements. I understand the hon. Gentleman to be telling me that he is against link roads and against the extension of part of the M25 from four lanes to five. I know that he is against the status quo, because he has said that in the past. So he is against seven, against six, against five and against four. The hon. Gentleman did not tell the House what he was in favour of.

The decisions that I have announced today are in the context of the characteristics of the piece of road to which I referred. The hon. Gentleman legitimately mentions the M4 and the M62. As he knows, there has already been public consultation about the M4. We will reflect on the views expressed, and make an announcement shortly. As I suspect the hon. Gentleman knows, further studies have been commissioned of the M62, which will take some time. We will carry them forward, precisely as we said we would. We will examine both those bits of road in the context of their characteristics, just as we have done for this bit of the M25.

All the hon. Gentleman's other comments about motorways were irrelevant to my statement. The House will have noticed again that the hon. Gentleman has been consistent. During questions, he was all in favour of the taxpayer footing the bill and against the private sector making a contribution. That remains his position. However, the opportunities are constantly expanding for the private sector to make a significant contribution to transport infrastructure. We are in favour of that. It provides extra services more quickly for the consumer. The consumer will have noticed that the hon. Gentleman is against it.

Nor did the hon. Gentleman say a single word about the importance of protecting the competitiveness of United Kingdom plc, in competition with other nations' economies. That is important to the Government, even if it is not important to the hon. Gentleman.

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the statement's stress on traffic management. We may well need to see the speed limit on that part of the road reduced at certain times of the day. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

We shall certainly use variable message signing on the motorway to give drivers more and earlier information. I expected the hon. Gentleman to welcome that, but all he wanted to do was shut slip roads, which would clog local roads even more. My hon. Friends who represent the relevant part of the country will have noted that aspect of Labour policy.

Finally, let me deal with the great unspoken part of the hon. Gentleman's question. For the first time in connection with the M25, we are contemplating the development and extension of railway links between the airports and the existing rail network. We are examining the possibility of using existing rail infrastructure to provide new services that will not only link the network with the airports and the airports with each other, but link the airports and the rail network with the arterial motorways.

In past flights of fancy, the hon. Gentleman has said that that would be a good idea; we are focusing on action—on the back of the private sector's expressed interest in becoming more involved both in the railway system and in the provision of transport infrastructure. The hon. Gentleman need only look at the Heathrow-Paddington link, which is financed entirely by the private sector, to give weight to my words.

The House will have observed that the Opposition have a policy of moratoriums on road building and a commitment to public ownership, and are prepared to allow both to get in the way of developing the railway, road, coach and airport services that will be fitting for the country in the 21st century.

Mr. Kenneth Baker (Mole Valley): My right hon. Friend's statement will be widely welcomed by all communities and groups concerned with the M25, from all parties, that have opposed the 14-lane motorway. It would have caused too much environmental damage and pollution. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's proposal for studies relating to development of the rail network and communications in the south-east.

May I press my right hon. Friend on the important question of the time scale? In particular, will he help to revive the idea of Thameslink—which is currently in limbo—and that of crossrail? Both projects could be financed privately, and the south-east needs such developments to reduce future congestion.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his encouraging words. I believe that he speaks for the vast majority of people in that part of the country—and, indeed, further afield—in welcoming my statement.

Our progress with the study will be as speedy as possible, but in a sense it breaks new ground: for the first time we are considering the possibility of expanding railway services—with private sector funds, but with the co-operation of the public sector—in a way that privatisation and the private finance initiative have uniquely made possible. I suspect that the study will take between a year and a half and two years to complete.

I assure my right hon. Friend that neither Thameslink nor crossrail is in limbo. I have attended meetings on both in the past few days, and progress is being made.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Secretary of State accept that we at least welcome the evidence of his Pauline conversion on the road to Heathrow? Will he also take comfort from the fact that hon. Members in other parties will have listened carefully to what he said about improving rail access not only to Heathrow but to other airports?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the time scale to which he referred in reply to the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) does not preclude the possibility of speedy improvement of rail access from the west, perhaps including a park-and-ride arrangement east of Slough on the M4? It may not be necessary to increase the capacity of the M25 to the extent that the statement anticipates.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that the work undertaken by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment has been applied to each section of the M25 that he has mentioned, and indeed to the other motorway proposals to which he has referred?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that the connection between increasing capacity and traffic generation—the opportunity for people to use that stretch

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

of motorway—has been applied to the decisions that he has announced? Does he accept that many hon. Members hope that this is the beginning of the end of motorway madness, and that in future there will be no more speedy driving through the fog of policy indecision?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman added the last bit, which is nonsense. I shall ignore it and get to the meat of his question.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the statement, although I assure him that it is in no way a Pauline conversion on the road, or indeed the rail, to anywhere. I have announced that we shall not proceed with the link roads, and I shall withdraw the orders. We shall go forward on the basis of expanding part of the M25 from four lanes to five lanes, with six between two junctions to facilitate the spur road to the proposed terminal 5.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): It is not agreed yet.

Dr. Mawhinney: The "proposed" terminal 5, I said.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister is prejudging it.

Dr. Mawhinney: I assure the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that we have taken into account a whole variety of circumstances, all of them appropriate, in coming to the judgment which I have announced.

While the hon. Gentleman may be right that some aspects of the potential development of rail services may become clear ahead of others, it will be for the committee to offer me advice through my hon. Friend the Minister on whether it is possible or sensible to proceed piecemeal, or whether it would be more sensible to wait until the study is complete before making judgments.

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): My right hon. Friend's decision to scrap the link roads will be widely welcomed in my constituency and in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls), who is ill with bronchitis. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will continue to study carefully the question of noise reduction measures? Many of the proposals that he has announced will generate more noise, and that issue must be kept constantly in mind.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his welcome and his kind words, and for the message that he conveyed about his parliamentary neighbour, whom I am sure the House will wish well in his recovery. I understand precisely the importance of his point about noise. In terms of noise abatement, we plan to ensure that, when the fifth lane has been added to part of the motorway, the overall noise level will not exceed the present level from the four lanes.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When it is stripped of all verbiage, does not the statement mean that the Minister has committed the House only to a five-lane motorway on part of the M25? All the rest is just marshmallow words.

Dr. Mawhinney: Given the importance which the hon. Gentleman normally attaches to public transport, that is a typically curmudgeonly response to my announcement. Even if he cannot bring himself now to welcome the prospect of new, better and more consumer and passenger-sensitive transport for the 21st century, I hope that he will do that in future, when it all becomes a reality.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My right hon. Friend's statement will be welcomed by my constituents and by those of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who did not like the proposals for link roads and will be glad to hear that it is now possible to meet the same traffic demand with a more modest scheme. Is it not clear that, contrary to what is sometimes suggested, the Government have an integrated transport policy and are as much committed to rail as to road?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his warm welcome. The Government have always looked at the possibility of practical arrangements to assist the passenger. The new circumstances for the development of rail services open up opportunities that we must take if we are to discharge our responsibility to the taxpayer, the passenger, business and industry. We shall seek to do that, so that we may offer choice. Choice is a value to which we attach importance, but it does not commend itself to the Opposition.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Will the study take account of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), which represents a consensus on the need to promote development east of London to ease development pressures west of London? Will the study have that concern especially in mind? Following the right hon. Gentleman's welcome remarks about developing the rail links between Stansted, Heathrow and Gatwick, can he confirm that crossrail will be an essential part of a satisfactory rail network between the three airports?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, which I appreciate. I understand and accept the importance of regeneration on the east side. He will accept that this is not the time for me to prejudge what the group will produce, either in suggestions relating to crossrail or on specific parts of the country. However, as was confirmed both at Question Time and in my statement, both the points he has raised are on our agenda.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): As much of the affected part of the M25 is in my constituency, I welcome the end to the uncertainty. My initial reaction to my right hon. Friend's announcement is that it is a sensible compromise between two equally valid extremes. His new rail initiative opens up exciting possibilities, which I whole-heartedly endorse.

Will my right hon. Friend also accept my welcome for his provisions for a possible terminal 5, which I believe is vital for the future economic prosperity of my constituents? Will he arrange for Highways Agency officials to meet me and affected constituents at an early opportunity? Can he send full details to all those living near the affected route? Will a public inquiry be obligatory?

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall try to recall all my hon. Friend's questions. First, we will notify all those who objected to the link roads proposal about the new arrangements. Secondly, I can confirm that, when the economic assessment for the new proposals is published, the Highways Agency will be available to explain that at public displays. Thirdly, because my proposals lie essentially within the curtilage of the existing road arrangements, there is no statutory obligation to hold a public inquiry.

Finally, I appreciate my hon. Friend's general welcome. I am grateful for it, because he has been assiduous in representing the interests of his constituents. However, I must tell him that the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are the two people in this country who are not allowed to comment on the question of terminal 5.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): While welcoming the right hon. Gentleman's concern to expand and integrate the rail system in the south-east, may I ask him to give the House some idea of how that will be achieved, as the Government have already spent £1.25 billion of taxpayers' money on privatisation? For many commuters in the south-east, all that that has produced is a deterioration in services, the closure of stations and a rise in rail fares.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady has misread her script—the figure is £240 million, not £1.25 billion. She is only £1 billion out, but I suppose that, for the Opposition, it is not an unreasonable estimate.

Ms Jackson: It is the Department's figure.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady is not reflecting the Department's figures. I shall tell her what I told the Select Committee on Transport—that the figure is £240 million. She simply misleads herself.

On the main issue, I can tell the hon. Lady that we intend to explore the use of the existing rail infrastructure. That is the important point. We are not talking about laying a whole series of new railway lines; they already exist. We need to consider how best to make use of those lines, alongside and complementary to other forms of transport, in the best interests of passengers. We want to give them a degree of choice that currently does not exist. We attach value to that, and I can tell the House that we will carry forward that study as quickly as possible.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): Will my right hon. Friend accept my thanks for having listened so carefully to local people's concerns about link roads? Does he agree that his announcement today marks a significant shift in Government thinking, from a demand-led transport planning policy towards a more responsive, perhaps more reflective, approach? Will he reiterate his remarks to our right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) about the importance of restraining noise from motor cars using the M25? As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows, noise is a prime and outstanding concern among my constituents in east Surrey.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. He and I share the understanding that it is important to have an M25 that enables the competitiveness of United Kingdom plc to be maintained. That can be achieved in terms of the announcements that I have made today. In addition, the possibility of providing further complementary services through rail infrastructure development, with a strong eye to the private sector, can produce an added bonus, which the country will generally welcome as it moves into the 21st century.

My hon. Friend is right: every transport initiative affects the lives of a variety of people, some of whom live close to that initiative. We have sought always to be sensitive, especially in relation to the issue of noise. I am happy to repeat what I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie): we aim to put noise abatement arrangements in place around the fifth lane, which will ensure that the overall noise level does not exceed the present level.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): As the Secretary of State has now admitted that he will widen the M25 to a combination of 10 and 12 lanes, plus a hard shoulder, and, as the proposals are within the curtilage of existing road arrangements, will avoid a public inquiry into the enormous expansion of the M25, will he take this opportunity to explain to the public how his Department will answer the charge that building and widening motorways, and increasing road capacity, simply attracts and encourages more traffic, which will lead to further pressures for more road widening and yet more road building? Why does he not come off it once and for all, stop road building and seriously put money—yes, public money—into rail infrastructure to improve public transport, rather than encourage one person to drive around the M25 in a car on his own, making it Europe's largest car park?

Dr. Mawhinney: That is not only nonsense, but reflects a deep prejudice on the hon. Gentleman's part, which is unrelated to the reality of what we are talking about. Clearly, his question reflected the fact that he has neither listened to my statement nor read the SACTRA report. I suggest that he goes away and does both.

In his question, or in any other circumstance, the hon. Gentleman has produced no evidence to suggest that, if the road's capacity were not increased, and if rail infrastructure, as he envisages it, were put in place, the UK's competitiveness would not be damaged. Whether he likes it or not, others make individual choices, and some of those choices involve the transportation of goods and services by road. That must be—and is—part of the rationale for the development of that part of the road from four lanes to five. It simply reflects again the fact that we on Conservative Benches have a concern about the UK's competitiveness, which is not shared by the Labour party.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express my warm appreciation for my right hon. Friend's statement today, which clarifies the strategy that has underlain his wise decisions in response to the RUCATSE report? In particular, may I say how welcome it is that Her Majesty's Government understand how important rail links are for the development and economic well-being of airports, especially Heathrow?

For my constituents, many of whom work at the airport, it is good that the Government understand how essential it is not only that Heathrow should grow and prosper, but that it should have a prospect of effective, well-co-ordinated rail links both to the west to Slough and to the south-east to Waterloo and ultimately, perhaps, through crossrail.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome and encouragement. No doubt he will have noticed that the BAA is embarking on a complementary examination of rail links between Heathrow and the rail network. I think that, as we proceed with the examinations

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in what I hope will be a complementary fashion, we shall both recognise that there is extra potential benefit to travellers, and we wish to explore that.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): The Secretary of State quite rightly mentioned the three major airports in London, but not London City airport. He will be aware that one of the key links from south-east London to the City and many other places is the Brunel tunnel on the east London line, which is now closed for at least seven months because of work on the Jubilee line.

Has he had time to assess the impact of the curious decision by his colleague at the Department of National Heritage to list not only the portals of the tunnel, which were already listed, but the hole in the ground itself? Is he aware that people in south-east London are keener on having reliable transport links and having them in use as soon as possible than on becoming sightseers in an industrial museum?

Dr. Mawhinney: First, like the hon. Gentleman, I recognise the importance of the line. Secondly, as he knows, the listing is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, but we are looking at ways to move the process forward as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which shows common sense in taking the brave route to update our plans for an integrated transport system in the south-east, but may I refer him back to his answer to our right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), in which he led us to believe that the time scale would be approximately two years? Will he clarify that in relation to crossrail? Crossrail is very much wanted by my constituents in Chesham and Amersham, but yet again the project looks as if it is being put on the back burner, which will cause them great concern. Will he give me an assurance?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. Crossrail may or may not turn out to be an integral part of what is envisaged in my statement, but work is proceeding independently with crossrail, and I would expect to receive the result of that work before the end of the year.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Secretary of State accept that, taken with his recent announcement on the RUCATSE report, his statement will mean a massive concrete funnel heading towards Heathrow, and that that will not satisfy the constituents of Conservative Members who represent Surrey and Middlesex, because they will realise that it will mean a major widening of the M25, which is environmentally unacceptable to them?

Does the right hon. Gentleman also accept that some of us realise that, in essence, the Government are pre-empting the inquiry into terminal 5? It is indicative of the fact that the Government are craven to the BAA, and British Airways for that matter, and will not recognise that there is a need for a major independent review of aviation and airports policy. Would not such a review, if it were held, point to the advisability of expanding Stansted and exploiting the great enterprise of Manchester on behalf of United Kingdom Ltd., instead of putting all our eggs in the one basket of Heathrow?

Dr. Mawhinney: The House will have to make its own judgment. On the one hand, I have the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) telling me what the people of Surrey think about the proposal, but on the other I have my hon. Friends who represent the people of Surrey telling me precisely the opposite. I invite the House to make a choice: will it accept the views of my hon. Friends who represent the people of Surrey or those of the hon. Member for Thurrock? I have no doubt that what my hon. Friends who represent those people say is correct, and that what the hon. Gentleman says is wrong. I am sure that the people of Surrey are as pleased as those of Peterborough that the hon. Gentleman does not represent them.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I offer my warm congratulations to my right hon. Friend on the creative direction in which his statement has taken this country's transport policy, but may I remind him of the importance that my constituents attach to the crossrail project, which would secure their personal convenience as passengers and ensure the economic well-being of Buckinghamshire as a whole? Does he still hope that the promoters of crossrail will be able to bring forward an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 later this year?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I know of his involvement in the crossrail project, and I am happy to reiterate what I told our right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) a moment ago. The time scale is as I set it out.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the study that he described will include improvements to rail links from Heathrow to the west? The Great Western line goes extremely near Heathrow, and it does no one any good if we have to go into Paddington and back out; nor, for that matter, if we have to come to the inside of the M25 by road to get to Heathrow.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the answer is yes.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): While I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on making exactly the right political and environmental decision on the M25, may I tell him that I and my constituents are angry and disappointed that he has failed to come to the House this afternoon with a similar decision on the M62? As a result of his statement, people who live around the M25 have been relieved of planning blight and inadequate housing management by his Department, but my constituents have not been, which adds insult to injury. Will my right hon. Friend quickly and urgently—not in two years' time—make a similar statement to the House on the M62?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposal that I announced for the M25. As I said in an answer to another question, the M62 is the subject of some further studies, as my hon. Friend understands. I know that he wants those studies to progress as quickly as possible, and I can assure him that

I want that, too. When they have done so, and we have been able to form a judgment, I will be happy to convey that to his constituents through him.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my right hon. Friend accept that my constituents will be delighted at the statement today, especially because it brings together a number of strands of the Government's transport policy? Does he also agree that the need to develop a fourth lane on the other parts of the M25 is paramount, and that those who oppose it are being unrealistic about keeping that road open as an effective artery for British growth and development?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words, for which I thank him. I can confirm that the road is a major artery in the United Kingdom, and needs to be treated as such. We have plans to expand the existing M25 to four lanes for about 70 per cent. of its distance which, added to the already planned four lanes, will mean that about 90 per cent. of it will be at least four lanes. We believe that to be important for precisely the reasons that my hon. Friend identified.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Can my right hon. Friend tell the House how quickly he expects the M25 expansion to take place? He said that the move to five and six lanes would not necessitate a public inquiry. When can we expect to drive along the fifth and sixth lanes?

Dr. Mawhinney: I made it clear to the Highways Agency today that I want it to make all deliberate speed in moving ahead with that expansion. An environmental assessment must be made and published, as well as an economic assessment, but we will make measured progress as quickly as possible, for precisely the reasons that my hon. Friend implied.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): In Kent, we are mindful of the fact that we have a unique position as the gateway to and from the continent. Traditionally, the south-east segment of London and the home counties has been the worst served by transport. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the committee that studies these important matters considers transport to and from the airports from the south-east—from Kent, my constituency and the others around it?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand precisely the point that my hon. Friend makes, and would want the report to be as comprehensive as possible in all the circumstances.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Does my right hon. Friend expect that his welcome announcement will have an effect on non-motorway road schemes such as the A21 and the A259, where progress is needed to strengthen the local economy?

Dr. Mawhinney: While I understand my hon. Friend's point, my announcement was about one particular part of a road, given its particular circumstances. It should not necessarily be extrapolated to any other road.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, with all the winners on Conservative Benches, there is bound to be at least one loser, and that his statement will not be welcomed in my constituency, where we shall continue to grapple with through traffic to Gatwick on our inadequate roads? Is he aware that, from the A3 to the south-west, round to the A2 to the east, there is no decent road in or out of London and we shall continue to suffer congestion and rat-running? Will he at least introduce a feasibility study to address that issue in south London?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am mindful of the point that my hon. Friend makes. I hope that, on reflection, he will not feel quite as depressed as his question implies, not least because I assume that the benefits which I hope and believe will flow from the rail study may assist his constituents also.

WAYS AND MEANS

Ordered,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made amending section 43 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Ordered,

That provision affecting the charges to income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax may be made about the interest paid on gilt-edged securities and about cases in which, where gilt-edged or other securities are transferred from one person to another, there is—

(a) a contract or arrangement under which a person makes a payment which is, or is treated as, representative of amounts paid or payable in respect of the securities transferred; or

(b) a contract or arrangement under which the transferee is or may be required to transfer securities, or benefits accruing from the redemption of securities, to the transferor, to his nominee or to a person connected with the transferor.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

As amended (in the Committee and in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 17

POOL BETTING DUTY

'.—(1) In section 7(1) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981 (which specifies 37.50 per cent. as the rate of pool betting duty) for "37.50 per cent." there shall be substituted "32.50 per cent."

(2) This section shall apply in relation to any pool betting duty the requirement to pay which takes effect on or after 6th May 1995.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.20 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We debated pool betting duty in Committee. In rejecting a similar new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), I said that we were, nevertheless, in touch with the pools companies and would review the duty in due course. Before I report the outcome of those discussions, I remind the House that, in 1990, pool betting duty was reduced from 42.5 per cent. to 40 per cent., with the difference being donated to the Football Trust. The money was used to update football grounds in line with the Taylor report on the Hillsborough disaster.

In August 1991, the duty was cut again by 2.5 per cent. to the present 37.5 per cent. The proceeds of that duty cut are paid to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. The pools companies make a further voluntary donation to the FSA of 5p for each pound stake. Hon. Members will know how appreciated that funding for the FSA is and that it supports many excellent projects in all our constituencies.

Recent discussions with the pools companies have confirmed the scale of the competition that they face from the great success of the national lottery. We do not know how the position will develop in the longer term. The pools companies are responding to the challenge with new schemes and are helped by a number of deregulatory measures introduced as a result of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. In the short term, however, the future of the football pools is threatened and, as a result, the Football Trust and the FSA face declining revenues. The Government have therefore decided on a 5 per cent. cut in pool betting duty. In return, the pools companies have confirmed that they can maintain their contribution to the organisations that I mentioned. That is a good outcome, and I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): How much will that measure cost in 1995-96 and in future years?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In a full year, it will cost some £40 million.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): The Opposition welcome this move by the Government, which, in Committee, they were determined not to make. I am sure that the House is aware that the Opposition managed to secure a tied vote in Committee on a similar proposal, so we are pleased that the Government have now recognised the Committee's spirit and will.

It is important that the Government try to establish a level playing field. It is essential that we ensure fair trade and competition, because the advantages given to Camelot have meant other forms of gambling have enjoyed far from fair opportunities in comparison.

It is somewhat ironic that I should deal with this issue, because as you know, Madam Speaker, I am inherently uneasy about any form of gambling. I spent part of this weekend undertaking my duties as treasurer of the Methodist Division of Education and Youth. We discussed how we should deal with the fact that funds for some of our charitable work are declining and with the Methodist Church's continuing implacable opposition to the lottery and to receiving funds from it. It is therefore a little difficult for me to speak about the new clause. I welcome, however, the fact that it will ensure that all those involved will be treated fairly, because, to date, the pools industry has not had a fair deal.

The Government should keep an eye on things, because we are not sure whether the measure will work and whether other forms of raising money for charitable and good causes will continue to survive and prosper. We already know from the charities of their considerable unease about what is happening to other forms of charitable giving. Last week, the problems associated with a charity involved in cancer research were highlighted. Such specific charitable work is outside the current provisions for charitable giving agreed by Camelot.

The Government should seriously reconsider the terms that they set down for Camelot because it is clear that it is making far more money than I suspect the Government intended or envisaged when they issued the guidelines for the operation of the lottery and accepted its bid. No one knows the precise amount that Camelot has been able to take as profit from the lottery, because the lottery has been running for only a short time and we do not have the company's first-year results. It has been speculated in the press and elsewhere, however, that it has already made a considerable fortune in a relatively short time.

I hope that the Government now acknowledge that certain problems have arisen that they did not envisage when the national lottery was set up, not least those experienced by particular sectors in society. As yet, no suggestion has been made about how those sectors will be dealt with by Camelot through its charitable committee. How will their problems be sorted out? It is clear that people who buy their lottery ticket see that as their form of charitable giving, but the proceeds from those tickets are not meeting the needs of many charities.

We know that the pools industry in particular has suffered from the effects of the lottery. One of the pools companies said that, as a result, it intended to pull out of the Football Trust, which has done so much to improve football grounds. I am delighted, therefore, that the Government have acknowledged the importance of acting now and have not waited until the Budget to do so. I hope that the Government will keep a close eye on that. The British public will be horrified if the lottery company makes such excessive profits while charities are seen to be failing as a result of the activities of the lottery.

Those people who work for, and who obtain their work from, the pools—for example, those in the print industry—have also been severely undermined. Many jobs have gone already. It was important, therefore, that steps were taken to protect the good works arm of the lottery and to protect the pools industry so that it might continue to flourish. It is an important sector of the economy, especially in the north-west.

For those reasons, we welcome the measure, but we hope that the Government will monitor things carefully and will allow the House to reconsider the position to ensure that all the things that hon. Members on both sides of the House wanted when they agreed to the introduction of the lottery—for example, the protection of other parts of the gambling industry and charities—are properly placed in the framework of fair competition.

4.30 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on tabling a new clause in Committee and say to the Paymaster General how very warmly welcomed the Government new clause is on Merseyside?

When the vote was tied in Committee, we were deeply disappointed that the two Liberal Democrat Members who should have been present failed to turn up and vote. Given the representations that they make on Merseyside, we felt that that was a significant and serious omission.

Our preoccupation on Merseyside has broadly been with the number of jobs that we have perceived to be under threat as a result of the introduction of the national lottery. Ninety-five jobs have gone at Vernons Pools and 560 at Littlewoods. Although I accept that those jobs have not been lost entirely as a result of the introduction of the national lottery, its introduction has, in part, had an impact on employment prospects on Merseyside.

The new clause recognises that the national lottery has been an immense success and that it will continue to go from strength to strength. The number of lottery retail outlets is growing by 1,000 a month, Camelot has just introduced a new scratch card game that I have seen advertised under the name of Instants and a second weekly on-line game is to be introduced in the summer. The improved terms for competitiveness of the pools companies will not pose a threat to the national lottery.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Lady accept that the introduction of scratch cards has had a serious effect on other charities, such as Tenovus, a cancer charity, and that the problem must be considered? I welcome the steps that have been taken today and their significance for people such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the others who will benefit, but that worry remains.

Mrs. Kennedy: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Indeed, if pools companies develop their marketing and new products, that will have an even greater impact on the sales of small lotteries run by charities. That emphasises the need for the Government to keep the matter under review.

We are witnessing the determination and resilience of pools companies, as demonstrated by the development of new products. I wish to mention one or two aspects of the way in which their determination to succeed despite problems presented to them by the national lottery has been demonstrated recently.

Before I do so, I should deal with marketing, which the pools companies are desperately eager to get on with. It is estimated that the national lottery's television advertising campaign has cost between £30 million and £50 million in its first year. No pools company is in a position to compete with such expenditure on television marketing, although the ability to do so is very much welcomed.

I understand that Littlewoods is considering following Zetters in reverting to an older system of scoring. That will result in smaller prizes overall, but more winners. I understand that Zetters' sales have increased as a result. Perhaps the national lottery will get the message and learn a lesson from that method.

As I understand it, the reduction in pools betting duty will have an impact on the Football Trust. Since Littlewoods has given notice that it is to reduce its contribution from spot-the-ball by 6 per cent., following the dramatic decline in sales of the game, what does the Paymaster General estimate the impact will be on the Football Trust?

Vernons pools stated its intention to withdraw its 5p contribution to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts from every coupon sold, but I understand from the Paymaster General's opening that it is to continue that commitment. That is very welcome as many small organisations in my constituency have benefited directly from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, but it means that the 5 per cent. reduction in pools betting duty is effectively 2.7 per cent, with the consequential overall cost benefits of that lower figure.

I recognise that the Government's intention is good and I welcome the new clause and the improvement that it makes in allowing pool companies to compete, but if the companies continue to support other organisations they will not benefit from the whole 5 per cent. reduction in betting duty. Clearly, the pools companies were saying that they needed a reduction of 5 per cent. to be able to compete more fairly. I ask the Paymaster General to take that point on board in conducting the overall review of the impact of the national lottery on businesses that are so important to the constituents whom I represent.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I warmly welcome the new clause. It is good news to the pools industry, which has campaigned for such action for some time. Putting £34 million back into their coffers is rather like sending a lifebelt out to a drowning man at sea. The move has given the pools companies a chance to regroup, replan and—we hope—move into more fortunate times.

The reduction in duty has not come a moment too soon. I am grateful for the fact that the Paymaster General has decided to ensure that it takes effect on or after 6 May 1995—in other words, almost immediately. I appreciate that he now recognises the urgency of the situation.

As my hon. Friend the Paymaster General knows, I went to see him in private, made an urgent plea for action and moved my new clause in Committee. Indeed, I had been charting the fortune and misfortune of the pools industry ever since the launch of the national lottery. I was a member of the Committee that considered the National Lottery etc. Bill and I recall clearly how we were assured that the pools industry would not run into dire straits as a result of the national lottery. The national lottery has been a staggering success, but its success has plunged the pools industry into deep crisis. As the House has heard, there

[Lady Olga Maitland]

has been a serious loss of jobs and a crisis of confidence. The most important thing about the new clause is that it offers a chance to move forward.

It has been very encouraging to speak to all the pools promoters, who were delighted at the news, but they uttered a word of caution. They trusted that this move alone would not close the matter and they hoped that the Government would keep an open ear and, indeed, review the situation as time goes on. They hoped that, if they have to raise the matter again, they will be free to do so. Moreover, they said that they would not again use the issue about good causes and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts as a lever—the foundation has suffered so much during the latest downturn—and they recognised that future judgments would have to be made purely and solely for commercial reasons.

None the less, the new clause is excellent news. It shows that the Government are listening and that they will respond to companies in trouble. That in turn will be very much appreciated.

Mr. Stern: I have no desire to be churlish about the proposal. The Foundation for Sport and the Arts does a great deal of useful work and would have been prevented from doing some of it without the new clause. A ballet dancer in my constituency depends on the foundation for the continuation of her training; and a great deal of useful equipment has been provided for a female weightlifting group there.

I must, however, sound a note of caution—it is, perhaps, inevitable that I should do so when the whole House joins together to welcome a tax cut. I should be grateful if the Minister gave us information about the extent, if any, to which the Government's plans for raising taxation from betting have been changed as a result of this announcement. When the Chancellor made his Budget statement, he will have included, in the balance of tax and expenditure, a certain yield from betting.

Those of us who follow the industry's progress in the newspapers, or who, like me, invest regularly in the national lottery—[Hon. Members: "Invest?"] That is the technical term. Nevertheless, it is clear that the taxation yield of the national lottery has been higher than expected. I should like my hon. Friend to reassure me that the expected yield, next year and in subsequent years, is sufficiently higher from the national lottery and other forms of betting to allow him to give away this £40 million.

Without such an assurance the House might want to debate whether such a tax cut would have been more usefully applied in other directions. I do not intend to sound unwelcoming about the tax cut. I have argued in the past and will argue again that all tax cuts are of benefit to the economy, but I hope that my hon. Friend can demonstrate this afternoon that this tax cut will not involve a diminution of yield to the Exchequer and that it is based on something rather more substantial than undue pressure from the pools companies.

Mr. Wigley: I apologise to the Minister for missing some of his opening remarks.

An important point has been made about the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. There can be no question but that it does excellent work. I doubt whether there is a constituency in the land that does not receive some benefit from it—more than 15,000 small clubs and organisations have benefited, and more than £200 million has been paid out, often in small sums, occasionally in larger ones.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) made an important point about how the changes will ensure that Vernons can still pay out adequate sums to maintain the work being done by the FSA. I should like also to take up her point about scratch cards. The Minister will be aware of the severe impact that the lottery scratch cards have had on some charities that depend on scratch cards and other forms of this sort of gambling. I do not criticise the lottery, although it has been much more successful than people expected, but it has had a knock-on effect. Tenovus in Cardiff has been doing vital work in cancer research and it would be unfortunate indeed if, as appeared from last week's announcement, that work were to be undermined. I should like some of the proceeds of the national lottery to be channelled in that direction, especially when no one wins the large prizes. Instead of rolling them over, the moneys should be distributed to good causes—but that is another issue.

I hope that in this short debate the vital work of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts can be safeguarded, following the Minister's announcement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful for the support of the House for the new clause—especially for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who tabled the original new clause. To answer the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) I should say that we shall of course keep the matter under review. If there has been a reduction in charitable giving, that does not necessarily follow from the success of the national lottery, but to the extent that it does I agree that the one fifth of the money going to good causes that will be channelled to charities will at least make up, in cash terms, the money that may be forgone in the shorter term.

The national lottery is a national success. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) almost made that success sound like a failure. The fact is that the lottery will give large sums of money to a wide range of good causes, including charitable causes.

4.45 pm

The hon. Member for Durham, North-West sounded critical of Camelot, but that company gained the right to run the lottery in competition with other bidders. It would be quite wrong of us to break its contract just because the lottery has been so successful, but I am sure that she was not asking us to do that. We should all rejoice in the fact that these sums will be available for good causes.

To answer my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), I should perhaps correct my earlier answer to him. The sum of money forgone in a full year will, I believe, be £30 million, not £40 million. I can confirm that it looks as though the total yield from this area of gaming and betting will remain buoyant overall. I think that he would agree that it is right to look again at pools duty, simply because the pools face direct and evident competition from the success of the national lottery.

I say to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) that the cut in duty will not adversely affect the Football Trust. Quite the reverse: maintaining the viability of the pools companies means that total pools turnover will be kept up, so funding for the Football Trust and for the good work that it does will be enhanced.

The pools companies have told me that they intend to keep paying not just the 2.5 per cent. to the Football Trust and the FSA but the 5p per coupon that they now voluntarily give the FSA. The 5 per cent. duty cut will help these companies to maintain their overall prize money; that in turn will help them to keep up their profitability, turnover and employment—and hence their giving to the FSA and the Football Trust.

This seems to be one of those rare occasions when the whole House should welcome what the Government have done, and I am grateful for remarks along those lines.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 14

GROUPS OF COMPANIES

'.—(1) Section 43 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 (groups of companies) shall be amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (1) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) Paragraph (a) of subsection (1) above shall not apply in relation to any supply of goods or services by one member of a group to another unless both the body making the supply and the body supplied continue to be members of that group until—

(a) in the case of a supply of goods which are to be removed in pursuance of the supply, a time after the removal;

(b) in the case of any other supply of goods, a time after the goods have been made available, in pursuance of the supply, to the body supplied; or

(c) in the case of a supply of services, a time after the services have been performed.";

and in subsection (1)(b), for "other supply" there shall be substituted "supply which is a supply to which paragraph (a) above does not apply and is a supply".

(3) In subsection (5) (applications to be treated or to cease to be treated as members of a group etc.), for the words after paragraph (d) there shall be substituted—

"unless the Commissioners refuse the application under subsection (5A) below."

(4) After subsection (5) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(5A) If it appears to the Commissioners necessary to do so for the protection of the revenue, they may—

(a) refuse any application made to the effect mentioned in paragraph (a) or (c) of subsection (5) above; or

(b) refuse any application made to the effect mentioned in paragraph (b) or (d) of that subsection in a case that does not appear to them to fall within subsection (6) below."

(5) Subsection (2) above has effect in relation to—

(a) any supply made on or after 1st March 1995, and

(b) any supply made before that date in the case of which both the body making the supply and the body supplied continued to be members of the group in question until at least that date,

and subsections (3) and (4) above have effect in relation to applications made on or after the day on which this Act is passed.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.—[*Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.*]

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): The proposals in the new clause are designed to counter a significant tax avoidance scheme which has come to light. Indeed, in connection with the proposals, the Paymaster General wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 28 February 1995 as follows:

> "The changes are designed to counter a significant tax avoidance scheme. The scheme exploits . . . recovery of input tax which would not normally be recoverable".

The Minister goes on to say that, because of a tribunal ruling,

> "in principle, there is nothing to prevent . . . the hitherto irrecoverable input tax charged to groups"

from being recovered and running into several billion pounds. The Minister adds that that, if

> "allowed to flourish unchecked, would constitute an attack on the very integrity of the tax".

We welcome the proposals that are set out in the new clause but we seek clarification from the Paymaster General. He has written about an attack on the "integrity of the tax" if the clause does not become part of the Bill. Yet the VAT tribunal's decision was made on 21 December 1994. The Government did nothing until the new clause appeared on 28 February 1995. Why was there such a long gap? Has there been a loss of VAT revenue in the interim? If so, how much?

I hope that the Paymaster General will respond to some brief questions about the operation of the clause. Will Customs and Excise be able to make the VAT due at the time of exit from the group? At present, it does not appear to have the power to make regulations to change the time of supply in the circumstances that I have outlined. If the regulations are ultra vires, the law requires the VAT to be due from the period in which the pre-payment was made. In such a case, the retrospective nature of the law is in principle objectionable. It means that the VAT liability of supply can be changed by an event occurring after the supply is made. There may be arguments that the principle is contrary both to United Kingdom principles and to EC law. I ask the Paymaster General to explain how the Government will counter such arguments.

In the Minister's letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East, he made it clear that the Government had not expected the VAT legislation to be interpreted in the way that it has been. He explained that that was why it was necessary to act promptly. It is questionable, however, whether the new provisions comply with EC law. There is nothing in article 4(4) of the sixth VAT directive to allow member states to change the time of supply for supplies between group members, or to treat group members as one taxable person in respect of some transactions but not of others. How do the Government intend to deal with that possible challenge?

The law will catch, perhaps unintentionally, pre-payments between group members where a company is leaving a VAT group because, for example, it has been sold. It will be vital for the group representative member to ensure that all intra-group payments made to and by that company are in respect of supplies that have already been made. Due to joint and several liability, the company leaving the group has a similar interest. Perhaps the Paymaster General will explain how he sees that problem being overcome.

There is also a problem with continuous supplies. These are normally supplies of services, but also of some goods. For example, when is the service of renting out a property "performed"? The service is not completed until the expiry or termination of the lease. Certainly this is likely

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

to be one sector in which pre-payments are common, rent usually being paid in advance. Customs and Excise may treat rent in particular as being pre-paid to the extent that it is in respect of periods after the degrouping. While not strictly supported by law, that would provide a reasonable solution for that type of pre-payment. However, it is more difficult to apply that principle to other continuous supplies that do not accrue evenly with time—for example, management and administration charges. How will interpretations be made in that respect and how shall we ensure that the new clause works effectively? I hope that the Paymaster General will respond.

Finally, confirmation is needed from Customs and Excise that a change of representative member does not mean that the group has changed. We presume that it will regard a group as the same group if the VAT registration number is unchanged.

The purpose behind the clause is to prevent tax avoidance. The Paymaster General has made it clear that if the loophole is not closed, the integrity of the tax and the tax base will be threatened. I hope that he will respond to the points and questions that I have raised.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall gladly outline the reasons for the proposed change. It is undeniably rather complex but I shall describe it as simply as I can. I shall be pleased to go into further detail if any hon. Members of a technical disposition wish me to do so.

The essence of the new clause is the grouping provisions and their abuse. The House may know that the provisions were introduced when VAT was first introduced to simplify accounting by associated companies. Supplies between members of a VAT group are disregarded for VAT purposes. Only one VAT return has to be submitted by the representative member of the group instead of separate returns for each company. That is a long-standing, deregulatory measure that we would not normally wish to change.

Unfortunately, some groups—more exactly their professional advisers—believe that they have found a lawful way of manipulating the relevant provisions to avoid VAT, which individual members, if they were not grouped, would otherwise have to incur. That is the subject of litigation. The potential loss to the Exchequer is so serious that the Government have decided to bring forward the proposals that are set out in the clause to ensure that the clear intention of Parliament is respected for the future.

In the example of the scheme that has reached the VAT tribunal so far, the group concerned, knowing that VAT that is paid on cars is not normally deductible, used two subsidiaries to purchase cars and other goods. It seems that 90 per cent. of the price was paid VAT free in advance to the two companies. They promptly left the VAT group, purchased the cars and other goods and delivered them to a company that remained in the group. Apart from the VAT on the remaining 10 per cent. of the price, which was paid later, the group had obtained the cars tax free. The group freely admitted to the tribunal that the only reason for arranging the purchase in that way was to avoid tax.

Other groups have already put similar schemes on the starting blocks. About £50 million-worth of revenue is at stake awaiting the outcome of the current case, which is being appealed by Customs and Excise.

The new clause will amend the group legislation provision by preventing the type of supply that I have described—this answers the question of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo)—between members of a group being disregarded for VAT purposes. Therefore, VAT will have to be accounted for on its full value and the group will be able to recover only such part of the VAT as is properly deductible. That, again, was the clear intention of Parliament.

We are also taking this opportunity to extend the powers of Customs and Excise so that not only schemes of this kind, but any similar schemes which may seek to exploit the ability to move companies in and out of groups, can be rendered ineffective. Only the first change, which is aimed at the specific avoidance measure we found, is retrospective to the day after we announced the changes—1 March this year. The second change is not retrospective, but will give Customs and Excise the additional powers from Royal Assent.

5 pm

The hon. Member for Bristol, South asked me why we were introducing the new clause so late. It was only when the VAT tribunal decision was released, just before Christmas, that it was realised that action was necessary. We then had to evaluate precisely what that action should be. We had to take legal advice about whether our action would conflict with EC law; I can confirm to the hon. Lady that it does not. When all those things were done, we introduced the measure. We announced it to the House on 28 February, the draft new clause was made available and a press release was issued. As the hon. Lady has said, I wrote to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). Now, at the first opportunity, the measure is being brought before the House as a whole for confirmation as part of the Finance Bill.

When an avoidance scheme is admitted as such by the company concerned, the House does not need to ask itself whether it is really dealing with a legitimate business activity in accordance with parliamentary intention, as it is clear that this is not just an avoidance scheme, but an extremely expensive one which could undermine revenue to a wholly unacceptable extent. Given those remarks, I hope that the House will endorse the Government's decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 12

INTEREST ON GILT-EDGED SECURITIES PAYABLE WITHOUT DEDUCTION OF TAX

'. After section 51 of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted the following section—

"Giltedged securities held under authorised arrangements

51A.—(1) Subject to the provisions of any regulations under section 51B, where gilt-edged securities of an eligible person are for the time being held under arrangements that satisfy the applicable requirements—

(a) those securities shall be deemed to have been issued subject to the condition that the interest on them is paid without deduction of income tax; and

(b) that interest shall be so paid accordingly, but shall be chargeable under Case III of Schedule D.

(2) For the purposes of this section gilt-edged securities are securities of an eligible person so long as—

(a) they are in the beneficial ownership of a company, local authority or local authority association or of any health service body (within the meaning of section 519A) and that company, authority, association or body is beneficially entitled to the interest on them;

(b) they are in the beneficial ownership of a person who does not fall within paragraph (a) above but is of any such description as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Treasury and that person is beneficially entitled to the interest on those securities;

(c) the circumstances in which they are held are such that any income from them is eligible for relief from tax by virtue of section 505(1)(c), or would be so eligible but for section 505(3);

(d) the circumstances in which they are held are such that any income from them is eligible for relief from tax by virtue of section 592(2), 608(2)(a), 613(4), 614(2), (3) or (4), 620(6) or 643(2);

(e) they are assets of any such trust fund as is referred to in section 83 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 (premiums trust funds of members of Lloyd's); or

(f) the circumstances in which they are held are such that any income from them falls to be treated as the income of, or of the government of, a sovereign power or of an international organisation.

(3) For the purposes of this section the arrangements under which any gilt-edged securities are held shall be taken to satisfy the applicable requirements if—

(a) such conditions as may be imposed by or under any such regulations as may be made by the Treasury are satisfied in relation to those arrangements; and

(b) a declaration with respect to the satisfaction of those conditions has been made in accordance with any such regulations by such person having an entitlement to or in respect of the securities as may be determined under the regulations.

(4) The conditions that may, for the purposes of subsection (3)(a) above, be imposed by regulations under this section in relation to arrangements for the holding of any gilt-edged securities shall include—

(a) conditions as to the accounts in which the securities are to be held under the arrangements and as to the accounts into which interest on the securities is to be paid;

(b) conditions requiring persons holding the securities, or otherwise having functions under or in connection with the arrangements, to be persons of a description specified in the regulations or to be approved in accordance with the regulations;

(c) conditions requiring persons who, for purposes connected with the arrangements, act directly or indirectly—

(i) on behalf of the person beneficially entitled to the securities, or

(ii) on behalf of the person who holds them,

to be persons registered with the Board in accordance with the regulations; and

(d) conditions as to the provision about transfers of securities held under the arrangements that is to be contained in the arrangements.

(5) Regulations made by the Treasury for the purposes of this section may-

(a) impose requirements in relation to any such persons as are mentioned in subsection (4)(b) and (c) above with respect to the manner in which their functions under or in connection with the arrangements are exercised;

(b) require such persons—

(i) to consider the accuracy of any declaration made for the purposes of subsection (3)(b) above; and

(ii) themselves to make declarations as to the extent to which conditions or other requirements imposed for the purposes of this section appear to be, or to have been, satisfied or complied with;

(c) make provision—

(i) about the making of applications for approval or registration under any such regulations;

(ii) for the circumstances in which any approval or registration is to be or may be given or refused;

(iii) for the withdrawal or cancellation of any approval or registration;

(iv) for appeals against any refusal to grant an approval or to register any person, or against the withdrawal or cancellation of any approval or registration;

(d) make provision for the publication of information showing the effect of any determinations in pursuance of regulations made by virtue of paragraph (c) above;

(e) make provision for notices to be issued by the Board to such persons as may be described in the regulations where the Board are satisfied that this section has effect, or does not have effect, in relation to any gilt-edged securities;

(f) impose obligations—

(i) on persons having any rights in relation to gilt-edged securities held under arrangements described in the regulations,

(ii) on any such persons as are mentioned in subsection (4)(b) and (c) above, and

(iii) on persons who are applying to be approved or registered for the purposes of this section,

as to the provision of information, and the production of documents, to the Board or, on request, to an officer of the Board;

and

(g) impose requirements, framed wholly or partly by reference to the opinion of the Board, as to—

(i) the contents of any declaration to be made in accordance with regulations under this section,

(ii) the form and manner in which any declaration or information is to be made or provided in accordance with any such regulations, and

(iii) the keeping and production to, or to an officer of, the Board of any document in which any such declaration or information is contained.

(6) Any person who—

(a) contravenes, or fails to comply with, any requirement imposed on him by or under any regulations under this section, or

(b) fraudulently or negligently makes or produces any incorrect declaration, information or document in pursuance of any such requirement,

shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding £25,000.

(7) In this section 'gilt-edged securities' means any securities which—

(a) are gilt-edged securities for the purposes of the 1992 Act; or

(b) will be such securities on the making of any order under paragraph 1 of Schedule 9 to that Act the making of which is anticipated in the prospectus under which they were issued.

(8) In this section 'international organisation' means an organisation of which two or more sovereign powers, or the governments of two or more sovereign powers, are members; and if, in any proceedings, any question arises whether a person is an international organisation for the purposes of this section

a certificate issued by or under the authority of the Secretary of State stating any fact relevant to that question shall be conclusive evidence of that fact.

(9) Regulations made by the Treasury for the purposes of this section may—

(a) make different provision for different cases; and

(b) contain such supplementary, incidental, consequential and transitional provision as appears to the Treasury to be appropriate.

(10) This section shall not apply to any interest paid before such day as the Treasury may by order appoint, and different days may be appointed under this subsection for different purposes."'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Government new clause 11—*Periodic accounting for tax on interest on gilt-edged securities.*

Government new clause 10—*Treatment of price differential on sale and repurchase of securities.*

Government new clause 9—*Manufactured interest on gilt-edged securities.*

Government new clause 7—*Power to make special provision for special cases.*

Government new clause 8—*Stock lending: power to modify rules.*

Government amendment No. 15.

Mr. Nelson: The introduction of these new clauses comes after an informed and thorough debate in Committee on the issue of the gilt repo market. The six new clauses make the tax changes necessary to facilitate the introduction of an open market in the sale and repurchase of Government securities. It may be helpful to the House if I refer briefly to each of the new clauses and say a few words about their intent.

New clause 12 enables interest on gilt-edged securities, which at present is normally paid after deduction of tax, to be paid gross under arrangements to be set out in Treasury regulations and brought into effect on an appointed day, which is expected to be at the beginning of 1996.

New clause 11 enables regulations to be made to introduce a system of quarterly accounting for tax on gilt interest received gross. It is to be brought into effect on an appointed day, reflecting the date on which gilt interest first becomes payable gross under the arrangements provided for by new clause 12. This quarterly accounting system is necessary to contain the effect that paying gilt interest gross would otherwise have on the public sector borrowing requirement. The arrangements will reduce the cost from about £1.2 billion over two years to about £100 million in total.

New clause 10 ensures that the tax rules for the treatment of repos reflect the underlying economic reality of the transaction. It also prevents the risk of tax being lost by repos being used to turn income into capital. Because of the risk of loss of tax, the provisions will come into effect from Royal Assent.

New clause 9 makes the necessary amendments to existing legislation to enable manufactured payments of gilt interest to be paid gross in all circumstances, which will simplify the position considerably. It should in particular assist the operation of the gilt repo market as participants will be able to make manufactured payments of gilt interest gross, regardless of the circumstances or identity of their counterpart.

The main purpose of new clause 7 is to provide regulatory powers to enable the operation of legislation affecting repos to take account of the detailed workings of the agreements under which these transactions are carried out. New clause 8 enables regulations to modify the circumstances in which transfers of security under stock lending arrangements are disregarded for tax purposes in computing the profits of the trade or in computing capital gains.

The new clauses will facilitate the introduction of an open gilt repo market by enabling gilt interest to be paid gross in a much wider range of circumstances than before. The Exchequer will be protected by the auditing regime for the new arrangements and by the new quarterly accounting system. The new clauses also provide for the price differential under a repo to be treated as interest for tax purposes and for consequential adjustments to be made to the capital gains tax rules. The new clauses provide regulatory powers to cater for the technical details of repo transactions and enable the tax rules to be modified in the light of market developments.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): This is a far from satisfactory way in which to legislate on this or any other matter. Although, as we made clear in Committee, the Opposition generally support the introduction of a repo market, we are concerned that the Government have introduced at this late stage some complex new clauses which provide for further regulations to be made to deal with matters which may be technical, but which are crucial to a number of taxpayers. That is not a satisfactory way in which to legislate, especially when one considers that in the next two days we have to consider 28 different groups of amendments and new clauses. Inevitably, the new clauses dealing with the repo market will not get the attention that they would otherwise have had.

That said, I accept that the Government are anxious to get the market under way at the beginning of next year and we shall not vote against the new clauses. However, the difficulties raised by legislating in this way are perhaps summed up by new clause 12, which provides that anyone who

> "contravenes, or fails to comply with, any requirement . . . under this section . . . shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding £25,000."

That is a very stiff penalty. Taxpayers may come to the view that it is not fair for Parliament to pass legislation with little consideration and then expect taxpayers to comply with it, with a penalty of £25,000 if they get it wrong. As was said time and again in Committee, the Government should think long and hard about the approach that they are increasingly adopting towards legislating in areas where there are complications and where far greater consideration should be given to ensuring that the regime is correct.

Can the Minister tell us whether unit trusts come within the new regime as it is not entirely clear whether they do? Point 7 of the annexe to the Treasury press release makes it clear that bodies which hold gilts but have no intention of entering into repos will be permitted to transfer their gilts to the new regime to obtain a cash flow advantage.

If that is right, what will the cost be to the Treasury? There is a suggestion that that might be a generous, perhaps unintended, consequence of the legislation.

As I have said, we generally support the thrust of what the Government are trying to do, but we believe that they must think long and hard about the way in which they have approached the matter. The introduction of so many complex new clauses and the prospect of complex regulations cannot be happy, especially for all those who will have to make the system operate.

Mr. Nelson: I am at least grateful to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) for giving what I took to be a welcome for the intent behind the new clauses and, therefore, implicitly for the considerable saving that will arise for the taxpayer who will, we hope, have to pay a far lower amount of interest on the overall amount of the national debt and on the issuance of new gilts. We should not be introducing the new clauses unless we thought—indeed, the market concurs—that there would be very considerable savings for the taxpayer.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman finds the new clauses complex, but we had an opportunity in Committee to discuss in considerable detail the intent behind them. I acknowledge that the translation of that intent into practice, not only in the new clauses but in subsequent regulations, the code of practice and the legal agreements, involve some complexity. That is probably inevitable in a developing, innovative market of this nature where substantial amounts of interest and, therefore, potential tax are involved.

The consultations on the introduction of an open gilt market did not end until the end of January this year. The Government then needed to consider the responses made and decide whether to go ahead and what changes were needed. By that time, it was too late for the necessary legislation to be introduced during the Committee stage. It is essential that tax changes are made in the Bill if an open repo market in Government securities such as already exists in many other countries is to be introduced early in 1996.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific point about the £25,000 penalty, the Inland Revenue will have to audit the scheme to ensure that gilt holders make the proper declarations and that they are eligible before the central gilts office member can hold their gilts in a special account. Those holding gilts directly through a CGO member will make their declaration to that CGO member. Otherwise, the declaration is made to a registered intermediary, who in turn makes a declaration to the CGO member.

The Inland Revenue will audit the scheme to check that only eligible persons are obtaining gilt interest gross and that all the requirements of the scheme have been met. In view of the large amount of interest which may be involved, there will be a mitigable penalty not exceeding £25,000 for any failure to comply with the legislation. I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and his party, which professes concern to defend revenue, prevent loopholes and crack down on those who seek to exploit them, will support a sensible penalty regime which is consistent, commensurate with the size of the transactions taking place and sufficient to provide real deterrence in relation to operation outside the scheme.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about unit trusts is yes, unit trusts are involved. The hon. Gentleman asked about bodies which could join the repo market to register with starred special accounts in the CGO which did not necessarily intend to participate in the repo market but thereby obtained gross payments purely for cash flow purposes. The answer is that the cash flow cost of that is included in the overall assessment of £100 million made for the cash flow cost of players and non-players in the repo market. The amount of interest or the tax forgone for a short while on interest in respect of non-players and players in the repo market is, frankly, a guesstimate. The figure of £100 million is an estimate rather than a guesstimate, but it will be within the total already announced.

While I have not provided an exact answer to the last point raised by the hon. Gentleman, I hope that I have reassured him that we have already taken his point into account in the cost. I emphasise that it is a cash flow cost and not a real cost. We hope that at the end of the day the measure will be an extremely positive sum gain for the taxpayer.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 11

PERIODIC ACCOUNTING FOR TAX ON INTEREST ON GILT-EDGED SECURITIES

'.—(1) After the section 51A of the Taxes Act 1988 inserted by section *(Interest on gilt-edged securities payable without deduction of tax)* above there shall be inserted the following section—

"*Periodic accounting for tax on interest on giltedged securities*

51B.—(1) The Treasury may by regulations provide for persons to whom payments of interest on relevant gilt-edged securities are made without deduction of tax to be required to make periodic returns to an officer of the Board of—

(a) amounts of any payments of such interest made to that person, and

(b) amounts of tax for which, assuming the payments to bear tax at the basic rate for the relevant year of assessment, that person is to be accountable under the regulations in respect of those payments;

and any such regulations may further provide for the amounts of tax required to be included in any such return to become due, at the time when the return is required to be made, from the person required to make it.

(2) Regulations made by the Treasury for the purposes of this section may—

(a) specify such periods as the Treasury may consider appropriate as the periods for which returns are to be made, and in respect of which any person is to account for tax, under the regulations;

(b) make provision for enabling returns under the regulations to be combined with returns under Schedule 16 and for requiring particulars of claims and calculations made for the purposes of the regulations to be set out in the returns;

(c) provide, in respect of any period for which a return is to be made by any person under the regulations, for that person to be obliged, before the end of the period, to make a payment on account of amounts that may become due from him in respect of that period;

(d) impose a requirement for a special return to be made for the purposes of any obligation imposed by virtue of paragraph (c) above;

(e) provide for the amount which, under the regulations, is to be due from any person in respect of any period to be reduced by reference to amounts which—

(i) are paid by or on behalf of that person under contracts or arrangements relating to transfers of gilt-edged securities; and

(ii) are or fall to be treated as representative of interest on those securities;

(f) authorise amounts in respect of which there is an obligation to account for tax under the regulations to be treated for specified purposes of the Tax Acts as payments on which a person has borne income tax by deduction;

(g) make provision for the assessment of amounts due under the regulations and for the repayment in specified circumstances of amounts paid under the regulations;

(h) make provision for interest to be payable, at such rate as may be determined by or under the regulations, on amounts that have become due under the regulations but have not been paid;

(i) make provision, where payments of interest on any relevant gilt-edged securities would be comprised in the income of a member of Lloyd's, for obligations that may be imposed by regulations under this section on the person to whom the interest is paid to be imposed, instead, on such other person as may be described in the regulations.

(3) Regulations made by the Treasury for the purposes of this section may—

(a) include provision which for the purposes of the regulations makes any provision corresponding, with or without modifications, to any of the provisions of Schedule 16;

(b) make provision modifying the operation of Schedule 19AB in relation to cases where payments of interest on relevant gilt-edged securities are made without deduction of tax to companies carrying on pension business;

(c) include provision which requires obligations and liabilities under the regulations to be treated as obligations and liabilities to which provisions of Schedule 23 to the Finance Act 1995 (UK representatives) apply; and

(d) include provision which, for any of the purposes of the regulations, applies provisions of sections 118 and 119 of and Schedule 23 to that Act in relation to times before those provisions otherwise come into force.

(4) Regulations made by the Treasury for the purposes of this section may—

(a) make different provision for different cases; and

(b) contain such supplementary, incidental, consequential and transitional provision as appears to the Treasury to be appropriate;

and subsection (3) of section 178 of the Finance Act 1989 (extent of powers to set rates of interest) shall apply for the purposes of the power conferred by virtue of subsection (2)(h) above as it applies for the purposes of the power to make regulations under that section.

(5) In this section 'relevant gilt-edged securities' means securities which are gilt-edged securities within the meaning of section 51A, other than any to which a direction of the Treasury under section 50 relates.

(6) In this section 'relevant year of assessment'—

(a) in relation to a manufactured payment, means the year of assessment in which it is received by the person to whom it is paid; and

(b) in relation to any other payment of interest, means the year of assessment in which the payment is made;

and in this subsection 'manufactured payment' means any payment which for the purposes of Schedule 23A is a payment of manufactured interest."

(2) In the Table in section 98 of the Management Act (penalties in respect of certain information provisions), immediately before the entry in the second column relating to section 124(3) of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted the following entry—

"regulations under section 51B;".'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 10

TREATMENT OF PRICE DIFFERENTIAL ON SALE AND REPURCHASE OF SECURITIES

'.—(1) After section 730 of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted the following sections—

"Treatment of price differential on sale and repurchase of securities

730A.—(1) Subject to subsection (8) below, this section applies where—

(a) a person ('the original owner') has transferred any securities to another person ('the interim holder') under an agreement to sell them;

(b) the original owner or a person connected with him is required to buy them back either—

(i) in pursuance of an obligation to do so imposed by that agreement or by any related agreement, or

(ii) in consequence of the exercise of an option acquired under that agreement or any related agreement;

and

(c) the sale price and the repurchase price are different.

(2) The difference between the sale price and the repurchase price shall be treated for the purposes of the Tax Acts—

(a) where the repurchase price is more than the sale price, as a payment of interest made by the repurchaser on a deemed loan from the interim holder of an amount equal to the sale price; and

(b) where the sale price is more than the repurchase price, as a payment of interest made by the interim holder on a deemed loan from the repurchaser of an amount equal to the repurchase price.

(3) Where any amount is deemed under subsection (2) above to be a payment of interest, that payment shall be deemed for the purposes of the Tax Acts to be one that becomes due at the time when the repurchase price becomes due and, accordingly, is treated as paid when that price is paid.

(4) Where any amount is deemed under subsection (2) above to be a payment of interest, the repurchase price shall be treated for the purposes of the Tax Acts (other than this section and sections 737A and 737C) and (in cases where section 263A of the 1992 Act does not apply) for the purposes of the 1992 Act—

(a) in a case falling within paragraph (a) of that subsection, as reduced by the amount of the deemed payment; and

(b) in a case falling within paragraph (b) of that subsection, as increased by the amount of the deemed payment.

(5) For the purposes of section 209(2)(d) and (da) any amount which is deemed under subsection (2)(a) above to be a payment of interest shall be deemed to be interest in respect of securities issued by the repurchaser and held by the interim holder.

(6) Any amount which—

(a) is deemed under subsection (2) above to be a payment of interest, and

(b) does not fall (apart from this subsection) to be treated as yearly interest,

shall be treated for the purposes of section 338 as if the reference to yearly interest in subsection (3)(a) of that section included a reference to that amount.

(7) The Treasury may by regulations provide for any amount which is deemed under subsection (2) above to be received as a payment of interest to be treated, in such circumstances and to such extent as may be described in the regulations, as comprised in income that is eligible for relief from tax by virtue of section 438, 592(2), 608(2)(a), 613(4), 614(2), (3) or (4), 620(6) or 643(2).

(8) Except where regulations under section 737E otherwise provide, this section does not apply if—

(a) the agreement or agreements under which provision is made for the sale and repurchase are not such as would be entered into by persons dealing with each other at arm's length; or

(b) all of the benefits or risks arising from fluctuations, before the repurchase takes place, in the market value of the securities sold accrue to, or fall on, the interim holder.

(9) In this section references to the repurchase price are to be construed—

(a) in cases where section 737A applies, and

(b) in cases where section 737A would apply if it were in force in relation to the securities in question,

as references to the repurchase price which is or, as the case may be, would be applicable by virtue of section 737C(3)(b), (9) or (11)(c).

Interpretation of section 730A

730B.—(1) For the purposes of section 730A agreements are related if they are entered into in pursuance of the same arrangement (regardless of the date on which either agreement is entered into).

(2) References in section 730A to buying back securities—

(a) shall include references to buying similar securities; and

(b) in relation to a person connected with the original owner, shall include references to buying securities sold by the original owner or similar securities,

notwithstanding (in each case) that the securities bought have not previously been held by the purchaser; and references in that section to repurchase or to a repurchaser shall be construed accordingly.

(3) In section 730A and this section 'securities' has the same meaning as in section 737A.

(4) For the purposes of this section securities are similar if they entitle their holders—

(a) to the same rights against the same persons as to capital, interest and dividends, and

(b) to the same remedies for the enforcement of those rights,

notwithstanding any difference in the total nominal amounts of the respective securities or in the form in which they are held or the manner in which they can be transferred.

(5) Section 839 (connected persons) applies for the purposes of section 730A."

(2) In section 729 of that Act (sale and repurchase of securities), after subsection (5) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(5A) This section shall not apply where section 737A applies; and this section shall be disregarded in determining whether the condition in subsection (2)(b) of that section is fulfilled in any case."

(3) In subsections (3)(b), (9) and (11)(c) of section 737C of that Act (adjustment of repurchase price), for "the Tax Acts other than section 737A and of the 1992 Act" there shall be substituted, in each case "section 730A"; and after subsection (11) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(11A) The deemed increase of the repurchase price which is made for the purposes of section 730A by subsection (3)(b), (9) or (11)(c) above shall also have effect—

(a) for all the purposes of the Tax Acts, other than section 737A,

(b) in cases where section 263A of the 1992 Act does not apply, for the purposes of the 1992 Act,

wherever in consequence of that increase there is for the purposes of section 730A no difference between the sale price and the repurchase price."

(4) After section 263 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 there shall be inserted the following section—

"Agreements for sale and repurchase of securities

263A.—(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4) below, in any case falling within subsection (1) of section 730A of the Taxes Act (treatment of price differential on sale and repurchase of securities) and in any case which would fall within that subsection if the sale price and the repurchase price were different—

(a) the acquisition of the securities in question by the interim holder and the disposal of those securities by him to the repurchaser; and

(b) except where the repurchaser is or may be different from the original owner, the disposal of those securities by the original owner and any acquisition of those securities by the original owner as the repurchaser,

shall be disregarded for the purposes of capital gains tax.

(2) Subsection (1) above does not apply in any case where the repurchase price of the securities in question falls to be calculated for the purposes of section 730A of the Taxes Act by reference to provisions of section 737C of that Act that are not in force in relation to those securities when the repurchase price becomes due.

(3) Subsection (1) above does not apply if—

(a) the agreement or agreements under which provision is made for the sale and repurchase are not such as would be entered into by persons dealing with each other at arm's length; or

(b) any of the benefits or risks arising from fluctuations, before the repurchase takes place, in the market value of the securities sold accrues to, or falls on, the interim holder.

(4) Subsection (1) above does not apply in relation to any disposal or acquisition of qualifying corporate bonds in a case where the securities disposed of by the original owner or those acquired by him, or by any other person, as the repurchaser are not such bonds.

(5) Expressions used in this section and in section 730A of the Taxes Act have the same meanings in this section as in that section."

(5) This section shall have effect where the agreement to sell the securities is entered into on or after the date on which this Act is passed.'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 9

MANUFACTURED INTEREST ON GILT-EDGED SECURITIES

'.—(1) In section 737 of the Taxes Act 1988 (manufactured dividends and interest)—

(a) after subsection (1A) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1B) Subject to subsection (5AA) below, subsection (1) above shall not apply where the interest in question is interest on gilt-edged securities.";

(b) at the beginning of subsections (2) and (5), there shall be inserted, in each case, "Subject to subsection (5AA) below,";

(c) after subsection (5) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(5AA) Regulations made by the Treasury may make provision in relation to any such case where the securities in question are gilt-edged securities as may be specified in the regulations—

(a) for subsections (1B), (2) and (5) above to be disregarded in determining whether the case is one where subsection (1) above applies; or

(b) for this section to have effect as if subsections (1B) and (2) above were omitted and the words in subsection (5) from 'unless' to the end of paragraph (b) were modified in such manner as may be set out in the regulations.";

and

(d) in subsection (6), after the definition of "foreign income dividend" there shall be inserted the following definition—

"'gilt-edged securities' has the same meaning as in section 51A;".

(2) In Schedule 23A to that Act, at the beginning of sub-paragraphs (2) and (3) of paragraph 3, there shall be inserted, in each case, "Subject to paragraph 3A below,"; and after that paragraph there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"3A.—(1) This paragraph applies, except in so far as dividend manufacturing regulations otherwise provide, in any case where paragraph 3 above applies and the United Kingdom securities in question are gilt-edged securities.

(2) In a case where this paragraph applies, sub-paragraphs (2) and (3) of paragraph 3 above shall not have effect, but the gross amount of the manufactured interest shall be treated—

(a) in relation to the interest manufacturer, for all the purposes of the Tax Acts except the determination of whether a deduction of tax is liable to be made on the making of the manufactured payment, and

(b) in relation to the recipient and all persons claiming title through or under him, for all the purposes of those Acts,

as if it were the gross amount of a periodical payment of interest on those gilt-edged securities, but made by the interest manufacturer.

(3) Sub-paragraph (4) of paragraph 3 above shall apply for the purposes of this paragraph as it applies for the purposes of that paragraph.

(4) In this paragraph 'gilt-edged securities' has the same meaning as in section 51A."

(3) In paragraph 5(6) of that Schedule (construction of references to securities in provisions relating to interest passing through the market), after "United Kingdom securities" there shall be inserted ", other than gilt-edged securities (within the meaning of section 51A),".

(4) This section shall have effect in relation to any payments made on or after such day as the Treasury may by order appoint, and different days may be appointed under this subsection for different purposes.'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 7

POWER TO MAKE SPECIAL PROVISION FOR SPECIAL CASES

'.—(1) Immediately before section 738 of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted the following sections—

"Power to provide for manufactured payments to be eligible for relief

737D.—(1) The Treasury may by regulations provide for any manufactured payment made to any person to be treated, in such circumstances and to such extent as may be described in the regulations, as comprised in income of that person that is eligible for relief from tax by virtue of section 438, 592(2), 608(2)(a), 613(4), 614(2), (3) or (4), 620(6) or 643(2).

(2) In this section 'manufactured payment' means any manufactured dividend, manufactured interest or manufactured overseas dividend, within the meaning of Schedule 23A.

Power to modify sections 727A, 730A and 737A to 737C

737E—(1) The Treasury may by regulations make provision for all or any of sections 727A, 730A and 737A to 737C to have effect with modifications in relation to cases involving any arrangement for the sale and repurchase of securities where—

(a) the obligation to make the repurchase is not performed or the option to repurchase is not exercised;

(b) provision is made by or under any agreement for different or additional securities to be treated as, or as included with, securities which, for the purposes of the repurchase, are to represent securities transferred in pursuance of the original sale;

(c) provision is made by or under any agreement for any securities to be treated as not included with securities which, for the purposes of the repurchase, are to represent securities transferred in pursuance of the original sale;

(d) provision is made by or under any agreement for the sale price or repurchase price to be determined or varied wholly or partly by reference to fluctuations, occurring in the period after the making of the agreement for the original sale, in the value of securities transferred in pursuance of that sale, or in the value of securities treated as representing those securities; or

(e) provision is made by or under any agreement for any person to be required, in a case where there are any such fluctuations, to make any payment in the course of that period and before the repurchase price becomes due.

(2) The Treasury may by regulations make provision for all or any of sections 727A, 730A and 737A to 737C to have effect with modifications in relation to cases where—

(a) arrangements, corresponding to those made in cases involving an arrangement for the sale and repurchase of securities, are made by any agreement, or by one or more related agreements, in relation to securities that are to be redeemed in the period after their sale; and

(b) those arrangements are such that the person making the sale or a person connected with him (instead of being required to repurchase the securities or acquiring an option to do so) is granted rights in respect of the benefits that will accrue from their redemption.

(3) The Treasury may by regulations provide that section 730A is to have effect with modifications in relation to cases involving any arrangement for the sale and repurchase of securities where there is an agreement relating to the sale or repurchase which is not such as would be entered into by persons dealing with each other at arm's length.

(4) The powers conferred by subsections (1) and (2) above shall be exercisable in relation to section 263A of the 1992 Act as they are exercisable in relation to section 730A of this Act.

(5) Regulations made for the purposes of this section may—

(a) make different provision for different cases; and

(b) contain such supplementary, incidental, consequential and transitional provision as appears to the Treasury to be appropriate.

(6) The supplementary, incidental and consequential provision that may be made by regulations under this section shall include—

(a) in the case of regulations relating to section 730A, provision modifying subsections (3)(b), (9), (11)(c) and (11A) of section 737C; and

(b) in the case of regulations relating to section 263A of the 1992 Act, provision modifying the operation of that Act in relation to cases where by virtue of the regulations any acquisition or disposal is excluded from those which are to be disregarded for the purposes of capital gains tax.

(7) In this section 'modifications' includes exceptions and omissions; and any power under this section to provide for an

enactment to have effect with modifications in any case shall include power to provide for it not to apply (if it otherwise would do) in that case.

(8) References in this section to a case involving an arrangement for the sale and repurchase of securities are references to any case where—

(a) a person makes a sale of any securities under any agreement ('the original sale'); and

(b) that person or a person connected with him either—

(i) is required under that agreement or any related agreement to buy them back; or

(ii) acquires, under that agreement or any related agreement, an option to buy them back.

(9) Section 730B shall apply for the purposes of this section as it applies for the purposes of section 730A."

(2) In section 182(1) of the Finance Act 1993 and section 229 of the Finance Act 1994 (powers to modify provisions relating to Lloyd's), the following paragraph shall be inserted, in each case, after paragraph (c)—

"(ca) for modifying the application of this Chapter in relation to cases where assets forming part of a premiums trust fund are the subject of—

(i) any such arrangement as is mentioned in section 129(1), (2) or (2A) of the Taxes Act 1988 (stock lending etc.); or

(ii) any such arrangements or agreements as are mentioned in section 737E(2) and (8) of the Taxes Act 1988 (sale and repurchase of securities etc.);".'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

STOCK LENDING: POWER TO MODIFY RULES

'.—(1) In subsection (1) of section 129 of the Taxes Act 1988 (description of stock lending arrangements)—

(a) for "subsection (4)" there shall be substituted "subsections (2B) and (4)"; and

(b) the words "has contracted to sell securities, and to enable him to fulfil the contract, he" shall be omitted.

(2) In subsection (2A) of that section, for "A to fulfil his contract" there shall be substituted "B to make the transfer to A or his nominee".

(3) After subsection (2A) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2B) Except in so far as the Treasury by regulations otherwise provide, this section applies only if A enters into the arrangement mentioned in subsection (1) above to enable him to fulfil a contract under which he is required to sell securities."

(4) After subsection (4) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(4A) Regulations under subsection (4) above relating to section 271(9) of the 1992 Act may include provision modifying the operation of that Act in relation to cases where, by virtue of the regulations, any acquisition or disposal is excluded from those which are to be disregarded for the purposes of capital gains tax.

(4B) In such cases as the Treasury may by regulations provide, this section shall have effect as if references to a transfer of securities of the same kind and amount as those subject to a previous transfer included references to the grant of equivalent rights in respect of benefits accruing from the redemption of securities of the same kind and amount."

(5) For subsection (9) of section 271 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 (exemption for arrangements to which section 129 applies) there shall be substituted the following subsection—

"(9) Subject to any regulations under subsection (4) of section 129 of the Taxes Act, any disposal and acquisition made in pursuance of an arrangement mentioned in subsection (1), (2) or (2A) of that section shall be disregarded for the purposes of capital gains tax unless it is one in the case of which subsection (2B) of that section has the effect of preventing that section from applying."'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 13

ANNUITIES PURCHASED WHERE CERTAIN CLAIMS OR ACTIONS ARE SETTLED

'The following sections shall be inserted after section 329 of the Taxes Act 1988—

"Annuities purchased for certain persons

329A.—(1) In a case where—

(a) an agreement is made settling a claim or action for damages for personal injury,

(b) under the agreement the damages are to consist wholly or partly of periodical payments, and

(c) under the agreement the person entitled to the payments is to receive them as the annuitant under one or more annuities purchased for him by the person against whom the claim or action is brought or, if he is insured against the claim concerned, by his insurer,

the agreement is for the purposes of this section a qualifying agreement.

(2) In a case where—

(a) an agreement is made settling a claim or action for damages for personal injury,

(b) under the agreement the damages are to consist wholly or partly of periodical payments, and

(c) a later agreement is made under which the person entitled to the payments is from a future date to receive them as the annuitant under one or more annuities purchased for him by the person against whom the claim or action is brought or, if he is insured against the claim concerned, by his insurer,

the agreement mentioned in paragraph (c) above is for the purposes of this section a qualifying agreement.

(3) Subsection (4) below applies where—

(a) a person receives a sum as the annuitant under an annuity purchased for him pursuant to a qualifying agreement, or

(b) a person receives a sum on behalf of the annuitant under an annuity purchased for the annuitant pursuant to a qualifying agreement.

(4) Where this subsection applies the sum shall not be regarded as the recipient's or annuitant's income for any purposes of income tax and accordingly shall be paid without any deduction under section 349(1).

(5) Subsections (6) to (10) below apply for the purposes of subsection (1) above.

(6) The periodical payments may be for the life of the claimant, for a specified period or of a specified number or minimum number or include payments of more than one of those descriptions.

(7) The amounts of the periodical payments (which need not be at a uniform rate or payable at uniform intervals) may be—

(a) specified in the agreement, with or without provision for increases of specified amounts or percentages,

(b) subject to adjustment in a specified manner so as to preserve their real value, or

(c) partly specified as mentioned in paragraph (a) and partly subject to adjustment as mentioned in paragraph (b) above.

(8) The annuity or annuities must be such as to provide sums which as to amount and time of payment correspond to the periodical payments described in the agreement.

(9) Personal injury includes any disease and any impairment of a person's physical or mental condition.

(10) A claim or action for personal injury includes—

(a) such a claim or action brought by virtue of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1934;

(b) such a claim or action brought by virtue of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1937;

(c) such a claim or action brought by virtue of the Damages (Scotland) Act 1976;

(d) a claim or action brought by virtue of the Fatal Accidents Act 1976;

(e) a claim or action brought by virtue of the Fatal Accidents (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

(11) For the purposes of subsection (2) above—

(a) subsections (6), (9) and (10) above apply;

(b) subsection (7) above applies as if the reference to the agreement were to that mentioned in subsection (2)(a) above;

(c) subsection (8) above applies as if the reference to periodical payments described in the agreement were to periodical payments described in the agreement mentioned in subsection (2)(a) above and falling to be made after the later agreement takes effect.

(12) This section does not apply unless the sum concerned is received after the day on which the Finance Act 1995 is passed, but it is immaterial when—

(a) the agreement mentioned in subsection (1) above is made or takes effect, or

(b) either of the agreements mentioned in subsection (2) above is made or takes effect.

Annuities assigned in favour of certain persons

329B.—(1) In a case where—

(a) an agreement is made settling a claim or action for damages for personal injury,

(b) under the agreement the damages are to consist wholly or partly of periodical payments,

(c) the person against whom the claim or action is brought (or, if he is insured against the claim concerned, his insurer) purchases one or more annuities, and

(d) a later agreement is made under which the annuity is, or the annuities are, assigned in favour of the person entitled to the payments so as to secure that from a future date he receives the payments as the annuitant under the annuity or annuities,

the agreement mentioned in paragraph (d) above is for the purposes of this section a qualifying agreement.

(2) Subsection (3) below applies where—

(a) a person receives a sum as the annuitant under an annuity assigned in his favour pursuant to a qualifying agreement, or

(b) a person receives a sum on behalf of the annuitant under an annuity assigned in the annuitant's favour pursuant to a qualifying agreement.

(3) Where this subsection applies the sum shall not be regarded as the recipient's or annuitant's income for any purposes of income tax and accordingly shall be paid without any deduction under section 349(1).

(4) For the purposes of subsection (1) above—

(a) subsections (6), (9) and (10) of section 329A apply;

(b) subsections (7) and (8) of section 329A apply as if references to the agreement were to that mentioned in subsection (1)(a) above.

(5) This section does not apply unless the sum concerned is received after the day on which the Finance Act 1995 is passed, but it is immaterial when either of the agreements mentioned in subsection (1) above is made or takes effect." '—*[Sir George Young.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.15 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The object of this clause is to simplify the administration of the payment of agreed damages in cases of personal injury, where the damages are to be paid to the victim of the injury in instalments over a period or for his or her life. It will make it possible for the victim of the injury to receive the damages as an annuity directly from a life insurance company without turning a non-taxable capital sum into income chargeable to tax.

The payment of an annuity directly to the victim of the injury will bring the advantage of protection under the Policyholders Protection Act 1975. Uncertainties as to the long-term financial stability of the payer of the damages will no longer be a significant obstacle to the acceptance of damages in a form which meets the long-term financial needs of the victim.

The clause achieves the objectives of the measure tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) in Committee and will, I know, have the support of the whole House. It also represents a first step towards realising our intention, announced to the House on 23 March, of implementing the recommendations made by the Law Commission in its report on structured settlements and interim and provisional damages.

Additionally, the clause breaks new ground by making it possible for existing structured settlements to be renegotiated to come within the new framework. This offers the advantages of long-term security for the individual receiving the damages by instalment payments and of administrative savings for the insurance company paying them. The removal of the territorial restrictions from the measures previously proposed will, we hope, make it easier for an individual suffering an injury when overseas to obtain damages payable through life without taxation disadvantages.

I hope that the measure commends itself to the House.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for acknowledging the role that the Labour party and the Law Commission played in proposing the measure. It is a good measure for all the reasons that the Minister set out, which I do not intend to repeat. It will bring considerable benefit to the victims of accidents and those who suffer injuries. It will stimulate competition in the range of financial instruments which are available to them. It will provide for annuities structured specifically to the varying needs that victims have for the rest of their lives following a severe accident or injury. We welcome the new clause and commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

DISCRETIONARY SHARE OPTION SCHEMES IN THE PRIVATISED UTILITIES

'.—(1) The Treasury shall present to Parliament for its approval before the next Budget a report on discretionary share option schemes operated by the privatised utilities which fall within Part IV of Schedule 9 to the Taxes Act 1988 (share options schemes other than savings-related share option schemes) ("the schemes")

(2) The Treasury shall report to Parliament on the past and estimated future effects on the public revenues of schemes which are operated by the privatised utilities.

(3) The report shall differentiate between public revenues raised from:

(a) members of these schemes and

(b) the privatised utilities which operate these schemes.

(4) For the purposes of this section privatised utilities will include all companies which produce or distribute water, gas, or electricity in which HMG has sold shares since 1979 and will include other companies which the Treasury may by order determine.'—*[Mr. Andrew Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I fear that this new clause will not be so uncontentious as the last one. I would be grateful if the Financial Secretary would nod across the Dispatch Box. We would be pleased to move on, once the Government had accepted it. The Minister is not making any such indication.

The new clause calls for an assessment of the costs to the taxpayer incurred in Government support for discretionary share option schemes in the privatised utilities, and for a report to Parliament before the next Budget. Our case is that such an assessment is long overdue, that the boardroom excesses of the privatised utilities are a national scandal, and that it is high time that the Government took action. I find it difficult to imagine who could possibly disagree with such a reasonable suggestion as that which we are making today—other than perhaps some of the beneficiaries, and some right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches.

Certainly, anyone with an intelligent experience in commerce would be appalled at any enterprise which spent large sums of money without assessing the value created. Yet that is just what the Government are doing. They are underwriting the handouts at the taxpayers' expense. We seek no less prudent supervision of matters involving the public purse.

As has been especially clear in recent months, the British people are fed up with the Government's excuses and double standards in regard to share options and the excesses of the privatised utilities. They want not mere words—such as the Prime Minister's admission that he found such abuses "distasteful"—but action. Families with ordinary incomes whose living standards fell last year and are falling now, and must pay an extra £812 in tax this year, are angry about the abuses at the top.

The Government should deal with these scandals. The chairman of the National Grid Company is set to make £2 million this year; the chief executive of British Gas has been awarded a 75 per cent. increase in his basic annual salary—an extra £205,000. That is on top of the share options, amounting to more than £100 million, taken out in the privatised utilities alone last year.

The Prime Minister has said that the Government may consider acting after the Greenbury committee has reported—indeed, that they may take legislative action. Even since that statement, however, three directors of Norweb alone have exercised share options netting them a combined benefit of more than £1 million. That will do nothing to make the public feel confident that the Government have any intention of ending the excesses of privatised industries.

We have set out the action that needs to be taken. The regulation of water, gas, electricity and telecommunications must be made open: there must be public hearings enabling customers to question the privatised utilities about their service to the public, and about profits and boardroom pay, before the prices are set. Regulators should have the power to cut prices in the event of "top pay" and share option abuses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying rather wide of the new clause.

Mr. Smith: I was just coming to the part of the new clause that deals with the effects on revenue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those effects are considerable. We also want executive share options to be taxed as income to discourage abuse.

It is high time that the Government listened to the public, and ended the indefensible position in which there is one rule for the few and another for the many. These discretionary share options are very expensive to the public purse: even the Government estimate that the cost to the taxpayer in the financial year that is now ending was some £60 million. That is a large amount, even if it is an underestimate—as we have argued it is, because it does not take account of all the opportunities for tax planning and avoidance.

Surely it is right to ask, as our new clause does, how such schemes affect the public purse and what public benefits they produce. I look forward to hearing from the Financial Secretary exactly what benefit the public are receiving in return for the huge handouts involved in the tax subsidies for those schemes.

It is not good enough for the Government to try to subcontract their responsibilities to the Greenbury committee. Important though that body is, and important though it is that the views of the CBI are taken into account, it cannot stand in for the Government. Paul Foot, writing in *The Guardian*, provided an amusing insight—although I do not always agree with him politically. Musing on what might have happened if Labour had been in government, he attempted to draw a parallel:

> "Imagine, for instance, that the trade union leaders, in a sudden rush of enthusiasm, pay themselves enormous wage increases. Imagine that Bill Morris or John Edmonds tripled their salaries. Imagine the sustained howl of protest in the newspapers.
>
> Investigative journalists would suddenly flourish at the Daily Mail. The union leaders would be pursued by persistent hacks who would describe in detail every morsel of food they consumed at La Gavroche"—

whatever that is—

> "and every gold tap in their country mansions.
>
> Imagine, then, the Government being panicked into a response. Imagine the Lord Privy Seal, John Prescott, announcing that his government had decided to suspend all further action on the matter until a committee of trade unionists, previously set up by the TUC, made their recommendations. Imagine, what's more, that the TUC committee was headed by Bill Morris and John Edmonds.
>
> Can you conjure up the Daily Mail headline: BLAIR'S BACK-SCRATCHING BUDDIES. A portentous leader in the Daily Telegraph would condemn the Government for insulting Parliament. 'What has become a matter of urgent public interest—a matter which threatens the very integrity of our public life—is to be dealt with by a cabal led by the very brothers who stand accused of enriching themselves beyond the dreams of avarice.'
>
> Strangely, there are few such headlines or leaders in the Mail or the Telegraph about the Greenbury committee",

which, Mr. Foot suggests, comprises

[Mr. Smith]

"a clutch of millionaires appointed by the Confederation of British Industry to investigate the scandal of, er, millionaires paying themselves grotesque salaries and share options."

It is a humorous piece, but does it not underline the Government's hypocrisy? This is an issue of vital public interest; there is outrage up and down the land about what the Government are allowing to happen. The Government, however, are happy to propose simply subcontracting their responsibilities to a CBI committee some of whose members are beneficiaries of the very schemes that they are charged with investigating. That is unacceptable to the public, and it should be unacceptable to the House.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that discretionary share option schemes in the privatised utilities should be treated differently, in tax terms, from such schemes generally? I understood that his policy was to subject them all to income tax. If the former is not his policy, what is the point of producing the report?

Mr. Smith: The point of producing a report that is specially geared to the privatised utilities is twofold. First, those utilities have attracted the most public concern, and have involved the most outrageous abuses. Secondly, there is an interaction, in the fiscal consequences and the consequences for the public purse, between the under-valuation of the assets of the utilities when they were sold and the benefits that the bosses have subsequently been able to extract.

The hon. Gentleman asks whether, in this as in other matters, the law relating to tax should apply equally to schemes in the privatised utilities and those elsewhere. Of course it should: we have made it clear that we consider it sensible and prudent to tax executive share options as income.

It would be interesting to hear from the Financial Secretary what reason the Government could possibly adduce for failing to present the report for which we have called. It cannot be that there are too many schemes to assess. Each scheme has to be formally approved, and there are only 5,000 such schemes covering the privatised utilities and others.

In the case of the privatised utilities, there are 12 regional electricity companies, 10 water companies, two major power generators, one gas company and one telecommunications company. Such a report should not be beyond the Government's resources in the time between now and the Budget. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), who nods agreement.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South) *indicated dissent.*

Ms Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is nodding off.

5.30 pm

Mr. Smith: I assure my hon. Friend that he is not; he is listening attentively, and is vigorously agreeing.

Mr. Porter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I will not give way, because the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his views clear in the debate.

Our suggestion is reasonable and feasible, and the Government can have no argument for not accepting the new clause, which is in the public interest. The regulators of the privatised utilities might also find such a report helpful.

Professor Littlechild of Oftel agreed prices with the regional electricity companies, and was subsequently surprised when Northern Electric found an additional £560 million to defend itself against the bid from Trafalgar House. That shows that the resources were not quite what he expected. Mr. Byatt showed equal surprise when North West Water found an additional £35 million to split between customers and shareholders.

Against that backdrop, it is sensible and in the public interest, and that of taxpayers and the public purse, to have precisely such a report and information as an essential guide to enlightened policy.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman wants to have the regulator involved, or thinks that the regulator will be interested. Share options involve the issue of shares to employees and directors, and have nothing to do with the pricing of gas or any other commodity. The issue is approved in general meeting, when shareholders decide that they are happy to see a dilution of their holding in the best interests of the employees and directors of the company and its good management.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman came into the Chamber so recently that he seemed to be out of breath during his intervention. The schemes have not been approved by shareholders: that is precisely the point of one of the main reforms for which we are calling. We say that shareholders should have the opportunity properly to regulate these schemes.

Mr. Legg: Share option schemes have to be approved by the shareholders in general meeting, and that happens in every company.

Mr. Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman claim that the amounts that have been paid to these top bosses were agreed by the shareholders, and were subjected to proper scrutiny? They were not, and that is precisely why we want the powers and composition of remuneration committees to be strengthened.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the regulator. It is relevant to pull the regulator into the picture precisely because the top bosses of these firms should not be able to benefit to such an outrageous extent. That benefit is unrelated to their personal performance, or, in many cases, to the performance of the companies of which they are directors.

As everybody knows, the benefit derives primarily from what happens more generally in the market, and that is precisely what the public find so objectionable about these handouts. They also object to their scale, and to the fact that they are unrelated to performance. They also find it objectionable that a few individuals get a benefit which is not available to the overwhelming majority of our people. No matter how hard they work, or how much they contribute to their companies, most people would never receive such benefits in a million years.

Mr. Legg *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman. I shall allow him to catch his breath, and perhaps give way to him again before I finish.

It is in the interests of the public and of customers and taxpayers that the report for which the new clause calls should be produced. A Government refusal to accept it would be consistent with the way in which they have mismanaged fiscal policy generally in this area and elsewhere. For example, the cost of profit-related pay went up from £25 million in 1990-91 to £500 million in 1994-95. It has become one of the largest reliefs.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) inquired of the Chancellor of the Exchequer about evidence of the effects of such schemes on companies which operate them and on the economy, he was told:

> "Studies on profit-sharing schemes generally suggest that they are associated with increased employee involvement and increases in productivity."—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. *241*.]

The Government should be less vacuous and more specific than that. What studies are they talking about, and what are the changes in productivity? In opening up what has become a bonanza for the privatised utilities and the bosses, the Government must justify themselves and their record to the electorate a good deal better than that.

The Government could make a start by accepting our new clause. If they refuse to accept it, and our arguments on behalf of the overwhelming majority of the public, it will be further confirmation of their hypocrisy. They would never allow any fully public service to be so profligate in the management of finances as they are in respect of these executive share option schemes and their tax subsidies. They will stand guilty yet again of incompetence, because any enterprise, whether publicly or privately owned, could not prosper if it operated in the way in which the Government operate these schemes. Moreover, they will stand guilty of failing to look after the interests of taxpayers as a whole, because it is they who subsidise the few who benefit from the schemes.

It is high time that the country had a Government who properly looked after the interests of the many, instead of allowing the few to feather their nests. That is what the privatised utility bosses are doing under the schemes which the Government seem so ready to tolerate, and which they have done so much to encourage. Our new clause makes prudent sense for the public and the taxpayer.

Mr. Barry Porter: I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I am sorry that he spoiled his case by using emotive words such as "bosses", and by deploying the envy argument. That is a green argument, not in the environmental sense but in the sense of envy and jealousy. If he had reduced his rhetoric, I might have agreed with him a bit more.

I shall not vote for the new clause, or abstain. It is not merely the forces of envy and jealousy that have reservations about what has happened in quasi-monopolistic privatised industries, because many people believe in rewards for endeavour. I am not arguing that the managers and chief executives of the privatised utilities are being overpaid; I do not know how we can judge that. It must be a matter for the shareholders, which is what the Government have been arguing.

However, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will outline the framework of what the Government intend to do about the problem. I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, East that, while the Greenbury committee is of serious importance, the matter cannot be left until we get its report.

I am sure that Ministers are exercising their little grey cells in that direction. I hope that we will get some specific indication, rather than a broad generalisation, of what the Government intend to do, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister having accepted in principle that something needs to be done. I await with interest the Financial Secretary's reply.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It will be interesting to see the Financial Secretary's reaction to the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said, it is very much a test of how concerned the Government really are about the share option scandal, and the outrage felt about it.

Through no fault of my own, I hope, I have spent more time outside the House than inside it during the past two months. Therefore, I can tell the Financial Secretary that we are not exaggerating the sense of outrage felt by so many people throughout the country—by no means only Labour voters—that so much can accrue to so few people who, at the end of the day, are simply doing precisely the work they did previously, when the utilities were in public ownership.

Not only have the salaries of those who run the privatised industries increased substantially, but they have been given various perks—altogether almost as though they had won the top prizes in the national lottery a number of times over. In addition, if they were to realise the share options, a great deal more money would accrue to them, which would cause further concern throughout the country.

I have been studying some of the figures. Based on share prices at 30 March, the value of shares held under option by the directors of the water, electricity and gas companies totals no less than £80 million. The profit that could be made were those shares to be sold would be about £27 million, to be shared by only a few individuals.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) made a fair-minded speech, except that he took my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East to task for using what he called emotive language about bosses. But they are bosses; they run the industries. Almost without exception, those same people were running the industries when they were in public ownership and they were receiving a reasonable salary; but since privatisation, they have received salary increases far, far in excess in percentage terms of anything our constituents could ever get. They have also had various perks, and now they have share options.

The Government's only response is to say that, although they do not really like it, there is nothing they can do about it. As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said, they think that it is a matter for the shareholders. I can tell the Government that what

[Mr. David Winnick]

has been happening with these directors smells as much among the electorate as what happened with Westminster council—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is nice to see the hon. Gentleman in his place once again, but I must tell him that we are not debating Westminster council this afternoon.

Mr. Winnick: I was merely using that council as an illustration, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I cannot help but compare the Government's attitude to bosses' salaries with their attitude towards the shabby way in which nurses and others in the national health service have been treated. However, I will not go any further down that road, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I know that you would rule me out of order.

5.45 pm

Tonight, the Government have a test on their hands. If they are truly concerned about what has been happening and about the sense of outrage felt throughout the country, they will accept Labour's very reasonable new clause. After all, it is not in such terms that the Government could say that it ran wholly against their philosophy; it would not return the industries to public ownership. It is a reasonably phrased new clause, which is concerned with public revenues.

Time and again, the Government say how concerned they are about public revenues, but when it comes to the fat cats, the bosses—I make no apology for using what Conservative Members may consider emotive language—and the need to deal with the scandal of the past few years, the test will be whether the Financial Secretary is prepared to respond positively to the new clause.

If the Government want to know why they are suffering from such unpopularity throughout the country—more so, perhaps, than any other Government since the war—I can tell them that it is because people believe that they deal differently with the fat cats than they do with the rest of the population. Ordinary employees know that they are likely to get a raw deal from the Government, but they do not believe that the Government will act in the same way towards the fat cats.

Although Conservative Members may not like what I am saying, and may feel that I am not presenting the picture fairly, the truth is that a great deal of the Government's unpopularity and the way in which, increasingly, they are held in contempt, is a result of the very strong belief that the Government do not give a damn about the ordinary people, be they the nurses or any other group who earn an ordinary living. The Government could not care less about what sort of wage increases—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman has been absent through illness, and I realise that now that he has returned, he wishes to cover a whole spectrum of issues, but he must not do so under this new clause. His remarks must relate to share option schemes.

Mr. Winnick: I appreciate your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was concluding my remarks, and trying to show why people throughout the country feel very strongly that the Government treat ordinary people—even when they lose their jobs—very differently from the way that they treat the fat cats.

If the Government want to show a genuine concern about the scandal surrounding the chief executives of the privatised industries, they will accept the new clause. However, Labour Members know full well that they have no intention of doing anything of the sort. That proves the point that we have made repeatedly—that the fat cats can do what they like because it is they whom the Government think should be rewarded in every possible way.

Mr. Tim Smith: It is good to see the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) back in his place. There is no doubt that there is considerable public disquiet about the matters that he raised.

I have some sympathy with the proposal of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) that the Treasury should produce a report. Reports are useful, and they provide information on which decisions can be made. He was kind enough to support my proposal that the Inland Revenue should produce a report, which the Committee considering the Bill agreed to.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again on his initiative in relation to the tax simplification clause. Does he agree that it would only be right for that clause to be known as the Smith clause?

Mr. Smith: Certainly. As the hon. Gentleman was good enough to support it, it should undoubtedly be known as the Smith clause.

In an intervention, the hon. Gentleman told me that he did not think that the tax system should distinguish between private utilities and companies in general. I am doubtful, therefore, about the value of producing the report. The question is how we should respond to the public disquiet that we all accept exists. Should we do so through the tax system, through the regulator, or by trying to persuade shareholders to do something about the matter?

I think that Paul Foot drew an interesting parallel with trade unions in an article in *The Guardian*. Clearly, accountability works much better in trade unions. It is obvious that, if trade union officials tried to abuse their position in the way that it has been suggested chairmen and chief executives of some companies have, union members would not stand for it. They would take action to deal with that. A direct relationship exists there between union members, the union council, and the general secretary.

When it comes to companies, however, clearly something is wrong with the system. We talk about large shareholders and institutional shareholders, but behind those shareholders stand the ordinary people who are so concerned about what is going on.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Does the difficulty not lie in the fact that customers of those companies are the victims of what is happening? Shareholders may, in a narrow sense, think that they benefit from that activity, but surely it is the customers who are suffering. They are the ones who need to be given a voice.

Mr. Smith: I do not accept that customers are suffering. The amounts involving customers are trivial. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade recently gave some figures about British Gas. They showed that, if the director of British Gas were paid nothing, the annual benefit to each customer would be trivial. I do not think that it is a matter for customers.

The other important point is that, since privatisation, both the customers and shareholders of those companies have benefited. If one takes British Gas, in the past nine years, the price of gas has fallen by 20 per cent. in real terms. At the same time, the business's profitability has increased substantially, because new pressure has been placed on management to become more efficient and to drive costs down. As profitability has risen, so has the share price.

Mr. Timms: May I give the hon. Gentleman the example of Thames Water? Last week, it was revealed that it had agreed with the regulator that it would invest £2.1 billion, and that it would set its prices according to that agreement. Now it has emerged that, in the next five years, it will invest only £1.75 billion; therefore, it is investing significantly less than had been agreed. Undoubtedly that is boosting the share price and share options, but it is leading to inadequate investment in Thames Water's infrastructure in its region. That is of particular concern to my constituents.

Thames Water is undertaking major sewer renovation work in my constituency in an extremely penny-pinching way, which is causing enormous difficulties for my constituents. The arrangement whereby Thames Water's objective boosts its share price, and therefore share options, is causing the problems.

Mr. Smith: I am not familiar with the details of Thames Water. Some of my constituents are customers, so I would be concerned about that matter. The normal effect, however, of reducing investment is to reduce profitability. Last week, North West Water announced that extra dividends would be paid to shareholders, and that there would be extra investment for customers, and a reduction in customers' bills.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Hear, hear.

Mr. Smith: I am sure that my hon. Friend is pleased about that, because the customers will benefit along with the shareholders. That has been the double benefit of privatisation.

I still think that the best way to tackle share option schemes is to try to persuade shareholders to do something about them. The Greenbury committee has been criticised because it consists, or so it is alleged, of the very people who are abusing the system, but they are the people best placed to deal with the matter.

Behind institutional shareholders stand the millions of people who put money into pension schemes. Every hon. Member has an interest, because our pension scheme has no doubt been invested in British Gas, and in water, electricity and other companies. If we consider the pension scheme's accounts, we shall find that it is no different from any other pension scheme.

Pension scheme members and people who invest in life policies stand behind institutional shareholders. If those people were able to have more of a say in the matter, something would be done about it.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman thinks that shareholders should exert greater pressure. The Government are a substantial shareholder in both PowerGen and National Power. Does he therefore agree that the Government have failed in their duty to protect the public's interest by not exerting their shareholder powers in those companies?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady is a few weeks out of date, as the Government sold their remaining shareholding in those companies a few weeks ago. The Government are, of course, a unique shareholder. I am not in favour of the Government using their shareholding to achieve those objectives. The Government used to interfere in nationalised industries for all sorts of nefarious reasons that had nothing to do with providing a decent service. It is down to shareholders. After all, directors will benefit from discretionary share option schemes only if the share price rises; otherwise, they will not.

Since privatisation, electricity businesses have been far more successful in driving down costs than anyone—including the Treasury and the City—had anticipated. Nobody had understood just how inefficient the electricity companies were when they were owned by the Government. Generally, nationalised industries are inefficient. Costs have been driven down substantially. As a result, profits have risen rapidly. As a consequence, the share price has risen rapidly.

Perhaps the regulator should have taken a tougher stance; that is another issue. Management has been successful in producing more efficient companies. The share price has risen. Why should not the directors of companies benefit in those circumstances? That is what a share option scheme is about.

As I said in Committee, it is not widely appreciated that retained profits, and not money borrowed from banks or raised on the stock exchange, are the main source of investment for companies. Those profits are important. The profitability of industry is extremely important. In any company, the principal people who can determine the profitability level are, of course, the senior management—the directors. That is why it is right that a special discretionary share options scheme should be widely available. It encourages efficiency, more investment and more profitability.

Particular cases of abuse in privatised utilities have been mentioned. We must move as quickly as we can away from their monopolistic position by injecting more competition into the system. That is what the Government are doing.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Is not the whole point that we are talking about privatised monopolies? That is the base from which directors work. They do not do anything over and above what other shareholders do. Those shareholders take risks, but no risk was involved for those directors. They work in privatised monopolies. Surely the Government should have done something at an early stage.

Mr. Smith: It is true that those companies have not been subject to the same competition as, for example, major retailers, which face intense competition, but they have been subjected at least to the pressures that come from having shareholders. As a consequence, they have become much more efficient. They have driven their costs down. It is right that management should be rewarded for that.

[Mr. Smith]

I agree, however, that we need to go further and to remove, as far as we can, those companies' monopolistic status. That is what we are doing with the Gas Bill, which introduces competition at all levels of the gas supply industry. We shall have the same provision for the electricity industry. Such competition will not be introduced in the water industry, which is a natural monopoly, where it is much more difficult to inject competition. I accept that, but it is important to introduce competition into the system so that management are subject to the same pressures as people in other businesses.

Mr. Timms: How is it possible to introduce competition into the water industry? In reality, cannot costs be cut in that industry only by reducing the level of service to the customers?

Mr. Smith: I know that it is difficult to introduce competition into the water industry, because I made an inquiry after we passed the Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992, which introduces an element of competition into the water industry. I am a customer of the Three Valleys water company, and Thames Water is half a mile down the road, so I wrote to Thames Water to see whether I could change suppliers. It told me that, if I paid £10,000 to have the main extended to my house, I would be welcome to buy its water.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that competition in the supply of water is more difficult to organise, but it can be done on the same basis as it is being done for gas. The pipes could be kept in public ownership, and different suppliers could supply the water. It is possible, but it is much more difficult.

As far as possible, we need more competition to put the utilities on the same basis as other businesses. These are the right pressures to place on those companies, rather than trying to tackle the problem through the tax system. It is tempting to try to use the tax system to achieve different, social objectives but I do not believe that we should do so in this instance.

6 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) is no longer in his place because he mentioned greed and envy. I find it interesting that every time we discuss this matter, Conservative Members use those words. That says rather a lot about them and their view of remuneration and not quite so much about Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South failed to recall that one person who has prosecuted the case for a more equitable means of controlling share options is Mr. Alistair Ross Goobey, chief executive of POSTEL, who is not known for his radical views or support of Labour Members as he was previously a special adviser to a Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Indeed, I am interested in several points made by Conservative Members about share options because they merely highlight the point that the Member for Wirral, South made: we are debating a divided society, a them-and-us society, and most people in the advanced world who are concerned about the operation of industry in the public and private sectors are very much aware of the need to reduce the them-and-us divide.

It is extremely difficult to convince people, in this week of all weeks, when they are about to have the 20th increase in taxation since the Government were elected, that those who control the privatised utilities should be treated more favourably by the tax system than those who actually work in those industries and the rest of us, who will face increased taxation from 6 April.

It beggars belief that Conservative Members can be so naive as not to see the inequities in the system. New clause 1, which I support, gives us a minor opportunity to consider in some detail the difficulties that have arisen as a result of discretionary share options in privatised utilities.

A debate is being held in this country about the effectiveness of share options. The same debate is taking place in the United States, where there is concern in the private sector about the use of stock options to allow remuneration of senior managers in a way that is not directly affected by the performance of the industries in which they are employed.

The debate is meaningful because there is considerable evidence to show that granting share options does not so much affect the performance of an industry as the performance of its share price. The share price and the performance of an industry are in many cases not directly related. Indeed, when the time comes for the publication of annual accounts, it is possible through creative accounting to make the operation of a business look much better than it has in fact been.

I would be much more convinced of the rectitude of those who argue for share option schemes if they were also prepared to build disincentives into the remuneration structure. When a company's share price increases, senior executives benefit. If there is a reduction in the share price or performance of that company, why should not those who run the company be disadvantaged? We should be in a position where true targets are set for businesses in place of the rather bizarre structure of share options that we have at the moment.

It is only in this country, the United States and France that such tax-attractive schemes tend to be introduced for senior executives. Most other countries recognise the true value of building a structure where employers and employees share together in the destiny of a company and are motivated by the destiny of that company, whether it be in the public or private sector.

Mr. Legg: Is the hon. Lady aware that 36,000 employees of British Gas benefit from share-related incentive schemes of some sort?

Mrs. Liddell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that there are different kinds of share option schemes. The 36,000 ordinary employees of British Gas usually benefit from savings-related share schemes and tend to be less able to have an impact on the share price than the senior executives who can directly affect it.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) mentioned the impact that institutional shareholders can have on controlling the excesses of senior management. That was a preposterous suggestion. Part of the argument of Mr. Ross Goobey has been that institutional shareholders are limited in their ability to control the senior management of companies. There is an informal network that operates among institutional shareholders. They are the same people, usually male and usually from the same schools, and they are recycled time and again. They turn up at the same annual meetings, eat the same prawn cocktails and have the same impact on the share remuneration schemes because they benefit from share remuneration schemes.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will make it clear how it is equitable that the taxation system that applies to the sale of share options should be different from that which applies to other aspects of earned income. That is extremely difficult to explain to members of the public who, like my constituents, see their service from British Gas reduced by the closure of gas showrooms. There are fears about what will happen to assistance for disabled people from the gas industry.

It is difficult to explain to people why senior executives in the gas industry can choose when to activate their options and can phase in the activation of their options over time to take advantage of allowances that are available through capital gains tax. They can even pass on those share options to their spouse to allow their wife or husband to benefit from those share options and from the capital allowances that are available to them.

That is manifestly unfair and people are not that gullible. They see that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest of us. The privatised utilities have been seen as basic to the structure of our country. They mainly operate as monopolies or quasi-monopolies. Those who are or have been in a position to benefit from the first tranches of share options—and they were granted options at a rate that was greatly deflated and had been massively underestimated—can now become millionaires, in some cases millionaires many times over.

The new clause seeks only a rational report and analysis of what is happening and of the impact on the Exchequer of the proposals so that people can make genuine judgments. It was not so very long ago that we were told by the Prime Minister of his commitment to ending inequality. The most fundamental inequality is this system of share options, which is unfair and inefficient. No one can put hand on heart and prove that the existence of share options dramatically improves, or in any way affects, the performance of a company or of an executive. Research published at the weekend suggested that the schemes have a limited impact on improving company performance.

The Financial Secretary has the opportunity to instigate an examination into the operation of such schemes and their impact on the economy and to consider the structure of the tax system in such a way as to get rid of the inequalities and convince the people that the Government are not prepared just to govern in the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I think that I am right in saying that the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill had 25 sittings. Obviously, it discussed many issues, but I suspect that this is the one that the public will consider very carefully. It is difficult to identify many of the other issues that we discussed in our number-crunching sittings in Committee as being in the forefront of public consciousness.

The public will carefully watch the Government's reaction to the new clause, which is not a radical attempt to bring down the Government, much as we would like to do so, but merely asks for a report back to the House. Why do we want such a report? We are talking about the principle of discretionary approved share option schemes, which are of massive public concern, as has been accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We are also considering the way in which such schemes are taxed. Approved schemes are taxed not as earned income but as a capital gain—I would argue about the concept of earned income, but perhaps that is an argument for another day. As far as I and many members of the public can see, the share option schemes have been established by a relatively small cabal and have enabled executives to freeload on privatised monopolies—Conservative Members have accepted that they are such monopolies—and to gain tremendously.

The speech of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who made a considerable contribution to the Standing Committee—some of it was useful and no doubt he would say the same for Opposition Members—was striking, but I gained the feeling that, the longer that he went on, the more desperate he became. Having created the conditions in which abuses—the word that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield used—can take place, the Government are turning their faces steadfastly against any reports to the House on those abuses, which is interesting. The public will be rightly outraged if they perceive that executive share options are being used to line the pockets of people who have done nothing to earn such largesse, while the Government refuse the House the opportunity to study in more detail the effect that the schemes are having on revenue. The new clause is the minimum that the public can expect as regards knowing exactly what is going on.

6.15 pm

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, and the other thing that shocked me about his speech was that he tried to argue that such executive share option schemes are necessary to encourage executive directors to work hard. It is interesting that Mr. Cedric Brown has to have nearly £700,000 worth of share options to work harder, but people in gas showrooms have to have a 3 per cent. pay cut to make them do so. It is a nice philosophical question, with which the Government singularly failed to deal throughout our debates in Committee.

The Government have also failed to recognise the chronic sense of injustice and unfairness that is felt throughout the country about the way in which executive share option schemes are operating. For some reason that is beyond me, the Government simply refuse to recognise it and the new clause is extremely important in that regard.

Many of us will be watching with great interest. In reply to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), the hon. Member for Beaconsfield said that the Government had disposed of their 40 per cent. shareholding in PowerGen and National Power. Another task is coming up, however, and it will be a test of the Government's approach to the issue. What will be their attitude to the give-away of the national grid? It was valued at £1 billion and handed over as the most massive Christmas present in history to the regional electricity companies, which are going to give it away, throw it away, privatise it, or sell it off for £4 billion—and that is the conservative estimate. What have the executive directors of the regional electricity companies done to warrant that massive unearned profit? They have done

[Mr. George Stevenson]

absolutely nothing. We shall watch extremely carefully how the Government approach the latest instalment of the largesse represented by the executive share option schemes.

Why should there be a report to the House? I mentioned the fact that the public are extremely concerned about the issue. The House should reflect that concern. Even at this late stage, I hope that the Government will recognise that it exists and that this is the place to deal with it.

It appears that the shares of the companies involved have gone up not only because they were undervalued in the first place but because many hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost in the past few years. That is bad enough, but the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) spoke of envy and jealousy. He should speak to my constituents, and to those of every other hon. Member who have lost their jobs as a result of those very same executive directors and ask them what they feel about envy, jealousy and the feel-good factor. He should ask them how they feel about the fact that the privatised utilities seem to be employing a strategy of maintaining or increasing their share value at whatever cost not in the interests of the country or of investment but because they are constantly looking over their shoulders for the next hostile takeover bid. Those issues are not peripheral; they are fundamental and are rightly reflected in the public's concern.

The least that the House can do is support the new clause, which proposes that the Government should report to Parliament so that extremely important issues can be examined in more detail. If Conservative Members vote in the Lobby to defeat the new clause, as we expect they will, I do not believe for a moment that the great British public will understand their action.

Ms Hodge: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on his speech, which was excellent and reasonable. It is difficult to understand how anyone could not be moved by such reason. This would be a sad day if Conservative Members were moved by party interests rather than national interests in rejecting this small move to bring to public account an issue that has caused such outrage in the community at large.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) said, the Prime Minister is on record as saying at Prime Minister's questions that he believes that it is the Government's responsibility to reduce inequality. The new clause strikes at the heart of that obligation.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) reiterated what many other Tory Members have said—that everybody has benefited from the efficiencies gained from privatising public utilities. Were there efficiencies to be gained, there is no reason why they could not have been gained while retaining those utilities in the public sector. If they were not attained, it is because of the Government's inefficiency and it reflects their mismanagement of those important sectors of the economy. It has nothing to do with privatising the public utilities.

The Labour party wants an economy that is run in the public interest. Two essential features of such an economy are fairness and openness, both of which are severely undermined by the scandal of discretionary share option schemes in the privatised utilities, particularly when low-paid workers are being offered paltry wage increases. We have had considerable interest recently in demonstrations by health service workers about the 1 per cent. pay increase that has been guaranteed nationally. Everybody's sense of social justice—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must address the majority of her speech to discretionary share option schemes. Other allusions are acceptable, but so far the minority of her comments have related to the new clause.

Ms Hodge: I understand what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was trying to juxtapose the two areas of public interest.

It adds insult to injury when people cannot even hold those responsible for such huge gains made through discretionary share option schemes to account for their actions. That is the purpose of the new clause.

We have already witnessed a massive unfair pay explosion among the bosses of the private monopolies. For example, last year the board of National Power awarded itself a 25 per cent. increase in remuneration, which was in stark contrast to the 4 per cent. average increase for its employees. The gap between the pay of people in the boardroom and people on the shop floor is even more stark. A comparison of last year and the year before privatisation shows that the total remuneration package for the highest-paid directors of the privatised utilities rose by an average of 321 per cent. In three of the privatised utilities, the directors gave themselves rises of more than 400 per cent. The boss of North West Water heads what I consider to be the roll of shame with an increase of 619 per cent.

Share option schemes are another side of the same coin. Some £500 million was paid out to just nine directors of PowerGen and National Power last year alone. That is an average of more than £500,000 each, which would be enough to pay for an extra 30 staff in a hospital or more than 100 full-time places in a good nursery school. Have we got our national priorities right? In addition, a further £18 million is yet to be cashed in by the very same directors and chief executives. Last year alone, the chief executives of PowerGen and National Power earned more than £1 million each in pay and share options, and they are set to make a further £1 million each in the coming year. It is a scandal of momentous proportions.

The greatest scandal of all is National Grid, as this year alone its chairman could make an astounding £2 million, almost £1.8 million of which is immediate share option profits. That is in a company that is yet to trade properly. With such handouts, the Government are giving private ownership a bad name.

Those are just a selection of the abuses being committed by the private utilities. We object not to rewards for excellence, entrepreneurship or enterprise but to the fact that the bosses of those private monopolies vote themselves handsome packages whereas their employees are forced to tighten their belts and consumers must make ends meet. More often than not, they are not new people who have been attracted into those industries since privatisation but the same old faces who are making a quick buck because there is nobody around to stop them doing so. That is the unacceptable face of capitalism.

The new clause simply seeks to make this area a little more transparent and open it up to public scrutiny. Parliament has a duty to monitor the operation of those share option schemes. Furthermore, I cannot see the argument against taxing share options as income. People have a right to know what is happening, how much a small number of very well-paid people are earning and what potential revenues are being lost to the public purse by the Government's refusal to tax share options as income. The new clause simply provides a new opportunity to put that information in the public domain.

The Government have claimed that those issues are the business of shareholders, and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield seemed to support that view. In a private monopoly that serves a vital public interest, such a contention is wrong. The Government have a responsibility to consider the interests of the general public, consumers and the environment. Shareholders could have greater opportunities to hold their utility bosses to account by electing a remuneration committee, to include people who are not on the board of directors. It could be told the pay and perks of individual board members and could vote on their remuneration.

The Government have a duty to act to safeguard the interests of taxpayers and consumers. Monopoly industries simply cannot be left to their own devices in the hope that, at some time in the future, some sort of competition will emerge.

Last week, we were lobbied by users and workers of the health and education services. The contrast between their situation and that of the people whom we are discussing tonight could not be more stark. It is a classic case of private greed against public need; of the interests of the many against the privileges of the few.

There is widespread public concern that the House and the Government have got their priorities badly wrong. The new clause provides the means of starting to undo that damage. We should start to hold the privatised utilities to public account. New clause 1 provides the foundation for doing so and I commend it to the House.

6.30 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I wonder whether Conservative Members will dare to venture out in the next few weeks to canvass during the local government elections. I wonder whether that possibility offers them any great opportunities or is a pleasant prospect to them.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury might like to come to my constituency and knock on one or two doors. Perhaps he could introduce himself with the words, "I am here from the Government. I have come to help you." I am sure that one of the instinctive responses from the people he spoke to would be that they consider that the Government are extremely unfair. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would be offered many anecdotes to back up that instinct, but what would come out most strongly is how unfair people consider share option schemes and other pay excesses in the privatised utilities. People feel incensed about that. They feel that it is wrong and that the Government should do something about it.

People are angry because their basic sense of reasonableness has been offended by such excessive pay increases and share option schemes. They are angry that directors and the like are receiving mega sums of money, which those people could not possibly dream of, unless, perhaps, they won the lottery. People are also angry that the Government either do not want to, or cannot, do anything about those excesses—either way, people are angry.

People are aggrieved not only because their basic sense of fairness has been offended but because those excesses carry a basic hallmark of the Government and their policies—their inability to act. Week after week, the Prime Minister came to the Chamber and said that such share options were not the Government's responsibility. He said that the Government had merely been responsible for privatising the utilities and introducing the regulations that govern them. He claimed, however, that the Government were not responsible for share option schemes and other pay excesses. Then, suddenly, one Prime Minister's Question Time, in one sentence, the right hon. Gentleman sold a dummy that sent all his hon. Friends the wrong way, when he said that he was concerned about the issue. He had claimed that it was nothing to do with the Government and all to do with the utility companies and their directors, but, suddenly, he accepted that the issue caused him concern. He did not promise any action, however, but said that the Government would await the Greenbury report. That is unacceptable.

The Greenbury committee, however well intentioned, is equivalent to the captains of industry reporting on themselves. It is no substitute for the Government taking a view and proposing some measures to deal with the matter. It is almost as though a new word has entered the English language. In future, "to Greenbury" may mean to delegate an issue which one feels uncomfortable about and about which one has no real idea what to do, in the basic hope that it will go away.

That seems to be the Government's attitude. They feel uncomfortable about share options, but they have no idea what to do about them. They hope that if they refer the problem to some committee that will report some months later, the steam will go out of the issue and it will go away. In that way, they hope that they will not have to make any difficult choices.

That is not the public's reaction to share options. They are angry at the unfairness, because directors vote for such schemes for themselves. Those directors decide how much money they should award themselves. Most people do not feel that that is right, not least because the Government have created the circumstances by which directors can make such decisions. The public also believe that directors are voting themselves pay increases through share option schemes to reward themselves for doing precisely the same job as they did before their companies were privatised. That may not be true of every utility, but it is true of the water industry, whose chairmen and chief executives are doing precisely the same job, with no more competition than that to which they were subject before privatisation. Those individuals have voted pay awards for themselves.

Share option schemes do not represent an attempt to involve executives in the ownership of a company. They are not the means by which, in the long term, executives will receive genuine rewards for the way in which they have managed their company and because that company has become more efficient. Those share options are one-way tickets, because it is not possible to make a loss. If the share price goes down, the executives suffer no loss; they simply fail to make a windfall gain. That offends people, including many in industry who may have made

[Mr. Clive Betts]

arrangements in the past whereby they took a stake in a company as managers and directors. They lost as well as gained when share prices went down and up. Those individuals sat on a company board for a number of years and were genuinely responsible for the management and running of their company as part-owners of it. They benefited or lost accordingly. Share option schemes do not operate in the same way. They are one-way bets, which result in winners only and no losers. That offends people greatly.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) is not in his place, but today he repeated the argument he made in Committee about retained profits. I accept that they are an important means of investment, but as the Opposition made clear in Committee, the problem with this country is the low level of retained profits. Share option schemes are an incentive because, although the beneficiaries may not keep them for a long time—usually they sell them quickly to make a profit—executives are keen to pay out dividends to boost share prices in the short term. In that way, those executives make their gains by selling the shares that are part of their share option scheme packages. That is what they are all about. They are not an incentive to retain profits for investment.

Reasonable people are offended when they hear about cases like that of one of my constituents, whom I saw today. Mrs. Wells, from Darnall in my constituency, lives beside a brook. In the past few months, the river served by that brook has gone into full flow several times due to heavy rainfall, and when that happens, the brook becomes an open sewer. As it flows over my constituent's garden wall, it carries with it raw sewage, which then flows past my constituent's home. That pollutes the river, creates an awful smell and attracts rats, which have even entered her home.

My constituent has asked Yorkshire Water to invest sufficient money in its next five-year capital programme to deal with the problem, but it has said that it cannot afford to do so. It has told her that it does not have sufficient money from its retained profits to afford that. In the next five years, however, what Yorkshire Water will pay in share option schemes to its directors is more than it would cost it to make a modest investment to deal with the raw sewage that passes the home of someone who lives 50 yd from a major shopping centre. That is unacceptable. It is another reason for people's outrage and why they believe that share option schemes are grievously unfair and action is needed to tackle them.

The Labour party has made a number of basic proposals to deal with the problem, and that the Government could adopt if they were minded to. We have argued for greater disclosure. It is all right for Conservative Members to say that shareholders are told about share option schemes, but why were we treated to the performance of Cedric Brown before the Select Committee on Employment? He had to have his pay package extracted from him as if having teeth drawn without anaesthetic. He did not want to give that information and others have been embarrassed by what he said, because he was too up front. The name of the game has been to vote pay packages through in such a way that companies hope that no one notices what is going on. Nasty questions will thus be avoided. There must be a better system of disclosure.

The Cadbury proposals must be extended, so that separate remuneration committees, made up of those who do not stand to benefit, vote for share option schemes. Basic reasonableness must be introduced into the system. It should be a basic tenet of the operation of such share schemes that the people who benefit from them do not vote for them. Go and ask the public about that. I do not believe that anyone would find one person in a hundred who felt that that proposal was unfair. Why do the Government not do something about that?

Why are not the schemes taxed as income? Conservative Members say that there is only £6,000 of untaxed income. Many people who live in my constituency do not earn £6,000 a year, let alone £6,000 of untaxed income. For many people, £6,000 is a great deal of money. When Conservative Members say that it is only £6,000, they badly misjudge public opinion.

Why should the regulator be worried about share option schemes? We have clearly demonstrated that they are linked to prices, profits and investment. They make up one package, and the Government have to adopt an opinion of the whole. The regulator has been given powers, which we believe need to be extended.

The new clause is fundamentally mild and moderate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) said, it is reasonable and moderate. We have not asked for all the things that we have said need to be done. We ask only that a report be made to the House to let the House know precisely what is going on and what is the impact of those schemes; whether, in total, the Exchequer and the British public gain or lose from those schemes.

We have already had a clear demonstration that the Government are incapable of acting on the issue. Are they now also incapable of providing information about it? Or is it not their capacity that is in doubt, but their desire to produce a report on that issue? Are they so embarrassed about it that they want to avoid further debate? If that is the case, people will not judge them kindly for their disgraceful attitude towards the issue. The Government should be prepared to produce a report and let the people know precisely what is going on.

Mr. Sutcliffe: This issue is not about greed, envy or even political advantage, as the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) suggested. It is about fairness and equity. Every Conservative Member who has spoken has recognised that the problem exists, but none has come up with a solution.

It will be interesting to hear the way in which the Financial Secretary to the Treasury replies to the debate. I hope that he will not push us to one side and tell us to wait for the Greenbury recommendations. I hope that he will tackle the issue because, if the regulator cannot consider the matter, the only organisation that can consider it is the Inland Revenue, via the tax system, and that is where the Minister's responsibility lies.

It is patently unfair that executives of privatised utilities make large sums when they are devoting no more effort to their work than they did when they worked for public utilities that benefited everyone. When those public utilities were privatised, the Government said that they would be privatised for the greater good and that many people would benefit. That was not the case. In that respect, we have witnessed the classic unfairness that has become a trademark of this Government.

The Government recognise the problem. They say that the money does not matter, but those people have benefited to the tune of £150 million. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said that 36,000 people in British Gas also have share option schemes. They do, but those share option schemes are usually "buy one, get one free" schemes, in which people have to invest their own money and take the risks. The executives have taken no risks and made no investment.

I hope that the Financial Secretary, who is very eloquent and who has been eloquent in Committee, will give the answer for the Government. It is no good the Prime Minister recognising that there is a problem but not suggesting a solution. Let us have it. Will the Government tell us what they will do about those abuses, or shall we hear nothing from the Government, as we forecast? That is patently unfair. It is not a party political issue. People throughout the spectrum are upset about those abuses, and it is about time that the Government did something about them.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): I extend a warm welcome to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and assure him, as a fellow Member of Parliament for the black country, that the anger and disgust felt about discretionary share option schemes among the private utilities is as strong and severe in Dudley, West as it is in Walsall.

Let me say at once that the directors of private utilities have done nothing illegal. All that they have done is to join the club, albeit with gathering haste in some cases. I suppose that it is the modern equivalent of the key to the executive washroom. It is the key to the executive dosh room of cosy remuneration committees, offering sybaritic salary perks to directors for what they should be doing anyway, which is acting in the best interests of their companies.

We have to draw a distinction between legislation pertaining to the privatised utilities and legislation relating to companies that are subject to the full forces of market competition, but what is basically at fault is some very lax legislation as regards Inland Revenue-approved executive share option schemes. Those schemes offer a perk because, rather than income tax, capital gains tax is payable on share options, which can be deferred almost indefinitely. Those schemes also offer an extremely generous treatment whereby share options up to the level of four times inflated salaries can be awarded to directors and senior executives.

Only the few benefit. We have heard talk about 36,000 people in British Gas who benefit from share-linked option schemes. The directors of British Gas who benefit from share-linked option schemes—they obviously have far greater schemes than any of the individual employees—have benefited to the tune of about 50,000 shares. Contrast that with their discretionary share options, whereby they have been awarded 1.3 million shares. That shows the scale of difference between properly organised share incentive schemes and executive share option schemes, which are a one-way bet and a perk to directors.

6.45 pm

One fact that has not been fully discussed in the debate but that has merit is that discretionary share option schemes can provide some benefit to consumers who have pensions that are invested in those companies, and who therefore benefit from the increase in the share price. That has been mentioned by some Conservative Members.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House must recognise that there is tension between the interests of two groups of people. On one hand, consumers whose pensions may be invested in share option schemes may benefit because directors are given an incentive and are focused on improving share performance. On the other, consumers may suffer from the consequences when certain companies are run in an aggressively short-term profit-maximising way in a deliberate attempt to boost the share price and thereby increase directors' income. That is one of the reasons why a report is very much needed, because there are potential benefits as well as the extreme costs of executive share option schemes of which we are all aware.

It is important to recognise the practical difficulties when Conservative Members speak of the need to enfranchise the people who stand behind shareholders. The shareholders of most of the private utilities are very much the shareholding institutions. I do not know how I, as a personal pension plan holder before I came to the House, could talk to the person who sold me a pension and say, "By the way, can you talk to someone who can talk to someone who can ensure that, at the next annual general meeting, you vote against those discretionary share options?" Similarly, I do not think that the House of Commons Members' pension scheme can exercise any reasonable legitimate influence on those companies at annual general meetings.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) has a good idea in trying to enfranchise those who stand behind shareholders, but I can envisage no practicable means by which that can be exercised.

Mr. Tim Smith: As an example of what already happens, we already have ethical investment and unit trusts. An individual can choose to invest in one of those trusts because it has, for example, made a policy decision not to invest in tobacco companies, drinks companies or whatever.

Mr. Pearson: I am well aware of ethical investment trusts and I have been pleased to note that their share fund performance has in many instances outperformed those of unit trusts that invest in a broader spectrum of companies without imposing those narrow criteria. I do not think that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield is seriously suggesting that shareholder pressure can operate in a broader sense against executive share option schemes, other than in those limited ethical considerations.

The simple fact is that a report is needed badly to investigate why directors of privatised utilities need executive share options at extremely lucrative levels to do what they should be doing anyway—acting in the best interests of their company—and why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) said, it can be right and reasonable that a director needs a £700,000 package to make him improve his performance when his staff are expected to accept a 3 per cent. wage cut to encourage them to increase their performance. That cannot be right.

Sir George Young: During the debate on new clause 1, Opposition Members have focused on what they perceive to be excesses resulting from the privatisation of

[Sir George Young]

the utilities. That part of the debate has been rather narrow. They have argued that consumers and taxpayers have been disadvantaged. If one stands back and looks at the policy as a whole, that is demonstrably not the case.

To begin with, let us take, for example, the interests of taxpayers. When we came into office, taxpayers were losing about £50 million a week through funds invested through the nationalised industries. From the industries that we have privatised, we are now getting £50 million a week coming in, so there has been a massive turnaround in the fortunes of the nationalised industries.

The figures which concern the taxpayer totally dwarf some of the figures mentioned in this debate. Before 1979, by and large, prices for consumers were going up and, by and large, they are now going down. The case on which new clause 1 is founded—that there has been some disadvantage to taxpayers and consumers through privatising the utilities—simply does not stand up to any examination at all.

What I found more worrying about the speeches of Opposition Members, with the exception of that from the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), was that nobody touched on the principle of whether it was worth trying to link the fortunes of a company and its shareholders with the interests of senior executives. I believe that there is a case for bridging the gap between employers and shareholders by promoting executive option schemes and the hon. Member for Monklands, East recognised it. The whole tone of the debate was critical of the principle of share option schemes for senior executives. To put the matter in some perspective, the average value of shares covered by executive share option schemes is £22,000, not the exorbitant figures mentioned by some hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) began by demanding action. If one looks at new clause 1, one sees that it would not produce any action at all, it would produce a report. I shall say in a moment why I do not believe that that report is necessary. I was pleased to hear that, instead of using the figures that the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has sometimes used, the hon. Member for Oxford, East used the figure of £60 million as the cost of executive share option schemes and abandoned the more extravagant claims which we have sometimes heard. The hon. Gentleman accused the Government of subcontracting their policy on this matter to the Greenbury committee—we are certainly not doing that—and he then subcontracted most of his speech to Paul Foot.

Our case is that the system has worked well for consumers. Consider what has happened to the caps. The regulators, by and large, have tightened the caps post-privatisation. BT started off at a retail prices index of minus 3 per cent. and it is now minus 7.5 per cent.

I was grateful for the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter). His views contrasted with what was said by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who believes that the regulator should intervene and said that he wanted him to interfere, regardless of whether that makes any difference to consumers' bills. The reality is that many Opposition Members are interested only in the politics of envy, regardless of any benefit to the consumer.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made two points on which I want to touch. One of them was replicated by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). The hon. Member for Walsall, North alleged that those who now run the privatised utilities are doing the same work as before. That simply is not the case. I speak as someone who once worked for a nationalised industry. When industries are nationalised, Ministers and civil servants take a large number of the decisions, such as those about the size of the investment programme.

The nationalised industries were overmanned and not particularly well run. They certainly did very little exporting. So it is not the case that those who now run the privatised utilities are doing exactly the same work as those who ran them before. I was delighted, however, to see the hon. Member for Walsall, North back after a spell away. He was looking much better at the end of his speech than at the beginning, so I assume that that is some part of his therapy in which it was a pleasure to take part.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) rightly posed the question of why we should pick out the privatised utilities. Why single them out? They are in the private sector. There is no case in principle why they should have a different regime to other industries in the private sector.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My right hon. Friend will have noticed that I tabled an amendment to the new clause. Why does he think that the Opposition are moving this new clause, which hits home at the directors and executives in the privatised utilities, but ignores other directors, especially those in the broadcasting industry, such as the directors of London Weekend Television who had lavish pay-outs on their share options and then donated a large part of them to the Labour leader's leadership campaign? Is there some preference between the Labour leader's election campaign and the fact that executives may be benefiting by helping the nation?

Sir George Young: If my hon. Friend's amendment had been in order, I would, of course, have been able to answer that question. As it is, the House will just have to guess what the answer might have been.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield also rightly made the point that the shareholders bear the cost of executive share options. It is they who are agreeing to diluting their interest in the company by allowing others to buy shares in the company at a preferential price. He made the point that the consumers benefit. He also said that one should examine the role of competition as an extra dimension in bringing pressure to bear on prices. In the Gas Bill, which is going through the House, we are implementing that principle.

The hon. Member for Monklands, East implied that the options were transferable to a spouse. They are not. She may have been alluding to the possibility of transferring the shares after the option has been exercised, but that is not what she said.

The House will not be surprised to hear that I cannot advise hon. Members to accept the new clause. The Inland Revenue publishes annually figures of the Exchequer costs for past years of the various tax-relieved employee financial participation schemes, including executive share option schemes. The Revenue does not break those global cost figures down between particular groups of companies and I see no good policy reason why it should.

In any event, there is a considerable amount of relevant information in the public domain. Companies are required by the Companies Act 1985 to maintain a register, which anyone can inspect, in which details of directors' interests in the companies' shares must be recorded. Where the scheme involves the issue of new shares, the register must show the number of shares under option, the period during which the option is exercisable and the exercise price. When options are exercised, it must be also be recorded in the register. The company is also obliged by law to list in its annual report or accounts the interests of its directors in the company's shares.

The stock exchange listing rules require listed companies to obtain shareholder approval at an annual general meeting for any share option schemes that involve or may involve the issue of new shares. The rules also require companies to give details to the stock exchange of all directors' share option schemes and of directors' interests in the company's shares. Much of the information mentioned in the new clause is already in the public domain. In any event, I see no basis on which the Inland Revenue could be expected to estimate the future cost of those schemes, as is required in the new clause.

Share option schemes are intended to enable companies to motivate key executives and the aim is to improve company profitability and so to benefit all shareholders, including, as was made clear in the debate, pensioners. As I said when we debated this subject in Committee, we need to remember that the main cost of such schemes falls properly on those who chiefly benefit from them—the companies and their shareholders. They carry the principal cost, not the customer nor, indeed, the taxpayer.

Tax relief schemes can be designed to link the exercise of options directly with performance. I welcome the fact that it is increasingly recognised as best practice for companies to ensure that the exercise of options depends on the attainment of tough performance targets. A recent survey found that 90 per cent. of companies floated last year intend to set targets. Indeed, the institutional investors, the Association of British Insurers and the National Association of Pension Funds, insist that it is fundamental to the exercise of options that they be subject to a realistic measure of management performance, as that is in the best interests of the company, its shareholders, customers and employees.

7 pm

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said a few weeks ago that bonuses and share options should be based on the performance of a company, and that stricter criteria may be required for the price at which shares are issued and for the circumstances in which they are exercised. All those matters are currently being examined by Sir Richard Greenbury's committee, whose report we await.

We have no quarrel with the idea that executives should be asked to deliver enhanced performance if they are to enjoy the benefits that share options can bring, but it is as well to remember that, unless the people at the top pull their weight and achieve good results, no one wins. If the company does not do well and the share price fails to rise, options deliver no rewards to the executives who hold them.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister noted that the recommendations of the committee would be addressed to companies and shareholders, but he has also said that the Government would be ready to consider any proposals that might require legislative back-up. In short, we shall be considering further the whole question of executive remuneration—including share options—in the light of the committee's findings.

I conclude by reminding the House that, under the last Labour Government, electricity prices rose by 2 per cent. every six weeks. Under this Government, they have fallen. The House now needs to ask itself: under which management regime do consumers really prosper? Our case is that they prosper under ours. Consequently I invite the House to reject new clause 1.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I should like to acknowledge the powerful arguments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), for Barking (Ms Hodge), for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe). I warmly welcome back to the Chamber our hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). It was good to see him making a characteristically robust contribution to the debate.

Replying to the debate, the Financial Secretary spent more time attempting to defend privatisation than defending the—admittedly indefensible—abuses of executive share options. In that respect he differed from the hon. Members for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who at least acknowledged that there was a problem and that something needed to be done. They must have been as disappointed as we were not to hear any promise of Government action.

The Minister did not deal with the case that my hon. Friends have made. Action is needed on the ground of fairness, and because of our responsibility for taxpayers' money. It is especially needed in the case of the privatised utilities because of their ability to exploit their monopolies and because of the fact that their share options are a one-way bet.

Having said that the Government were not subcontracting their policy on this matter to the Greenbury committee, the Financial Secretary proceeded to do just that: he said that action would follow Greenbury. That is not good enough. I commend our new clause to the House. Let us show the public that we want to act against these outrageous abuses of share options.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 283.

Division No. 123] **[7.03 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim

Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don [illegible]
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel

Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. David Willetts.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 4

POSTPONEMENT OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

'(1) In subsection (2) of section 199 of the Finance Act 1994, for "1996-97" there shall be substituted "1997-98"

(2) In subsection (3) of section 199 of the Finance Act 1994, for "1996" there shall be substituted "1997".'.—*[Ms Armstrong.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Armstrong: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 7, in clause 95, page 107, line 37, leave out '1996-97' and insert '1997-98'.

Ms Armstrong: Once again, we return to self-assessment. We do so because we foresee problems for the Government who are in office when the proposed provisions take effect. The factor dominating many of our debates in Committee was the complexity of taxation legislation. Two of the aims of self-assessment are for the taxation process to be simplified and for it to be made open to taxpayers who will, in a new way, become liable for self-assessment. We remain unconvinced—we take this view because of the way in which the Government have framed the self-assessment procedure and developed the complexity of legislation in general—that self-assessment will work in the interests of taxpayers and will secure the advantages that the Government were trumpeting when they first introduced the principle.

The Opposition are in favour of the principle of self-assessment but we are wary of the proposed manner of implementation. There was a clear defeat for the Government in Committee—it added to the defeat that the Government suffered on the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel, which took place on the Floor of the House—on an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), which is now known, as I understand it, as the Smith amendment. The amendment was tabled in an endeavour to simplify the mechanism of tax law.

[Ms Armstrong]

Members of the Committee felt so strongly that the Government suffered a defeat. It is clear, however, that although members of the Committee pushed the Government to introduce measures to simplify taxation legislation, we are still a long way from having a mechanism whereby legislation can make taxation simpler.

This year's Finance Bill is one of the longest in history and is testament to the sheer complexity of British taxation legislation. The Bill was put down by commentators as one that contained little contentious legislation. The Budget was seen as simple, not too contentious and fairly neutral. Even so, in Committee, clause after clause was described as impenetrable and extremely complex. Even hon. Members who, before they came into the House, earned their professional reputations as interpreters of and advisers on tax law, made that point. Indeed, many of the people who have talked to us during the passage of the Bill have said that it is complex and have called for the legislation to be simplified. The Institute of Taxation is one of the many organisations that have made this case.

We are moving ahead quickly with self-assessment, despite the fact that both sides of the House recognise that taxation legislation has become increasingly complex and that it is increasingly difficult to thread one's way through it. That is the context in which self-assessment is being introduced. We are fearful about the introduction of self-assessment at this stage. We all acknowledge that it will be quite a culture shock for many taxpayers and that it may lead to all sorts of difficulties which will make taxpayers upset and which will make the Government of the day fairly unpopular.

The Financial Secretary has written to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn); my hon. Friend is not feeling well today which is why I am dealing with the letter. The Minister was answering questions raised in Committee relating to the introduction of self-assessment. I am especially concerned about two aspects. The first is risk analysis and how the Government intend to pursue that matter. The second is advertising and how the Government intend to ensure that people who will be eligible for self-assessment know what is coming and how to deal with it.

On the latter point, the Government say that they estimate that they will spend some £25 million over the next three years in a public information campaign, and that on

> "present plans, they expect to spend some £15 million on advertising, mainly television and press. The remaining £10 million is intended to fund supporting activity and materials".

The letter gives no indication of when the campaign will start and no indication that it has already started. If the Government are serious about their plans, they should be doing work now. The general public and the taxpayers concerned should already be aware of what will hit them next year.

We propose, through the new clause, simply that the Government should delay the introduction of these measures for a year so that the House can be assured that every possible means has been taken to ensure that taxpayers and Inland Revenue staff know what is expected of them. We also need to be sure that the cultural change, which the Government acknowledge is necessary, has begun, both in terms of the taxpayers involved and Inland Revenue staff. We remain unconvinced that this is happening.

In his letter the Minister raises the issue of risk analysis and he describes how the Government intend to monitor taxpayers who submit forms. Obviously, each individual form will not be analysed rigorously so the Government will make a risk analysis of the number of forms that should be examined and of what, in terms of an individual taxpayer, should lead Inland Revenue staff to examine the form. The Minister also says:

> "the present assumption, on the basis of research to date, is that following risk analysis something like a third of returns will be considered for enquiry, with enquiries actually being made in something like two thirds of those cases. Of those enquiries, only a small percentage (as now) will involve a detailed examination of technical aspects or a full investigation of the underlying records."

That is not very reassuring.

There is to be a wholly new means by which people will fill in their tax liability forms. We want to know to what research the Minister refers. Is it research from the pilot studies on self-assessment currently being undertaken? The risk analysis for existing forms may not be the same as that required for self-assessment.

The temptations may be different under self-assessment. I want to be reassured that the Government are absolutely sure that they have the right criteria for identifying the forms of taxpayers whom they want to examine rigorously in terms of whether they have submitted the forms properly and in terms of whether they are declaring what needs to be declared. I am not implying that everyone will automatically cheat—far from it—but I am making the point that this is a new means of assessment; we have not experienced this before.

We do not want to read headlines in the tabloid press about it having uncovered someone who has said on the self-assessment form that he is liable for a small amount of tax, but who has not declared all sorts of things. That would put the whole system into disrepute and would undermine the general public's confidence in it. It is, therefore, important that the Government err on the side of caution in the early years of the process. The Minister says in his letter that the figures are "highly provisional". I hope that they are and I hope that he can reassure us more than he did in the letter.

If self-assessment is part of the Government's drive to reduce the number of Inland Revenue staff, it will undoubtedly fail. The Inland Revenue currently proposes to reduce staff levels from 54,000 in April 1995 to 48,000 in April 1988 and to 42,000 by April 2001. The latter round of job cuts includes some 3,000 job losses as a result of the introduction of self-assessment. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation and the Opposition are pressing the Government to redeploy staff on the customer service side of simplified assessment as well as on compliance and investigation work instead of making them redundant.

We maintain our deep concern about the manner of the introduction of what was a sound principle. We back the sound principle, but we remain unconvinced by the Government's determination to introduce the measures in a serious way. Unless the Government can reassure us, we shall call on the House to vote to delay the introduction of the measures for a further year until we can be assured about the manner of implementation of this good principle.

7.30 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), I am in favour of the principle of self-assessment. We have what has been called a Rolls-Royce system, whereby the Inland Revenue does all the work and taxpayers merely answer a few questions. The system will change fundamentally to one in which the taxpayer is asked to fill in forms on a range of matters in which they have not previously been involved. The United States, which is the model for this sort of thing, has been at it for a long time. Accountants who deal with people with modest tax dues are used to handling such matters. Here we are starting from scratch and there are serious problems.

The particular problem that I am worried about is the need for simpler legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West was right to draw attention to that. One book in Somerset house contained all the income tax legislation for 1840 to 1855. Now, there is a whole shelf of regulations for each year. So the mass of problems has undoubtedly increased enormously. That means that the ordinary taxpayer has to be guided through. I do not believe that the work has been done sufficiently well until now.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, we are dealing with a decline in the morale of Inland Revenue staff. The Government cannot improve the staff's morale when they are cutting their jobs. To give them new responsibilities at such a time could be dangerous. So it is right to talk about the risk factor. There is the greater danger that the new system could become a matter of some disrepute. An attempt will be made to separate out fraud from genuine mistakes. There will be a large number of genuine mistakes. However much is spent on advertisements and background, a large number of people will come to self-assessment unprepared and will make mistakes. It will be a serious matter to separate mistakes which arise out of the novelty of the system from those which arise out of less worthy motives.

The legislation is being rushed. We have to be very careful about that. We have had a large number of pieces of legislation which have not been properly considered. Self-assessment is of such fundamental importance, particularly to a Government who talk about reducing the level of income tax, and especially when there will be further complications, that it needs further careful consideration.

The letter that the Financial Secretary sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), which my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West quoted, says:

> "These broad figures are highly provisional".

It is a bit late in the day to have highly provisional assessments. We should be coming to fairly clear conclusions at this stage. For those reasons, a delay such as that proposed in the new clause should be accepted.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to both hon. Members who have spoken for their support in principle of the move towards self-assessment. I agree with what they both said about the need to move towards a less complex system. I believe that self-assessment will be simpler. I remind the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) that those taxpayers who do not want to go the final mile and assess themselves will not need to do so. They will be able to complete the return broadly as they do now and send it in a few months earlier. The Inland Revenue will do the final calculations for them.

I cannot accept the new clause. It would put back the introduction of self-assessment by one year from 1996-97 to 1997-98. A similar amendment was tabled last year, but was not moved in the Standing Committee.

I should like to respond to some of the points that were raised in the debate, particularly publicity and compliance. I can confirm that a substantial programme of publicity and education for taxpayers is planned and is already under way. So far, it has covered raising awareness and understanding of the changes among tax advisers through mailings and presentations. As I said in the debates in Standing Committee, a major advertising campaign, aimed directly at the 9 million people who will receive tax returns, using television and national press as well as specialist magazines, is due to be launched before the summer and will continue until well after self-assessment has been introduced. That will be backed by leaflets and video material.

As for compliance, a number of hon. Members have seen the letter which I wrote to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), whom I am sorry to hear is not well. All tax returns will be checked. They will be subjected to an initial risk analysis which will take account, not only of the information in the taxpayers' return, but of information from third parties, previous history and so on. Following that initial risk analysis, a percentage of returns regarded as potentially presenting a high risk will be reviewed in detail for inquiry. In a percentage of those cases, inquiries will be started.

The inquiries needed to deal with the risks identified may range from straightforward clarification of individual items to more detailed examination of one or more technical issues, or right through to full investigation of the taxpayer's affairs. In addition, a small percentage of cases may be selected for inquiry on an entirely random basis to increase deterrence and to enable the Revenue to monitor compliance levels and identify new areas of risk. We have already devoted substantial resources to tackling tax evasion. There has been a 20 per cent. increase in compliance resources in the past six years. That will not change under self-assessment.

The hon. Member for Durham, North-West expressed anxiety about compliance. The Revenue's plans are at least to maintain present coverage levels for the more searching types of inquiry and, indeed, gradually to increase them both by switching resources into compliance work and by improving compliance training, organisation and working methods.

Let me confirm the good progress that is being made in the move towards self-assessment. Returns for the first year of self-assessment will not be issued until April 1997—still two years away. Nothing that has happened in the past few months has changed the Government's considered view that we should proceed to the planned timetable. Indeed as this year goes by, we are passing a number of milestones which would

[Sir George Young]

make it more difficult to adopt the course suggested by the new clause.

The main legislation was passed last year and more legislation is before the House now. Businesses and tax practitioners are gearing up for the changes in line with the published timetable. We are well on track for the implementation of self-assessment as planned. We have an extensive education and publicity programme. We have been testing the new tax return and the results of this latest consultation are encouraging. Some 90 per cent. of the volunteers completed the return well enough for the Inland Revenue to process it. However, there is still room for improving the tax return so the consultation and testing will continue throughout 1995, starting later this week with the full trial of self-assessment in Leicester, involving some 5,000 taxpayers.

In conclusion, delaying the start of self-assessment is not sensible in practical terms. It would only cause confusion and add a layer of complexity. Nor is it necessary. I urge the House to reject the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 277.

Division No. 124] **[7.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke Eric (Midlothian)
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *('Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Wareing, Robert N
Watson; Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 6

PREMISES FOR THE PROVISION OF CHILD CARE

'The following section shall be inserted after section 14 of the Capital Allowances Act 1990—

"14A (1) Where a building or structure which is not an industrial building or structure is used by a person carrying on a trade for the provision of care for the children of workers employed in that trade, this Part shall apply to that building or structure as if it were an industrial building or structure.

(2) The writing down allowances within section 3 which are made to a person by reason of subsection (1) above are not to exceed £10 in aggregate for a chargeable period.

(3) In this section—'care' means any form of care or supervised activity whether or not provided on a regular basis, but excluding supervised activity provided primarily for educational purposes; 'children' means person under the age of eighteen.".'.—*[Ms Armstrong.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Armstrong: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The clause has been narrowly drawn because we are trying to deal with an important issue within the confines of what the Opposition can move on a Finance Bill. I have spent many hours trying to work out a method by which the House can respond more effectively to the needs and wishes of millions of families who want to put together the patchwork of care and education which they know is essential for their children. The House has failed to address that issue effectively.

The clause deals with the narrow issue of the way in which the Government treat employers who seek to provide child care on their premises and with employers whose workplaces are not necessarily factories or industrial buildings. A growing number of employers, especially those in the service sector and shops and supermarkets, want a fair tax regime in relation to the provision of child care and workplace nurseries. Many more who employ mainly women want to provide such facilities for their employees but are unable to do so.

I admit that even if the clause were accepted and acted upon by the Government it would not fundamentally change the pattern of child care in the way that the Opposition seek to change it. Millions of families want access to high-quality, affordable child care and early years education because they know that that is essential for their children.

Children are growing up in a dangerous world. The common spaces to which children had access in my day and in which they could play are no longer available. Parents are often afraid to allow their children to play in the street or in the back lane. Whatever type of play young children are involved in, it is important that it is supervised in safe areas by people who know what they are doing. We should be able to check that those people have the proper motives and have received proper training.

The steps that need to be taken today to protect young children may not have been necessary in earlier generations. For example, children of five and under watch an average of 23 hours of television a week. Whatever the quality of the programmes, that is bound to cause concern. It frequently happens because parents do not have the physical resources to engage their children in active learning and, rather than allow them to be in situations in which they do not know what is happening, parents sometimes stick them in front of the television. The House should not treat that as normal.

If children are to grow up able to deal with the enormous complexities of 21st century society—many of which we do not yet know—it is essential for them to get the best experiences in their early years. Children learn much more quickly when they are very young and their behaviour and experiences set patterns for later life that are difficult to change. Report after report speaks of the value of high-quality early years education and care. The House has failed to address those needs. That is why we have tabled this modest clause. It gives us the opportunity to raise these issues and to expose the incredible poverty of the Government's response to the needs of children and families.

8 pm

When my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) moved a similar clause last year, she drew attention to the changing nature of the work force. I am sorry that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not in the House. The largest town in my constituency is Consett, where in 1980-81 the steel works closed, not to reopen. Consett had virtually an exclusively male work force at that time: hardly any women in the town worked. Now more women than men work in Consett and that has happened in an incredibly short time. It has revolutionised community activity, family life and social activity.

Work has always described family and community life in many areas of the country and that was certainly true of Consett. Life consisted of hard shifts of skilled labour in dirty jobs and that constructed a pattern of life for families. Women spent most of their lives at home caring for the children, but that has totally changed and women have had to find ways to make sure that child care and the raising of children became more than just their preserve. Some have done it gladly, some with caution. Women have had to go out to work to earn an income for the family because of the change in the nature of the jobs available.

In Consett, the jobs are no longer highly skilled and highly paid. Indeed, according to the Government's latest figures, during the past year the average wage for women in that area has actually dropped by £12 per week. Those women and many others like them throughout the country now have to go out to work to support their families, whether they like it or not. Their wage levels have been squeezed to the point where, as I said, the average wage dropped by £12 a week in one year. I find that staggering.

It is obvious that the changing pattern of employment will have an incredible effect on the need for affordable, accessible, quality child care and early years education. The need for that is glaring. It is critical for those families to have such a facility. Like it or not, many of them have had to change their family patterns—although I accept that for some it has been a positive move. Nevertheless, overall it has had a devastating effect on family life.

There is a responsibility on the Government, who made the decision to close the Consett steel works. It is telling to note that the young Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry in 1980 who received a delegation from Consett protesting about the closures was none other than the current Chancellor. One would have thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have remembered that. One would have thought that it might have clicked with him that he met with people from a town that was about to be devastated by the closure of its steel works. That tells us a great deal about the minds of Cabinet Ministers.

I use Consett merely as an example of what has happened in communities throughout the country, where family life has been radically overturned by the changing patterns of employment. We neglect the effect of that on the children at our peril. The experiences that children have in their early years literally stay with them for the rest of their lives. During the past year, there have been a number of studies—primarily from America, but also from this country—showing the value of high-quality early years education. That should surely lead the House to question how, as a priority, we can provide a pattern of child care sufficiently flexible to allow parents to make real decisions that fit in both with their employment and with what they want for their families. Their children need access to high-quality early years education and care.

In view of the amazing changes in family life brought about by changes in the pattern of employment, it is nothing short of a scandal that the House has not debated the matter regularly. Indeed, our last serious debate on the importance of early years education was on an Opposition Supply day, following the 1988 Education Select Committee report on nursery education. That is why we wanted to have this debate on the Finance Bill, even though we could table only a very restricted new clause.

We had hoped to have this debate in Committee because the Liberal Democrat party had tabled new clauses on child care. We do not support the Liberal Democrat suggestion of vouchers because we believe that the first priority for the use of public money must be to expand and develop the pattern of child care and early years education. There is no guarantee that vouchers would achieve that. They might simply ensure that those who already have access to child care take up what money is available. Nevertheless, the new clauses would have given us the opportunity of a debate, but unfortunately that did not happen.

We have not moved a new clause seeking greater extension of tax relief because, again, that is not how we want to use public money. I know from work that I did before the last election that employers are desperate to find ways to co-operate with the Government so that they can use their commitment and their money to match public sector money and expand provision. In her speech on the Finance Bill last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham quoted Howard Davies of the Confederation of British Industry, who at its conference on child care said how important it was to employers.

I have met employers and I have worked with employers groups, so I know how much they want to extend partnerships which would link public sector, private sector and voluntary sector money to provide a variety of methods of delivering child care to meet the needs of families. However, the Government have chosen not to act on the enthusiasm of those employers. I recently met some employers, involved in the child care lobby, who told me how extremely disappointed they are at the Government's lack of progress in providing early years education and child care.

Last October, at the Tory party conference, the Prime Minister promised nursery education for all four-year-olds. We have heard nothing of how the Government intend to fulfil that promise—yet he said that it would be delivered before the next election. Time is beginning to run out. I know the cost, the time and the energy needed to fulfil that commitment. People will have to be sufficiently well trained to ensure that the children's experiences are of the right quality. Premises will have to be adapted.

During last week's education debate, the Government criticised the Opposition's attitude to surplus places. Surplus places and a commitment to nursery education could be brought together. The Government could really do something. They could sort out some of the problems that they talk about by bringing those two objectives together and delivering something—and, goodness knows, we all wish that they would do that.

The Prime Minister's commitment has not been followed up. I suspect that the reason is that the Government do not want local authorities to be involved. The Government's dogma is such that they want any expansion to take place purely in the private sector. That is my suspicion. I hope that I am wrong because the most effective delivery of early years child care and education will be achieved through a partnership approach, bringing together the talent and commitment of the private, public and voluntary sectors to develop the highest quality of opportunity. None of us should rely on dogma or return to it to avoid making the commitment that young people deserve.

The Government have failed to honour their commitments. The Secretary of State for Education seems to have reneged on them. She said that her Back Benchers should examine local authority education spending that was targeted at non-statutory areas—which include, of course, nursery education. By implication, she was saying that Conservative Members should attack local authorities which spend money on nursery education. She will live to regret that.

The Secretary of State made those comments because, despite severe financial difficulties, many Labour authorities have fulfilled their commitment to the youngest children and their families. They have ensured that nursery education is available. Nursery education, however, does not solve families' needs or deal with the changes that have taken place in families. For that reason, we want to give the Government the opportunity to return to their commitments, even if they do not go back as far as Baroness Thatcher's commitment in 1972, but simply go back to the Prime Minister's commitment. That will be better than nothing.

Nobody should kid himself, however, that that commitment will be sufficient to meet families' needs today and in the next century. If the House is really concerned about the chances, opportunities and quality of life of the youngest children and of children yet to be born, it will take far more seriously the issue of how we can unlock the resources and the will that we know is there to develop a child care strategy that will meet children's needs, wherever they live, and whatever their families' decisions about what will best suit them. The new clause would be just a small token effort, but it would be better than nothing. If the Government are not going to accept it, I challenge them to say what they are going to do.

[Ms Armstrong]

Children's needs will not go away. It does not matter what class or group they are in—they have those needs. We know that the quality of child care is inherently enhanced if there is a mixture of children in classes. If child care is available only for the most disadvantaged, children are locked into a culture of disadvantage, and that is the last thing that we want. We want child care to be available much more widely than it is. The Government could make a gesture this evening. I hope that they will.

The Select Committee on Employment recently issued an important report in which it carefully considered what was happening to women and working mothers. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) will catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, as she was a member of that Committee. I do not propose to go into that matter any further.

8.15 pm

It is important that the House takes its responsibility to ensure that children grow up with the best opportunities far more seriously. We can achieve that only if we give them the opportunity to have the best early years education. We know that the more parents are involved in their children's experiences at an earlier age, the more they will be involved in their children's education as they go through life, and the more they will feel that they are part of the provision for their children throughout their lives.

We are talking not just about the under-fives, but about children's opportunities after school and during the school holidays. Schools are not necessarily always open when it is convenient for working parents. We must have a pattern of child care which meets not only providers' but families' needs. It is important that we deal with that issue. The House might have taken more positive steps in relation to that, but that is another issue, which is not before us today.

I hope that the Government will recognise that the issue cannot be resolved by a dogmatic relationship with one sector. All sectors must be involved. We are talking about the future of all children and of our communities. Dogma must not rule there.

Ms Hodge: Labour Members have tabled a small amendment. It will make a small contribution to what should be a policy of national importance. We hope that we can encourage Conservative Members to build on a previous U-turn. I think that it was in 1990 that the Government abolished the toddler tax—a tax on employer-subsidised child care. The new clause highlights other discrepancies, not so much in the tax on employer-subsidised child care, but in tax allowances that are available to employers. They need to be dealt with. I hope that Conservative Members will take the small suggestion seriously. It is in line with the stated policy and priority of the Prime Minister, which, I understand, he reinforced again this weekend.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) a deep concern about what is happening to early years services. The Government are leaving them in an unholy mess. In 1972, the then Secretary of State for Education made a commitment that, within 10 years, she would provide free state nursery education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents wanted or needed it. Twenty-three years on—that is nearly a generation of children lost—the Prime Minister stated at the Conservative party conference that he would ensure that, in the lifetime of this Parliament, free nursery education would be provided for all four-year-olds—a lesser policy, but nevertheless an important move forward.

That was six months ago. Since then, all we have had is clear division among the ranks of various Ministers, aided and abetted by various advisers outside the House, who put their oar in through writing documents for policy think tanks. I am sorry that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is not here because he demonstrated some interest in the subject. Most recently, he gave a speech saying that he would support two propositions. I could not quite work out which he wanted most. First, he wanted vouchers for early years service and, secondly, he suggested a beauty contest involving the public and private sectors and, I suppose, non-statutory providers. They would bid for resources to build on a service that is so essential to the country as a whole.

Such suggestions, whether a voucher scheme or a beauty contest, seem wholly at odds with what the Secretary of State for Education has been saying recently in a number of speeches. She seems to recognise that statutorily provided nursery education is the best early years service to provide the best start for children in early, and later, life. It is interesting that she often appears to be overridden nowadays in her desire for more resources generally for schools and, more specifically, for children in their early years.

People like the Chief Secretary are driven by a bigoted loathing of anything to do with the public sector in general and by a more bigoted loathing, if that is possible, of anything to do with local authorities. Whether we have vouchers or beauty contests is irrelevant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West said, vouchers are a diversion. There is such paucity of provision in the United Kingdom—we have one of the lowest levels of publicly provided early years services—that to concentrate the very limited public resources on providing vouchers would mean that we could not direct them towards increasing the quantity of quality services on which we should be focusing. Such people simply reflect a loathing of the public and an applauding of the private at the expense of our young children.

What this country and what parents need and what young children deserve is proper public investment in early years services for education and child care. The Government are ambivalent about the state's role in providing such services. They do not know who should provide what for whom or how to finance it.

In some ways, I am pleased that the Minister of State is to reply because he, perhaps more than anyone else in the Treasury team, should recognise how short-sighted the short-termism of the Government's policy is. There is plenty of evidence from local authorities in the United Kingdom, but more especially from America, that any investment made in early years services for children saves public expenditure later.

The most recent American research revealed that every $1 spent on a child in the early years, especially on a child from a disadvantaged background, saves up to $7 later. It saves money not only on the resourcing of special needs education, but on income support because people who have adequate early years services are more likely to get qualifications and then work. It also saves expenditure on the criminal justice system because, once in work, people are far less likely to become criminals and become a cost to society in that way.

In other words, investment in the early years pays later. I think members of all parties accept that the key to our economic success is the level of our people's skills. If so, good-quality early years provision makes sense because creating a highly qualified work force starts with investment in children in their very early years.

There is a substantial body of evidence to show that how young people perform at 16 has a direct correlation, not with their economic background, but with how they performed at seven. Their performance at that age can influence GCSE results by as much as 25 per cent. We also know that how children perform at seven has a direct correlation, not with their socio-economic background, but with whether they enjoyed pre-school education and care.

Investment in pre-school education and care means better results at seven and at 16 and a better equipped work force who will contribute to the health of the economy in the adult world. I hope that the Minister of State will take that on board. It makes sense for the Government to spend a little money. The new clause would involve a very small sum that would contribute to an increase in early years services of good quality, an issue to which I shall return a little later.

The provision of early years services is especially important for women in the work force. Today, about 600,000 more mothers go to work than in 1984, and more than half of mothers with children under five are part of the work force. Only 10, 15 or 20 years ago, they used to depend on members of the informal family network to assist with child care. That dependency has slipped, and as many as 80 per cent. of working mothers with children under five may look for formal child care arrangements. The Government have completely failed to meet the needs of working parents and their children, but we know that to meet them would make not only social but economic sense.

What has happened as working mothers have sought child care solutions? Increasingly, their child care needs are being met by the private sector. In the past few years, the greatest growth in the provision of child care has been among child minders and independent registered nurseries. They accounted for 86 per cent. of the growth in day care services in England between 1982 and 1992. That contrasts with the number of nursery places, which has risen by only 30 per cent. In other words, 86 per cent. of places are provided in the private sector and only 30 per cent. in the public sector.

The Government would no doubt applaud that, but the truth is that much of that provision is part time and of very poor educational quality. I know because I have visited several such places in the past few months. We often hear Ministers and Government spokespeople say that 90 per cent. of children have a pre-school place of some kind. That may be true, but too often the reality is that children are cared for part time in an extremely poor physical environment where there is absolutely no educational focus to their activities. It is child care on the cheap, not quality nursery education which gives future generations a better start in life.

Despite the increase in private sector provision, much of which is of a doubtful standard, the supply has not matched the increasing demand from working women. As many as 19 per cent. of children have lone parents. These parents cannot afford private nurseries or child minders if some form of local authority or other subsidised provision is not available. Even with vouchers, how would the children of such parents have access to quality provision? If we want those children to break out of the cycle of deprivation into which they are often locked, quality early years provision is the key. It is vital if we are to ensure that they have a chance of a better future.

The Government's figures show that, of the 19 per cent. of lone parents with children under five, as many as 90 per cent. want to go back to work, but they have no access to suitable child care that would enable them to do so. Why should parents in this country have to seek the cheapest or the only available option, especially as employer-based provision remains so patchy?

8.30 pm

We should also not lose sight of the fact that we spend a lot of money—although perhaps not enough—on training, but employees with valuable skills are lost to the work force because we do not make effective facilities available for women so that they can return to work after they have had a child. That is a criminal waste of the parent's talent, skill and experience. Let us not forget the small and medium-sized businesses, which are often less able to provide independent child care and, therefore, find it difficult to compete for skilled staff.

Every other European country apart from the United Kingdom recognises the importance of the early years services of child care and education by putting in much more publicly funded provision. They see that it makes an important social contribution to the well-being of the community and an important business contribution to the well-being of our society. In Britain, we lag behind our competitors as usual. As a country, we have no national strategy, but that is what we desperately require so that we can have accessible, available and affordable child care services for all our young children before they go to school.

Why have the Government done so little so late, especially in the area with which our new clause deals, which is to encourage employers to invest in provision? The answer lies in their lack of commitment and ambivalence towards those early years services.

Before the debate, I tried again to look for the figures so that I could form some idea of how much we provide as a nation. Anyone who has delved into the matter—I have asked a number of parliamentary questions about it—finds it impossible to get adequate information, even for how much we spend on public early years services and how many places are provided. The Departments of Health and for Education each calculate the statistics on a separate basis—one talks of pupils and the other of places, which is a further sign of the lack of a coherent child care strategy. Opposition Members believe that such a strategy is key if we are to move forward in this important area of public policy.

There is also much double counting in the Government's figures of children who could attend both a playgroup and a nursery class in the same day, which massages the statistics. That is terrible provision. Imagine a little child with a lone parent who has to go from her

[Ms Hodge]

parent to the child minder in the morning, then to the playgroup, back to the child minder, to a nursery class in the afternoon, back to the child minder and finally home at night. Is that the good start that we want to give children in their early years? Is that the sort of start that they deserve if they are to develop their full potential?

In Britain, child care is a lottery. It depends where one lives, on one's occupation and on whether one's employer provides anything. Another reality is that most parents have little or no choice of the type of service that they use.

One Labour party objective that lies behind the new clause is that we want to work towards employer-based child care being a realistic choice for working parents—a choice that is based firmly in the context of a strategic and co-ordinated national child care strategy. To achieve that, we must get rid of the existing anomalies in tax treatment that the new clause highlights.

I shall outline the anomalies and ask the Minister of State whether he believes that they make sense. The 1990 capital allowance tax distinguishes between capital expenditure on plant and equipment, on which all employers can claim capital allowances, and capital expenditure on buildings. That distinction means that one can claim capital allowances against corporation tax on any expenditure on nursery equipment, but expenditure on nursery space in offices and shops—the two categories with which we are concerned—is not allowable.

Nurseries that are attached to warehouses and factories qualify for an allowance, but those attached to other buildings such as offices and shops do not, yet where are women with young children most likely to work? In offices and shops. How daft and inappropriate. As a result, employers based in shops and offices who want to provide workplace nursery facilities are treated less favourably than those based in factories. Where does that leave the Government's interest in private funding for child care to promote diversity and choice, which we all favour?

The one exception is for company sports and recreational clubs, which receive an allowance even when they are attached to offices and shops. Why should sports facilities incur benefits that are unavailable to nurseries? What does that say about any professed commitment on the Government's part to take early years services seriously?

New clause 6 has the support of Employers for Childcare. Obviously, employers have an interest in producing a future generation of highly literate and numerate children to provide a well-educated and well-motivated work force later in life. Employers for Childcare has said that

> "the current tax policy is inconsistent. Many forms of child care are not tax exempt, thus affecting employers' ability to offer parents a genuine choice."

Our new clause would end that inconsistency by extending the industrial buildings allowance to all companies that invest in workplace nurseries, whether alone or jointly with local authorities. That will provide an incentive to employers to construct their own workplace nurseries, or to enter into partnership with local authorities to extend their provision. That is the road that we must go down if we are to offer parents genuine choice.

Labour Members realise that workplace nurseries should supplement and not replace other services that are provided locally. As has been said, partnership with employers is important. Central Government have a leadership role to play in enabling local authorities to develop a mix of provision based on the needs of children and their carers in their locality.

In conclusion, if we in Britain are to achieve the level of provision that is available in most other European countries, the Government must go beyond merely removing a punitive tax on workplace child care provision. We require a comprehensive child care strategy, together with the funds and the political will to put it into action. New clause 6 is a step in the right direction.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I support new clause 6, which would introduce tax relief for premises used to provide workplace nurseries. As has been said, that is only one aspect of child care provision and it is one that can properly be debated in a Finance Bill. Opposition Members would agree that workplace child care is appropriate only in some instances. We are not trying to make a case for monolithic workplace provision, but believe that, at the least, Government should encourage its provision, as new clause 6 would, by making it clear to employers that the Government expect that, if they are interested, it should be their duty to provide child care for their employees.

The pattern of employment for women has changed profoundly and permanently, but the Government have been extremely slow to recognise that fact. To date, the fiscal and legislative framework within which we all live has failed to adapt to that significant and profound change. Women are at work despite social policy, Government legislation and the Government's response to change rather than because of it. We could do much to improve women's ability to work, have careers and provide for themselves and their families. As my hon. Friends were quick to point out, the result of making such provision would be that everybody would gain: women at work; children in their early years; and society. The economic efficiency of spending on that provision is proven.

On 15 February, the Employment Select Committee issued its "Mothers in Employment" report, the first report of this Session. Given the Government's record on this matter, the fact that it was unanimous and signed by all Conservative members of the Committee deserves particular attention as it contains a number of far-reaching proposals that would help women with children who work or wish to work.

The Committee found that, between 1984 and 1994, economically active women as a proportion of the whole rose from 66 per cent. to 71 per cent. The trend of those women who have children was even more marked, which suggests that social policy should shift to accommodate them. In 1984, 55 per cent. of those with children were economically active, but in 1994 the figure had risen to 64 per cent.

Some women need particular support and the "Mothers in Employment" report was conscious of the plight of lone parents, 90 per cent. of whom are women. Lone parents formed the only group of women in which, over the same period, the percentage of those who were economically active fell. In 1981, 45 per cent. of lone parents were economically active whereas the figure now is 39 per cent.

Lone parents are thus being trapped in a life on benefit, unable to work for a series of complex reasons with which I shall not detain the House tonight. However, that points to the fact that lone parents need a special strategy to help them back into the work force. As the Committee studied that issue, it became abundantly clear that high-quality, affordable child care must be available because the provision of child care is the key to allowing many women to work.

Although the report deals with other key issues such as maternity pay, family leave and paternity leave, I shall comment purely on aspects relevant to the new clause. The Government should provide various types of help to encourage employers to make provision for their employees and to create more state provision.

The Committee made a number of recommendations. Child care helps not only women and employers but the development of our children. The report's 13th recommendation is about tax relief on workplace nurseries and concludes that the current restriction on tax relief to workplace nurseries is not effective. It states:

> "The Committee recommends that the tax relief currently available to employers on workplace nurseries be extended to cover all forms of employer-assisted childcare in order to provide the necessary flexibility to suit a greater variety of circumstances."

Our modest little new clause would be one aspect of that.

The Committee also realised that Britain's response to the profound change in the nature of the work force and the massive move by women out of the home and into the work force needs a proper strategic response. The report states:

> "We recommend that the Government work to increase the availability and quality of childcare and to reduce its cost throughout the country by the formulation and implementation of a national strategy for childcare."

As other hon. Friends pointed out tonight, that is long overdue.

Other hon. Members have referred to the Prime Minister's oft-quoted pledge at last year's Conservative party conference. The Committee welcomed that pledge and recommended

> "that the Government now take action to implement the Prime Minister's pledge."

We look forward, at long last, to some action in that area because, for women who work, nursery education is as important as early-years education and child care.

8.45 pm

The Committee recognised the trend that many women now return to work much earlier after their child's birth because, most often, the household relies on their earnings. We must ensure that appropriate, not informal, child care is available so that those women can return to work.

We also want the House to put its own house in order and create a reasonable system of child care for the many women who work in this place. We suggest that the House of Commons Commission act as soon as possible to establish a suitable child care scheme for all those who work in the House of Commons. It is not adequate to pontificate and tell other people what they should do while failing to make such provision ourselves. This place should lead in that respect, not embarrassingly trail behind what goes on in some more enlightened areas of the economy.

The report mentions the totally unacceptable poverty trap that exists for mothers and some fathers who receive means-tested benefits, which often makes work uneconomic for them. It recommends

> "a review of the benefit system with the aim of removing this poverty trap."

The provision of child care at an affordable price would open up the world of work to people with caring responsibilities, including those responsible for caring for elderly and disabled people. Such provision can often pay for itself because it encourages people to become economically active when it may not have been practically possible before. Thus we reduce benefit bills and make people generally happier because they contribute to our economy. We cannot understand why the Government have not recognised the logic of that long ago.

We would welcome the Government's recognition that employers should at least be tipped the wink that they approve of their providing workplace nurseries and seeking different and appropriate ways to provide child care support for their employees. We want the Government to start making those noises.

The report contains far-reaching recommendations. The Committee was disappointed that, although on its publication it was welcomed widely by such organisations as Women into Business, the Equal Opportunities Commission and, as the Minister might expect, many trade unions, who campaigned long and hard on those issues, the Department of Employment instantly dismissed it. We hope that, at least, those on the Treasury Bench will take a more far-sighted view of the economical realities and the savings that can be made, and will look more kindly on the report's recommendations, which may mark a milestone in the battle to provide a decent, appropriate child care system for working women.

Women will not go back into the family. They now wish to take their rightful place in the economic and social life of our country. They wish this Parliament of all Parliaments to recognise at long last the social changes that have occurred, to legislate to enable women to make that move permanently and to recognise the pattern of their lives in legislation. I hope that, in responding to this modest proposal tonight, the Minister will show that the Government are listening and say that we can expect some progress soon.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I support new clause 6, which represents a small piece in the large jigsaw of a national child care strategy that is urgently required. Small though it is, we would like answers to the questions put today, which were also asked last year in a similar debate.

Why should the capital allowance be available for certain types of building, but not for others, particularly, as it happens, buildings where women are likely to work? Why are the allowances available for sports pavilions and sports facilities in any kind of building, but not for nurseries? That is even more bizarre. We know that the Prime Minister feels strongly about team sports, but why does he not feel as strongly about choice of affordable child care for everyone who wants it?

The key issue is the supply of affordable child care. The Government's only initiative, the after-school care initiative, is okay as far as it goes, but it will end this year. A recent report by the Kids Club Network says that

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

1,000 after-school clubs will close if that initiative is not continued. Over and above that is the question of affordability. If continuing financial help is not offered to those clubs, many people will be unable to afford to pay for them.

On the demand side, the Government may talk about the child care disregard for family credit and other benefits, but welcome as that disregard has been, it has many problems. For example, it still does not cover the necessary costs; for some reason it stops when a child reaches the age of 11 and it operates per family rather than per child. Many other problems are associated with it, not least for those on maximum family credit, who receive no help. The use of that disregard must be developed extensively.

Some Conservative Back Benchers supported the report from the all-party Select Committee on Employment. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) for the key role that she played in producing that report. The Government would do well to consider many of the Committee's recommendations.

The Government must soon present a report to the European Commission on their implementation of the European child care recommendation, which deals with services, leave arrangements, family-friendly work practices and men and women sharing family responsibilities. The Government have little to put in their report to the Commission, so I suggest that they implement quickly some of the recommendations in the Select Committee's report. The bit of paper that they must fill in would then be slightly bigger than it is now.

The Government should also consider what many Labour local authorities have done, because they have shown the way. I should just like to mention my local authority of Lothian, which provides a nursery place for all four-year-olds and has guaranteed a nursery place for all three-year-olds as part of its election manifesto for Thursday. Lothian is already providing for 68 per cent. of three and four-year-olds in its nurseries, which is way above the United Kingdom average of 40 per cent. and the Scottish average of 37 per cent. Despite the cuts imposed by the Government, Lothian has not cut its nursery school budget. It must be commended for that. It has appreciated the importance of nursery school education. Its policy for extended nurseries will also be developed once it has won the election on Thursday.

Lothian and the Labour local authorities of Edinburgh have put £450,000 into a child care centre, which is about to be built in my constituency. We know that existing need is still not being met, because more resources must be provided for nursery education from central Government. The nursery education provided is excellent, but it is not flexible enough to meet the needs of working parents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This is not an election platform, but a debate on the provision of child care.

Mr. Chisholm: We all know about the desperate need for child care from talking to our constituents. I do not think that I am allowed to mention the local elections, but I have been talking to a lot of people around the doors in the past few days. It is absolutely remarkable how many times the issue of child care came up, unsolicited by a politician. It is the great under-recognised issue of politics.

The stories I have heard are all the same. One woman with three children told me how there is nothing in her area for children under three. She wanted to work, but could not do so because of the lack of child care. Another woman had a good job, but her marriage broke up and she had to give it up because there were no care facilities for her children.

The problems associated with lack of child care facilities are relayed to us all the time. The Government should recognise that demand, because such facilities are necessary for parents—most frequently for women. Although I do not have time to talk about it now, child care is also necessary for children. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) that the quality of child care is extremely important. As many reports have shown, the provision of child care is also important and necessary for the economy.

It is time that the Government took that issue on board and offered us a child care strategy instead of the occasional inadequate policy.

Mr. Nelson: This has been a commendable, albeit brief, debate. I hope to demonstrate both qualities in my response to it.

I want to assure all hon. Members who took part in the debate that I listened carefully to all their contributions. The Government will reflect on what they said. I was struck by what the hon. Members for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), for Barking (Ms Hodge) and for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said about quality child care. They are right that not only the quantity but the flexibility and quality of education at all levels, particularly at pre-school age, is important. That is not the subject of contention on either side of the House. We should not simply throw money at a problem or extend facilities without regard to quality. The importance of quality has been an extremely significant theme of the debate.

The new clause seeks to extend industrial buildings allowances to buildings that do not qualify for that relief, but which are used for child care purposes. The clause restricts the allowances available to £10 for each chargeable period so that, in cash terms, a person can save between £2 and £4 a year depending on his marginal rate of tax. That is probably less than the cost of making a claim. That is not, presumably, a serious proposition from the Opposition, as it would be virtually worthless to business.

Under our current legislation, most day-to-day expenditure incurred by employers in the provision of child care facilities is already given full and immediate relief. That includes money spent on running costs such as staff wages, professional supervision and any incidental expenditure. Much of the capital expenditure by employers will already qualify for capital allowances, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Barking.

The new clause would extend the scope of capital allowances. It is presumably aimed at facilities within shops, offices and other buildings. They do not generally qualify for relief on the footing that such buildings tend not to depreciate, at least over the medium to long term. An extension of capital allowances for child care facilities would therefore run counter to our policy of keeping to a minimum the number of special reliefs within the tax system. It might also open the door to claims for special treatment for other types of currently non-allowable capital expenditure.

The hon. Member for Durham, North-West asked about the Prime Minister's commitment to universal infant education provision. The Prime Minister gave that commitment and it remains our policy to meet it. No specific date relating to the time of the next election was mentioned regarding the implementation of that commitment, but we remain pledged to it. A good deal of progress has already been made.

I note what the hon. Member for Barking said about child care expenditure being an investment. That does not, of course, mean that it does not have an immediate and substantial cash flow cost to the Exchequer and the taxpayer. We are already spending a good deal of money on child care. The hon. Lady said that it is difficult to get the figures for total provision and I rather agree with her. I hope that she will continue to ask parliamentary questions about that. A lot of child care provision is made in the form of tax relief, which is a Treasury matter and in the form of Department for Education grants and expenditure. The Ministry of Defence spends money on child care and a variety of other Departments make allowances and provisions. It is therefore important to tie them all together. I think that the totality will be a good deal more substantial than the hon. Lady may suspect.

The hon. Member for Barking says that the Government do not have a policy in that respect. We certainly do. We are committed to encouraging the expansion of provision for rising fives and for three-year-olds. However, I disagree with her about part-time education. All the studies appear to show that, although full-time education for four to five-year-olds is extremely worth while—we are responsive to that—part-time education is more beneficial for three to four-year-olds. That does not undermine the thrust of much of what the hon. Lady said.

The hon. Member for Wallasey, a distinguished member of the Select Committee on Employment, referred to the Committee's report, which has been published. I can tell her that officials are considering that report. The matter will be brought before Ministers early next month, but the Committee's recommendations have a substantial price tag. The key recommendations to extend statutory maternity rights, introduce statutory paternity and family leave arrangements and extend tax relief currently available to workplace nurseries to cover all forms of employer-assisted child care are substantial, so we must consider those carefully.

9 pm

The hon. Member for Wallasey will be aware that our right hon. Friend and colleague the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) recently made an announcement on behalf of the House of Commons Commission about the voucher scheme, which will take effect, I believe, from the beginning of this month.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) asked why capital allowances were available for some but not all types of property. I think that I swept that point up earlier.

In conclusion, I shall say a brief word about the range of provision. I hope to provide some reassurance to hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Government take very seriously provision for the education and care of nursery children.

Employers currently obtain tax relief on direct provision of child care on the premises. They obtain child care revenue cost as an immediate deduction, 25 per cent. capital allowances on equipment and 4 per cent. capital allowances on child care buildings and structures if those are on industrial premises. Incidentally, in the small minority of cases where they are in enterprise zones, they qualify for 100 per cent. relief. There is also tax relief for other child care payments. Employers receive immediate relief on payments direct to employees or to third parties providing child care for employees.

Employers' cash payments are taxable in the normal way, as are payments made by the employer to defray the employee's pecuniary liability. However, the 1990 scheme that was introduced, the workplace scheme, has been extremely successful.

The out-of-school initiative by the Department of Employment will cost about £45 million over three years. The child care disregard, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Leith, amounts to about £60 million. The Department of Health is paying £1.3 million a year in grant aid to 10 national voluntary organisations. There is a small grant scheme giving capital grants to local groups. The Government and local authorities are giving £10 million to pre-school playgroup associations, in addition to which about £90 million of parents' contribution adds up to a significant provision.

Finally, workplace schemes, which allow the benefit in kind of the provision of a workplace scheme not to be taxable, have now encouraged the provision of about 500 schemes. All those amount to well in excess of £100 million of Government support in that area, which has given rise to a profusion of new facilities. We intend to continue to provide those facilities and to build on them, as we have done in recent years.

The Government have a very creditable record and a very clear policy on the matter. I am afraid that the new clause would do nothing at all to add to that in practice, and appears to demonstrate that the Opposition once again have a good idea but then limit it without putting a price tag on it. Once again, that is uncosted idealism, but this is not a no-cost new clause and I cannot commend it to the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 240, Noes 276.

Division No. 125] **[9.02 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David

Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. George Mudie

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley

Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hoh David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Pobertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 16

REBATE MECHANISM FOR IRRECOVERABLE VAT FOR CHARITIES

'(1) The Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1995 shall include for the financial years 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99, Treasury estimates of—

(1)(a) the total amount of VAT to be collected;

(b) the total amount of VAT paid to be paid by charities on—

(i) business activities; and

(ii) non-business activities;

(c) the amount of VAT paid by charities on input tax on expenditure in pursuit of their charitable objectives which cannot be recovered.

(2) There shall also be included an estimate of the effect on the PSBR of a mechanism to rebate to charities by grants-in-aid a sum equivalent to:

(i) 25 per cent;

(ii) 40 per cent; and

(iii) 50 per cent:

of the irrecoverable VAT paid by them.'.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.15 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would require the Government to provide information that would enable us to appreciate the scale of the problem of irrecoverable value added tax which faces charities.

We are asking charities to do more and more. For example, care in the community invites charities to play a new, more formalised and more extensive role in social provision. That is as it should be. Our aspirations for social provision are rising. We know that state agencies, crucial as they are, are insufficient. Of their nature, they tend to be broad-brush in their approach, somewhat clumsy and somewhat insensitive to the infinite variety of human need.

By contrast, charities at their best reach the parts of society that bureaucracies are unable to reach. Charities have entrepreneurial qualities, and they are cost-effective.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

It is right that we are seeking to mobilise them in a partnership to enlist all the resources of generosity in our society.

There is a perversity in our fiscal system, which lies in irrecoverable VAT. Charities are being asked to provide residential homes, day centres and respite care. They are expected to demonstrate cost-effectiveness by tendering against commercial organisations and to demonstrate their effectiveness compared with local authority providers.

At the same time, local authority providers, providing the same services as charities, do not have to pay VAT. Commercial organisations can reclaim VAT, or, if they are engaged in the provision of exempt services, they can build in a profit factor to offset the cost of irrecoverable VAT. That is not possible for charities for the greater part of their activity.

The services that charities provide are mostly VAT exempt or outside the scope of VAT. They are unable to recover the VAT that they have paid on necessary supplies to enable them to deliver services. The Charities Tax Reform Group estimates that the cost of irrecoverable VAT to the charitable sector is about £335 million annually. New research by London Economics suggests that the figure may be nearer £550 million.

I shall give some examples of the burden on particular charities. Methodist Homes for the Aged found itself paying £450,000 in irrecoverable VAT. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children paid £650,000 in a year. Help the Aged paid about £750,000. The Royal National Institute for the Blind paid £1.2 million. Some charities are losing about 10 per cent. of their income in irrecoverable VAT.

If policy is to be consistent, and if we are to provide for fair competition in the developing market for care, we must redress the balance. The solution is the establishment of a refund scheme whereby charities would be compensated through Treasury grant in aid for a set proportion of the VAT that they incurred on their non-business expenditure. I emphasise that the charities would not keep the money that came back to them as profit; they would plough it back into services.

Such a scheme works successfully in Canada, where charities are able to reclaim half the amount spent in general services tax at the end of the financial year. The Charities Tax Reform Group has been advised by the European Commission that such a scheme would be permissible within European law.

The proposal is that the scheme should apply only in relation to non-business expenditure, which would go a long way to safeguard against fraud. Such a scheme would also be flexible, enabling my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to vary the proportion of irrecoverable VAT which would be rebated according to the circumstances of the economy and his judgment of what he could afford.

Such a scheme ought to be attractive to the Treasury and to my hon. Friends on the right, because they could look forward, if they wished to do so, to some substitution of charitable activity for state activity. Charities also provide excellent value for money. This scheme should also have a broader appeal; it should recommend itself to others of my hon. Friends and to the Opposition, because it would make for a cost-effective increase in social provision.

The standard objection advanced against this argument over the years is that it is Government policy to provide fiscal concessions to encourage charitable giving, and that we cannot have it both ways. Speaking as the chair of the all-party group on charities, I know that the increase over many years in tax concessions for charitable giving has been very much appreciated—at least until the March 1993 Budget.

Until that date, the cumulative value—I speak from memory, and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will correct me if I am wrong—of tax concessions on charitable giving introduced by this Government amounted to £900 million a year. Since then, however, the Treasury has been somewhat less benign. In the March 1993 Budget, we saw the measure on advance corporation tax for charities and the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel and power. The consequence was that charities lost £100 million net in tax terms.

Alongside that fiscal setback, charities then and since have suffered from fairly tight restraints on the capacity of central and local government to make grants to them. The recession caused enormous difficulties for them in fund raising with the private sector. Charities have recovered very unevenly from the recession.

The Government's strategy of switching the emphasis from direct to indirect taxation and the prospect that my right hon. and hon. Friends hold out of progress towards a 20p basic rate of income tax challenge us to a fundamental reconsideration of the tax treatment of charities. We should not, of course, reduce the concessions for charitable giving, but we should recognise that encouragement for giving is insufficient.

There is, after all, a certain randomness. Although we should respect the wishes of donors to charities and should let them make their own judgments, we should recognise that, in terms of how social need is to be addressed, there is considerable randomness in the pattern of charitable giving. Although the great majority of charities are active, efficient and competent in what they set out to do, we cannot say that of all of them.

There is a case for a new emphasis on supporting charities that do things—charities that make social provision. It is often provision in unglamorous, unfashionable, but vitally necessary areas. My right hon. and hon. Friends ought seriously to consider how they will remedy the problem that the Government take more away in VAT from some charities that perform extremely valuable social tasks than those charities gain in concessions on charitable giving.

The Government want charities to play an important part in the pattern of social provision. Charities are strongly placed to do so. They are cost-effective. Their gearing, through their capacity to mobilise voluntary support, means that they have an enormous amount to contribute for the money that they dispose of. They are innovative.

We ought to be systematic in our encouragement and support of the charitable sector. I put it to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we need a systematic review of the tax treatment of charities and the totality of Government's policy in relation to charity, so that we can do our best to ensure that it is coherent and that charities are consistently supported.

The ways and means resolution and the money resolution that we have approved mean that it is not possible to table a new clause that would be in order which would provide substantively for the implementation of a compensation scheme such as I have argued for. Therefore, I have tabled new clause 16, which would require the Government to supply information that would illustrate the situation and the need. It is my hope that, in researching and considering the estimates that the new clause would require, my right hon. and hon. Friends will be persuaded of the necessity of a VAT compensation scheme.

Mr. Tim Smith: In recent years, charities have had to bear an increasing burden of VAT, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) has said. He is right when he says that we should have a comprehensive review of their liability to pay VAT. His new clause has my full support.

Ms Primarolo: I congratulate the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on tabling new clause 16. As he said in his closing remarks, the ways and means and money resolutions are drafted tightly, so it would be difficult, if not impossible, to table an amendment that would be in order. He was right to table a new clause asking for information to identify the scale of the difficulty experienced by charities because of irrecoverable VAT. We support the principle that we should look carefully at the impact of the increasing importance of VAT as the major element in the Government's strategy of shifting from direct to indirect taxes.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon highlighted, charities mostly provide services which are exempt from VAT. Therefore, they are unable to recover VAT where they have paid it on purchases of necessary supplies.

The director of finance and administration of the National Children's Home has said:

> "The irrecoverable VAT burden of NCH in 1992/93 was £891,000."

If it had been able to use that money to finance its activities, it would have been able to open and run another 20 family centres. As has been pointed out, examples such as the Canadian tax regime, in which proportions of tax are reclaimed by charities, are worthy of consideration by the Government. It would be important that any scheme limited the recoverable VAT to non-business expenditure only.

We support the principle of the new clause. I hope that the Paymaster General will tell us that the Government are willing to look closely at the difficulties that charities are experiencing. I hope that he will tell the House how we could introduce a sensible tax regime that did not penalise the charities to the extent that they are penalised now.

9.30 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I pay tribute to the good work done by the charitable sector, described eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). The Government recognise that work by, for instance, granting tax reliefs, as my hon. Friend mentioned.

A number of specific VAT reliefs are granted for charitable purchases, which save the sector about £150 million a year—perhaps one third of its potential VAT bill. The reliefs cover purchases of medical research and rescue equipment such as lifeboats, equipment for disabled people, the construction of certain charities' buildings, and advertising to raise funds. Moreover, the sale by charities of donated goods is zero-rated, and admission to fund-raising events such as concerts is exempt. Those reliefs may be worth another £50 million. Direct tax reliefs are worth about £830 million, and exemption from business rates about £240 million.

It is clear that the charitable sector as a whole has been given a wide range of reliefs to enable it to do the good work that we expect of it. The general VAT rebate scheme outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon and others, which would apply to all charities, would be very expensive; it might cost a further £300 million a year—money that would either go straight on to the budget deficit or have to be found elsewhere. Moreover, such a scheme would give most benefit to bodies spending heavily on taxable goods and services, regardless of the aim of the charity or the nature of the expenditure.

Charitable status is widely granted: there are about 170,000 registered charities in the country. Both this evening and in discussions elsewhere, my hon. Friend has spoken of the importance of social provision by charities, but it would be almost impossible for us to differentiate between charities of that kind and the generality of registered charities—which include universities, providers of private medical care and public schools. We must be cautious about granting another general tax relief by way of a VAT refund scheme; the good it might do would not be particularly narrowly focused.

I now realise that the new clause was intended as a probing measure; before my hon. Friend made that clear, I was a little worried. The figures requested would be extremely difficult to obtain, certainly on a routine basis: much of the information could not be obtained from VAT returns, for the good reason that most of the activities involved are exempt from VAT or outside its scope, because the charities concerned are not registered.

Therefore, the information would have to be obtained from surveys, which would not only be administratively expensive for Customs and Excise but would impose on the charities a compliance cost that might not be altogether welcome. If my hon. Friend wishes to obtain further and better information about the sums involved, which is the requirement of the new clause, I should be happy to answer a parliamentary question.

I think that I said enough earlier to show that, although I am highly sympathetic to the aims of the clause, and genuinely acknowledge the work that is done by charities, especially in filling the gaps that must always exist in state provision and in finding new and innovative ways to respond to human needs, I must resist, without any misunderstanding, the thinking behind the proposal. We do not contemplate a general VAT refund scheme, despite the eloquence of my hon. Friend's pleadings.

Mr. Alan Howarth: With his usual astuteness, my hon. Friend has perceived that the new clause was probing. I am grateful to him for his sympathetic view of the issue. It is important, and I hope that the debate, which I am glad we have had, will encourage the Government to think systematically not only about this issue but about the totality of Government fiscal policy in relation to charities. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Madam Speaker: We now come to new clause 18. The three hon. Members who are eligible to move it are Mr. Knapman, Mr. Alexander and Mr. Rupert Allason. As they are not present, the new clause falls.

Clause 8

HYDROCARBON OIL: "ROAD VEHICLE"

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I beg to move amendment No. 68, in page 6, line 21, at end insert—

'Vehicles used between different parts of land

4A. A vehicle is an excepted vehicle if—

(a) it is used only for purposes relating to agriculture, horticulture or forestry,

(b) it is used on public roads only in passing between different areas of land occupied by the same person, and

(c) the distance it travels on public roads in passing between any two such areas does not exceed 1.5 kilometres.'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Amendment No. 91, in schedule 4, page 169, leave out lines 39 and 40.

Government amendment No. 69.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are denied an outing on amusement machine licence duty. The amendment relates to vehicle excise duty changes and it might be helpful briefly to remind hon. Members of the reasons for the changes to that duty, which are set out in schedule 4.

The existing system of VED suffers from a great many faults. It is archaic, in some cases dating back to before the second world war, and as a result it no longer concentrates special treatment and concessions on those who most merit them. It is also extremely complex. There are 132 separate classes for this type of indirect taxation. Consequently, it is bureaucratic and I am afraid that it is also prone to evasion. Therefore, we have used the Bill as an opportunity to push through major reform and restructuring of the vehicle excise duty system.

Any reform on this scale is not easy and we made a number of consequential changes after discussing the matter during earlier debate on the Bill and with the trades and associations that are affected. The system that is set out in schedule 4 addresses the faults that I have outlined and the 132 classes are reduced to fewer than a dozen. Special treatment is now concentrated on the most deserving, opportunities for evasion are closed and bureaucracy is reduced.

The amendment relates to farming, horticulture and forestry because it is obvious, especially to hon. Members with agricultural constituencies, that farm operators are frequently obliged to make short journeys between parcels of land in the same ownership. Such limited use of the public roads warrants the continued exemption from VED and entitlement to rebated fuel.

The old 6-miles-per-week exemption was bureaucratic and virtually impossible to enforce and our original intention was to abolish it. However, I said clearly in Committee that I would listen to representations from hon. Members, the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and others on whether we could design an exemption that was less bureaucratic and more enforceable, but which would give relief, where merited, to those farm vehicles making inevitable short trips along public roads.

Ms Primarolo: I am listening carefully to the Paymaster General. Can he confirm that the proposals before us are not less restrictive than the previous 6-miles-per-week regulation, but are less bureaucratic? Is he saying that, basically, it is the same arrangement but in a less bureaucratic form?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The proposal is certainly less bureaucratic because previously the farmer had to fill out a complex annual form. If he needed to divert from the route laid down in the form because, for example, of a blockage in the road, theoretically he had to write for permission to make the detour.

The proposal is also more enforceable because, instead of a system based on time and distance—6 miles per week—we have agreed to a scheme that gives exemption to vehicles used for agriculture and similar purposes where no trip on a public road between land in the same occupation exceeds 1.5 km, which is about as near to a mile as the metric system allows. To enforce that, the police officer no longer has to guess how many miles the vehicle has travelled in a week; instead, he can easily judge whether the vehicle is within 1.5 km of the nearest land in that particular ownership or occupation.

It is a different system and a slightly different category of vehicles will benefit, but the overall intention is the same. In general, it is slightly more generous than the system it replaces. Under the old system, if the limit of 6 miles per week had been used up, in theory the farmer was not entitled to any more trips on a public road. Now, he can make an unlimited number of journeys on a public road, within the overall constraint that they can be no more than 1.5 km in distance. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Tyler: I want to mention the concerns that the agricultural, horticultural and forestry industries had about the original proposal, from which, to some extent, the Government have now retreated. That is welcome.

I have two questions for the Paymaster General. First, why was the original proposal ever included in the Bill? Clearly, consultation must have been absolutely minimal if the Government now have to make this major, albeit welcome, change. The only thing that I can think of that might have been the logic behind the original proposal is that Conservative Members who represent agricultural constituencies must have told the Government that such was the scale of current agricultural enterprises that they had so many private roads that the exemption was no longer necessary.

The other question is why the distance of precisely 1.5 km has been chosen. It is near a mile, but why were not the distances of 1, 1.5 or 2 miles chosen? That restriction does not seem to have any particular logic. No precedent for it exists in similar legislation from the past, or in present restrictions.

The Government's retreat is welcome. I know that all three industries will be delighted that, at long last, the Government have recognised the problem that they were creating. However, the attempt to reduce bureaucracy could still result in a number of problems. The provision on vehicles that are used only for agriculture, horticulture and forestry purposes might, for example, not catch in its net a pick-up truck that is used for leisure purposes at weekends—not that farmers ever get any leisure time. They may find that, if a tight net were drawn, a vehicle used for leisure purposes would not be captured within the amendment and, therefore, that they would not have the exemption either from fuel or vehicle excise duty.

I hope that the system will prove simpler than that of the past, and than that which would have resulted from the original proposal. I thank the Paymaster General for listening to hon. Members on both sides of the House at an early stage in Committee. I hope that he will be able to answer those two simple points when he replies to the short debate.

9.45 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I want to thank my hon. Friend the Paymaster General for the changes. Farmers in Hastings and Rye quickly alerted me to the difficulties with the original proposal. I know that they are pleased about not just the changes in the distance that they can drive, but the reduction in bureaucracy. Every farmer would dearly like to have fewer forms to fill in. The reduction of one will be much welcomed.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider new section 4A(b), which states that the vehicle should pass between

"different areas of land occupied by the same person".

On many occasions, the cost of agricultural machinery is so great that farmers buy machinery jointly, or have a working arrangement to farm each other's land and share the machinery. Although those farmers meet the purposes of new section 4A(a) and (c), the lands that they farm may not technically be occupied by the same person, even though they may be only 1 or 2 km away from each other.

That is important to farmers in my constituency such as Mr. Sandell and Mr. Crook of Amesbury, who have a river and a bridge between their land. They would not benefit from the clause simply because they do not occupy each other's land.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be extremely brief, but I want to refer to my amendment No. 91. I accept that amendment No. 68, which stands in the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is a massive improvement on the original proposal. The Paymaster General has referred to his desire to reduce bureaucracy and the complexity of forms that farmers must fill out, but I do not believe that the amendment will reduce that complexity. Aspects of it will lead to various arguments being propounded as to what an agricultural vehicle is exactly.

The amendment is not particularly clear when it states:

"for purposes relating to agriculture, horticulture or forestry".

Will that, for example, include a truck that is not defined as a tractor or an agricultural implement? That is one of the concerns that many farmers have about the definition of an agricultural vehicle.

Has the Paymaster General received any representations recently from the National Farmers Union for Scotland or from Forestry Enterprise on the provision allowing an unlimited number of journeys of 1.5 km? Realistically, that provision is not particularly helpful in regions such as mine, where farms or forestry may cover vast areas of land. Farms may not be especially profitable, but they cover vast areas. I wonder whether there has been any recognition of the particular geography or topography of certain areas.

I echo the sentiments that have been expressed about co-operation between farmers which may involve moving implements from one farm to another, thereby leading to the 1.5 km provision being exceeded. It is important to clarify the issue so that we do not get into yet another muddle and in order to avoid bureaucracy. Our farmers and foresters are extremely concerned.

While there has been a general welcome for the amendment, I hope that the Paymaster General will take on board the fact that there are still reservations about it. I hope that we can be provided with a final definition.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): The Paymaster General referred to "the most deserving case"—I think that that was the phrase—being kept in the revised regulations. I wonder whether he may come to regret that phrase because, although I have no objection to the proposal to reduce the burden on those who operate vehicles for forestry or for agricultural purposes, other groups of people in an almost identical situation do not receive the same sympathetic attention.

I am thinking of, for example, plant hire companies that provide, for use in construction, vehicles which are often used on the road for only part of the time. They are faced with a great increase in tax in the Budget and, while I accept that the merits of the case for agriculture may be strong, other groups do not benefit from the subsidies received by agriculture and forestry but, as they are involved in the construction industry, face considerable difficulty in passing on the increased tax burden.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I echo the views expressed by the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Salisbury (Mr. Key) about co-operation among farmers. I think that the House will appreciate that the smaller the farms, the more likely there is to be such co-operation. Indeed, it is not so much common as nearly universal in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister will take on board the comments made a few moments ago.

I draw the House's attention to a matter which has not yet been mentioned, at least not in my hearing—the 1.5 km provision. In Northern Ireland and, no doubt, in slightly different forms throughout the United Kingdom, we have a system of renting land. In Northern Ireland it is called conacre. It involves renting land for a particular crop for one year. It is of considerable value to specialist potato growers and, to a lesser extent, to specialist grain growers and, of course, in respect of grass silage which often has to be grown at a considerable distance from where it is needed.

The periods of time during which tractors and other vehicles are used to move crops are comparatively short—in some cases, only a few days each year. As the House will know, at such times it is a question of every possible vehicle being put on the road to do the work in the shortest possible time. Crops are sometimes grown on land that is considerably further off than 1.5 km. Indeed, I should have thought that 10 km was a more reasonable distance to include in the legislation. Perhaps the Minister will take that point on board in addition to that made by

[Mr. William Ross]

the hon. Members for Moray and for Salisbury and attend to them next year, as I do not expect that any further changes to the Bill will be made now.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I was asked why the original proposal was to do away with the exemption. It was simply because it was bureaucratic and unworkable and the House should not pass or tolerate laws that are described as such. I made it clear, however, that if agricultural and similar vehicles could be exempted from vehicle excise duty in a way that overcame the problems, I would consider it. Since I said that and since we have had the meetings with the trade representatives, we have found exactly such a way and I commend it to the House.

I was asked why the amendment sets out a distance of 1.5 km. I own that I would rather have put "1 mile" in the statute, but I am advised that nowadays we are all going metric. I do not know why, but I can guess. It is certainly the case that, from 1999, our statutes have to reflect kilometres and other metric measurements, with a few exceptions that do not cover this case. I went for the nearest length equivalent to a mile and came up with 1.5 km, which is reasonably comprehensible to farmers, even though most of the farmers I know are still in the day of rods, poles and perches—if they are very modern they talk about furlongs. I am afraid that we must all go metric in due course, and so the figure in the statute will be 1.5 km.

On the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) about construction vehicles, the rationale for the agricultural exemption is the low mileage on roads. Often, farmers simply have to cross a main road—they do nothing more than that—so they do not use the public highway in any real sense of the word, whereas construction vehicles and the like use public roads, which explains the difference in treatment.

I was also asked about farms that may not be in the same occupation, but use the same vehicles. Contract vehicles frequently travel quite short distances between different farms, but during a year they tend to make significant use of public roads. They would not have benefited under the old exemption of 6 miles per week and it is not right, therefore, that we should design a markedly more generous system to replace the one that we are doing away with.

Mrs. Ewing: Can the Paymaster General differentiate between a contract vehicle and one that is owned by a co-operative?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, but I think that the general point still applies. If a co-operative's vehicle moved frequently between different farms, it would not have benefited under the old system of 6 miles per week and, typically, would do more than the 1.5 km hops between land, even if we were to change the statute to allow such hops between farms to include movements between land in different ownership. Obviously, we have to draw a line at some point and I think that we have done so in the right place.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman spoke earlier and I am trying to answer him, but I will be happy to listen if he has a different point.

Mr. Tyler: I want to draw the Paymaster General's attention to the words "same person" in paragraph (b) of the amendment. It is not clear to whom that applies—the same as what? In this case, it is extremely important because, as the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said, "same person" might mean something in the context of a co-operative. The "same person" is very difficult to define. I think that the hon. Member for Salisbury is agreeing.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The use of "same person" means that it applies to a farm in the same ownership. We are exempting a farm vehicle—a tractor or whatever—when it moves from a field owned by a man or a partnership to a different field in the same ownership. If it involves a journey of less than 1.5 km, the farm vehicle will be exempt from vehicle excise duty. That is reasonably clear and I commend the measure to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 14

RATES OF DUTY

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I beg to move amendment No. 83, in page 10, line 13, after 'State', insert 'or Cyprus or Malta'.

The amendment deals with the transport by air from this country to two Commonwealth nations that lie within the European geographical area: Cyprus and Malta.

Some 50 years ago, the air over Malta was full of aeroplanes—those of the Nazi Luftwaffe trying to crush that little island out of existence. Britain owes a debt to Malta and, as we celebrate VE day, the Bill provides the House with an opportunity to give the people of Malta a small present by reducing from £10 to £5 the air passenger duty that British holidaymakers must pay when they fly to Malta.

10 pm

As hon. Members may know, we have two rates of air passenger duty: £5 for the European Union and the European Economic Area; and £10 for the rest of the world. The amendment simply proposes that, as Commonwealth countries, Malta and Cyprus should be treated on an equal footing with the European Union in that regard and people travelling by air from the United Kingdom to either Malta or Cyprus should pay only £5 in air passenger duty.

The sum involved is minimal. Some 500,000 holidaymakers from the UK go to Malta each year and a little under 1 million go to Cyprus, so the Cypriot tourist industry is suffering. To make that concession just to Malta holidaymakers would cost less than the share options to be exercised by the chairman of the National Grid. Given that this is a chance to pay a practical tribute to the Maltese people by encouraging our citizens to go on holiday to Malta, I ask all hon. Members to vote for the amendment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Actually, that is not true; I do not mind disappointing the hon. Gentleman because this is not one of his brainier schemes. In Committee, he had the idea of exempting all members of the Council of Europe from the full rate of air passenger duty. That was rejected, and I invite my hon. Friends to do the same to this amendment.

The £5 rate of duty was originally restricted to European Union countries as they are easily identifiable. That is an important consideration because travel agents and airlines around the world will have to administer the duty and distinguish between the £10 and £5 rates, so we chose the European Union as a readily identifiable group of countries. We then extended the rate to the European Economic Area because, by law, we must extend to it privileges of that nature granted to the European Union. There we must stop, however, because there is no clear case for singling out Malta and Cyprus, brave and plucky though at least one of them may have been during the second world war.

The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that a relief may come the way of those two countries as both have applied to join the European Union. If and when they succeed in doing so, they will qualify for the £5 rate of air passenger duty. I would rather leave it to the forces of time and history to grant them that privilege than do so this evening in the House.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 42

CARS: ACCESSORIES FOR THE DISABLED

Sir George Young: I beg to move amendment No. 58, in page 35, line 35, leave out

'designed solely for use by a chronically sick or disabled person".'

and insert

'which falls within section 168AA".'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 1, in page 35, line 36, at end insert

'and also automatic transmission and power steering where those accessories are required to permit the chronically sick or disabled person to use the car.'.

Government amendment No. 59.

Sir George Young: I should like to speak briefly to Government amendment No. 59 and I hope that the Opposition will then not move amendment No. 1.

The amendments extend the exemptions included in the Finance Bill to exempt accessories for the disabled from an income tax charge when fitted to a company car. The amendments mean that exemptions will apply not just to special accessories designed solely for use by a disabled person, but optional accessories needed to enable a disabled employee to use the car where the employee is an orange badge holder because of his or her disability.

The original proposal was widely welcomed when we debated the measure in Committee, but there was a general feeling that we should go a little bit further. I have now carefully considered whether we can respond to that feeling without running the risks that the Committee identified of giving relief for non-disabled drivers.

We have looked again at the scope for widening the range of accessories covered by the exemption while still ensuring that those items are exempt only where they are needed by a disabled person. As a result, we propose amendments Nos. 58 and 59, which will extend exemption to include optional accessories, which a disabled person needs to use the car. That means that if accessories such as automatic transmission, power steering, electric windows, air conditioning or heated seats—all of which were mentioned when we debated the proposal in Committee—are fitted to a company car at extra cost to enable a disabled employee to use that car, the extra cost of those items will not be added to the price of the car in calculating the value of the car benefit. Only those accessories that the particular disabled employee actually needs will be excluded. Where the accessory is no more necessary than for anyone else, the extra tax charge will still be due.

An employee will be eligible for the exemption if he or she is the current holder of an orange badge because of his or her disability. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said, the orange badge scheme was reviewed recently and the eligibility criteria were greatly tightened. The orange badge scheme was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) and it operates under regulations made under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and its Northern Ireland equivalent.

I believe that amendments Nos. 58 and 59 fully meet the concerns expressed by the Committee. I commend them to the House. I hope that amendment No. 1 will not be moved.

Ms Primarolo: I support the Government amendments. The proposals cover exactly the points that were discussed in Committee. The exemptions now provided to disabled drivers as a result of the Government's amendments mean that the discrimination that was exercised before will no longer exist.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 59, in page 35, line 36, at end insert—

'( ) After section 168A of the Taxes Act 1988 there shall be inserted—

"Equipment to enable disabled person to use car

168AA.—(1) Equipment falls within this section if it is designed solely for use by a chronically sick or disabled person.

(2) Equipment also falls within this section if—

(a) at the time when the car is first made available to the employee, the employee holds a disabled person's badge, and

(b) the equipment is made available for use with the car because the equipment enables him to use the car in spite of the disability entitling him to hold the badge.

(3) In subsection (2) above "disabled person's badge" means a badge—

(a) which is issued to a disabled person under section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 or section 14 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 (or which has effect as if so issued), and

(b) which is not required to be returned to the issuing authority under or by virtue of the section in question.

(4) Subsection (12) of section 168A applies for the purposes of this section as it applies for the purposes of that.'"—*[Sir George Young.]*

Clause 68

APPROVAL OF COMPANIES AS TRUSTS

Amendment made: No. 71, in page 60, line 19, leave out '50' and insert '30'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Further consideration adjourned.—[*Mr.Bates.*]

Bill, as amended (in the Committee and in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION

That the draft Asian Development Bank (Extension of Limit on Guarantees) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th March, be approved.

That the draft Inter-American Development Bank (Eighth General Increase) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th March, be approved.

That the draft Asian Development Bank (Further Payments to Capital Stock) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Council Housing, Southampton

10.6 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I wish to present a petition signed by 1,000 council tenants in Southampton, which is headed by David and Rashin Bishop of 2 Kenilworth house. They are in their fourth year of waiting for a larger home for themselves and their three children. They cannot understand why they have to wait so long while the city council has £14 million from the sale of council houses, which cannot be used to build new homes.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble Petition of residents of Southampton sheweth that:

Local authorities are prevented from using the money raised from the sale of council housing to build new homes.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your humble House will:

Urge Her Majesty's Government to enable Southampton and other local councils to use capital receipts to build new homes, improve existing homes and create useful work.

To lie upon the Table.

Official Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.9 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate this evening's Adjournment debate about *Hansard* and related issues. I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, for being here to reply to the debate and I look forward very much to hearing what he has to say. I am also pleased to see my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) in the Chamber, and I hope that they will take an interest in the matter.

Hansard is essential to the work of Members of the House. It is also highly important to our constituents, who need to know what right hon. and hon. Members say in Parliament. The dramatic fall in *Hansard*'s circulation in recent years, the decline of parliamentary reporting and the lack of in-depth coverage of the House's proceedings in the press have together significantly weakened the working of democracy in this country.

I am especially pleased to start the debate as a Member for a Norwich constituency. It was in Norwich that Luke Hansard was baptised and where he served his apprenticeship to a printer before coming to London in 1774. Here he became one of the commercial parliamentary printers contracted to Mr. Speaker to publish the papers of the House. Those were straightforward papers—the journal, votes and Bills—necessary for the work of the House. What was said by Members in debates continued to be regarded as confidential and strictly reserved for the ears of other Members. I suspect that there may be occasions nowadays when the thought crosses the minds of some right hon. and hon. Members that it might be better if that continued to be so.

It was not until the first decade of the 19th century that unauthorised verbatim accounts of proceedings by William Cobbett began to appear. From 1807 onwards, those were published by Luke Hansard's son Thomas, who took over the whole operation from 1812. Since that time, the name *Hansard* has been synonymous with the publication of a clear and independent record of the proceedings in the Chamber and in our Standing Committees. It is a tribute to the achievements of the Hansard family, of Her Majesty's Stationery Office and of its highly proficient staff for many decades that the title *Hansard* has been adopted for the reports of proceedings in other legislatures throughout the world.

Norwich's historic connection with *Hansard* was reinforced in 1968, when HMSO transferred its headquarters from Atlantic house in Holborn to Norwich. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of my constituents and others in Norwich who work in the HMSO organisation. I thank also those members of staff at HMSO who have helped me in preparation for the debate.

It is in HMSO's parliamentary data centre that the copy sent from the *Hansard* editorial staff here is converted from continuous text into columns and pages, scanned for quality control and delivered in hard form to HMSO's parliamentary press for printing, finishing and distribution the following morning. I do not know whether I am allowed to pay tribute to those who are present taking down the proceedings right now, verbatim, at the same time as I am referring to other people associated with *Hansard*. Written answers have to be typeset before being converted into columns and paginated, while proceedings in Standing Committees also require typesetting.

Getting *Hansard* to our breakfast tables is therefore a complicated and costly operation. It is an operation that I believe is essential to the workings of democracy in Britain. The electors who send right hon. and hon. Members to represent them here are entitled to know what decisions we have taken and why. The arguments that we have made to one another, the challenges that we have made to Ministers and their responses, the votes that we have recorded, all belong in the public record. That information makes us truly accountable to one another in the House and should make us accountable to the wider public, beyond these walls.

Unfortunately, access to information about the proceedings in the House and the reasoning behind parliamentary decisions has become more restricted. Sixteen years ago, *Hansard* had a circulation of 10,500 copies, covering proceedings in both Houses. Now, its daily sales are of about 5,500 copies, and most of those—some 85 per cent.—go to officials and Government Departments, with the remainder going to institutions and corporate bodies. Many public libraries, academic institutions and individuals have ceased to take *Hansard* altogether.

There can be no doubt that the major reason for the decline in the circulation of *Hansard* has been its pricing policy. In 1979, Commons *Hansard* cost 45p. By 1983, that had more than trebled to £1.50. Now it is £7.50. The *Hansard* for the other place costs £4.20. Few public or academic libraries can afford to pay nearly £12 a day to learn what happens here.

I understand that the decision was taken in 1983 to withdraw the subsidy of £6 million a year which HMSO was then receiving to support the publication of *Hansard*. That process was completed in 1992. No announcement of that decision was, so far as I can discover, ever made in the House. Right hon. and hon. Members never had the opportunity to express their views on its merits or on its inevitable consequences. It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) tabled a written question on this matter in November 1993. The figures that he obtained confirm the information that I have given in this debate.

It is not acceptable for the citizens of this country to have to pay seven times what Americans and Germans pay for finding out what happens in their legislatures, eight times what Canadians and French people pay and 14 times as much as Australians have to pay.

The fall in the circulation of *Hansard* has been compounded by the changes in parliamentary coverage in the press. Twenty-five or 30 years ago, the quality broadsheets, if not the tabloid press, gave proceedings in this House much more coverage than they do now. I know that that is true because I took the opportunity to do a certain amount of research into this subject some six months ago. *The Times*, for example, some years ago, quoted directly from the speeches of right hon. and hon. Members in some detail. It is very rare indeed for it to do so now. The quality press now prefers to produce the diaries of parliamentary sketch writers. Serious reporting has given way to a preoccupation with knockabout comedy and juvenile witticisms.

Of course I accept that there are programmes on the radio and television which are specifically devoted to covering parliamentary proceedings. That is all to the good, but they cater for people with specialised interests, not for the general run of viewers, whose attention—or perhaps that of news editors seeking spectacular rows—is aroused only for snippets of debates in the House or in Committee which are carried on the main news bulletins.

It is no good complaining of course about the preferences of the broadcasting media or of the newspapers. They have their own agendas and rightly so. The House must make its own views felt, at least on the issue of *Hansard*, in which we have a locus.

Hansard should be more readily available. That means lowering its price, if necessary by subsidising it from parliamentary rather than Government funds. The House should consider whether copies of *Hansard* should be supplied to the major public libraries throughout the United Kingdom at a price equivalent to the marginal cost of production. That would make it readily accessible to a very large number of people whenever they needed to discover what the House had heard, decided and done.

Why should *Hansard* not be available, for example, on the Internet, perhaps at a modest charge to subscribers?

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): My hon. Friend was talking earlier about cost, which is an important factor as, indeed, is accessibility. Does he agree that if *Hansard* were put on the Internet, it could possibly be made available more cheaply and—perhaps even more beneficially—made far more accessible to people?

Mr. Thompson: I certainly accept my hon. Friend's point. I know also that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is particularly interested in the information being available on the Internet, and cheaply. If electronic communication represents the future, the representatives of the people of this country should be among the first, not the last, to use it.

Parliament is the linchpin of democracy in Britain. In this Chamber and in another place, the range and scope of the laws and regulations that people have to obey is continually being extended. Their continuing consent depends on their ability to scrutinise the activities and decisions of their Members of Parliament. That has become harder in recent years. It should—it must—become easier in the future.

10.19 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I strongly endorse what has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who has put a powerful and well-researched argument to the House. I hope that the Minister will pay particular attention to his implicit suggestion that the subsidy should be restored to *Hansard* so that it can be made available to the general public, libraries and others at a more competitive price which is more akin to the price in other countries. And if money needs to be found for that purpose—if it is not possible or tenable to find it from Exchequer sources—we should look to Parliament's own revenue-generating capacity. As I understand it, the Kiosk and one or two other places here make a handsome profit;

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

perhaps we should look to them to find the necessary subsidy that would enable us to bring *Hansard* to the attention and use of a much wider public.

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. John Horam): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) for drawing attention to an issue that is of concern to both sides of the House. It was fascinating to hear of the links between Norwich, *Hansard* and its printer and publisher, HMSO. As we know, Norwich is a fine city, and HMSO is not the least fine of its occupants. Indeed, this very morning I was extolling its excellent recent progress to a conference on pay and grading delegation in the public sector.

My hon. Friend has raised important issues, focusing on the premise, with which I very much agree, that Members of the House must be properly accountable to their constituents; and that the people of this country must have the opportunity of following what goes on here and what Members say in Parliament. That principle is at the heart of our democratic system of government.

I too regret the increasing tendency in the press to trivialise our proceedings, and I believe that Parliament should be covered more thoroughly and seriously by the media. I was impressed by the way my hon. Friend collected his information on that subject.

I also believe that *Hansard* is an essential and high-quality service. The service provided to the House by the Editor of debates, in collaboration with HMSO, matches the best in the world. Many legislatures manage to issue their record of proceedings only some days after the event. Obviously costs, and therefore the cover price, could be substantially reduced if hon. Members were prepared to contemplate a diminution in the standards to which we have become accustomed. But I do not favour going down that route; nor do I believe that such a move would attract significant support anywhere in the House.

In order to guarantee the breakfast-time delivery of the previous day's proceedings, HMSO has made a heavy investment in plant and equipment in central London, which is costly to maintain. The facilities are fully stretched each night when Parliament is sitting but cannot be used to full capacity at other times, particularly during the recesses.

To deal with this problem the Government are introducing a new arrangement in the 1995-96 estimates, permitting HMSO to seek non-Government work to fill spare capacity. I am hopeful that that will lead to the more effective use of HMSO's facilities and thereby spread the fixed costs of the installation over a wider base. That, I hope, will lead to the lower costs with which my hon. Friend is concerned. It will be one more step in a progressive programme of service improvements and cost reduction.

Following investment authorised by a Committee of the House, for example, the Editor of debates has, for more than a year, been providing copy to HMSO in electronic form, instead of typescript and manuscript. That eliminates the need for typesetting and it has opened the way to substantial savings in production costs.

At the same time, HMSO has subjected its *Hansard* printing operations to the full rigours of competitive market testing—an exercise which has demonstrated that there are no private sector printers capable of producing *Hansard* more cheaply or efficiently. The successful in-house bid has led to the rationalisation of production facilities and improvements in productivity.

A second market test—of the keyboarding of written answers—led to another innovative in-house bid by HMSO that resulted in new investment in modern data technology and much greater cost-effectiveness. New proposals for changes in the pattern of working at the Parliamentary Press, that will further improve productivity, are under discussion with union representatives.

The desire of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North to see an increase in the circulation of *Hansard* is, I am sure, understandable, strong and widely shared. It is so strong that he is prepared to contemplate the reintroduction of a general *Hansard* subsidy or wider recourse to differential pricing, with parliamentary and Government users paying a higher price than external purchasers, such as public libraries.

That raises two questions: is subsidy the most desirable way of keeping costs to the customer under control; and would a general subsidy lead to a marked increase in the readership of *Hansard* among our constituents? My hon. Friend rightly observed that *Hansard* is no longer heavily subsidised by the taxpayer, as it was until only a few years ago. As my hon. Friend said, at its peak the subsidy was as high as £6 million a year. At that time, circulation was nearly twice what it is now.

I remind the House that the present cover price of £7.50, which finally eliminated the need for general subsidy, was introduced as long ago as November 1991. There has been no increase in the past three years, and I am pleased to tell the House that HMSO has pledged that there will be no increase during the life of the present Parliament. That amounts to a five-year price freeze, which is all the more remarkable given the continuing increases in the price of paper, which alone have added about £1 million to production costs over the period to which I have drawn attention.

Ever since the general subsidy was eliminated, HMSO has been funding from its overall revenues the heavy investments in new equipment, rationalisation and relocation to which I have referred. As a result of these investments and action by the House, there is a real prospect that the publication of *Hansard* will become profitable in 1996, for the first time ever.

It may therefore be possible to go one better than a price freeze. I am pleased to tell the House that HMSO is discussing with House officials the possibility of a price reduction. These discussions are not sufficiently advanced for me to go into more detail tonight, but I understand that the issues concerned will be brought before the relevant House Committees in the near future.

As you know, Madam Speaker, since April 1992 the House has taken financial responsibility for its stationery and printing needs, including *Hansard*. The House authorities, principally the Commission, chaired by you, Madam Speaker, and advised by the Administration Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), are therefore actively involved in any decision on the future pricing of, or distribution policy for, *Hansard*. That means that the House has a role in the pricing of *Hansard*.

I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North that the Government still provide a subsidy that enables HMSO to supply Government publications to public libraries at half price. I do not think that that is generally known. That subsidy applies both to *Hansard* publications, which are already slightly discounted, and to the bulk supply terms offered by HMSO for those who take omnibus collections of publications. That means that members of the public throughout the country are able to consult *Hansard* and other Government publications in libraries, which have been supplied at prices ranging from only 25 per cent. to 45 per cent. of face value. That can be a reduction of 75 per cent. That is a real public benefit, which makes a practical contribution to promoting open government, and which represents a base on which I would be prepared to build. I think that these arrangements go some way to meeting my hon. Friend's laudable objectives. Indeed, if my hon. Friend takes into account all the discounting that can happen both on the weekly *Hansard* and on the daily *Hansard*, he will find that it comes very close to the marginal costs that he mentioned.

I have already mentioned that during the many years when Government provided a substantial subsidy, the circulation of *Hansard* was, nevertheless, modest. Regrettable though hon. Members may find it, sales of *Hansard* to the general public have always been extremely small. As my hon. Friend has said, no less than 85 per cent. of sales are to official users—Government Departments and so forth—and the remaining 15 per cent. largely comprise libraries and other institutions and commercial organisations, rather than individual citizens. Circulation among individuals is not very different now, with a price of £7.50, from what it was when the price was 45p. The reduction in sales over the past 10 years or so, to which my hon. Friend referred, has come about mainly as a result of fewer sales to Government Departments. I read nothing into that; that is the fact of the matter.

It is certainly true, as my hon. Friend observed, that many overseas legislatures publish their official report at lower prices—sometimes considerably lower where a subsidy applies. However, despite these lower prices, very few countries manage to sell more copies of their official report than does the United Kingdom. Indeed, one legislature that makes its proceedings available free of charge has almost the lowest public readership of all.

This apparently perverse logic may be explained by the results of some market research which was undertaken by MORI last year, under commission from HMSO. MORI found that although most members of the general public were aware of the existence of *Hansard*, there was much less interest in reading it in its present form whatever the price might be.

I normally reserve a healthy scepticism for the results of public opinion polls, but I have to confess to an uncomfortable feeling that there may be something in the proposition that although the average citizen no doubt wishes to keep abreast of the main elements of parliamentary business and might well want better newspaper coverage, as my hon. Friend said, he or she may be rather less interested in a verbatim transcript—which is what *Hansard* is—of our proceedings.

As my hon. Friend said, radio and television programmes devoted to parliamentary proceedings cater for a small and specialised market. I think that most hon. Members will agree that *Hansard* inevitably falls into the same category.

MORI's other findings included the fact that more than half of present subscribers regarded *Hansard* as being either "very good" or "fairly good" value for money. In fact, most users of *Hansard* were less concerned with the cover price than with the cost of employing people to go through its pages to find the issues of interest to them. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that the presentation of information that follows the exact order of business in the House is, in practice, not very user-friendly—at least for people who are not Members of the House of Commons.

MORI's overall conclusion was that the market for *Hansard* as a complete publication in its present verbatim form is, therefore, extremely limited, although the market for some of the information it contains is potentially large. What is needed, therefore, is a means of extracting bespoke information relevant to the needs of individual users and presenting it to them either electronically or by printing on demand. Most users would be prepared to pay more for such a service than they pay for the present *Hansard*. The point is that there would be an opportunity to generate more revenue and, therefore, the possibility of reducing further the price of *Hansard* if we could achieve such a bespoke information source.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the attractive possibilities now opened up by the Internet with its potential for fast transmission of information to a wide audience. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) also commented on this. HMSO is exploring these possibilities, in conjunction with the House authorities. But it needs to be borne in mind that a continuous stream of undifferentiated data is no more user-friendly on screen than it is on paper so there will be a need for careful presentation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East said, the key is to make the information more accessible. That would require us to put in sophisticated software to make *Hansard* as user-friendly on the Internet as we would wish it to be.

HMSO now publishes *Hansard* in CD-ROM form. This enables the proceedings of a complete Session of Parliament, amounting to some 20 million words, to be captured on a 5-in disc. The sophisticated retrieval software of CD-ROM allows users to look up within seconds what any hon. Member has said on any given subject at different points in time and for a long period. That is a sobering thought, but such technology clearly has the potential to meet the needs of *Hansard*'s customers very effectively. I know that HMSO and the House officials will continue to work to develop service improvements to meet those needs and to ensure that *Hansard* continues to play a central role in the life of parliamentary democracy.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 April 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Madam Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Bill
Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Manufacturing

1. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for manufacturing employment. [16003]

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): Manufacturing employment in Great Britain rose by 8,000 in the latest month, to stand at 4.3 million in January 1995.

Mr. Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures are extremely encouraging? What would be the impact on that increase in manufacturing employment if the social chapter and other measures beloved of the Labour party were imposed on this country? How relevant does my right hon. Friend consider the recent statement of the president of Daimler-Benz in Germany that if the imposition of the social chapter were continued and extended, there would be no manufacturing employment left?

Mr. Portillo: I consider it a substantial advantage to manufacturing employment in the United Kingdom that we do not subscribe to the social chapter. It is clear that inward investors value our membership of the European Union, but consider it very important that the costs of the social chapter are not imposed on us. Our duty as politicians and legislators should be to make it easy for one person to give another a job, rather than to impose burdens that prevent employers from creating jobs.

Mr. Chidgey: Does the Secretary of State agree that a key factor in sustaining and, indeed, increasing employment in our manufacturing industries is the development of a highly trained and highly skilled work force, and that the modern apprenticeship schemes could well play an important role in that? Does the right hon. Gentleman also agree that engineering apprenticeships should take priority over training and enterprise council funding plans relating to other, more easily achievable apprenticeships, so that we can achieve an increased and sustainable work force in manufacturing industry in the long term?

Mr. Portillo: I am pleased to hear a tribute to the Government's modern apprenticeship initiative from an Opposition Member. It is indeed an important initiative, raising skills to a level that is vital in industry.

I think that all the apprenticeships should be rigorous. People should be expected to achieve standards of excellence in the modern apprenticeship programme, and in national vocational qualifications. I do not believe that I myself should choose between one sector and another, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that engineering is an extremely important sector of British industry.

Ms Harman: Does the Secretary of State admit that the reason why people are so concerned about the loss of manufacturing jobs—40 per cent. have been lost since 1979—is not just unemployment, but the low pay that goes with it? Does he not recognise that when manufacturing jobs are lost, the new jobs that replace them are often low paid? One million people in this country earn less than £2.50 an hour. Is that not a disgrace, and does it not mean that the Tory party is the party of low pay?

Mr. Portillo: I know that the hon. Lady does her research very carefully. She will know that, between 1974 and 1979, 609,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. If she has some magic solution, why were manufacturing jobs lost when her party was last in power? Why is it that it is only under this Government that the number of manufacturing jobs is rising?

If the hon. Lady is worried about low pay—despite the fact that real living standards have risen dramatically under this Government—will she commit herself to the minimum wage level that the Labour party would propose? The trade unions are pushing her on that, and we are pushing her on that. The Labour party must now come clean and tell us. It wants to promise a minimum wage but it does not want to put a figure to it. That is a dishonest posture. She should be ashamed of it.

Mr. Streeter: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the 1,000 jobs announced yesterday in south Devon by the Canadian company Nortel? They were won in the face of strong opposition from the United States of America and Mexico. Is that not just a massive vote of confidence in the far south-west economy, but a reminder that the United Kingdom remains a paradise for inward investment?

Mr. Portillo: We remain a paradise for inward investment. The long-term nature of that company's commitment in Devon shows that a strong belief exists that the country will sustain a Conservative Government who will keep us out of the social chapter in the long term.

Young People

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new proposals he has to increase the percentage of young people in full-time work.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): We will continue with the policies that have reduced unemployment among young people under 25 by 200,000 in the past two years, and that give the United Kingdom an unemployment rate for that age group that is among the lowest in Europe.

Mr. Flynn: In the paradise of Britain in 1979, 66 per cent. of young people were in employment; the figure is now less than 50 per cent., and three quarters of those people are in part-time, low-paid work. Is not the Minister ashamed that the deserted generation of young people suffer the daily rejection of unemployment or under-employment when they should be enjoying the best years of their lives? Is not the cruel choice for young people in Tory Britain to be fully educated and unemployed, to be fully qualified and partly employed, or, as is the case for 1 million people, to be in full-time work but earning part-time wages?

Mr. Paice: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is casting doubt on the International Labour Organisation unemployment figures, which show that the unemployment rate for under 25s is 16 per cent., or whether he is somehow trying to use the percentage of young people in education. Of course, fewer people in that age group are in work than in 1979 because far more are staying on in education and going on to gain further qualifications. At present, 73 per cent. of 16-year-olds are staying in full-time education, compared with just 42 per cent. in 1979.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is not it the case that, were the UK to have the misfortune of a minimum wage, young people would be the first and the worst to suffer? Cannot that be seen by comparing our country, where we do not have a statutory minimum wage, with France and Spain, which do?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right. If one considers the youth unemployment statistics across Europe, a clear similarity exists between countries with high levels of youth unemployment and those with a statutory minimum wage. Compared with the youth unemployment level in the rest of the Europe, our level is exceptionally low. It stands at 16.5 per cent., whereas in Spain it is 38 per cent., in Italy 30 per cent., in Ireland 26 per cent., in France 23 per cent. and in Belgium 9.2 per cent. I could go on. The European average is 19.6 per cent.

Mr. McCartney: Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on the independent report that will be highlighted in tomorrow's press and that will show that, in the past four years, youth unemployment has risen by 24 per cent. Nearly 1.3 million young people are economically inactive and looking for work, and the Government will not provide them with work because of their economic policies. Will he also comment on the fact that eight out of 10 young people in work are earning less than £2 an hour? Is not that proof that the Government are prepared to let young people in Britain work eight weeks full time to earn what Sir Iain Vallance, the British Telecom chief, earns in one hour of one day, and that the Conservative party is the party of low pay, privilege and exploitation?

Mr. Paice: The alleged research to which the hon. Gentleman refers does not bear very much examination. The reality is that the unemployment level for the under-25s has fallen over the past two years, both as a number and as a proportion of the age group. The number of 16 to 17-year-olds defined as unemployed by the ILO has also gone down in the past two years.

As for wages, the important thing for young people is that they are developing, learning and training. What matters are the jobs for which they will be suited as adults, which is why to consider their wage levels at a very young age is to take account of only half the problem. If we had a minimum wage, there would be no jobs at all for them.

Housebuilding Industry

3. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently employed in the housebuilding industry. [16005]

Mr. Paice: Latest estimates show that there were 1.8 million people employed in the construction industry as a whole.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but is he aware from a response that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made to me last Thursday that the housebuilding and construction sectors of our economy are in a very depressed state? Does my hon. Friend accept that there could be a dramatic multiplier effect if we could regenerate our construction and housebuilding sectors and that, if we did, we might get the feel-good factor sooner rather than later?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There is, of course, a multiplier effect involving jobs in the construction industry but what would do the country immense damage would be any artificially inspired rise in house prices, which would lead us back into a cycle of inflation. We have seen an improvement in the housing market. Housing output last year was up by 6 per cent. on the previous year, a steady, albeit slow, improvement. That is the best way forward for the economy.

Mr. Barry Jones: Why do not the Government release council house sales receipts and employ more building workers?

Mr. Paice: For the very simple reason that it would go straight on the bottom line of public borrowing.

Unemployment

4. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what comparisons he has made between the United Kingdom's record on reducing unemployment and that of other major EU countries. [16006]

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Since December 1992, unemployment on the International Labour Organisation definition has fallen by nearly two percentage points in the United Kingdom while in France, Germany and Italy it has risen by one percentage point or more. It has also risen in most other European Union countries as, for example, in Spain where it has risen by 2.7 per cent.

Mr. Waterson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that those excellent comparative results are due to the much more flexible labour market that the Government have created in this country without the harmful influence of a national minimum wage or the social chapter?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is a very clear correlation between countries with heavily regulated labour markets and countries with high unemployment. In Britain, flexible labour market policies have meant that we have attracted inward investment, that employers have been able to make the most of the recovery and that people are able to choose and agree with their employers working patterns that suit them. It is a very good country in which to be working, and I hope that the Opposition never get the opportunity to destroy that very sound base.

Ms Short: Will the Minister please explain how it benefits the British people or the British economy to encourage competition with Europe by promoting low pay in Britain? Does she agree that there is no future for Britain as the sweat shop of Europe?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed. I agree that there is no future for us as the sweatshop of Europe because we are not. The Opposition will not like to hear these facts but the take-home pay of a single man in the bottom 10 per cent. of earnings has risen 23 per cent. above inflation since 1979. What did the Opposition do for such people? Their pay fell under the previous Labour Government. Since 1979, real pay at all levels has risen for male full-timers and women, in comparison with the late 1970s when productivity and pay stagnated. Real take-home pay for a couple with an average earner has risen by 46 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not want to hear the facts. They want to make statements that they cannot substantiate. When they hear the facts, they do not like it. One can tell how well the country is doing by the length of the Opposition's faces.

Mr. Heald: Can my hon. Friend confirm that Britain has the fastest-falling rate of unemployment in Europe and that that is because we have a vibrant economy with fast-rising exports and flexible labour markets, and we are the best place in Europe to do business, which is why we are getting so much inward investment at the moment?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right. It is significant that the rest of Europe is beginning to realise that fact, with an increased concentration on competitiveness and flexibility and a rather embarrassed retreat from over-regulation. That is a tribute to the example that we have set. It is a great pity, indeed, that the Opposition cannot revel in Britain doing well.

Social Affairs Council

5. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the next Social Affairs Council meeting is to be held; and what items are to be discussed. [16007]

Mr. Portillo: The next Social Affairs Council will be held on 29 June. No agenda has yet been published.

Mr. Cook: The House will have read in the past fortnight of the expressed determination of the German Government to stop the Gastarbeiter from being engaged in conditions or at rates of pay which would undermine the conditions of the indigenous worker. The Secretary of State may be pleased to know that that is indeed welcome news to those constituents of mine who undertake the "Auf Wiedersehen Pet" route and go to work in Germany. Will the Secretary of State tell the House why my constituents may expect the German Minister to defend their standards when he will not?

Mr. Portillo: If the German Minister's policy of the posted workers directive were carried through, it would prevent the hon. Gentleman's constituents from going anywhere in Europe to find work at the rates of pay that employers would like to offer. I believe in a single European market. I believe in people being able to offer their labour freely in any place in that European market. I think that perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not believe that. If he does not, it would be to the disadvantage of his constituents who at present have the freedom to go to Germany and also of his constituents who will be employed when Samsung brings 3,000 jobs to his constituency.

Mr. John Marshall: Would my right hon. Friend like to suggest to the German presidency that the subject of job creation should be on the agenda, so that he may point out that many more jobs are being created in this country than in other European countries?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is extremely well experienced in these matters and he will not be surprised to hear that when European Employment Ministers meet, although supposedly unemployment is meant to be top of their agenda, they spend much of their time discussing directives which would make it more difficult for people to get jobs in Europe and more difficult to move from country to country. The question of unemployment is usually relegated to a brief discussion towards the end of the agenda.

Mr. Barron: The Ministers at the Social Affairs Council agree with a national minimum wage. Does the Secretary of State accept that 1 million people who are being paid under £2.50 an hour in the British economy may think that it is a good idea to have a national minimum wage in this country? Why do the Government take every opportunity, including abolishing wages councils, to drive down the hourly rate to level people down? Surely British workers deserve better than this Government who believe in low pay?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman and his party do not believe in anything, or if they do, they are not prepared to tell the public what it is. If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on having a minimum wage, I offer him the opportunity to stand up again and tell us what that minimum wage should be. Why will he not do that? I believe in a high-wage economy based on high levels of education and high levels of skill. The hon. Gentleman believes in promising people something which he is not prepared to deliver. He believes in trying to mislead people. I believe in trying to raise people's standards by education and skills. The people of this country, when it comes to the election, will not put up with the deception which is being attempted by the hon. Gentlemen.

Trade Unions

6. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment his Department has made regarding the operation of democracy in (a) the British trade unions and (b) those of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and if he will make a statement. [16008]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): Our reforms have ensured that trade unions in this country are now more accountable to their members than ever before. The strike rate in the United Kingdom has fallen twice as fast as that in the OECD generally. The last time that there were as few strikes was so long ago that the Liberals were in power.

Mr. Fabricant: Is it not true that when, in the 1980s, the Government introduced legislation to democratise the trade unions, with secret ballots for electing their leaders and before strike action, the Labour party bitterly opposed it all? Does my hon. Friend agree that under the tranquil waters of trade union democracy there lurks a kraken waiting to be awoken by the Labour party and its trade union paymasters?

Mr. Oppenheim: Characteristically, my hon. Friend is right. Our trade union reforms have given trade unionists the right to secret ballots before strikes, the right to refuse to strike and the freedom to leave a trade union without losing their jobs. Every one of those policies was opposed by the Labour party. On the basis of that record, the kraken should be put out of its misery by being put permanently to sleep.

Mr. MacShane: The question referred to trade unions in other countries, and the Minister will be aware that one of the most distinguished European trade unionists is the Secretary of State's opposite number in Germany, the Minister of Labour, Norbert Blüm, who has been in post for about 10 years—unlike the Secretary of State, who is here today, gone Portillo in a few months. Will the Minister reply to the question and assure me that, if we want a high-wage, low-unemployment economy such as that of Germany, which the Secretary of State praised yesterday, the best thing that he could do is to arrange a job swap with the Minister of Labour in Germany so that we could all say auf Wiedersehen, Portillo?

Mr. Oppenheim: I am not sure which monster sounds worse, the kraken or the Blüm, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Strikes in this country are now running at exactly 1 per cent. of the level that we inherited from Labour in 1979.

Jobseeker's Allowance

7. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the jobseeker's allowance will help people to get back to work. [16009]

Miss Widdecombe: The back-to-work bonus, national insurance contributions holiday, revision to partners working hours and other jobseeker's allowance measures, combined with the initiatives announced in the Budget, will provide substantial help and incentives for unemployed people.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful for that reply. I welcome the splendid news about the falls in the rate of unemployment over the past 14 to 15 months. However, does my hon. Friend agree that for each person who finds himself or herself long-term unemployed, that is a personal tragedy, and that the new package of measures associated with the jobseeker's allowance, such as the back-to-work bonus and the extension of employment on trial are welcome news? Does she agree that they are constructive measures that will increase employment opportunities, as opposed to the job destruction measures advocated by the Opposition, such as the national minimum wage, at whatever rate, and the social chapter?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right, and I have hopes, although I suspect that they are not destined to be fulfilled, that the whole House may welcome the substantial fall in long-term unemployment now occurring. That is due to our labour market policies, and I am glad to say that work start and work trial, the national insurance contributions holiday and the other measures that I have outlined will substantially benefit the long-term unemployed. Again, I am rather sorry to see that there is no joy among the Opposition at the fall in long-term unemployment, but only rather sad looks. They do not want people to feel good, because that means that they feel bad.

Mr. Battle: Is not the jobseeker's allowance an attempt to drive people back to work by taking their income away if an officer of the employment agency feels that they do not look properly dressed for work or have not made sufficient telephone calls? Where is the justice in that? Are not the Government simply penalising people for being unemployed through no fault of their own?

Miss Widdecombe: No, the Government are not penalising people for being unemployed, and we are extremely keen that the unemployed should have every possible assistance to get back to work. Benefit cannot be withdrawn on the whim of an employment officer, as there is a process of independent adjudication. The hon. Gentleman should perhaps study the Bill so that he can understand it a bit better.

Mr. Sykes: Is it not ridiculous that some Opposition Members do not accept that there are some people who will not work, and that the Jobseekers Bill will make such people do a job of work in return for benefit? My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) forgot to mention the national insurance holiday in his list. As an employer, can I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that the national insurance holiday will be extremely beneficial in helping the long-term unemployed get off the unemployment list?

Miss Widdecombe: One of the problems faced by the long-term unemployed is that of employer perception. There is a general, if misguided, view among employers that if a person has been out of work for a substantial time, it is somehow his fault. One of the welcome outcomes of work start, work trial and the national insurance contributions holiday is that they provide an incentive to employers to take on the long-term unemployed. As a result, not only does the long-term unemployed person benefit immediately, but the employer's attitudes towards the long-term unemployed change. I must register once again that I have not heard the Opposition welcome that.

Minimum Wage

8. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to conduct research into the effects of a national minimum wage. [16010]

Mr. Oppenheim: I have looked at unemployment among young people in Spain at 38 per cent.—a country which has a national minimum wage—and concluded that no further research is necessary.

Mr. Gapes: Smart arse.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) refers to the Minister as a "smart arse", but I will say nothing on that subject as I know that you would stop me, Madam Speaker.

Would the Minister care to contrast a constituent who telephoned me at the weekend to say that he had been offered a job at £1.70 an hour as a security guard—with all the danger that that involves—with the chief executive of PowerGen, who gets £34,000 for three "little jobs" which he does in his spare time, and a further £350,000 in salary? Does not that illustrate that we need legislation not only for a national minimum wage but for a national maximum wage?

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not know whether that was a Labour policy announcement. We all want the less well-off to be better paid, but the Opposition's policy is doubly deceitful and dishonest. The Opposition pretend to the less well-off that there is a simple and cost-free way to raise wages, but they will not even say until after the election at what level the minimum wage will be set. In effect, they are giving the less well-off a menu without prices in the hope that the less well-off will not find out the true cost—which will be their jobs—until after the election.

Mr. Thurnham: Did not Barbara Castle carry out research into a minimum wage 20 years ago and reject it because it would cause unemployment? Does not that prove that Labour never learns?

Mr. Oppenheim: Barbara Castle, when she was Secretary of State for Employment, and John Grant, when he was the low pay Minister in the last Labour Government, had the honesty and integrity to admit that no minimum wage policy could be implemented because of the problem of pushing up differentials. It is extraordinary that new Labour—as it calls itself—is, far from progressing on the issue, regressing.

Ms Eagle: Is the Minister happy that 1 million people currently earn less than £2.50 an hour and that 300,000 earn less than £1.50 an hour after nearly 17 years of this appalling Government?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady is quoting from a recent press release from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), which criticised several national supermarket chains for paying less than £4 an hour. The hon. Lady might like to know that her hon. Friend the Member for Peckham missed one important retailer off her list. The Co-op pays many workers about £3.50 an hour, which is well below the TUC's recommended minimum wage.

Unemployment

9. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what comparisons he has made of the change in the rate of unemployment between the United Kingdom and other EU countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: In the past two years, unemployment in the United Kingdom fell by 600,000, while unemployment registers rose in the rest of Europe by 1.9 million.

Mrs. Gillan: Is it not a fact that the United Kingdom is the only country in the European Union in which unemployment not only has fallen consistently in the past year but is below average? Does my right hon. Friend agree that our opt-out from the social chapter preserves not only investment but jobs? Perhaps he would care to comment on the fact that a shop floor superviser for Black and Decker, which recently moved its production from Germany to the United Kingdom, said:

> "Industry is flexible—it has to be—the social chapter isn't."

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The United Kingdom has had the record that she described. Unemployment has fallen faster than in any other country and we now have higher employment levels for men and women than most countries in Europe. The general range of flexible labour market policies that the Government have pursued has been responsible for that rapid turnaround in our employment and unemployment prospects, as is recognised throughout Europe. Other countries are studying what we have done. Typically, only the dinosaurs in the Labour party refuse to recognise what has been achieved and how it has been achieved.

Mr. Grocott: Is it too much to expect a little consistency from the Secretary of State in the lectures that he is fond of giving on our economy? Given that he and the Prime Minister repeatedly lectured us during the worst part of the recession that unemployment was nothing whatsoever to do with the Government, will he take the opportunity of telling the House and the country that, if there is some small upturn in the level of employment, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Government?

Mr. Portillo: I think that the hon. Gentleman finds it difficult to grasp fairly simple concepts. What the Government say is that they cannot create jobs. The Government are responsible for creating conditions such as low inflation, in which jobs can be created, but it is for businesses to create jobs. If we did not have low inflation, they would not be created. If we had a Labour Government, it is perfectly clear that we would have no strategy for low inflation and jobs would be destroyed for that reason, too.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that clear evidence of the fact that the pernicious and employment-deterring effects of the social chapter are gradually dawning on European industrialists, rather than on the Labour party, is that Edward Reuter, the chairman of Mercedes-Benz, has said that, unless it does something about the costs that it is incurring but British companies are not, it will gradually move car production out of Germany to, one hopes, the United Kingdom?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, it is evident that European industrial leaders are giving thought to moving their operations to places where they do not face the burdens of the social chapter. They realise that those burdens prevent them from creating jobs. The great irony of all this is that many of the inward investment decisions have been made in north-east England and have benefited Labour consistencies, but Labour Members are so obdurate and blind that they will not even wake up to the benefits for their constituents. That is how well those people are served by Labour Members of Parliament.

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State admit that, since 1979, the United Kingdom has been the only G7 country that has seen no rise in the number of people employed? Does he not recognise the plain fact that, when it comes to unemployment, the British people simply do not trust this Government? They know that the Government have never been concerned about unemployment; all they have been concerned about is massaging the figures. When will the right hon. Gentleman stop fiddling the figures on unemployment? When will he stop making excuses about unemployment, and when will he produce some action to tackle unemployment?

Mr. Portillo: During the 1970s, unemployment was worse than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. Now, it is at the OECD average, which is an improvement. What the hon. Lady will not do—possibly because she is not so good with figures—is compare a like period with a like period. Over the course of the cycle, the number of jobs in this country has increased by 1.5 million. She needs to compare like with like and not just to pick her dates at random.

10. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current figure for unemployment (a) in the United Kingdom and (b) in other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [16012]

Miss Widdecombe: The International Labour Organisation unemployment rate in the United Kingdom was 8.9 per cent. in January 1995—lower than the EU average of 10.8 per cent. and lower than in every other EU country except Portugal, Luxembourg and Sweden. I shall, with permission, Madam Speaker, arrange for a full statistical table to be printed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that Governments cannot create jobs but can create the right economic conditions in which business can flourish? Does she agree that the figures that she has just given and the 1,000 a day drop in unemployment demonstrate the success of policies designed to reduce burdens on business and create a framework in which businesses can expand?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Any comparative study with other European countries makes it clear that our policies are producing employment. At 68 per cent., we have the third highest percentage of the population in work in the European Union, and we have the second highest percentage of women in work in the European Union. We have a steadily increasing growth in jobs—260,000 in the past year alone. That is a tribute to our policies, as I said before, and Europe is beginning to realise that. Eventually, I suppose, even the Labour party will start to realise it.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the decline in the unemployment numbers, but does the Minister agree that there is a tremendous shortage of skills? Will the Government keep a watch on our European competitors who have hidden Government subsidies that affect even our shipyards? Is there not something wrong when a nation like ours cannot tender for the Oriana and when the Belfast shipyard had to employ 600 labourers from England although there is so much unemployment in Northern Ireland?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw attention to skills. That is what lies behind the many Government initiatives, from the new modern apprenticeships to general national vocational qualifications and the Investors in People scheme. He is also right to say that we must all compete equally in Europe, which is why we are determined that no unfair burden of regulations puts us at a competitive disadvantage and that we will not have our workers stifled, as they would have been under the posted workers directive.

Mr. Eastham: May I remind the Minister when she is pluming herself about the unemployment figures in the UK that, in 1979, 1.25 million people were unemployed and now 2.5 million are unemployed? May I also remind her of the important fact that 3 million male full-time jobs have been lost in the UK since 1979?

Miss Widdecombe: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is rather behind the times. We have a higher percentage of males in employment than France, Italy, Belgium, Greece, Ireland and Spain. Male unemployment has now been falling for some time. Male and female unemployment are falling and full-time and part-time jobs are rising. The Opposition simply cannot recognise facts even when they stare them in the face, but that is a fact. Another fact is that their policies cost jobs, the country will realise that their policies cost jobs, and they will never have an opportunity to tell us what their minimum wage will be because there will be no Labour Government to tell us.

Mr. Brazier: Although unemployment is desperately sad for the individuals concerned, would not it be astonishing if this country were to look for solutions to the problems in countries with much higher unemployment, when their policies have failed so conspicuously? That seems to be the policy advocated by the Opposition.

Miss Widdecombe: That is exactly the policy advocated by the Opposition. They are refreshingly honest sometimes. The deputy Leader of the Opposition tells us that a minimum wage will cause shake-out. Will he be explicit and tell us that what will be shaken is people, and what they will be out of is jobs?

Following is the table:

Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates in EU Countries

		Latest Month
Austria	N/A	
Belgium	9.9	December
Denmark	9.3	December
Germany[1]	—	
Greece[2]	—	
Finland[3]	17.2	December
Spain	22.6	December
France	11.3	December
Ireland	17.6	December
Italy	12.2	December
Luxembourg	3.5	December
Netherlands	10.0	November
Portugal	6.2	December
Sweden[3]	8.2	January
United Kingdom	8.9	January
EU(12) Average	10.8	December

[1] No ILO rate available for unified Germany.

[2] Only 1991 annual average figures available for Greece.

[3] Only OECD unemployment rates are available for Finland and Sweden.

N/A Not available.

Source: Statistical Office of the European Community Unemployment Bulletin, (except Finland and Sweden—OECD). Latest available data—subject to revision.

Eurostat—the Statistical Office of the European Community, or SOEC—is currently negotiating with the OECD for both organisations to compile unemployment statistics on a common basis. Because of this, Eurostat has not issued any new figures this month. The figures quoted are those released last month, except in the case of the United Kingdom figures which are based on a methodology which is common to both organisations.

Next month, Eurostat is expected to re-establish its normal publication schedule and issue figures for all EU members based on this common methodology.

Note in particular, that the United Kingdom "Youth" unemployment rate has been revised upwards as a result of this review of methodology.

Redundancies, Dundee

11. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been made redundant in the Dundee travel-to-work area in the most recent year for which figures are available. [16023]

Mr. Paice: Information on redundancies is not available for the Dundee travel-to-work area.

Mr. McAllion: Will the Minister explain why, as happened to me, local Members of Parliament are denied information on local redundancies that have been notified to his Department, on the ground that those redundances are confidential as between the companies concerned and the Department?

Surely, if it is right for the Government to require companies to notify redundancies to the Department of Employment, it is also right for that Department to provide information about those redundancies on request to Members of the House and, through them, to the local communities that are affected by those redundancies. Or is it simply the case that the Government are now so steeped in undemocratic practices that they believe that only Tory Ministers have the right to know the real number of redundancies in the British economy?

Mr. Paice: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not appear to have the type of close relationship with businesses in his constituency that would lead them to tell him automatically. There is no reason why they cannot tell him if they feel inclined to do so. That is a matter for the businesses themselves to do.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to welcome the fact that unemployment in his constituency has decreased to half what it was 10 years ago. Redundancies are an inevitable part of the dynamism of an economy, as is the creation of new jobs.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16033]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am grateful to Opposition Members.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is currently on an official visit to the United States.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Leader of the House aware of the sad plight of about 3,000 haemophiliacs who have contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood used in their ordinary treatment? Do the Government accept the overwhelming moral responsibility that exists and the case for a hardship and compensation fund? When the Prime Minister returns from America, will the Leader of the House ask him to have a word with the Secretary of State for Health and tell her to stop resisting that claim and allow justice to be done?

Mr. Newton: The straightforward answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is that of course I am aware of that tragic position. Indeed, I had some experience of a related one when I was Minister for Health and there was the problem of haemophiliacs with AIDS. I will, of course, do as the hon. Gentleman requests and bring his question to the attention of not only my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Knapman: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on Scotland's continuing success in attracting inward investment. Might that in any way be prejudiced by Opposition parties' policies with regard to devolution?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly the case that all the signs are that Scotland has just enjoyed another record year for inward investment. I understand that it is attracting inward investment projects at the rate of about 100 a year, examples being Motorola at East Kilbride and NEC at Livingston. One thing is certain: that inward investment is coming as a result of Conservative policies and would be put off by Labour policies.

Mr. Prescott: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell me why, if the economy is now so strong that the Prime Minister can offer tax cuts in November 1995 and November 1996, taxes are going up again on Thursday?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman well knows that taxes have had to be increased as part of a number of difficult decisions to bring about recovery from recession and the sustained economic growth that is now going on. As my right hon. Friend said once again at the weekend, as those policies pay off we shall seek to reduce taxes as soon as it is prudent to do so. The one thing that everyone in the country knows is that a Labour Government never have, and never will, reduce taxation.

Mr. Prescott: Is it not the case that the Government are taking £800 a year in new taxes now, so that at the next general election the Tories can bribe us with our own money? Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that the British people now know that, when it comes to tax, you can never trust a Tory?

Mr. Newton: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will reflect on two facts. The first is that, on average, households are expected to be about £250 better off this year than last, even after tax and inflation, and the second, on which I hope he will reflect, is that, if we had maintained the tax regime that we inherited from the last Labour Government, more than 1 million more people would be paying tax next year.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that middle England is not a land that takes kindly to political correctness or positive discrimination? Will he give a firm assurance that under the Conservatives it will never have to submit to either?

Mr. Newton: I think that I can safely give my hon. Friend that assurance in general terms, but I would want to look carefully at each specific proposition.

Q2. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16034]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pearson: Now that the Prime Minister has promised tax cuts in November, will the Leader of the House say whether that is a real promise or the sort of promise that the Chancellor makes on a wet night in Dudley?

Mr. Newton: It is a point that is reflected in the fact that one in five taxpayers now pays tax at the lower rate of 20p in the pound compared with the basic rate which stood at 33 per cent. when the Labour party was in office. That point is also reflected in the fact that last year's increased allowances for pensioners took 190,000 people out of taxation—many of them, no doubt, in Dudley.

Q3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16035]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are 56,000 asylum applications awaiting decision? Are not bogus asylum applications damaging to the prospects of honest and true immigrants as well as damaging to race relations? Will my right hon. Friend do something about it? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must settle down.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has already announced measures to speed up the processing of asylum applications to deal with the backlog. As a result, 7,000 more cases will be processed every year. My hon. Friend will be aware of, and no doubt welcome, the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear last weekend that there will be a new Bill in the autumn to tighten up the asylum rules further. I believe that that will be widely welcomed, as it is, as my hon. Friend said, in the interests of good race relations.

Front-line Services, Sheffield

Q4. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit Sheffield to discuss funding of front-line services. [16036]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Michie: Two years ago, the Prime Minister did have plans, but never arrived. When the Leader of the House answers this supplementary question, will he debate not the past but the present and future in terms of funding in Sheffield? The funding in terms of Government grant is becoming so bad that it is affecting front-line services to such a degree that the Labour party, the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrat party in Sheffield support a redetermination bid. Will the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister to support that bid and to come to talk to the people of Sheffield—the carers, teachers and children—who are suffering under the present regime?

Mr. Newton: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman, like many other Opposition Members, does not want to debate the past, and I will not do so—I shall come to the present. The latest figures for March 1994 show that there are, in Sheffield, nearly £8 million in council tax arrears, more than 1,200 vacant properties and unspent school balances of £5 million. Perhaps the Opposition should address those problems first.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16037]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barron: Has the Leader of the House seen the latest report of the National Federation of Housing Associations, which reveals that because of Government cuts this year, only 17,000 new homes will be built? Given that repossessions in Britain are still running at 1,000 per week, does he agree with me that the Prime Minister's offer on Saturday of a White Paper on housing is totally inadequate for the needs of the country?

Mr. Newton: I might pay more attention to the hon. Gentleman if his comments were a little more balanced—for example, if he had acknowledged that last year housing starts were up 13 per cent. and repossessions have fallen by more than a third since the peak in 1991. He might have added that the average mortgage is now down by £140 a month since 1990.

Q6. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16039]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Heald: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to see the Audit Commission report on the performance of local authorities, showing that Conservative authorities provide better services at lower costs, that eight out of the top 10 most debt-ridden councils are Labour and that, typically, a Conservative council has a council tax 40 per cent. lower than a Labour council? Does that not show that Britain is better off under the Tories?

Mr. Newton: I sense some support for my hon. Friend and I certainly wish to extend my support to him. The report ties in the indicators in the Audit Commission report with the fact that for the average band C council tax payer, Conservative councils cost people nearly 40 per cent. less than Labour councils and 25 per cent. less than Liberal Democrat councils. The fact is that Conservative councils do cost less and provide better services.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister expect a vote of confidence in the Government in the Scottish local authority elections on Thursday?

Mr. Newton: I envisage that in the Scottish local elections on Thursday people will focus on the fact that in Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, Conservative councils cost them less and give them better value for money.

Q7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16040]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my right hon. Friend consider joining me in congratulating the Federation of Small Businesses, which voted at its annual conference to come out of the European Community? Does he agree that most good economic ideas have their origins in small businesses?

Mr. Newton: I fall short of expressing congratulation in quite the terms that my hon. Friend seeks, but I certainly did note the resolution of the Federation of Small Businesses in Torquay, not least because I happened to be in the west country that weekend and was asked one or two questions about it. We all understand the federation's concerns, not least about what is sometimes seen as excessive interference and over-regulation. We need to continue to address those real concerns, both by our attitude to subsidiarity in Europe and by our policies on deregulation at home.

Mr. Winnick: In view of the Government's deep and continuing unpopularity, can the Leader of the House tell us how far the Prime Minister is safe from internal party intrigues to change the party leadership? Does he accept that the words of loyalty he will no doubt say were used by Cabinet Ministers in 1990? Look what happened to her—she was betrayed by her Cabinet colleagues and repeatedly stabbed in the back.

Mr. Newton: I recall something else about 1990, which is that the hon. Gentleman was talking about the deep unpopularity of the Government two years before we won the last election.

Q8. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 April. [16041]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Spring: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the continuing waste, bureaucracy and extravagance that mark so many Liberal [illegible] Labour local authorities? Is he aware that Suffolk county council, while protesting frugality, is spending some [illegible] per cent. more on its education bureaucracy than the surrounding counties—money that could be spent directly on schools and pupils?

Mr. Newton: I was not aware of the specific figures from my neighbouring county of Suffolk. What my hon. Friend said will certainly strike a chord with many Conservative Members. The figures reflect the extremely large number of non-teaching staff compared with teaching staff, to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has referred on a number of occasions.

Mr. Simpson: Will the Leader of the House explain the compelling case for a cut in taxation at a time when the Government will not fully fund the pay awards that they make, or the services that they demand, in health and education?

Mr. Newton: The compelling case is to strike an appropriate balance between those considerations and the considerations of enlarging choice and improving our economic prospects. The Government have constantly sought to do that and it is reflected in the improvement of our public services, in the strengthening of our economy and in paving the way to cut taxes when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House clearly understands that the butchers, the bakers and the candlestick makers are fed up with regulatory overkill. Will he take this opportunity to confirm to the House that he understands that, when Government make a law, that law impacts most heavily on those who get up in the morning and make something or do something—in other words, those people who create the wealth in our nation and upon whom the rest of society depends?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I repeat the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). There is no doubt that our emphasis on reducing unnecessary interference from Brussels through the subsidiarity theme and not least our emphasis on deregulatory measures at home—which we shall continue to drive forward—are of great importance to the business prosperity of this country.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I draw attention to a problem that arises constantly between me and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), to whom I have given notice of my point of order. The hon. Gentleman constantly invents phrases and attributes them to me. On this occasion, I point to the *Hansard* of the Scottish Grand Committee of—

Madam Speaker: Order. Political knockabouts that take place in the Scottish Grand Committee are not points of order; to raise them as such is an abuse of the House. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) should raise them at the time and not now.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, concerning remarks made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) during the education debate last Wednesday. I have given notice of my intention to raise a point of order to the hon. Member for Brightside, and to the shadow apprentice, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle).

In column 1037 of *Hansard*, the hon. Member for Brightside claimed during the education debate last week that Kent county council had spent £9 million on a nursery voucher experiment. I have checked that, and it is not true.

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair; it is a political argument. The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) might have done me the courtesy of letting me know in advance. If he will come to his point of order to me, I will try to deal with it. He might have made some indication to me, so that I might also see *Hansard*.

Mr. Dunn: Madam Speaker, I am very sorry that you were not told about the point of order—it is my fault entirely. I am making a charge against the hon. Member for Brightside that he misled the House with a statement which was untrue. While I was debating the matter today on Radio Kent, I received a message that the hon. Member for Brightside had acknowledged that the statement was untrue.

Madam Speaker: What is the point of order for me, please?

Mr. Dunn: I am about to get to it, Madam Speaker. I am taking my time, to make sure that you have the full facts before you.

Madam Speaker: Order. If I had the full facts, I would be able to respond to the hon. Member. He might have done me the courtesy of giving me the full facts to start with.

Mr. Dunn: Madam Speaker, as you know, I have already apologised for not giving you the full facts.

The hon. Member for Brightside has acknowledged that the statement that he made was misleading and untrue. I think it is essential that he should come to the Chamber and apologise to you and to the House for misleading us last Wednesday.

Madam Speaker: I will look at *Hansard*. Far too often, hon. Members raise points of order that are not points of order but are questions of political cut and thrust and debate across the Floor of the House. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have the opportunity to correct these issues by means of the Order Paper and in debate.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I entirely understand the grounds on which you refused my private notice question, Madam Speaker, but I hope that you will allow me the licence to remark that, the next time a Secretary of State closes a hospital that is nearly 900 years old, he or she will have the moral courage to come to the Dispatch Box.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The next time that a Secretary of State wishes to close another hospital in my constituency, I hope that a similar courtesy will be offered, so that I may be given an opportunity to vote against it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. I must deal with those two points of order.

The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) was a Secretary of State for many years, and therefore is probably not aware that we do not mention applications that are made to me about such matters. However, I understand his strength of feeling.

May I say to the right hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) that there is an Adjournment motion tomorrow morning, when hon. Members will have three hours during which they may raise such issues? If hon. Members are in their place at that time, I might look their way. Who knows?

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I seek your advice on access to information to deal with constituency issues. For some months now, hon. Members on both sides of the House have been inquiring about the blood transfusion service, in particular the closure programme at Lancaster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and I have found out that our telephone calls about these matters are being monitored by the management of the blood transfusion service, and, as part of that procedure is to prevent us from discussing matters with the staff at the centre, I find it an abuse of hon. Members' access to deal with constituency matters. I ask you what we need to do to ensure that that monitoring is stopped immediately.

Madam Speaker: There may well be a question of privilege involved in that. Will the hon. Gentleman please write to me without delay?

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): What protection do hon. Members have from the provision of bogus statistics and information such as that provided by the Lib-Lab Kent county council to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett)?

Madam Speaker: I hope that they will exercise their minds about these matters and determine for themselves what are the true statistics.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): I wish to raise a point of order of which I have given notice, both to yourself, Madam Speaker—although briefly and without a copy of *Hansard*, for which I apologise—and to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). It arises from the debate last Wednesday on education. I was present at the opening of the debate and, indeed, for the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I had left by the time the incident that I am about to raise had taken place, because I had gone to the Home Affairs Select Committee.

After I had left, the hon. Member for Brightside, in an intervention, purported to describe a letter that I had written to a constituent, saying that it attacked Tory-controlled Buckinghamshire. That was a misrepresentation of the contents of the letter, but I appreciate that you will not take that point. My point is that, yet again, the hon. Gentleman did not do me the courtesy of informing me that he was going to raise the matter. He had the letter with him—translated, I believe, into braille, for obvious reasons. He was clearly prepared to use it, and intended so to do.

Madam Speaker, you repeatedly rule that hon. Members should observe common courtesy among themselves; you are repeatedly ignored. Is there anything that you can do about it?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority to enforce it. I simply ask hon. Members to abide by common courtesies. Far too many hon. Members do not do so.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Following that, and having heard your answers to colleagues earlier, Madam Speaker, I raise a more general point of order about statements and answers. I know that you cannot determine what Ministers do, but surely there must be some control of Ministers who make statements about a minor variation in policy, and yet do not make any statements about the conclusion of an assessment of policy—the health service reforms in London. The assessment of that policy was introduced by a statement, but the decisions were announced by way of a written answer, not a statement.

I have no chance, as the Member of Parliament representing Guy's hospital—and nor have the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), representing Bart's, and the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst)—to ask any questions; and the whole process began with a statement in the House.

I am merely asking you, Madam Speaker, to find out whether rules exist to determine what matters are so important that they must be brought to the House. Otherwise, war could be declared by means of a written answer and peace by means of a statement, and we would have no chance to ask about the former—only a chance to say, "Thank you very much," when we are told the latter.

Madam Speaker: I well understand hon. Members' frustration, but there are no rules that I can consult. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman, and others, will put the matter to the Procedure Committee. I entirely accept that there are occasions when it is very important for a Minister to come to the Dispatch Box so that hon. Members can question him. I ask hon. Members to bear in mind the fact that there is an Adjournment debate tomorrow morning, but I make no promises. Let us leave it at that for the moment.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has spent £41.5 million on building an almost completely new hospital to serve my constituents. I am extremely disappointed that she is not here today, so that I can congratulate her personally.

Madam Speaker: That is a total abuse of the House. I should have thought that hon. Members—however new they were in 1992—would be accustomed to our procedures now, and would not continue to abuse the House and its procedures.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, I am going to move on now. I have taken enough points of order.

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I have already taken a point of order from the hon. Gentleman. He must resume his seat.

Boxing

3.41 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to ban the sport of boxing.

As a young sports teacher many years ago, I always had doubts about the merits of boxing, having seen the state of a former Manchester world champion; but it was when I saw the plight of Muhammud Ali that I became totally convinced of the terrible tragedies and hazards connected with professional boxing. He was and is known as "the greatest", but in my view he is the greatest advertisement for the necessity of an independent Government inquiry to investigate the safety of boxing.

It is said that Ali has Parkinson's disease, and that his condition is not due to boxing, but my videos of his latest fight suggest otherwise. I have with me an *Evening Standard* report that claims that he received 29,000 blows to the head. I do not know whether that is an exaggeration, but I do know that he took one blow too many.

Given the medical condition of another professional boxer, Michael Watson, following a contest between him and Chris Eubank, I asked the Minister responsible for sport for his views and intentions regarding the dangers of professional boxing. On 23 June 1993, I asked the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he had received a copy of the British Medical Association's book, "The Boxing Debate", which reported in detail the medical risks associated with boxing, and whether he intended to set up an independent inquiry. I also asked the Prime Minister, during Prime Minister's questions, if he would ban boxing. The answer has always been the same.

On 10 May 1994, I succeeded in obtaining an Adjournment Debate on brain injuries in boxing. I based my speech on the BMA's book. The BMA wants boxing to be banned, and in 1982 it declared:

> "in view of the proven ocular and brain damage resulting from professional boxing the BMA should campaign for its abolition."

In 1987, the BMA stated:

> "In view of the continuing serious ill effects on the health of boxers the BMA should pursue the Government with renewed vigour until there is a ban on boxing."

In 1992, it again called for a ban on boxing, and in 1993, it produced its book "The Boxing Debate", which states that the heaviest blows may represent as much as half a tonne—which is like being hit by a 12 lb padded wooden mallet travelling at 20 mph. That is enough force and velocity to injure any brain.

The report says that there are two main ways in which boxing may lead to structural damage to the brain. The first type of damage occurs as an acute episode, in which one or more severe blows during a single fight lead to a loss of consciousness and, occasionally, to death. Death in the ring, or in the days or weeks following the contest is usually attributed to acute haemorrhage of the brain.

The second kind of damage tends to develop over a much longer period and is cumulative. It is associated with chronic neurological disorders that are often experienced by boxers. Damage to the eye and brain occurs in both amateur and professional boxers, although it is doubtful whether participants or others involved in boxing fully appreciate the risks, especially the dangers of delayed, cumulative brain damage.

Damage can be detected only after it has occurred, and by then it may be too late. It has been too late for 361 boxers whose deaths have been recorded worldwide since 1945. In the United Kingdom, it has been too late for the following boxers. In 1969, Ulrich Regis died after fighting Joe Bugner. In 1979, Angelo Jacopucci died after fighting Alan Minter. In 1980, Johnny Owen, aged 24, died after fighting Lupe Pintor. In 1982, Young Ali died after fighting Barry McGuigan. In 1986, Steve Watt died after fighting Rocky Kelly. In 1987, Joe Sticklen died in his first fight. In 1988, Brian Baronet died fighting Kenny Vice. In 1989, Rod Douglas had to have brain surgery; he will never fight again.

In 1989, Roy Hodgson died. In 1991, Michael Watson fought Eubank. We know that Michael Watson is in a wheelchair, having had brain surgery. In 1994, Bradley Stone, aged 23, died. In 1994, Michael Bentt went into hospital after fighting Herbie Hide. He will not fight again. In 1995, we had the most recent case, involving the McClellan *v.* Nigel Benn contest. Three amateurs, one in Liverpool, one in London and one in Margate, have all had brain surgery.

From those statistics alone, it can be said that prevention is better than cure, particularly when the disease in question is incurable. The virility, or any other virtue, shown by one man hitting another on the head in a boxing ring cannot transform the act into an accident. The blows are intended. Hitting one another is deliberate. That point, no matter how trite, distinguishes boxing from all other sports. The prime intention is to knock out one's opponent before he has a chance to inflict a knock-out blow on the other boxer.

Before his recent fight, Gerald McClellan said:

> "You have to go to war and in war you have to be prepared to die."

That is what boxing is. We all know that Gerald got his war, and that, tragically, he paid the price in his savage bout with Nigel Benn. I am sure that I speak for all hon. Members in the House today in saying that we all wish him well now that he has survived a life-threatening injury and been flown back to the United States of America to be with his family. I doubt whether he will fight again.

I am sure that the House will also want to send its full appreciation to Mr. John Sutcliffe, the neurosurgeon who operated so successfully on Gerald McClellan. He has saved his life. Although it may surprise hon. Members, I also give credit to the British Boxing Board of Control, which has made important safety improvements in boxing since learning the lessons from the Watson-Eubank fight. Perhaps it read the suggestions I made in my Adjournment debate on 10 May 1994. It had four doctors, paramedics and ambulances at the McClellan-Benn fight. The speed with which oxygen was administered to the stricken boxer saved his life.

Despite all those necessary reforms, further calamities will occur. I was deeply concerned when, after the Gerald McClellan fight, I read in the press that many 11-year-old children were getting ready for their first bouts. The "kid gloves" scheme at Croxteth community school has put boxing back in schools. The Minister with responsibility for sport has confirmed that the school is receiving financial support from the Sports Council and Sportsmatch.

From a recent parliamentary question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), a neurosurgeon, we learned that Sportsmatch contributed £5,000 to the scheme. It is ludicrous for the Minister to argue that the scheme involves a "non-contact" form of boxing, and that its purpose is to teach children the skills and discipline of boxing without hitting an opponent. How ridiculous.

Over a number of years, I have asked various Ministers to initiate an independent inquiry into the health risks associated with boxing, all of which have been highlighted by the BMA in its various reports on boxing.

I have been told that the Government did not believe that the risks associated with boxing were sufficient to justify such an inquiry. I deeply regret the Government's negative attitude towards such requests, because I firmly believe that a public inquiry could prevent serious injuries, and even death, for some boxers.

I still believe that an independent inquiry is necessary because we have reached an impasse, with the British Medical Association on one side of the argument about safety in boxing and the British Boxing Board of Control on the other, with the Minister responsible for sport in the middle, not doing anything. Because of that impasse, I believe that there is no alternative but to ban boxing before further calamities occur in the boxing ring.

As one famous boxer recently said:

> "Boxing damages your brain. Don't let anyone tell you different."

Accordingly, I urge the House to take action to save the health and lives of boxers by calling for a ban on boxing.

3.51 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to oppose the Bill, but, in doing so, I acknowledge that no hon. Member doubts the sincerity of the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) or his consistency of view in this important matter.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a catalogue of deaths in boxing, and I am quite prepared, in defending boxing, to stand up and say that 14 boxers have been killed since 1946. However, I ask the House to set against that statistic the fact that, this winter alone, many more people than that have died on the Cairngorms while mountaineering. No hon. Member has come to the House to say that mountaineering should therefore be made illegal.

There is an extremely serious inconsistency in the hon. Gentleman's argument. I remind him and the House that people can choose whether to box, just as they can choose whether to go mountaineering, with all the known attendant dangers.

The tragic case of Michael Watson and the others mentioned by the hon. Gentleman moved the House as they moved this country. Such suffering moves the world, as does the suffering of people in any sport who are damaged almost to the point of death. I would remind the House that Mr. Sutcliffe, the surgeon who operated on McClellan and was mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, does not want boxing banned, and nor do many other doctors, who know that it would only go underground if it were.

We really must not take the nanny state to the extremes suggested by the hon. Gentleman. Boxing is a very dangerous sport, as is my own main sport of horse riding. I mentioned mountaineering, but there are also many other dangerous sports, such as skiing, rugby football, motor car racing and cycle racing.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Jogging.

Mr. Greenway: People have died jogging, but this is a serious matter, and I want to consider the lethal sports. People are killed in motor racing, but nobody suggests that that should be stopped.

Boxing would not in any event be stopped if the Bill were passed. It would go underground. People would fight with bare fists, unlicensed and without medical supervision. What a dreadful society we would create if that were allowed to happen. What would happen to people drawn in against their will, as they would be if boxing were not open and they were unable to refuse? Is that what the hon. Gentleman wants? I am sure that it is not.

Boxing teaches people the art of self-defence. To listen to the hon. Gentleman, one would think that there were no arts that a boxer could employ to defend himself and avoid damaging blows, but the great art of boxing is not to be knocked out or knocked about, and 99 per cent. of boxers achieve that aim.

Boys enjoy boxing. I have helped in boxing clubs in my constituency and in east London, where boys have learned the art of boxing and become involved in an activity which has given them life when nothing else could. Does the hon. Gentleman want to take that away from such boys? Many come off the streets, they learn the art of boxing, and they learn self-discipline, often for the first time. Why should that be taken from them? They enjoy it, their families enjoy it, and the community enjoys it.

With all deference to the hon. Gentleman, is he not aware of clubs all over London where boxing takes place? Does he not know that boxing is returning to schools, and that, in such clubs, schools and other areas, there is very close supervision of the sport? That is its great value. There is medical supervision, training and skill in the sport.

Some distinguished hon. Members have boxed their way to the top. A boxing blue is sitting on the Front Bench today—my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the Paymaster General—and some Opposition Members are former boxers. There is no doubt that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), the Opposition's spokesman on sport, and the Paymaster General have both learned to take care of themselves partly through the great sport which they enjoyed so much.

Is the House aware of the distinguished membership of the British Boxing Board of Control? It includes two hon. Members—the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde and my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). How could it include more distinguished sportsmen? They are not going to stand by with others on that distinguished board and see people mutilated wantonly—and they will not.

There is no doubt that boxing is a fine, well-supervised sport. This House would do ill even to contemplate abolishing it.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 60, Noes 120.

Division No. 126] **[3.56 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Callaghan, Jim
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davidson, Ian
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John
Gordon, Mildred
Gunnell, John
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Sheerman, Barry
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tyler, Paul
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilshire, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. John Home Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Richard
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Dalyell, Tam
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanson, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Knapman, Roger
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Meale, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mills, Iain
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Reid, Dr John
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shersby, Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stewart, Allan
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Brian H. Donohoe and
Mr. Terry Lewis.

Question accordingly negatived.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 5th April, do adjourn till Tuesday 18th April.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

As amended (in the Committee and in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 81

APPLICATION OF SS.63 TO 66 TO DEBTS HELD BY ASSOCIATES OF BANKS

4.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move amendment No. 86, in page 80, line 27, leave out '1996' and insert '2000'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 82, in page 80, line 29, leave out from beginning to end of line 35.

Mr. Smith: The amendment seeks to put right the injustice which will otherwise be suffered by housing associations and universities—and, as a consequence, by tenants and students—as a result of the Government tightening the tax rules on deep discounted securities and qualifying indexed securities.

No one disputes the need for the general measure which the Government are introducing in this part of the Bill. It is, of course, wrong that financial institutions should receive the tax subsidy which they have been able to exploit simply through the way in which they structure their lending. What is at issue is the need for protection for the position of housing associations and universities, which, having undertaken borrowing in good faith on a perfectly prudent basis under the existing law, now face higher charges as the lending institutions pass on the higher costs arising from the tax change. Housing associations and universities are, in this sense, innocent victims of the more general and necessary change which the Government have made.

A number of hon. Members in the Chamber will recall that there were strong feelings on both sides of the Committee, and I recall that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) spoke with passion on the matter.

There is a strong feeling that something needs to be done on this subject. That housing associations and universities have a case was recognised by the Government. The Financial Secretary acknowledged that the original provisions of the Bill would cause "disruption"—as he described it—to the financial plans of the institutions affected, with consequent and avoidable damage to laudable objectives in social housing and higher education.

While resisting our amendment, which was seeking more sweeping exemptions for housing associations and universities, the Government tabled their own amendment to allow those bodies an additional year in which to rearrange their finances before the present favourable tax treatment is withdrawn.

Amendment No. 86 attempts to build on that Government indication of flexibility; it would simply extend the exemption period for a further four years, to five years in total, before tax treatment is changed in the case of loans to housing associations and universities.

I stress that the exemption applies only to existing borrowings. Its cost to the Government would be small, when set against the substantial £100 million in savings they are making by closing the present loophole. It is even more modest when one takes into account the knock-on effects, such as housing benefit costs, and the effect on higher education institutions.

The gains to those institutions, from the additional flexibility in rearranging their affairs which we propose, and the gains to the tenants of the schemes affected, would be considerable. Equally, if no change is made, the effect on those schemes financed by such loans would be detrimental.

In a statement, the chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, Dr. Edwards, said:

> "We are very disappointed that the Government has seen fit at this stage to give universities only a year in which to reorganise their finances. If they are not able to do so at the same or better rates, student rents are bound to have to rise, since most schemes have been used to finance the building of student accommodation. This is a very poor signal to universities in terms of the Government's own policy on the private finance initiative. How can universities have sufficient confidence to enter into schemes involving private finance if the Government changes the rules so suddenly?"

That is the point. The rules have been changed suddenly.

One understands why it is difficult to give full warning of that sort of tax change, but we are talking of institutions that entered prudently and in good faith into borrowing arrangements, in the interests of their tenants and students, under the injunction that the Government gave them to make sensible use of private finance.

The National Federation of Housing Associations also underlined the difficulties that the change would pose for its members:

> "We feel strongly that the government should recognise the legitimacy of housing association and university transactions when they were set up, and should at least consider an amendment at the Report Stage to allow a significant transitional period of up to 10 years. This would allow housing associations to choose the point in the economic cycle most appropriate to go for re-financing and thus minimise the detrimental effects particularly on rents."

Those detrimental effects could otherwise be significant. Increases of between 14 and 38 per cent. were discussed in the original brief from the National Federation of Housing Associations, and universities have also forecast sharp increases. The London School of Economics has warned that the increase might be as much as £9 a week for those of their students accommodated in projects financed by the instruments, and Manchester has warned of a 7 per cent. increase in rents.

We have tabled the amendment to extend the transitional period, providing, as the National Federation of Housing Associations said, the opportunity for institutions affected to pick the appropriate time in the economic cycle to rearrange their finances. The five-year period is sensible, it is more flexible than the one year by which the Government were prepared to extend the period, and it fits in neatly with the normal minimum holding requirements imposed by the Government on qualifying indexed securities for them to qualify for favourable tax treatment in the first place.

I will be honest: we suggested five years rather than 10, which some people might have preferred as a transitional allowance, precisely because we think it more likely that the Government will be induced to accept five years, having already been coaxed towards giving the one-year exemption.

[Mr. Smith]

It is a good case, and I hope that the Government will accept it. It is a modest concession, but it is no doubt right in terms of natural justice, and it will make a big difference to those affected. I commend it to the House.

4.15 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I do not intend to press amendment No. 82, which stands in my name, at the end of this brief debate, for reasons that I shall explain. As I initially raised this issue in Committee, I shall take a few moments to remind the House of the slightly tortuous way in which the matter has developed, and how the university world arrived at the conclusions to which it now clings.

The clause, which brings qualifying indexed securities into the tax system and closes a loophole that was exploited largely by offshore associates of certain leading financial institutions, has had a bit of a chequered history, particularly in the course of the Standing Committee's debates on qualifying indexed securities.

To begin with, certain universities and housing associations discovered that some of their private borrowing for capital expenditure purposes using those instruments would be caught by the Finance Bill as it was then drafted, which would probably leave them with extra costs which they had not anticipated. They assumed that banks and other financial institutions would probably find ways to pass those costs on to them, and that the costs would not be absorbed by the intermediaries and financial institutions.

I took some trouble to draw that problem to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, and he was kind, courteous and sympathetic enough to listen carefully to the arguments put at that time by me, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and other Committee members. He showed his customary flexibility, and persuaded my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to introduce a modest concession in delaying by one year the implementation of that measure, to give universities and housing associations the necessary breathing space in which to adjust to the new tax regime.

As luck would have it, however, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and others clearly advised me and other Committee members at that stage that, although well meant by my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, the concession might end up doing the sector more harm than good. They told us that, in those circumstances, only a five or possibly 10-year delay in the implementation of that tax regime would do the trick for institutions that had become involved in what are, by any standards, complex instruments.

To have their full and desirable effect, those instruments must be left in place for a considerable period, because the capital expenditure which they are intended to help finance would be incurred over a considerable period.

In the light of that background, my amendment was designed to restore the wording of the clause to what it had been before my right hon. Friend's concession, so that it would have excluded universities from benefiting from the Government's concession of one year's breathing space.

However, since I tabled that amendment, the plot has thickened, and the various interested parties in that complicated matter have reconsidered the balance of advantage and disadvantage in the existing arrangements. The financial institutions have apparently assured the university world that investors in qualifying indexed securities that are issued by universities are now prepared to clarify the terms of the deals into which they have entered in a direction favourable to the universities.

For that reason, I should place on record, for the avoidance of doubt, the press release that was issued today by the CVCP, which says about the apparent intellectual gymnastics that the issue has involved:

> "The CVCP has had confirmation from 9 of the 10 universities with QIS schemes that they do not now want to press for exemption from clause 81"—

as suggested in my amendment No. 82.

> "This was amended by the government at the Committee Stage, and gave universities (and Housing Associations) an extra year. The universities' decision follows discussions with the banks by the universities concerned and the negotiation of a concession by the banks over the increased charges which would have been involved in the one year extension.
>
> Ideally, those universities would like to see the government concession extended for a total of five years."

That is the argument that the hon. Member for Oxford, East has made, which is covered in amendment No. 86.

However, the CVCP does say in conclusion:

> "The CVCP is enormously grateful to all those MPs"—

it is obviously referring to hon. Members on both sides of the House—

> "who have supported the principle of the universities' case in what is a very complex issue."

That general thrust of argument to which I have just alluded—in other words, the present position—has been strongly supported in faxes that have been sent to me, in the past day or two, by University college, London, the university of Bristol, the university of Sheffield, the university of Aberdeen, the university of Durham, and, of course, the London School of Economics, which the hon. Member for Oxford, East specifically mentioned.

All those institutions, I can confidently say, urge me and the House to support the position that has now been reached as a result of the Government concession, allowing that year's breathing space to remain, so that the institutions concerned may use that time to best effect to reorder their affairs, and perhaps to refinance some of their borrowing.

If you are interested in specifics, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is a complicated matter, I should say that the lending institutions have apparently confirmed that, in the event that the year's breathing space remains, the same beneficial borrowing rate would apply to those instruments for the extra period of grace that is now on offer, until 30 March 1996.

At the least, that welcome development would remove the financial disadvantage to universities that was threatened before the concession was made, and would provide some extra time in which they might consider the options for closing down QIS instruments and refinancing their university borrowings in other ways.

To end on a general note, some universities, as my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary knows, have been landed in that process in something of an unfortunate muddle, and placed at potential financial hazard by the vagaries and complexities of that piece of tax legislation.

The legislation has been necessary, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East said, to close a loophole that needed closing—no one disputes that. However, something that I previously mentioned in the House has been at work—the law of unintended consequences. It has certainly applied in this case.

Virtuous and desirable changes in tax law, designed to tackle the problems thrown up by the affiliates and associates of some of the most prominent lending institutions, have had, or appear to have had, undesirable effects on two sectors of considerable interest to the House—the higher education world and the housing world. The hon. Member for Oxford, East was right to mention the end users—students and tenants.

It is a great pity that the law of unintended consequences should work in that way, because clause 81 in its original form was well directed at the problem. However, the way in which the Government could best make it up to those two sectors—were they minded to do so in future—would be to bear in mind the fact that the private finance initiative, to which the hon. Member for Oxford, East referred, is a worthwhile way forward for many parts of the public sector.

If my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is prepared, as I hope he is, to cling to the strong statement he made in his recent excellent speech to the Adam Smith Institute—on, I think, 27 March—I trust that he will bend every effort to ensure that the general climate within which public sector institutions seek to use private borrowed money is improved in every sensible way.

I shall quote one paragraph from my right hon. Friend's excellent speech:

> "The Government's commitment to the private finance initiative is absolute. Our aim is to make the PFI the procurement route of choice for all projects. In a few years' time people will wonder how it could ever have been otherwise. To drive that aim forward the Chancellor announced that in future the Treasury would not approve any capital projects unless private finance options had been explored."

I say amen to that, as does the higher education sector.

I hope that one practical consequence of the long-running and slightly complicated debate that the House and the Committee have had on the issue will be that, over the coming months, there will be opportunities for university finance officers, and perhaps housing association finance officers, to have detailed discussions with Treasury and Revenue officials to look at the robustness of any future funding arrangements that they may think of as replacements for qualifying indexed securities in due course.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful comments. Can he satisfy the House and say that, as part of the need to promote such arrangements between the public and private sector, perhaps the most significant necessary aspect is a consistency of tax treatment? Does he feel that, in their approach to such matters, particularly in relation to longer-term considerations affecting housing associations and universities, the Government have shown the necessary consistency in their treatment?

Mr. Forman: I certainly believe that the maximum possible stability for the tax regime in such matters is highly desirable. In defence of my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, may I say that I have seen copies of correspondence—not private—between him and the university world, in which he made it crystal clear in one paragraph that, under our system, it is certainly unusual, if not practically impossible, for any Treasury Minister to give guarantees about tax decisions in a future Budget? I am afraid that that must remain the position under our quaint and familiar constitution.

In a spirit of helpfulness, I am trying to suggest to the Financial Secretary—I hope that he can follow up my suggestion, perhaps in answer to the debate and subsequently—that it may be possible to inject slightly greater certainty and stability. If that is not done, the desirable thrust of the policy of involving private finance in public sector capital projects, particularly in the two sectors that we have mentioned, will be undermined to some extent. No one on either side of the House would wish that to happen.

A constructive approach of that sort in future would help the Government and the House to restore the credibility of the approaches taken by my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to private finance. It would also lend support to the clear statement of intent that I quoted in Committee—I will not repeat it today—which was drawn from the Department for Education's document "Education means Business".

I thank my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary for his sympathetic efforts to assist us. I underline the importance in such sectors of the greatest practical degree of tax regime stability. At the conclusion of the debate, I shall not press my amendment to a vote.

4.30 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I also urge the Minister to support the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). In my constituency, there are at least half a dozen community-based housing associations, as well as housing co-operatives which borrow money and are involved in joint ventures. The dedicated men and women who become involved in those committees increasingly do so after a day's work and after looking after their families, and they do an excellent job for the community.

If it had not been for the community-based housing associations in my constituency, many of the beautiful old Glasgow tenements would have been destroyed and lost for ever. Instead, there are thriving communities in tenements which have existed for many years but have now been totally refurbished inside and out. The back courts are marvellous. When the Prince of Wales was writing his book about architecture, he drew attention to some of the community-based housing association tenements in my constituency.

The big concern now is that the joint ventures with the banks and building societies mean that rents will increase. If the Minister is not prepared to promise some help today, the rents will increase further.

The Minister should know that, in at least one community-based housing association in my constituency, through no fault of the committee, 75 per cent. of the rental income is spent on administration. That is a terrible state of affairs. The association is not shrinking from the circulars produced by Scottish Homes stating that we should become involved in more joint ventures. The joint ventures in Glasgow have led to the creation of some lovely buildings, including a building that won an award for the city.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

If tenants have to face rent increases every year, many tenants will be forced to consider leaving the homes that they fought to get modernised and the communities in which they fought to stay. The Minister may say, "Why don't they buy their houses?", but he will know that, in the housing association movement, more and more tenants are being required to sign what are known as assured tenancy agreements, which deny them the right to buy.

I shall not get into a debate about whether anyone should buy a house or continue renting, but if people do not have that option, and if a husband and wife both work and receive no housing benefit, there will come a point when those couples realise that it is not financially worth their while staying, and will decide to move to other accommodation. That is moving away from exactly what we have all been promoting in previous debates—family values, and communities staying together.

What is the point of community-based housing associations fighting to get property modernised so that they can keep everyone together, when the rents force people out? I do not want to see that. I am sure that the Minister does not want to see that, and I hope that he agrees to this small concession.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I wish to take up the time of the House only briefly, primarily because of my concern about certain aspects of the Government's position on universities.

Last Friday, as a member of the court of the university of Strathclyde, I had cause to discuss with the principal and the chairman of that university the capital funding difficulties that universities are currently experiencing. I think that it is widely recognised on both sides of the House that universities—indeed, the whole higher education sector—experience periods of considerable financial difficulty.

This aspect of the Finance Bill was introduced initially for the quite laudable motive of closing tax avoidance loopholes. I believe that the legislation was aimed initially at the trading subsidiaries of banks, which were taking advantage of the laws that then existed to defer and minimise taxation on interest. However, I am concerned that the universities will suffer disproportionately as a result of the new clause. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Warrington (Mr. Forman) pointed out, the one-year period may not be long enough to allow universities to seek alternative arrangements.

We should give our higher education institutions greater opportunities to concentrate on educational merit and on the pursuit of excellence. They should spend less time dealing with the niceties of financial management. I recognise that that is perhaps a utopian ideal, but university principals and chancellors are concerned that they are spending increasing amounts of time meeting financial arrangements.

Many principals and chancellors have spent a fair amount of time trying to honour the Chancellor of the Exchequer's requirement to seek assistance through the private finance initiative. They are doing their very best in the circumstances. However, they are deeply concerned about the impact of the clause—particularly as it relates to student accommodation.

Those hon. Members with student and student family constituents know that students are currently suffering particular difficulties. Recent events involving the Student Loans Company Ltd. have shown that many families experience great difficulty in assisting young people in higher education. All of us who do not have silver spoons in our mouths and who experienced higher education know how difficult it is to finance young people through university.

If universities are forced to build new student accommodation, and consequently increase the rent in that accommodation, it stands to reason that that higher cost will be passed on to students at a particularly difficult time in their careers. There is no reason why we should take a partisan approach to the matter before the House this evening. We must find an opportunity to reduce the impact on those sectors—the universities and the housing associations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) pointed out—which have been caught in the trap.

I was much taken with the point that we must allow those organisations to choose a suitable time in the financial cycle to enter the market and raise finance. If we force them to raise funds quickly, they will have no choice in the matter. I can see a situation emerging in which the universities will be frightened away from the private finance initiative and perhaps from further capital expenditure because of the stresses that are put upon them. That will mean that less student accommodation will be built, and that many students will be forced into the private rented sector.

Many of us have children who are approaching student age, and we would rather see them accommodated in university halls of residence in an environment where they were more likely to be supervised and where their transition from school to university would be made easier. Many of us have very bad memories of the private rented sector.

Some families in this country are sufficiently concerned about the kind of environment in which their student children are likely to live that they are taking out mortgages, which are placing them under enormous financial pressure. They are trying to buy accommodation, so that their children can have some security as they enter university.

Many young people in my constituency are entering university for the first time in their families' histories. Their families are deeply concerned about the kind of university environment that their children will encounter, and they would rather see them living in university accommodation.

I am convinced that, if the Government think through the amendment, they will see the logic of extending the period to five years. I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East, that the amendment seeks to look at a period of only five years, not 10, to make it less unpalatable to the Government.

I cannot believe that right-minded Members, on both sides of the House, would wish to see universities put into a less favourable situation. Many universities are trying to do their best in creating an environment of excellence. Indeed, many are so concentrating on the capital requirements that they will have to meet in the next few years that they are having to think less about the money that will be put into teaching and into research funds.

It is unacceptable, as we reach the turn of the century, when we should look to improve the excellence in our institutions of higher education, that we are putting this unexpected burden on them. It is not a dramatic amendment. Indeed, all the Opposition's amendments are moderate, and this is no exception. Common sense should apply, and we should ensure that the universities and housing associations are not disadvantaged unwittingly by this aspect of the proposed legislation.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): In Committee, we had a good debate on the clause and how it affects—in some ways inadvertently—both housing associations and universities. I do not think that it was the Government's prime intention in drafting the clause to attack and single out those two institutions for penalties under the new arrangements. Every hon. Member who spoke in Committee accepted that there was a misuse of qualifying indexed securities and deep discount securities by associates of banks, which, effectively, had been set up to gain tax advantages that the Government had never intended should be available to banks in the first place. Associates were set up to gain tax advantages that would not have been available to the banks themselves.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who said that he would not press his amendment because he accepted that if he removed reference to universities and other such institutions, effectively they would not benefit from the concessions that the Government were going to make. I accept the logic of that argument but do not understand why the hon. Gentleman did not go on to say why he was not prepared to vote for the Opposition's amendment, which was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). All that it was seeking to do was to extend the concession for a further four years to allow the deliberations and consultations to which the hon. Gentleman referred, between the banks, universities and other higher education institutions, to take place in perhaps a rather more relaxed atmosphere over a longer period.

Although I can understand that nice noises might be made behind the scenes by the banks to the universities to which they have lent money and which have issued such securities, my worry is that the banks will not come out of the negotiations without an element of profit for themselves. Perhaps they would be prepared to terminate the arrangements in a way that would be less costly to the universities and, indeed, if similar discussions take place, to the housing associations as well. Almost certainly, the costs involved in entering into new arrangements and getting out of the current arrangements will be greater than if the institutions had been able to continue with their QISs and deep discount securities for a number of years under the current arrangements with the tax reliefs that are available.

In other words, even with the Government's concession—even if they allow a breathing space for one year, as a result of which there will be negotiations on new arrangements between the current lenders and the current borrowers, or with new lenders—the costs for the institutions are likely to rise. The problem will then be that inevitably the costs will be passed on to the people who live in the properties that are being built as a result of the security arrangements. I do not understand why the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington did not accept that it would be much better for those institutions if they could have five years' breathing space rather than one. That seemed to be the logic of what he was saying. Perhaps he might like to reflect on whether there is still some merit in supporting the Opposition's amendment.

Mr. Forman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, just so that I can tell him what was going through my mind when I argued my case. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary did very well in his reconsideration in Standing Committee, to be able to offer one year's breathing space. If the hon. Gentleman reflects on it, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect five years, bearing in mind the fact that that would take us well into the next Parliament.

4.45 pm

Mr. Betts: There are, perhaps, many Conservative Members, although they are not in their places, who would willingly commit this Parliament to measures that go well into the next Parliament and would commit the future Labour Government to things that they may not want to do.

It is worth going through some of the reasons why housing associations—the area in which I am most interested—are caught in their current position. I do not think that that was the Government's primary intention, and I, like other Opposition Members, accept that the intention was to stop tax abuses by associates of banks. We support that and do not in any way want to undermine it. The arrangements for housing associations have great merit, one of which is that they are long term. By its very nature, building homes is a long-term venture and one needs long-term funding arrangements. To have to scrap one's arrangements and within a year renegotiate alternative arrangements naturally puts the borrower at a distinct disadvantage. The properties are already there. Those involved have to fund them somehow. They are not entering into funding negotiations with free hands, for a new estate of houses. The houses are already there. They need the funding to continue to pay for their properties. That puts them at a distinct disadvantage. Long-term arrangements are important to organisations in that position.

I refer to an important comment that was made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) about the nature of private sector finance. Many organisations—many are local authorities—that have tried to get involved in those arrangements will say that the greatest problem has nothing to do with ideology or negotiations between the public and private sector—where there is a proper and understood level playing field, and where organisations can sit around a table and come to arrangements to their mutual advantage—but is uncertainty. Most of that uncertainty is created not by the markets but by Government.

Those institutions do not know from one year to the next what the Government's taxation policy will be. They do not understand from a local government perspective, or, indeed, from a housing association perspective, what their vires will be. Will they have powers to do things or will they not? Governments so often change their position on those matters that it is difficult not only for the public sector but for the private sector, if they want to enter into negotiations and make arrangements of a long-term nature, to do so when they are not sure of the position that their partners will be in vis-à-vis Government policy at any one moment. That is a real problem. When the Government change their position from year to year, the financial forward plan for private and public partnerships is undermined and simply does not get off the ground in any meaningful way. That issue comes up time and again,

[Mr. Betts]

and the accountants involved in such ventures warn how the Government operate. I hope that the Government will learn a few lessons from that in future.

Associations have also entered into various deals; in many cases, the deals are index-linked, which suits housing associations, because their rental stream tends to go up over time as inflation takes it upwards. It is sensible to link the rental stream to a form of borrowing that is also index-linked. It is good planning and sound common sense. There are tax advantages, which, of course, make the deals attractive, but their very nature is attractive to organisations seeking to invest in a product with a long life and with an income stream that rises on a similar basis to the cost of their borrowing. Initially, tax advantages accrue to associates of banks. When they reach deals with housing associations, at least the majority of those advantages tend to be passed on to the associations and their borrowers.

In Committee, the Financial Secretary said that—although, superficially, many such deals were index-linked, the accumulated interest being paid and taxed only after a discount for inflation—a number of side deals were done. A "shadow" arrangement operated, allowing the interest rate that would otherwise have been charged—perhaps a rate linked to LIBOR, the London inter-bank offer rate—to be assessed and the difference to be paid back to the lenders. They would receive a return as if they were conducting a straightforward deal, but the deal was dressed up to enable tax reliefs to accrue.

I agree that that happens in many deals, but the Government are not seeking to outlaw such arrangements. They do not wish to abolish QISs and deep discount securities, or to abolish the tax reliefs that are available in conjunction with side deals. They merely wish to abolish such deals when they are conducted by associates of banks. Their stated policy is to encourage the development of a bond market with other institutions, and, presumably, to encourage the practices to which I have referred: that is how institutions enter the market, make profits and make their lending attractive to organisations that wish to borrow. As I said, the Government do not oppose the side deals in principle; they oppose them only when they are conducted by associates of banks.

It is not the banks that will suffer as a result of the Government's proposals, however; it is the housing associations that will suffer. Most of the deals, while giving associations the benefit of tax relief while they exist, also include clauses stating that the associations—and, of course, universities—must pick up the costs if a deal is unravelled or tax relief is not available.

The Government should question the morality of the penalty that they are imposing. I understand that, in the case of housing associations, all such deals must receive consent from the Housing Corporation. Every deal has been approved by a quango: Government appointees have vetted those deals and given them their blessing. I think it wrong for housing associations to enter into such deals—deals that the Government support in principle, despite their reservations about the involvement of associates of banks; deals that have been approved by the Housing Corporation.

Indeed, I understand that some of those deals have been approved by the Treasury. I consider it questionable, halfway through a deal that has been approved by the Treasury, to change the ground rules—in effect, retrospectively—so that the tax reliefs on which the borrowers were counting are no longer available: in fact, to tear up the deal.

I understand and support the Government's main intention, but I feel that the organisations involved need a longer breathing space. Will the Government consider allowing five years for the continuation of arrangements entered into before the Budget announcement? I am not talking about new arrangements. Perhaps a longer period could be allowed in the case of deals that currently involve more than five years, which is the minimum in many cases. It is the minimum in the case of QISs, for instance, to make the deals worth while. Organisations need time to think about their future, to begin negotiations with banks and other institutions and perhaps to seek opportunities for the development of alternative markets as other institutions enter the field. The deals involved are complicated, and unravelling them overnight would be damaging.

We have cited rent levels in the past. Increases have been assessed by various organisations, which have produced figures ranging from £14 to £40 a week in the case of schemes caught by the arrangements that I have described. The amount depends on the finances of the organisations involved, and the way in which the deals were structured. If the Government are concerned about losing their own tax income, however, I think that what I said in Committee is still pertinent. The Nationwide building society, which produced some assessments for me, concluded that, as 78 per cent. of housing association tenants are in receipt of housing benefit and as the full cost of any rent increase resulting from the unscrambling of deals would fall on the Exchequer rather than the tenants, the Government will not gain the full benefit of any tax returns by reducing tax reliefs connected with the schemes.

The Nationwide's calculations show that in the case of 78 per cent. of tenants, the Government would lose £23 a year as a result of the difference between the tax savings and the extra benefit that they would have to pay out. Of course, in the case of tenants not in receipt of housing benefit, the Government will gain the full impact of the extra income tax that they receive, but at the expense of a widening of the poverty gap—at the expense of those who must pay the full amount of rent.

Let me return to the issue of other financial institutions. The Government seem to be saying that if other institutions wish to enter the market and issue securities, it will be possible for housing associations and, indeed, universities to switch their borrowing to those institutions—building societies, perhaps—and enter into arrangements, through QISs and discount securities, allowing them to gain the benefits that they currently gain from schemes involving associates of banks.

As has been pointed out to me by people involved in such markets, however, the problem is that they take some time to develop. It takes time for those in the other financial institutions that I mentioned to understand fully the way in which housing associations work, and to feel that they understand that well enough to lend on the basis on which banks have been prepared to lend on the past.

Associates of banks, and banks themselves, are currently the main lenders in the market. I suggest that, if other institutions were as willing to lend, they would already be in the market and lending. The five-year period proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East would allow a little extra time—in regard to existing schemes—for other institutions to enter the market and offer alternatives to housing associations and universities, which could accept them on the same or similar terms to their current arrangements with associates of banks, which would have to be terminated on their current terms.

The problem at present is that those involved in the markets do not understand the nature and operations of housing associations because they have not lent to them regularly. It is therefore difficult to secure sufficient private sector funds to cover the cost of a scheme. As I pointed out in Committee, the cost of building most rented accommodation is not reflected in the valuation of such property when it is first built: the open-market valuation is likely to be only about 75 per cent. of the building cost.

Banks, because they understand housing associations, are currently prepared to lend on the basis of a fairly advantageous valuation-to-debt ratio, but many other institutions that do not know as much about housing associations are prepared to lend only on a ratio of around 150 per cent.—sometimes even higher. If the valuation-to-debt ratio on which the other institutions are prepared to lend is higher than 150, because of the relatively low ratio of valuation to building cost, the amount of the building cost that institutions are prepared to advance will be less than 50 per cent.

As we all know, one of the Government's policies in the past few years has been to reduce the amount of housing association grant that they pay on schemes, thus implicitly telling associations to increase their private finance. If the only institutions that can enter into such arrangements are not prepared to lend as much as banks—if they are prepared to lend less than 50 per cent. of the cost of building properties—that, along with the reduction in HAG, means that there may well be a gap in the funding arrangements for new housing schemes. If that gap exists, not only will rents will go up, but new schemes will not be built. That is a problem.

We are saying that there is a real difficulty for housing associations. We accept the main thrust of what the Government are trying to do, and that associates of banks have been manipulating securities for their own advantage. We want to close tax loopholes. We do not want to be seen to be stopping the Government in trying to achieve that. However, if the consequence is that housing association rents will rise steeply and that, at the same time, other institutions will have insufficient time to come into the market and start lending to associations so that there is no funding gap between HAG and private finance, would not it be better for the Government to stop, reflect and give a little more breathing space?

5 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East made a good case. He did not seek to undermine the impact of what the Government are trying to achieve, or to allow new schemes to get off the ground with associates of banks using the arrangements that have been available in the past. The Government should recognise that it is wrong to say to housing associations, in the middle of those arrangements, that they have only one year and that, in that year, they must either pick up the full cost of changes in the tax position under schemes' penalty clauses, or go around looking for another borrower, who may not be available on anything like the same advantageous terms.

The proposal will cost housing associations and their tenants dear. A bit of reflection and a small extension of the period during which the pre-Budget arrangements may continue would be of enormous benefit and would lead to little cost to the Exchequer. I hope that the Financial Secretary will give serious consideration to that.

Mr. Hoon: I shall endeavour not to repeat the many excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). He has clearly shown the essential problem addressed by amendment No. 86—the difficulty faced by housing associations and universities in adjusting to the new tax regime that was established by the Government amendment, which was accepted in Committee.

The position was well set out by the Financial Secretary in Committee. Essentially, we are dealing with a relatively small number of institutions that have taken advantage of a tax position created by the Government. About a dozen housing associations have borrowed about £150 million, and a dozen universities have borrowed about £300 million. Each of those institutions acted in good faith on the basis of tax arrangements in force at the time.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) fairly accepted that, if we are to promote arrangements between the public and private sectors, consistency of tax treatment is essential. That is precisely what the Financial Secretary said repeatedly in Committee. He said that the Government wanted

> "to encourage private borrowings by universities and housing associations. That is the thrust of our policy."

I should grateful if, in reviewing the thrust of Government policy over a considerable period, he made it clear whether he really believes that the consistency advocated by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington has been borne out in the way in which the Government have treated, in particular, housing associations and universities.

The nature of those two institutions dictates that what they do is in the longer term. Universities do not build student accommodation simply for this year and the next. They build such accommodation over a prolonged period. That must also be the case with housing associations, whose primary focus is aimed at providing accommodation for families and for people who are not in a position to buy their own accommodation. Such work cannot be turned on and turned off as easily as the Government might suggest.

If that in any way suggests that I am being critical of the Government's position, I should emphasise how much I agreed with the Financial Secretary in Committee, when he said:

> "I see some force in the argument that the immediate commencement envisaged in the Bill, backdated to the Budget, could cause disruption to the short-term financial plans of the institutions and a consequent risk of avoidable damage to our objectives both in social housing and higher education."

That is right. That is why he fairly delayed the implementation of the Government's original proposal until 1 April next year.

That was a concession. I am not arguing against that, but consistent with the Financial Secretary's comments in Committee, I wonder whether, on reflection, he feels that

[Mr. Hoon]

the concession is sufficient to allow housing associations and universities to adjust their finance. I should be grateful if he dealt with that point. In Committee, he said:

> "That will give them a breathing space in which to reconsider their financial arrangements and, if they wish, to unwind the borrowings caught by the clause."

What investigations have he and the Government made of the practicalities of unwinding financial arrangements for long-term capital commitments in a relatively short time? I seriously wonder whether it is practically possible to unwind financial arrangements in the way that he suggested in Committee. That could not be done without a considerable cost to both housing associations and universities.

Labour Members have said that their concern is the cost to students and to housing association tenants in the form of higher rents. I hope that the Financial Secretary did not make those comments off the cuff to get out of the difficulty in Committee, but that the Government have investigated the ability of both housing associations and universities to unwind borrowings caught by the clause. If not, I assume that the Financial Secretary will accept the logic of what he said previously—that it is right that universities and housing associations should be given a proper period in which to adjust their borrowings.

That proper period was touched on in Committee by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, who was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe to explain why he was not able today to support the thrust of the Opposition amendment. The hon. Gentleman intervened on the Financial Secretary in Committee and made it clear that

> "a year's breathing space . . . is not adequate to deal with the situation."

I was delighted to discover that he had made his position so clear in Committee. I hope that, in considering the amendment, he will accept that perhaps five years is a more sensible period in which to allow housing associations and universities to adjust their arrangements. If he does not accept the amendment's logic, he will be forced to vote for the year's grace that he said would be inadequate. I hope that, being a man of great consistency, he will follow through his position in Committee and support the amendment.

In the context of that debate, I hope that the Financial Secretary will think carefully about the matter. During the debate, he said that he saw no technical difference between the borrowings of housing associations and universities, and any other borrowing caught by clause 77. I hope that, in considering the matter fairly, as I am sure he will, he will recognise that, although technical differences may not exist, there are practical consequences for both housing associations and universities.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will not rely on the point that he went on to make in Committee, that housing associations and universities should have been on notice that they borrowed those moneys under arrangements that might be changed. He said:

> "That might have flashed up some warning signals to the housing associations when they entered into such an agreement that there was a possibility that the tax regime would change, with the result that they would have to bear the costs."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 21 February 1995; c. 426-27.]

Of course, that is precisely what has happened and it has happened because the Government sought to change the rules, originally retrospectively for housing associations and universities. However, I am pleased that the Government at least thought that the retrospective element should not apply in this instance.

The type of comment that I have just cited is most unhelpful in promoting arrangements between the public and private sectors. It is precisely such observations that cause nervous anxieties among those who are contemplating entering into such financial arrangements. If bodies think that, when the Government change the rules, they will say that they—the bodies—should have been on notice that the rules could change, it is less likely that any arrangements will be entered into. I hope that the Financial Secretary will not press the argument too far.

Clearly, we all agree that arrangements between the public and private sectors are necessary. It is also necessary that they should be fair and sensible and not "tax driven and artificial", an expression that the Financial Secretary used repeatedly in his defence of the change. However, as he is a fair-minded man, I hope that he will recognise that the changes should not have adverse, short-term consequences for institutions such as universities and housing associations. I hope that he will also recognise that if he accepted amendment No. 86, he would be providing a proper period in which such institutions could adjust their finances and make proper provision for the people whom they serve.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): We are not arguing about a matter of principle, because we agree with the Government's proposals to close the loopholes, but difficulties arise for bodies such as universities and housing associations during the transitional period. The Government are suggesting 12 months, whereas we feel that five years would be more advantageous.

Universities in particular are having difficulty with funding and have had to reduce the number of courses. The university of Bradford is having tremendous problems reassessing the courses that it provides, and I imagine that others face the same difficulties. The Minister said in Committee that the Government were not attacking universities or housing associations, but, ultimately, the costs will have to be picked up by students and tenants.

The difference between the Opposition and the Government centres on the period that we consider reasonable for such institutions to be able to develop a way out of the problem. A breathing space of 12 months is inadequate, as my hon. Friends said so eloquently. I hope that the Financial Secretary will reconsider.

Housing Corporation funding for small housing associations has been reduced and many of them are in difficulties. If the Government are interested in efficiency and cost, I should have thought that they would try to support such organisations. The case for the amendment has been well made, and I hope that the Financial Secretary will take on board what has been said and stretch the breathing space to a more reasonable period.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I have a number of non-pecuniary interests that I must declare at the outset. I chair Circle 33, one of the major housing associations in London, and I am also on the governing body of the

London School of Economics and that of the university of London. I must apologise for not having heard some of the earlier contributions.

This is a sensible amendment that should be accepted by the Government because it would achieve their purpose of ensuring that we get effective private finance into some of the projects undertaken by public sector institutions. I think that the Government are cutting off their nose to spite their face in this instance, because their proposals will have a detrimental effect on their pursuit of their objective.

Had the Government consulted rather more widely, they might have avoided the adverse impact that their proposals will have on a number of higher education institutions and housing associations. Housing associations and universities have used these instruments to borrow, not to avoid taxation liabilities but to pursue their perfectly legitimate objectives. I hope that the Financial Secretary will accept that.

When housing associations first used these instruments in about 1989, they sought permission from the Government's own agency—the Housing Corporation—in the form of a section 9 consent. Instead of legislating retrospectively, it would have been appropriate for the Government to tell the Housing Corporation at that point that they thought that these forms of deep discount securities and loans were not appropriate.

5.15 pm

With his previous hat on, I think that the Financial Secretary will remember that, at that time, the Housing Corporation undertook a thorough investigation. Indeed, I should be surprised if he were not party to that investigation into the structure of the loans when housing associations first entered into them. Having given consent only four or five years ago and allowed housing associations to enter into such loans, it is not good practice for the Government now to cause housing associations additional financial problems by stopping them having the advantages provided by the loans.

Also at that time, other public bodies examined the nature of these loans. The Department of Health considered some of those where housing associations were working with health authorities, and the Treasury ensured that it was happy with the way in which the loan structures were established. At that point, no one said that such schemes were wrong or accused housing associations or universities of avoiding tax. However, by changing retrospectively the tax liabilities of such organisations, the Government are ending up with private bodies meeting public purposes.

The LSE, with which I am connected, has, through deep discount and qualifying index securities, raised about £30 million of which it has spent £16 million on new residences and £14 million on purchasing and refurbishing academic buildings. If higher education institutions cease to have the tax advantages that they currently enjoy, they will no longer be able to supply the student bed spaces that are absolutely crucial for people attending courses in inner London.

Since 1989, the housing associations have used about £130 million: £80 million through deep discount loans—the Treasury would now lose the interest on the tax—and £50 million through qualifying index securities.

Housing associations and higher education institutions should have sufficient time to unravel their loans if they are not to suffer an adverse impact from the early introduction of the Government's proposals. I think that all parties agree with the attempt to get private finance into public bodies, and I should be astounded if the Financial Secretary were to reject such a reasonable amendment.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): This has been a thoughtful debate and it follows an equally thoughtful debate in Committee on the equivalent of clause 81.

There is a measure of agreement among all parties. No one is arguing that housing associations and universities should be caught as from Budget day, which is the case with every other borrower affected by clause 81, and no one has argued today that housing associations and universities should be wholly exempt for ever and a day.

The debate has focused on whether the concession already announced by the Government—to postpone the impact until April next year—is the right one or whether we should have agreed to the longer one proposed by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), which expires in the year 2000. The hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) said that we should have consulted, but as I think that I explained in Committee, if one is looking at anti-avoidance—this is an anti-avoidance measure—it is, by definition, difficult to consult in advance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) made a thoughtful speech. I pay tribute to his work as an intermediary between the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Government, for his active interest in the subject and for the positive proposals which he has put to the Government to take some of the tension out of the change which is now under discussion.

I take very much to heart what my hon. Friend said about the private finance initiative. I was interested to see, as I am sure was he, that the university of Lancaster has recently launched £35 million of 30-year debenture stock, which is to be listed on the stock exchange. Press reports show that it will pay interest at a fixed rate on a quarterly basis, that it is a public issue to a range of subscribers and that it is otherwise on quite straightforward terms. That is exactly the grain of what my hon. Friend talked about: genuine private finance initiative.

The features of the university of Lancaster launch are very different from those that we have discovered in clause 81. I take very much to heart what my hon. Friend said about—where it is reasonable so to do—promoting certainty and stability. If one is to do that, the designers of the schemes will equally have to put their cards on the table. If the Government proceed with the policy of pre-transaction rulings, an element of certainty will be injected.

I welcome what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) said and I join him in paying tribute to those who work for housing associations.

Mr. Forman: I apologise to my right hon. Friend for not intervening with my usual speed. He has just mentioned the possibility of the Government proceeding on the basis of pre-transaction rulings. So far as I understand the view of the university world, such an

[Mr. Forman]

approach would be very helpful. If he can build on that, it would go some way towards meeting the concerns which have been expressed by all hon. Members.

Sir George Young: We have already made some progress with post-transaction rulings and we have it in mind to issue—we hope—a consultative document on pre-transaction rulings later this year.

The hon. Member for Springburn, as I said, paid tribute to those in his constituency who work for housing associations and I join his tribute. I also recognise the good work done by many universities, which hon. Members have mentioned.

On the private finance initiative, I refer my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington to an article in the *Financial Times* for the weekend of 25 and 26 March, because it is exactly in line with what he was advocating. It said:

"Other universities are still likely to follow"—

the university of Lancaster—

"as continued expansion in student numbers puts pressure on them to borrow for capital projects."

There is reference to some 12 other universities which are still considering taking part in the initial launch. The move that my hon. Friend advocated is now under way and the Government will certainly play their part in accelerating it.

Clause 81 is directed at a growing trend for lending by banking groups to be packaged as a bilateral issue of debt securities, which are structured, often in a highly artificial way, to secure a tax advantage. The advantage goes to the lender, but part of the benefit passes to the borrower in the form of a reduced cost of borrowing. The clause removes the tax advantage. Although the first-round effect is to increase the tax liabilities of the lenders, the terms of the deals, to which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) referred, are such that they trigger off increases in the borrower's costs to compensate the lenders.

Perhaps I should explain briefly how the mischief that concerns us works in practice. Suppose a borrower wishes, for example, to borrow £30 million. The borrower issues a zero coupon bond, having a nominal value of £340 million, redeemable in 20 years' time. Instead of offering that issue to the market at large, the borrower issues the whole of it to a purpose-built subsidiary of a bank. The issuer gets an annual tax deduction for its accruing interest obligations, but the holder only pays tax, if at all, when the discount is realised at the bond's maturity or sale. The tax deferral substantially reduces the holder's effective charge, bringing it below the cost of conventional lending.

In addition, in many of the cases that we have seen, side agreements exist between the issuer and the bank, which allow for the bond to be redeemed on terms quite different from those specified in the terms of the issue. In practice, those side agreements convert the borrowing into London inter-bank offer rate-linked loans and thus conventional bank lending is dressed up in a complex package designed solely to secure a tax advantage that it was never intended to enjoy.

A wide range of borrowers, including housing associations and universities, have used the techniques addressed by the clause. We received a number of representations, which were discussed at length in Committee, that those particular institutions should be made a special exemption to our proposal. I saw representatives of universities and housing associations and had constructive meetings with them, but we saw no case for exempting them totally, because the techniques used by those institutions are essentially the same as, and just as artificial as, those used by other borrowers.

I am afraid that it is not a justification for borrowers to say that those particular tax-driven loans should be excused because the funds have been applied to further public policy objectives; rather, it is the contrary. Such institutions already receive substantial support from public funds. It is essential that that should be controlled and allocated between institutions in a disciplined way and not topped up on a self-service basis by recourse to tax-motivated borrowing structures.

Moreover, failing to act now to close that particular avenue would have given rise to very substantial Exchequer costs, running into hundreds of millions of pounds over time, as universities and housing associations would have every incentive to arrange more and more of their borrowings in that way.

We did, however, see force in Committee in the argument that an immediate commencement, as in the Bill as first drafted, would disrupt the short-term financial plans of housing associations and universities and so risk avoidable prejudice to our own objectives. So, we suggested that the start date for our proposal should be deferred to 1 April 1996 in the case of pre-Budget borrowing for housing associations and universities. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington for explaining why, on reflection, the amendment in his name does not secure any particular advantage for universities.

I shall now turn to amendment No. 86, moved by the hon. Member for Oxford, East. Even if the commencement were deferred for much longer, as the Opposition propose, the significant Exchequer costs would very often go largely as a windfall gain to the banks concerned, rather than increasing the resources available to serve our housing or higher education policies. We estimate that the cost of the amendment would be about £25 million in aggregate, but the housing associations and universities would in total gain much less. I believe that that can only reinforce the case for rejecting such a change. Such an extended deferral would be unjustified on balance, even if the fruits of it flowed through wholly to the borrowers. It makes no sense to do so if they would go to any substantial extent as a benefit to bankers.

I shall deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Attercliffe who asked why we were just blocking deals for subsidiaries of the banks. If one looks at the history of the qualifying investment securities rules, one sees that they were designed for genuine public issues to the market. If the hon. Gentleman reflects on the side deals, which are a feature of the transactions that we have been discussing, he will conclude that it would be scarcely practicable to issue those artificial side agreements in cases of public issues. It is practicable only when the issue is on a bilateral basis, such as those caught by clause 81. The banks are obviously the main candidates for such deals, but of course we shall look at the matter again if other institutions start using the technique.

Mr. Betts: Does the Financial Secretary accept that housing associations have tried—as in the case of Lancaster university, which has been successful—to go to the markets for resources in the way that he identified as a possibility, but that the markets have not been secure about lending to housing associations? They simply do not understand the workings of housing associations and universities as well as the banks. It will take some time to build up confidence and an understanding of housing association finance, and it is that period of time which we are trying to buy through the amendment.

Sir George Young: I am not sure that I buy that argument. As the hon. Gentleman will know, many building societies, for example, lend substantial sums to housing associations. It is not the case that only the banks understand how housing associations work.

As I was saying, I looked with some sympathy at the problems that confronted housing associations and universities. The concession that the Government have offered is reasonable. There are sound arguments for not going to 2000, not least because the benefit would not go primarily to the universities or housing associations, but would be secured as a windfall gain to the banks. On the basis of those arguments, I invite the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The significant aspect of the Financial Secretary's reply was the fact that, although he tried to argue that the housing associations and universities and their tenants would receive less benefit than the banks, he did not attempt to quantify the difference, which suggested to me that he was not altogether confident of his argument.

We have had a good debate, and I am grateful for the contributions by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) and for Barking (Ms Hodge), who all showed an excellent appreciation of the importance of the issue both to tenants of housing associations and to university students in affected schemes.

The Financial Secretary said that we had had a reasonable debate, and indeed it was reasonable. I, too, acknowledge the contribution made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. Even he did not argue against our amendment. He said that perhaps he could see why the Government were not prepared to accept it, but I have little doubt that, left to his own devices, he would have wanted to vote with us.

The debate has been reasonable, and the amendment is reasonable; the only thing that the Government have not given us is a reasonable conclusion. Those who, as a consequence, suffer rent increases, whether in housing association properties or in university accommodation, will know exactly who to blame.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 283.

Division No. 127] **[5.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan

Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Stephen Byers.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arness, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. David Willetts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 82

RELIEF FOR POST-CESSATION EXPENDITURE

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 83, line 28, leave out 'substitute' and insert 'insert'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Clause 83

EMPLOYEE LIABILITIES AND INDEMNITY INSURANCE

5.45 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I beg to move amendment No. 87, in page 84, line 20, at end add 'of insurance'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 88, in page 85, line 49, leave out from '(8)' to end of line 7 on page 86 and insert—

'Where it would be unlawful in the United Kingdom for a liability of a particular description or costs or expenses of a particular description to be indemnified or paid under or in consequence of a contract of insurance, no deduction may be made under this section in respect of:

(a) the discharge of any liability of that description;

(b) any costs or expenses of that description.'.

No. 89, in page 86, line 10, at end add—

'(10)(a) For the purposes of this section where a company ("the first company") effects a contract of insurance extending to any other companies in relation to which it can lawfully effect such contract and that contract would if confined to the first company be a qualifying contract of insurance it shall be a qualifying contract in relation to those other companies also and any liability arising in relation to any or all of those other companies shall if it would be qualifying liability in relation to the first company had it arisen in relation thereto also be a qualifying liability in relation to those other companies.

(b) This subsection shall apply to any payment made to a taxpayer by the company referred to as the first company in (a) above even if no contract of insurance was actually taken out as envisaged in (a) but would have come within (a) had such contract been taken out'.

Mr. Carrington: The amendments are designed to clarify some of the problems in clause 83. The clause is very welcome, and the subject with which it deals was debated extensively last year in Committee. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has moved a considerable way to meet the needs of industry and the insurance business.

There are some problems with the clause that worry employers and insurers. My amendments are designed to tease out some explanations of the Government's intentions, and they may highlight some of the problems that are foreseen in the implementation of the clause. My amendments were suggested by the CBI and are supported by the British insurance industry. Consequently, they are designed to clarify some of the difficulties in the minds of employers and insurers.

I will go through the intention of the amendments briefly; my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary may be able to express a view on the intention of the clause in three specific regards. Will he reconsider the clause in the light of experience as it settles down and as the provisions of directors' and officers' liability insurance become more readily used in the market?

Under clause 83, the insurance contract must be separate for it to qualify for tax relief. Furthermore, the contract must be unconnected with any other contract. The problem is that policies are usually associated with the contract of employment of the individual. That is not so much for the benefit of the employer, but for the protection of the employee so that he has some assurance that his employer has taken out the right insurance cover to enable his interests to be protected.

As the clause stands, it seems that that would not be permitted. It would be necessary for a company or an employer to take out separate insurance, which seems to be unnecessarily bureaucratic. I understand that it is important to have some anti-avoidance provision in the clause, but the current wording is unduly restrictive. Is it the Government's intention that employees and employers should take out completely separate insurance policies, or could they still be linked to a contract of employment, which is the normal practice in the industry?

Amendment No. 88 is designed to clarify the intention of the clause, which at present concentrates on whether it is lawful for an employer to take out insurance. Where it is unlawful for an employer to take out insurance, tax relief will clearly not be available. The amendment is designed to carry on excluding uninsurable liabilities and liabilities against which it is illegal to insure. It is possible to imagine a situation where an employer would not be able to take out insurance for one reason or another. The

[Mr. Carrington]

employer might not be able to do so for legal reasons as much as for anything else but, because of the nature of the liability being insured, the employee could take out insurance in his or her name.

As the clause stands, it appears that if an employer cannot take out insurance, an employee cannot do so in his or her name either. The employee would, therefore, lose the tax deductibility. Clearly, that is undesirable in the sense that an employee would want cover against the risks and, regardless of the position of the employer, should be able to have that cover as though he or she were any other employee of the organisation.

My amendment is designed to enable that to happen. It moves the restriction from the nature of the employer to the nature of the insurable risk. If the risk is one against which it is illegal to insure, it would not qualify for tax deduction. If it is legal but the employer cannot legally insure against it, the employee could still do so.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would clarify the Government's intentions and say whether my interpretation of the clause is correct, or whether the insurance industry is being unduly pessimistic in its interpretation.

Amendment No. 89 is much more simple and covers the problem caused by groups of companies. It is not unusual for employees of the parent company in a group, or of one of its subsidiaries, to be paid by the company that directly employs them, but to serve as a director or in other capacities with other group companies on an unpaid basis. Nevertheless, they take on responsibilities that mean that they should be able to cover themselves with directors' and officers' liability insurance. As the clause stands, it appears that the group would not be able to take out insurance cover for employees on a group-wide basis. Each subsidiary would have to take out separate insurance to cover the one employee who might have multifarious responsibilities throughout the group. I am thinking of a group of companies in which a director of the main board might be employed by and paid as a director of that board, but might serve as a director on any number of other boards in the group. It would seem ridiculous for the subsidiary companies to have to take out separate insurance.

If my interpretation of clause 83 is correct, it seems unduly restrictive. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary could clarify whether that was the intention and my interpretation is correct or whether the industry is again unduly concerned and has no real reason to worry.

I am aware that the problems that I have highlighted are problems of detail in a clause that is greatly welcomed and will simplify the situation for directors' and officers' liability insurance. I am looking for some reassurance and comments from my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary. Implementation of the clause is likely to be somewhat complex within the insurance industry, however, and I would be grateful for my right hon. Friend's assurance that he will ensure that his officials work closely with the industry during the implementation period to ensure smooth running and to ensure that any unforeseen problems are sorted out with the minimum of difficulty.

Will my right hon. Friend assure us that, if problems cannot be sorted out and it is felt that the clause is unduly restrictive to the insurance industry or employers, the Inland Revenue will keep the matter under review and that, if the problems need to be rectified and legislation is the only means of doing so, necessary legislation will be introduced in next year's Finance Bill?

The clause is widely welcomed. The Government have gone a long way towards meeting the worries of employers in the insurance industry, but I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could put the final bells and whistles on an otherwise excellent measure.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) for his comments on clause 83 and for the role that he played in getting the reform on to the statute book. I will briefly try to put some bells and whistles on the clause.

I will deal with the three amendments in the order in which my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham did so. I understand his concern that the provisions regarding connected contracts might have been drawn too widely. They are drafted to prevent abuse of the new relief. One obvious example would be when two insurance contracts are taken out, but only one relates to liability insurance and the premiums on the liability insurance policy are artificially weighted to inflate the amount that qualifies for relief.

Amendment No. 87 would still permit those anti-avoidance provisions to operate if both connected policies were contracts of insurance. We have carefully considered whether we could accept the limitation that my hon. Friend proposes, but I am afraid that there would still be scope for abuse of the relief by using contracts other than insurance contracts. For example, an insurance company might provide free cars or holidays for directors of a company under one contract, in return for an inflated premium for liability insurance taken out by the client company for its directors under a connected non-insurance contract. Such arrangements are by no means inconceivable.

The approach of preventing abuse via connected contracts generally, and not merely via contracts of insurance, is precisely that adopted under the private medical insurance relief that we introduced, which has been operating successfully.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham that the provisions are not intended to disqualify insurance contracts taken out alongside a director's or employee's ordinary contract of employment. I have already given my hon. Friend such an assurance in correspondence and I am happy to repeat it to the House. That approach will be incorporated in guidance about the relief, which the Inland Revenue will issue in due course.

I cannot recommend that the House should accept amendment No. 87, but I hope that the assurances that I have given my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham about the way in which the provision will be interpreted will help to meet the concerns that he expressed.

I understand my hon. Friend's continuing concern about the provisions covered by amendment No. 88. He raised the matter in a debate on a similar amendment in Committee and has since been good enough to write to me on the subject. I hope to be able to show that the provision as drafted already meets our policy objectives and to reassure him that his amendment is not necessary.

The guiding principle in clause 83 is to give relief for all work-related liabilities, costs or expenses that can be insured against lawfully. It would be wrong to give relief for costs arising from criminal convictions, so fines and penalties imposed on a director or an employee for a criminal offence, which cannot legally be insured against on public policy grounds, will not be within the scope of this relief. The costs of defending a criminal case, however—whether or not the defence is successful—are lawfully insurable and will be covered under the new relief.

The clause rules out any contract of insurance covering liabilities, costs or expenses into which it is unlawful for a person—an employer—to enter. In contrast, amendment No. 88 would consider the legality of the indemnity against the liabilities, costs or expenses. The approach in the existing provision is preferable because it may not be simple to decide whether an indemnity per se against the liabilities, costs or expenses is lawful, irrespective of who has entered into the contract. It is relatively straightforward, however, to decide whether the person entering into the contract, such as a company, has done so lawfully. Moreover, that is the approach adopted in the Companies Acts and Building Societies Acts as regards whether a company or building society may lawfully purchase and maintain liability insurance for its directors or officers.

That general issue was the subject of debate in Committee. Since then, a further concern has been raised with the Inland Revenue about the scope of the term "unlawful" in this context. That is, whether it would rule out contracts which, although not generally illegal, may be outside the scope of an employing company's powers as set out in its articles of association or internal rules. I am advised that that is not the intention of the provision, nor will it be interpreted by the Inland Revenue in that way. What would be at issue, if the point arose, would be the lawfulness of the contract under UK law generally. I hope that this will provide reassurance for my hon. Friend. On that basis, I hope that he will withdraw the amendment.

I understand that amendment No. 89 seeks to ensure that relief would apply in situations that typically involve a group of companies, where liability insurance is taken out by one company for the group. I reassure my hon. Friend that clause 83 already achieves that, so I do not recommend that the House adopts it.

Clause 83 gives relief for directors and employees, regardless of who effects the contract of insurance. Thus, relief is available where one company in a group takes out insurance covering the employees of another company in the same group, or where an unrelated third party effects the insurance contract. Similarly, where an individual incurs expenditure on uninsured liabilities relating to his work, and that is reimbursed, any tax charge would be cancelled by the relief provided by the clause.

6 pm

For example, an employee or director working for several group companies on whose behalf sums were paid out under a policy covering the whole group for a liability that he had incurred from his employment with one company would be treated as receiving emoluments of that amount from that company. But that would be matched, under the relief provided by the clause, by a tax deduction against those emoluments of an equivalent amount.

In respect of the last two assurances for which my hon. Friend asked, of course we shall keep the matter under review as it beds down and my officials will continue to work closely with representatives of the insurance companies and others, with whom they already enjoy a close relationship. Against that background, I hope that my hon. Friend will not feel moved to press the amendment to a Division.

Mr. Carrington: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for those comments. His reassurances will be welcomed by the industry. As there will inevitably be some lingering doubts about how the clause will work in practice, I am glad that the issue will be kept under review. With that in mind, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 86

DEFERMENT OF BALANCING CHARGES IN RESPECT OF SHIPS

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 91, line 48, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 3, in page 92, line 23, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

No. 4, in clause 88, page 96, line 28, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

No. 5, in page 96, line 37, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

No. 6, in page 96, line 47, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

Mr. Waterson: As I did in Committee, I declare a sort of interest, in that I am a solicitor who, for many years, has specialised in maritime law. Sadly, the number of British clients for whom I have worked over the years has steadily declined.

The original announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was much welcomed, not only by myself and other hon. Members who support the cause of British shipping, but by all the major British shipping organisations. It is, however, important to get the details right and ensure that roll-over relief is as available as possible to a wide cross-section of British shipping.

I pay tribute to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who is in his place, and my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway)—the latter is also in his place—for putting forward the arguments for British shipping, not only this year but in previous years, and to all other right hon. and hon. Members who take a similar view.

The amendment that I originally proposed in Committee sought to make roll-over relief available for a period of seven years. That has become a period of six years in the amendments before us. In any case, it is designed to be a significant improvement on the original period of three years announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. His announcement was that capital allowance balancing charges for ships would be allowed to roll over for a period of up to three years from

[Mr. Waterson]

the date on which a ship was disposed of, and that that would be set off against subsequent expenditure on ships within that period. He said:

"competitively, tax measures available overseas put our ship owners at a particular disadvantage".

I echo those words today.

Most ships have a long and useful working life, in some cases significantly more than 20 years. When an owner trades a ship on the charter market, particularly the spot market, commercial success in the long run often depends on the crucial decision of when to buy or sell that asset. By introducing roll-over relief in this form, the Government recognised the need to help British shipowners to make rational decisions of that sort—when to buy and when to sell—based not on the need to avoid taxes but on commercial considerations and market expectations.

That is the nub of the issue. At three years, the period of the relief was simply not long enough to allow a totally rational decision to be made based on the state of the market at that time. In some circumstances, it would encourage British shipowners to make tax avoidance decisions rather than profit-maximising and investment decisions.

Cycles in the shipping market extend well beyond three years. To recognise the harsh realities of the international shipping market, UK shipowners must be allowed to exploit shipping cycles in exactly the same way as their major competitors in other countries, such as Greece, do year in, year out, and invest in ships when the market dictates rather than prematurely because of those considerations. I am delighted that, as a result of those discussions and representations, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has listened and is prepared to accept the amendments.

May I put down a marker for two related issues, which were touched on in Committee and may be matters for on-going discussions with the Chamber of Shipping and in the House in future years? The first is group relief. Modern shipping is based on groups of companies and lending institutions' need for so called "clean" companies, or when new buildings are bought via their original owning company. Currently, only the same company that has sold a vessel is permitted to use roll-over relief for new investment. That is unduly restrictive.

The second issue is that of foreign connected parties. International groups are typical in shipping. Naturally, robust precautions are necessary against abuse, but to force a shipowner to invest in unconnected tonnage when his group has something more commercially desirable to do would be unproductive and uncommercial—in short, a distortion.

British shipping is not a sunset industry looking for handouts from the taxpayer. All it asks is the removal of unfair advantages enjoyed by its foreign competitors, or measures to match those advantages. A vibrant, successful and growing British fleet is not only an absolute good in itself but an essential underpinning for the continued success of the City of London, the British economy and Britain's defences.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his persistence and determination to turn the Government's mind. It is interesting to note that, if the hon. Gentleman is right and the Government intend to concede, we will have managed to have concessions in almost every part of the Bill. That is remarkable for a Finance Bill. It suggests a listening Government who are slightly anxious about things.

I notice that one of the signatories to the amendment, the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), is not in his seat. However, we read in the newspapers this morning where he would be at 6 o'clock this evening—meeting the Chancellor, arguing for tax cuts. The way in which Conservative Members cope with, on the one hand, arguing for tax cuts and, on the other hand, arguing for increased public expenditure is interesting. We welcome the hon. Member for Dover to those contradictions. Perhaps it is politic of me to say no more about that.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne on his determination to improve the ability of shipping organisations to increase the number of ships built in this country, for which the Opposition have fought hard. We have also argued, and will continue to argue, for an increase in the number of merchant seamen who come from this country. Both those issues are important to us.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) has argued vociferously on both those issues, as have two of my neighbours, my hon. Friends the Members for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown).

My hon. Friends the Members for Wallsend and for Stoke-on-Trent, North are both in their seats. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East is not here. He spent many a long year and many a long hour on the Finance Bill, and he is beginning to wonder what on earth has happened that has meant that this year, since he ceased to be a member of the Finance Bill Committee, we have managed to wrench so many concessions out of the Government. There may be a lesson somewhere in that.

The crucial importance of these yearly debates has been that they have taken place while merchant shipping in this country has deteriorated significantly. Indeed, my hon. Friends the Members for Wallsend and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East have witnessed the real effect of the deterioration of British merchant shipping and British Navy shipping; they have witnessed the demise of shipbuilding on the Tyne in the region that they represent.

The arrival in Southampton this week of the magnificent new cruise ship, Oriana, was heralded by cries of, "Why did that ship have to be built outside the United Kingdom?" It was also heralded by statements by shipowners that they believed that never again would a ship of such size be built in British waters.

It is an incredible indictment of the Government that it is now being said that this country, which at one time was able to build the finest ships in the world and was noted for them throughout the world, will not be able to build ships of that nature in future. We have the skills and the expertise, we have the rivers, but we now no longer have the capacity in our yards to do that type of work. It is a tragedy, and the Government will for ever be indicted for that legacy.

I am delighted that the Government have conceded—I understand that the Minister is to concede—on these amendments. However, I would ask the Minister what he estimates will be the cost to the public purse of the concessions, and what the Government will do to monitor their effect. There are two criteria against which Opposition Members believe that any concessions should be judged—first, the increase in the number of ships that are built in British yards and, secondly, the increase in the number of merchant seamen who come from the United Kingdom.

Concessions from the British taxpayer are important if they are able to produce increased productivity for British shipyards and increased activity for British merchant seamen. It is important that, if we are agreeing increased money from the British taxpayer, we know that that money will be used in the right way and will be spent on meeting those ends.

What steps will the Financial Secretary take to monitor progress? In Committee, the Government argued both that such a change was not necessary and that, if those concessions were made—certainly the second one—they might amount to a tax loophole. I should be interested to know whether the Government have any other opinions that do not relate to the fact that five Conservative Back Benchers have signed the amendment, and whether it was that or the arguments that persuaded them. I am sure that it was the arguments, and I am sure that the Minister would not be tempted to admit that it was anything else.

6.15 pm

Shipping is in a poor condition. We have an enormous amount to make up. I hope that the Government are seriously considering how they can ensure that more ships are built in British yards and that there is a resurgence in the British merchant shipping industry.

We welcome the concessions that the Minister is making, but I hope that he will monitor them to ensure that they will herald a resurgence in British shipping.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on the way in which he has pursued those matters in Committee and on moving the amendment. I hope that I shall be able to congratulate the Government on accepting the amendment that he has moved.

I would add a word or two about the remarks made by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong). I spent about seven years in the shipping industry, a considerable time ago. It is important to distinguish between the shipbuilding industry and the shipping industry; the hon. Lady confused the two. Many of the problems from which the shipping industry—that is to say, the ship operators—has suffered have resulted from the extent to which the shipbuilding industry throughout the world has been subsidised and excess capacity created.

I found it extraordinary that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West should somehow seek to blame the decline in the shipbuilding industry on the present Government, because it took place a long time ago—as long ago as when I was in the ship-operating industry. The reason for the decline was largely the appalling restrictive trade practices that were to be found on the trade union side in that industry. That was what affected the industry.

As my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will know, especially the Minister of State, Treasury, that matter has been coming up in Finance Bills year after year. It has taken us a very long time to obtain a satisfactory outcome, although I welcome the fact that the Chancellor last year announced that he was going to introduce clauses broadly on the lines of clause 86 and the subsequent clauses, which now extend for more than 11 pages of carefully drafted legislation.

I very much welcome the fact that, at that stage, the Chancellor had accepted the case for roll-over relief. I was surprised, therefore, to discover from the subsequent statements and the legislation now before us that it was restricted to three years. One knows very well, from one's own experience in the industry, that the cycle in the shipping industry—it is essentially a cyclical industry—extends for much longer than three years. Therefore, the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne moved an amendment to make it six years—which I understand the Government will accept—is very welcome.

A three-year arrangement would have had little effect, whereas a six-year period gives a reasonable opportunity for British shipowners to reinvest money in line with the market movements in the trade, to be able to sell at the top end of the trade and, one hopes, buy at the bottom end of the cycle.

I shall add a word or two to what has been said about group relief. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will not think that, in asking for group relief, I am being like Oliver Twist and asking for more and more. If one has any regard for the structure of the British shipping industry, group relief must be an intrinsic part of roll-over relief.

In the same way that making the period three years instead of six would have greatly restricted the roll-over relief, given the industry's structure, not having group relief would greatly reduce the effectiveness of the measure, which I understand my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues now accept. Many shipping companies are one-ship companies and operate as part of a group, with various subsidies. Unless group relief is given, the general relief will be considerably restricted.

I understand that subsequent discussions with the industry have highlighted some difficult drafting points in relation to group relief. Given the length of time that the matter has been under discussion, that is extraordinary. I should have thought that the issue would have been sorted out before now. I hope that my right hon. Friend will say that he will consider the group relief aspect of what is essentially a part of the change in roll-over relief, or its effect will be greatly diminished.

There has always been another amendment related to the 100 per cent. first year allowances. I accept that it would be difficult for the Government to make that concession as the repercussions in the industry would be considerable—even though it would help the liner trade, whereas the group of amendments that we are discussing largely helps the tramp trade. But if we accept that the Government are not prepared to countenance first year allowances—I well understand the reasons for that—the Government must redouble their efforts to prevent other Governments acting to give their shipping industries a competitive advantage.

The French still have subsidies for ship investment and fleet modernisation. The Germans give considerable reliefs. In Greece—the most extreme example—shipping companies pay no corporation tax. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will be as familiar as I am with

[Sir Terence Higgins]

the range of devices used by other countries to give their shipping companies a competitive advantage over British shipping.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will cover the group relief issue—which is very much the limit of what the Government have in mind for the shipping industry. My right hon. Friend must redouble his efforts, perhaps at the intergovernmental conference or in negotiations with other European Union countries, to get rid of the appalling discrimination that occurs in other countries, and establish a level playing field.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, and hope that the Financial Secretary gives us a positive response.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall be brief, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, and we have to make progress.

We welcome the concession that we believe the Financial Secretary is about to make. As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) said, if the concession is made, it will be welcomed on both sides of the House.

The amendment did not come about by accident, but because a joint campaign has been waged by the trade unions—by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and NUMAST, the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers—working in partnership with the Chamber of Shipping. The campaign also received cross-party support. It is amazing what can be achieved when there is an ever-reducing number of Conservative Members. There are still people who want to see the shipping industry take advantage of the opportunities that exist worldwide. We want the British industry to take advantage of those opportunities.

I have a sense of déjà vu, because, almost a year ago when we last discussed the subject, it seemed that we would never achieve a breakthrough and persuade the Government to concede the issue of roll-over relief. Those of us who were so involved in the campaign this time last year felt that what happened then was only a beginning.

If the Government make a concession today, it will be welcome, but just as we have made progress on last year, we should now ensure that there is a close partnership, including not just the Treasury but the Department of Trade and Industry, where there are opportunities to assist new shipbuilding, the Department of Employment, where there are opportunities to create new jobs for British seafarers, and the Department of Transport, where there is currently a debate on transport.

We must put shipping at the centre of transport policy, and see what opportunities exist. I want the concession to be not a once-and-for-all concession, but the start of a transport policy that recognises the role of British shipping and the part that British seafarers have to play in that role.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): If the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) wanted to help British shipping, it is a shame that she did not support the proposal for an open register made last year.

I declare an interest as parliamentary adviser to the Baltic exchange. While my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) argues largely on behalf of the Chamber of Shipping, the Baltic exchange speaks for the service sector of the British maritime sector. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) spoke of the difference between shipowning and shipbuilding. There is a third element: the service sector, which exists behind London as a maritime centre.

While the British fleet is small—I suspect that the overall cost of the amendment would not be huge—the maritime sector in the City of London is large. It comprises brokers, bankers, lawyers, underwriters, P and I executives and a huge number of people who work in the centre of British shipping, making London the maritime centre of the world. The maritime sector earns huge invisible exports for this country.

I believe that, when discussing subsequent Finance Bills, we may have to return to the subject of the ways in which the maritime service sector can be consolidated in its position as the world's premier maritime centre. Other centres are already trying to become competitive and undermine our leading position. It is essential that we consolidate our position at the centre of world shipping.

It is clear that we need a viable home fleet. I know that I speak for the service sector in the City of London in supporting the amendments.

Sir George Young: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) who, throughout the passage of the Finance Bill, has tirelessly championed the cause of the shipping industry. I agree with what he said this afternoon, particularly on the strategic importance of the shipping industry.

I take very much on board what my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said about the need to look at the discrimination and anti-competitive pressures that exist in other countries. I shall certainly ensure that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and other Ministers read his speech and take appropriate action. Bobbing in the wake of my right hon. and hon. Friends are Opposition Members, and we are, of course, grateful for their support.

We have debated roll-over relief for shipping extensively in Committee, so my remarks can be brief. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing said, the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) spoke as much about the shipbuilding industry as the shipping industry. We provide financial support to the shipbuilding industry, under the shipbuilding intervention fund and the home shipbuilding credit guarantee scheme. But the measures before the House involve the shipping industry.

The point of roll-over relief is to encourage reinvestment in the merchant fleet in the face of competition from other countries, a number of which provide extensive tax subsidies to their shipping fleets. It is important, with a measure such as roll-over relief, to get the period right. The period must be long enough to ensure that the timing of the investment is not distorted or dominated by the mere ticking of a clock.

However, if the period is set too long, the measure goes beyond facilitating investment. By encouraging calculation about future price movements to dominate, it can cause commercially justified and economically desirable investment to be delayed. There is no magic formula for the right period. It is a matter of judging the right balance in the particular circumstances of this unique industry.

In Committee, the eloquence of my hon. Friends convinced me that our original proposal for a three-year roll-over period is too short by a significant margin. It carries too great a chance that, in too many cases, investment would be forced by the expiry of the roll-over period and would be below par in economic terms, so the Government have concluded that a substantial increase in the period is needed, and a doubling of the roll-over period is warranted. The Government are therefore content to accept the amendments proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, and we commend them to the House.

My right hon. and hon. Friends put down some markers. They threw some buoys overboard, which are bobbing in the water to be picked up or not by the Finance Bill Committee when it cruises past next year. We will, of course, monitor carefully the effect of the amendments.

I was asked about the cost. The cost of the measure as it now stands in the Bill peaks at £20 million in 1996-97, and starts to decline in 1998-99. The amendments mean that the peak costs would continue until 2001-02. I commend them to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 92, line 23, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

Clause 88

SHIPS IN RESPECT OF WHICH CHARGE MAY BE DEFERRED

Amendments made: No. 4, in page 96, line 28, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

No. 5, in page 96, line 37, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

No. 6, in page 96, line 47, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

Clause 129

PART-TIME WORKERS: MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

6.30 pm

Sir George Young: I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 143, line 30, leave out from 'words' to end of line 32 and insert

'"a full-time employee" there shall be substituted "an employee".'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendments Nos. 17 to 21.

Sir George Young: In Committee, when we debated new clause 5, on part-time workers in employee financial participation schemes, I said that we proposed to table amendments to the clause on Report. These are the amendments that I promised. As I said in Committee, they are designed to ensure that the provisions in the clause about the inclusion of part-time workers in financial participation schemes will apply only to part-time employees and not to part-time directors.

I explained in Committee why we had decided to amend the clause in this way. The clause is designed to open up financial participation schemes fully to part-time workers following the House of Lords' decision in the case of Regina *v.* Secretary of State for Employment ex parte Equal Opportunities Commission and another.

When we were planning the legislation, we believed that, to treat part-time workers fairly and in accordance with the House of Lords' decision, it was necessary to treat all workers alike, whether they were employees or directors.

After further consideration, however, and in the light of representations from institutional shareholders, we were satisfied that we could properly take part-time directors out of the new clause altogether, without conflicting with the House of Lords' decision. We thought it right to do that, because there is a distinction between part-time directors and part-time employees. The personal interests of a company's non-executive directors, in particular, should not be too closely tied to the company and its share price if they are to bring a measure of independent judgment to the company's affairs.

The amendments mean there would be no change at all in the present treatment of part-time directors in relation to any of the tax-relieved schemes. In particular, they will remain unable to participate in approved executive option schemes and qualifying employee share ownership trusts.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Financial Secretary has accepted our arguments in Committee, although at the time he was unable to accept the form of our amendment to achieve the objective that the Government are now achieving through amendment No. 16.

We welcome the amendment. It was always wrong to imagine that it would have been acceptable to extend the opportunities of the tax breaks on executive share options to part-time directors. I shall agree that the Government have conceded to the advice that they have received from institutional investors if the Financial Secretary will concede that they have also given ground to the upsurge in public concern on the matter and to the vigorous campaign waged by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Labour party.

The amendment represents one small step towards reforming the potential abuse of the schemes that we have debated elsewhere in the Bill; therefore, we welcome it. It is wrong, however, that the Government should ever have entertained for an instant the idea of extending tax breaks on executive share options to part-time directors. We are glad that the Government have conceded to the pressure that the Labour party has mounted on the issue and we support the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 143, line 35, leave out from beginning to end of line 41 and insert

'27(4) (qualifying employee defined as employee required to work at least 20 hours a week) the words from "who is required" to the end shall be omitted'.

No. 18, in page 143, line 44, leave out from 'words' to end of line 46 and insert

'"a full-time employee" there shall be substituted "an employee".'.

No. 19, in page 144, line 1, leave out from 'week)' to end of line 3 and insert

'for the words "at that given time he worked as an employee or" there shall be substituted "in the case of a director, at that given time he worked as a".'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Clause 146

INHERITANCE TAX: AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY

Amendments made: No. 84, in page 156, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) After subsection (2) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

> "(2A) In the application of this section as respects property in Scotland, the reference in subsection (2)(c) above to a tenancy beginning on or after 1st September 1995 includes a reference to its being acquired on or after that date by right of succession (the date of acquisition being taken to be the date on which the successor gives relevant notice under section 12 of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1991).".'.

No. 85, in page 156, line 17, leave out 'Subsection (1)' and insert 'Subsections (1) and (1A)'.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

Schedule 3

AMUSEMENT MACHINE LICENCE DUTY

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move amendment No. 80, in page 164, line 24, leave out from 'machines),' to end of line 26 and insert

'for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the following paragraphs—

> "(b) a five-penny machine which is a prize machine without being a gaming machine or which (if it is a gaming machine) is a small-prize machine, or
>
> (c) a thirty-five-penny machine which is not a prize machine."'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Government amendments Nos. 23 to 26.

Amendment No. 90, in page 166, line 21, at end insert

'after paragraph (a)—(d) there shall be inserted—

"(e) the machine is one that can only be played by the insertion into the machine of a coin or coins of a value exceeding 50 pence.".'.

Government amendments Nos. 27 to 32, 81 and 34.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced, in his Budget speech, that he wanted to widen the coverage of gaming duty to cover amusement machines such as arcade video games. That is the purpose of clause 13 and schedule 3. The schedule is due to come into effect on 1 November 1995 for machines made available for play on or after that date.

Gaming machines have long been liable to duty, but the tax base for gaming machine licence duty was being eroded by competition from machines outside the scope of the existing duty. The amendments fulfil a pledge given in Committee that the Government would make changes to the provisions for the introduction of amusement machine licence duty.

The package is designed to meet the industry's concerns that the extension of the duty net captured too many machines that could not afford to bear the licence cost, even at the rate of £250 a year.

We listened carefully to the industry and we are grateful for the help it gave in framing the amendment in terms that it finds more acceptable. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends, particularly the hon. Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who is in his place, and for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who were vigilant to ensure that the concerns of the industry were brought to my attention.

We have already introduced amendments in Committee to give effect to the seasonal concession for all machines, including those newly brought within the scope of the tax.

The amendments, first, limit to the lowest rate—£250—all machines newly brought within the scope of the tax. That meets a concern of the industry that some of the new machines would otherwise be taxed at the higher gaming machine rates. The £250 rate for the new machines is less than half the rate that applies to the lowest category of gaming machines.

Secondly, the amendments define video machines according to the number of screens rather than to the number of playing positions, and this again meets a concern of the industry that a machine with two playing positions for one screen could be taxed at twice the normal rate. That will not be the case.

Thirdly, the amendments exempt from duty all new machines except quiz machines that can be played for an amount not exceeding 35p. That goes further than the 20p exception mentioned in Standing Committee. For instance, it means that machines that give three plays for £1 will be exempt. That will exclude many pinball machines.

Fourthly, we will limit the duty to video machines, quiz machines and pinball machines. That responds to a concern that, if we were to extend it wider than that, many arcades, particularly those in seaside resorts, could not afford to keep in play a number of machines which appeal to children. Therefore, a typical family entertainment centre would become a centre almost exclusively for adults.

Fifthly, the trade has requested the reintroduction of special licences, and I am willing to concede that. The envisaged reintroduced special licences would enable operators to move machines more freely between sites without incurring additional licensing costs. That is particularly important for machines that are marginal and that could be given a boost by transferring them from one site, such as a pub, to another site in order to cater for changes in demand.

That is a complex measure. We will need to discuss it with the trade and give it legislative effect in the next Budget. Meanwhile, I assure the House that the facility will be available from the introduction of the new duty on 1 November 1995 by extra-statutory concession. I think that the House will agree that we have gone a very long way towards meeting the industry's concerns and I commend all the amendments to the House.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Although I welcome the Government's amendments and their about-face on the issue, it is a shame that the Paymaster General did not have the good grace to acknowledge the hard work and the lobbying by hon. Members on both sides of the House in relation to it or the debate about it in Committee.

The Government proposed to introduce a new tax on amusement machines which hon. Members on both sides of the House lobbied against extensively. The trade association, which represents some 80 per cent. of the amusement machine industry, worked hard to educate the Government as to the folly of their original proposals. It pointed out that, in their rush to find more and more indirect taxes in order to try to fulfil their hollow promise of direct tax cuts, the Government would be taxing an industry to such an extent that City accountants Pannell, Kerr and Forster estimated that almost 3,000 jobs would be lost as a result of the original proposals and that they would cost the Government almost £50 million.

The proposals for a new tax on machines came on top of a 43 per cent. increase on gaming machine licence duty in the past two years. There is a good lesson for the Government to learn from this sorry episode: it is always better to consult and to listen to the industry before drafting legislation.

The Government have now made some very real concessions in the regime as proposed originally, such as exempting from duty videos and pinball machines costing 35p or less to play, and reintroducing the special licences that the Government originally proposed to abolish. That is a triumph not only for the industry but for the good sense that has prevailed among the Opposition, if not on the Government Benches. We are glad that progress has been made.

Nevertheless, the Government will have to monitor closely the impact of the new tax regime on the industry. I hope that they will give a commitment in stronger terms than the Paymaster General used to consult widely with the industry. There is no point in taxing an industry until it goes out of business, and the Government came very close to achieving that in this instance. We welcome the amendments, but I am sure that we will have to return to the issue again in later Finance Bills.

6.45 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): Before I proceed, I should declare an interest as I am an adviser to the British Holiday and Home Parks Association, a number of whose members have amusement machines installed on their sites.

I rarely agree with the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), but on this occasion I believe that she made an extremely valid point about new taxes. Time after time, without ever learning the lessons from previous occasions, the Government introduce a new tax without consultation, without thought and frequently without any depth of knowledge of the industry concerned. It is then swiftly revealed that the effects of the tax are counter-productive and may lead to unemployment. In this case, far from raising revenue, it would have cost the Government money if certain alterations had not been made.

I commend to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General a study of the system which I understand prevails in America. A select committee of Congress, or its equivalent, anticipates a tax proposal not in quantum, but in its application, target and how it will be carried out for at least a year before it is introduced. That gives everyone who has an interest or expertise in the area the opportunity to set the matter straight. Therefore, when it is finally introduced, the legislation is clear, easily understood and has a beneficial effect.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Like my hon. Friend, I must declare an interest as I am an adviser to the industry. I remind him that when amusement licence duty was first introduced 26 years ago or more—by a Labour Government—the same thing happened. Roy Jenkins introduced it at a swingeingly high level which had to be slashed to meet the industry's ability to pay. As my hon. Friend says, it happens time and again under Government after Government. I hope that he is correct in urging the Government to consult any industry before taxing it in future.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing my point. I do not refer just to this tax; it is a wide point which I hope that the Government will take seriously.

There is some evidence of a welcome change and of new thinking within the Treasury. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will go down in history as one who made a mark on our legislative procedures by introducing a different way of tackling the taxation issue. I thank him for taking immensely seriously the representations from many of my constituents in Weston-super-Mare. I know that amusement arcade operators in Burnham-on-Sea in his constituency expressed the same opinions. In responding to them, I believe that we have arrived at a much better arrangement. The fact that the British Amusement Catering and Trades Association has accepted the changes is, I think, adequate confirmation that the present proposal is much more sound.

I am sorry that, because of the shenanigans of the Whips and the misfortune of having an early night, the motion on new clause 18, which would have allowed us to debate the matter, was not moved yesterday. The new clause proposed the exemption of caravan and mobile home parks from the tax on the ground that the sorts of entertainment machines provided on site to amuse the inhabitants of such parks during the British summer were not main revenue earners, but simply amusements to occupy people. The machines will have to be removed because the revenue from them is so small that it is not worth paying the tax.

All caravan and mobile home parks have to be registered with and licensed by the local authority; therefore, there was no difficulty in definition. The Government clearly were not going to smile on the new clause, but I hope that they will, however, do their sums, as the Customs and Excise goes about its duties, and work out that the cost of collecting from and checking those many remote sites will prove a negative operation. The revenue for the whole tax is minuscule. Indeed, I would question whether the total addition to the revenue has been worth the anguish that it has caused to a good many people.

I know that time presses, but I hope that it will be in order if I thank my hon. Friend the Paymaster General once again for the amendments, which will be strongly supported in seaside towns and in the amusement areas of many of our tourist attractions. Ministers quite rightly on the one hand make a point about the importance of tourism, but then the dead hand of the Treasury manages to intervene and tax it. The two are not compatible. My hon. Friend has been going down the right course with the amendments.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Although I welcome amendment No. 80, I shall address myself to amendment No. 90, which stands in my name and that of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd).

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I have received extensive briefings from BACTA on this issue, so I do not intend to rehearse the arguments that have already been propounded by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), from the Labour Front Bench. It is worth reminding the House, however, that BACTA

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

contributed some £375 million to the Exchequer in 1994 in VAT and gaming machine licence duty. It is, therefore, an organisation that cannot be ignored. All of us have welcomed the way in which it has conducted its campaign in the context of the Finance Bill.

I have also received considerable representations from representatives of the licensed trade association in my constituency, which, of course, is also an area where tourism is of great significance. Whatever one's moral opinion of the various machines that operate in our tourist resorts, one must recognise that they play a significant part in ensuring employment and opportunities for people who wish to reside permanently in those areas.

Amendment No. 90 was tabled by my hon. Friends to establish the effects of the Government's amendments. Although BACTA is pleased with the changes which give some genuine relief to the industry, we must recognise that it is a new tax and that it was accompanied by a second substantial increase in gaming machine licence duty in two years, neither of which can be passed on. I put it to Ministers on the Treasury Bench that there should be a requirement to look at the possibility of having a 50p exemption, as I think that it follows Government thinking on the issue. A 50p exemption would give genuine relief to the low-earning machines that would otherwise be removed from site. We have to think of the small tourist areas—the villages, caravan sites, and small localities—where the machines are one of the attractions for people who come to the area. I also believe that a 50p exemption would catch some of the higher-earning machines and reduce amusement machine licence duty takes to an insignificant level. That is a matter that must be taken on board. I wonder why the Government have not considered extending the exemption that currently exists to skill with prizes machines, because there does not seem to be a particular difficulty in that. I do not know why they have drawn the line between the various machines that might be played.

I also ask the Paymaster General to make it clear to us whether he has worked out how many machines are currently on a 20p or 50p payment system, because there does not appear to have been a real Government assessment of that issue. We need to know the implications for tax take and assessment. Surely we have the right to know precisely what the Government are talking about.

The Paymaster General referred earlier to the fact that he would continue consultations with BACTA and other interested organisations, which, I assume, will include representatives of the tourism industry. Once he has completed those consultations, how does he intend to bring back his recommendations to the House? Will it be through statutory instrument, or does he intend to introduce further primary legislation? Is it something that we can anticipate in the Budget in November this year? It is extremely important to know the answer, because the people who have written to hon. Members, on both sides of the House, want to know how the matter will be progressed. I should be most grateful if the Paymaster General would announce what procedures he intends to follow.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I wish to add briefly to the comments that have already been made and to add to them my thanks and those of my other hon. Friends who have been heavily involved in discussions with my hon. Friend the Paymaster General. I thank my hon. Friend and his colleagues on the Treasury Bench for their great courtesy and for the time and trouble that they have taken in welcoming the delegations and the various submissions that have been made.

I pay particular tribute to the leadership in the campaign and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst), who is in his place, and who has always fought the industry's cause strongly. Representing as I do the southern half of the world's leading tourist resort, it is no surprise that I pay tribute to him and to other hon. Friends, including my hon. Friends the Members for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait)—who was extremely assiduous in supporting all the work that we did—and for Dover (Mr. Shaw), whom my hon. Friend the Paymaster General mentioned in his opening remarks.

Both BACTA and BALPPA—the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions—have been extremely active in making their case, supported by many smaller companies, even those which are not members of those leading organisations, and by individual employees. The size of my file on the matter well exceeds that on any other issue that I have had to take up in my three years in the House. It has been an extremely effective campaign, and I very much welcome the fact that the Government have listened. Before the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) is too confident in claiming credit for the Opposition, I should remind her that the day before the matter came before the Committee, of which she and I were members, she was asked by BACTA—the main lobbying organisation—not to press the Labour amendments to a vote. She told BACTA that she would not, but Opposition Members thought that they saw a short-term electoral opportunity—

Ms Primarolo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: When I finish my point, of course I shall give way to the hon. Lady.

Having promised the lobbying organisation that the Labour party would not press the matter to a vote, the hon. Lady thought that she saw a voting opportunity to defeat the Government and broke her promise.

Ms Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman has misled the House, and I shall produce the evidence for him in private. I hope that he will then come back to the House to correct the record. What he has said is not true.

Mr. Hawkins: I am happy to welcome any submissions that the hon. Lady may make to me, but I should tell her that what I just said, and I hope that I was not misleading the House, came to me directly within five minutes of it happening from those—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am concerned tonight only with the substance of the amendments before us. I do not want to hear a potted history of what did or did not happen.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let me end by thanking my hon. Friend the Paymaster General once again for his common sense and courtesy.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): At one point during Conservative Members' speeches, I thought that we were attending a consultants' convention. I have no interest to declare, other than a constituency interest.

I, too, welcome the amendment. I was lobbied by arcade operators in my constituency, particularly Mr. Billy Cullis, who has arcades in Saltcoats, Largs and elsewhere in south-west Scotland. It is a pity that BACTA was required to line Rodin's with pinball machines to bring home a point that should have been obvious from the start. As has been pointed out by hon. Members on both sides of the House—particulary my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo)—if there had been some consultation and cost-benefit analysis before the introduction of the original proposal, it would never have reached the stage that it reached.

7 pm

The proposal would have caused a loss of jobs in the industry, which would have increased the net burden on the state. It would also have led to the removal of machines that give innocent non-gambling pleasure to children in particular, softening the impact of arcades. If those machines had been taken away, we should have been left with rows of one-armed bandits—which would have been rather an odd aim even for a Government who are currently devoted to the promotion of gambling.

We welcome the changes that have been made, and I am glad that my constituents' interests have been safeguarded by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South and other Opposition Members. The attempt by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) to make a petty party point was pretty pathetic; let us not forget that we would not be discussing the proposal at all had it not been originally made by the Government of which he is a temporary supporter.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I support what has been said by the hon. Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). I was pleased to add my name to amendment No. 90.

The Government have gone some way towards meeting our demands, and I am grateful for that. The industry is very important to my constituency: in Barmouth, for instance, I have been lobbied persistently. I agree with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North: without the good sense of those who lobbied, the changes would not have been made. The Government should have considered the matter in more depth before drafting their original proposals.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) spoke of the anxiety caused to the industry by those initial proposals. They were draconian, and would have led to many job losses. I therefore give the Government amendment a guarded welcome, although I should have preferred amendment No. 90 to have been accepted. I hope that the Government will not make an even worse mess of things in the next Finance Bill. My speech may sound grudging, but I am nevertheless grateful for small mercies.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Let me join other hon. Members on both sides of the House in thanking my hon. Friend the Paymaster General for his flexible approach. I recall the first occasion on which Conservative Members visited him to discuss the matter: he was amazed to find his office filled to overflowing with Members of Parliament who had come to represent the views of operators of amusement arcade machines in holiday constituencies and elsewhere.

Following the amendments, the Government's proposals are much more flexible. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has already pointed out that we have now extended the gap between machines intended purely for amusement and pleasure and those based on an element of gambling and gaming. The difficulties probably arose because the two types of machine were muddled when the original proposals were made.

I thank my hon. Friend the Paymaster General for what he has done, but we should also pay tribute to the way in which the industry has lobbied us. Many hon. Members have referred to that, and have also named specific individuals. Like those in traditional fairs, many operators of amusement arcades are marvellous characters, and it is a pleasure to be lobbied by them. That is not always the case when the House is heavily lobbied. We all enjoyed our contacts with representatives of the amusement business, and with those who operate the small machines.

I am particularly grateful for the exclusion of such machines as the traditional crane, which I used to play many years ago when I was a child. It really represents the spirit of the seaside, and, given the weather in this country, parents welcome it.

My hon. Friend the Paymaster General can take considerable credit for the way in which the matter has been handled. I think that the industry feels a certain satisfaction with Parliament's response to its genuine concerns.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful for the general acceptance that the extension of the tax has had a happy outcome. I am particularly grateful for what was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who were closely involved in the discussions that took place.

Let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North that I never intended to damage the industry, or drive out of business people who add to the richness and gaiety of our national life. We have all experienced the valuable family entertainment that is provided in our constituencies. There are also expensive machines that cater for the more adult player: those are not gaming machines, but they cost a good deal nevertheless. We intended to shift the burden to broader shoulders as far as possible, and to make things easier for seaside arcades and operators who may have only a few machines.

I understand the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) about seasonal caravan parks, which often have only a few machines. It would be sad if those operators felt that they could not continue. I think that my hon. Friend will agree, however, that the seasonal licence greatly assists caravan park owners, who can obtain a six-month licence for the summer months and operate the machines for eight months: effectively, they are given two months free of charge. The exemption for any machine costing less than 35p a play automatically excludes many smaller machines catering for holidaymakers.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) issued a number of strictures about the need to consult. I take it from what she said that Labour, if it ever gained power, would always consult on any tax changes. Perhaps our successors, who may one day witness that phenomenon, will remember the pledge.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) asked me about skill with prizes machines, sometimes called quiz machines. Why were they included? The answer is that they can give the player up to £10 in prizes. I remind the hon. Lady that they will be taxed at only £250 a year, whereas comparable gaming machines that can give out prizes and cash amounting to only up to £6 are already taxed at £535 per annum. I think that she will agree that it is fair to include the quiz machines in the tax.

The hon. Lady asked me about the legislative vehicles for those changes. I confirm to her that all the changes are in the Bill, with the exception of the special licences that we shall introduce. Because of their complexity, they cannot be drafted in time for the Bill. They will be in the next Finance Bill. I make it clear that an extra-statutory concession will ensure that the benefits, or their equivalent, will be available from 1 November until the date when the next Finance Bill comes into law. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that the tax is right and proper and that the House will give the amendments its consent.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 164, line 30, leave out from beginning to end of line 42.

No. 24, in page 165, leave out lines 14 to 18 and insert—

(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*
'Period (in months) for which licence granted	*Machines that are not gaming machines*	*Gaming machines that are small-prize machines or are five-penny machines without being small-prize machines*	*Other machines'*

No. 25, in page 166, line 15, leave out 'and'.

No. 26, in page 166, line 21, at end insert 'and

(e) the machine is a gaming machine, a video machine or a pinball machine.'.

No. 27, in page 166, line 22, leave out 'An amusement machine' and insert

'A machine constructed or adapted for the playing of a game'.

No. 28, in page 166, leave out lines 35 to 44 and insert—

'(1B) A machine constructed or adapted for the playing of a game is a video machine for the purposes of this Act if—

(a) a micro-processor is used to control some or all of the machine's functions; and

(b) the playing of the game involves information or images being communicated or displayed to the player or players by means of any description of screen, other than one consisting only in a blank surface onto which light is projected.

(1C) For the purposes of this Act an amusement machine is a prize machine unless it is constructed or adapted so that a person playing it once and successfully either receives nothing or receives only—

(a) an opportunity, afforded by the automatic action of the machine, to play again (once or more often) without paying, or

(b) a prize, determined by the automatic action of the machine and consisting in either—

(i) money of an amount not exceeding the sum payable to play the machine once, or

(ii) a token which is, or two or more tokens which in the aggregate are, exchangeable for money of an amount not exceeding that sum.".'.

No. 29, in page 166, line 46, leave out

'for "a gaming" there shall be substituted "an amusement"'

and insert

'for "a gaming machine" there shall be substituted "a machine of any description".'.

No. 30, in page 166, line 47, leave out from beginning to end of line 7 on page 167 and insert—

'(3) For subsections (5) to (9) of that section there shall be substituted the following subsections—

"(5) For the purposes of sections 21 to 24 above a machine (the actual machine) in relation to which the number determined in accordance with subsection (5A) below is more than one shall be treated (instead of as one machine) as if it were a number of machines (accountable machines) equal to the number so determined.

(5A) That number is—

(a) except where paragraph (b) below applies, the number of individual playing positions provided on the machine for persons to play simultaneously (whether or not while participating in the same game); and

(b) where—

(i) that machine is a video machine but not a gaming machine, and

(ii) the number of such playing positions is more than the number of different screens used for the communication or display of information or images to any person or persons playing a game by means of the machine,

the number of such screens.

(6) Subsection (5) above does not apply in the case of any machine which is an excepted machine for the purposes of section 21 above or in the case of a pinball machine.

(7) Any question whether the accountable machines are, or are not, machines falling within any of the following descriptions, that is to say—

(a) gaming machines,

(b) prize machines,

(c) small-prize machines, or

(d) five-penny machines,

shall be determined according to whether or not the actual machine is a machine of that description, with the accountable machines being taken to be machines of the same description as the actual machine.".'.

No. 31, in page 167, line 7, at end insert—

'. After section 25 there shall be inserted the following section—

"Power to modify definition of 'amusement machine'

25A.—(1) The Treasury may by order modify the provisions of section 25 above—

(a) by adding to the machines for the time being specified in subsection (1)(e) of that section any description of machines which it appears to them, having regard to the use to which the machines are put, to be appropriate for the protection of the revenue so to add to those machines; or

(b) by deleting any description of machines for the time being so specified.

(2) An order under this section may make such incidental, consequential or transitional provision as the Treasury think fit, including provision modifying section 21 or section 25(5A) above for the purpose of—

(a) specifying the circumstances (if any) in which a machine added to section 25(1)(e) above is to be an excepted machine for the purposes of section 21 above; or

(b) determining the number which, in the case of a machine so added, is to be taken into account for the purposes of section 25(5) above.".'.

No. 32, in page 167, line 9, after '7' insert '(1)'.

No. 81, in page 167, line 16, at end insert—

'(2) In subsection (2) of that section—

(a) after the definition of "United Kingdom" there shall be inserted the following definitions—

"'video machine' has the meaning given by section 25(1B) above;

'prize machine' has the meaning given by section 25(1C) above;"

and

(b) after the definition of a "five-penny machine" there shall be inserted the following definition—

"'thirty-five-penny machine' means an amusement machine which can only be played by the insertion into the machine of coins of an aggregate denomination not exceeding 35p;".

(3) After subsection (2) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2A) References in sections 21 to 25 above and in this section and Schedule 4 to this Act to a game, in relation to any machine, include references to a game in the nature of a quiz or puzzle and to a game which is played solely by way of a pastime or against the machine, as well as one played wholly or partly against one or more contemporaneous or previous players.".'.

No. 34, in page 167, line 19, at end insert—

' In section 32(3) (orders subject to affirmative procedure), for "or 14(3)" there shall be substituted "14(3) or 25A".'.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Schedule 4

VEHICLE EXCISE AND REGISTRATION

Amendment made: No. 69, in page 170, line 6, at end insert—

'Exemption for vehicles used between different parts of land

3A. In Schedule 2 to the 1994 Act the following shall be inserted after paragraph 20—

"Vehicles used between different parts of land

20A. A vehicle is an exempt vehicle if—

(a) it is used only for purposes relating to agriculture, horticulture or forestry,

(b) it is used on public roads only in passing between different areas of land occupied by the same person, and

(c) the distance it travels on public roads in passing between any two such areas does not exceed 1.5 kilometres.".'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I beg to move amendment No. 61, in page 176, leave out lines 45 to 49 and insert—

'"(2) The annual rate of vehicle excise duty applicable—

(a) to any rigid goods vehicle which is a showman's goods vehicle with a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms but not exceeding 44,000 kilograms, and

(b) to any rigid goods vehicle which is an island goods vehicle with a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms,

shall be the basic goods vehicle rate.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendments Nos. 62 to 67.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: May I remind hon. Members of the background to this debate? At an earlier stage in the consideration of the Bill, I made it clear that the concession attaching to vehicle excise duty of island vehicles arose from the fact that no plating and testing stations existed on a number of offshore islands. Consequently, vehicles on those islands are relieved of the obligation to pay duty higher than £150 per year.

A change has been made in the Bill. The present system of plating and testing is being replaced by another system: revenue weight taxation. If we did nothing, therefore, all those vehicles would be subject to the full vehicle excise duty rates.

In an earlier debate, I undertook to return to the House with proposals to make some concessions in recognition of the fact that many of those vehicles are low-mileage vehicles and are essential to the well-being of the island communities in which they are based. I therefore met and corresponded with hon. Members representing those islands. I have agreed to continue to grant significant special treatment to lorries on those small islands.

The Government have decided to allow the £150 concessionary rate of vehicle excise duty to continue to apply to smaller lorries—that is, lorries up to 17 tonnes—provided that they are based on the islands, irrespective of the mainland mileage that they may also do. Heavier lorries—defined as being over 17 tonnes—that are based on the islands, but that visit the mainland only to collect or deliver goods from docks, will also be liable for the £150 per annum concessionary rate. The definition of "delivering to docks" will include loading or unloading within 5 km of those docks.

7.15 pm

Mr. Wilson: We have moved a fair distance since we had what became a famous little late-night debate on an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). To some extent, the Minister has educated himself in the ways of offshore islands. He knows of the existence of many islands that he might not have been terribly familiar with that night. He was not served very well by his briefing on that occasion.

Certainly, the proposal before the House is a distinct improvement, although the Minister has not gone as far as we would like him to have gone. That is evidenced by the figures that he supplied us with on the number of vehicles in various categories that will be exempt. In Arran, the main island in my constituency, there are 10 vehicles of 7.5 tonnes and 12 of 17 tonnes. Twenty-two vehicles will be exempt from normal excise duty.

However, there are nine 24-tonne vehicles, six 30-tonne vehicles and 13 38-tonne vehicles—28 in all. Those larger vehicles will for the first time be subject to the same vehicle excise duty level as vehicles based on the mainland. That will be a source of great disappointment to my constituents who operate the firms. They will face an on-cost running into many thousands of pounds, which will inevitably be passed on to islanders. I am sure that that will be the view of my colleagues who participated in the first debate and who will participate again this evening.

The Minister's reason for denying that concession was that it was not practical to work out with the ferry operators a scheme that would have identified the number of journeys that those larger vehicles made per year. He said that it was simply not feasible to give that concession.

I should like to record my disappointment about that. It would have been feasible to establish that those lorries were genuinely island-based and serving island communities. Therefore, the principle that the Minister

[Mr. Wilson]

has accepted in relation to smaller vehicles should have been applied to larger vehicles. We have, however, moved some part of way. For that much, I am grateful.

I want to put the matter in perspective. The islands have not been given a great concession. If the Government want to hand out money through the taxation system, they are perfectly capable of doing so. I do not need to remind the Minister that on 1 April—just a few days ago—a spectacular reduction in taxation took effect which involves the communities that we are talking about.

I refer to the abolition of sporting rates, which will give a minimum of £2 million—or, according to the boast of one Tory Member of Parliament, £5 million—to sporting proprietors, mainly in the highlands and islands of Scotland. I guess that, in his other capacity, the Minister has probably personally gained more from that tax cut than any island haulier will gain from the small concession that has been made tonight.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister. The debate that we had late at night on another occasion was one of the most embarrassing experiences that I have had since I was elected to the House. I am grateful for the statesmanlike and practical way in which he has resolved the problem, which will be of enormous benefit to many islanders the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I am grateful to the Paymaster General for having agreed to reconsider the matter of a concessionary vehicle excise duty rate for island-based lorries. It had come as something of a shock to me and the island communities in my constituencies and those of other hon. Members that, after reassurances from the Department of Transport last year, we suddenly found that the Bill contained clauses that put an end to such concessions.

My impression on the night that we debated the matter at the end of January was that the Minister had had no consultation with the Department of Transport and was somewhat taken aback by—indeed, unprepared for—the strength of feeling expressed. I therefore appreciate the Minister's rethink and the useful meeting and subsequent exchange of letters which I and other hon. Members have had with him.

We now have a definition of an island goods vehicle which, as the Minister said, can be of any size if used only on the islands, or on mainland roads to and from the islands provided that it weighs less than 17 tonnes. I am glad that he agreed to my request to increase the size from 12 tonnes to 17 tonnes. That will be especially welcome to a number of farmers and crofters, because it will allow them, for example, to take cattle or sheep to market and to return with a load of hay from wherever they can get it on the mainland.

The definition of a small island—less than 230,000 hectares—caused a moment of panic, because I thought that the island of Mull must be bigger than that—but not so. The Minister kindly sent a list of islands that come into this category, and asked for any additions. I can tell him that we need to include the islands of Luing and Lismore. He must have been horrified when he saw the number produced by Ordnance Survey, but I can assure him that they do not all have lorries, at least not yet.

Amendment No. 61, subsection (2)(b), would allow the lorries coming off the ferries to travel 5 km without penalty to marshalling yards. That would cover the tractor units that simply ply back and forth on the ferries, which we discussed previously. It is welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) because often, on the islands in his constituency, lorry loading and unloading cannot be carried out on the pier but has to happen at a nearby depot or yard.

There is, however, one problem that I should like to draw to the Minister's attention. A lorry larger than 17 tonnes and operating solely on an island may need to come off once in a while for special repairs. For example, I have a constituent on the island of Islay who has a Volvo lorry which can be repaired only at Barrhead near Glasgow. I hope that the Minister's officials will try to solve such problems.

I cannot sit down without making it clear to the House that island-based haulage contractors are deeply concerned by the loss of the concession for those who operate businesses on the islands. I am sure that many companies have written to Ministers. Such companies include Gordon Harper, the haulage contractor on Mull; the Trading and Transport company on Tiree; Rothesay Carriers on Bute; and G. and M. Porter, hauliers on Islay. They all provide much-needed employment which is vital for the prevention of further depopulation and for the protection of the fragile economies of those areas.

The Minister will be aware of the views expressed by the Freight Transport Association, to the effect that it is illogical not also to allow larger lorries the same concession when they are going to the mainland only to deliver goods from, or collect goods for delivery to, the islands. They are not in competition with mainland operators, who are not interested in this sort of work because they do not wish to bear the extra ferry costs.

As I am sure the Minister knows, the cost of living on many islands is very high. For example, on Tiree, petrol is £3 a gallon. There are only three ferries a week in winter, and the return ferry cost for a 32-tonne articulated lorry carrying 20 tonnes, made up of groceries, beer and household goods, or a load of coal, is £416 plus value added tax.

On the island of Mull, the haulage contractor's business depends on the taking of loads to and from the mainland. He also transports timber and granite and returns with animal foodstuffs, fish food for the fish farms, building materials or coal. He does not compete with mainland operators, and is fearful that any increase in the cost of the produce coming from the island will lead to mainland buyers saying that it is too expensive and that they will no longer buy such commodities.

Of course, the islands have recently suffered another blow. The Secretary of State for Scotland announced that the Government were withdrawing the tariff rebate subsidy given to the boats and ships which succeeded the puffers which plied the islands carrying salt and coal. The subsidy is to be withdrawn, so more goods will be hauled on the roads.

I should like to point out that, in terms of Treasury take, the amount that we are debating is peanuts and of no consequence in the larger scheme of things, yet, on the islands, it is the difference between surviving and going out of business, between staying on the islands and leaving. I am not exaggerating when I say that I have absolutely no doubt that some island haulage contractors will have to close.

Although there was some abuse, which was deeply resented by islanders who carry on a legitimate and honest business, it was not widespread. I suggested to the Minister how enforcement could be properly policed. Caledonian MacBrayne in fact records the registration numbers of lorries, and lorries carry a tachograph which record where lorries leave from, where they are going and the distance they travel. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will hold further discussions, especially with the Freight Transport Association, because the problem will not go away.

Finally, I am sincerely grateful to the Paymaster General for having listened, and I appreciate the support that I have received from hon. Members from all parties. From nothing, sensible discussion has yielded a significant change of heart, and I ask the House to support the amendment.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Gratitude is a very rare commodity in politics, and it is a pleasure to be able to tell my hon. Friend the Paymaster General that I am extremely grateful to him. The debate that took place on that January night was embarrassing. I felt deeply sorry for him, because he was taken unawares in a gale that would have done credit to any island. He has, however, emerged from it a stronger and tougher man, and has listened carefully. I shall not make any churlish comments at all, but wish simply to express my gratitude to him for taking on board a very important case that was made with great eloquence by hon. Members of all parties.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) is present—he was Banquo at the feast in the previous debate—and that he has been able to utter on this occasion. The solution that has been reached, while not perfect, will bring enormous benefit to some of the finest citizens in the British Isles.

7.30 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on moving the amendment which caused the initial debate some weeks ago, and on pursuing the case so tenaciously since. I also thank those Conservative Members who supported Opposition Members when this case was raised, especially the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). Without his initial flexible attitude while he was a Minister, we would not have had the opportunity to return to the matter again. The Paymaster General must also be thanked for having agreed to reconsider this issue after what must have been quite a painful night for him.

I am afraid, however, that thanks have to be limited, because it is not a question of benefits being conferred on the islands, but of damage being limited on them. The concession made by the Minister is still much too limited from my point of view and that of my constituents. It will cover only less than half the lorries which were previously exempt. As the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute said, there is no reason in principle why the concession could not have been extended to the whole range of lorries which were previously exempt.

It is also important to note that the initial defence mounted by the Minister on behalf of the Treasury was that taxation had to be absolutely uniform in all circumstances throughout the United Kingdom. It is welcome that the Treasury has been forced to acknowledge that that principle cannot be applied inflexibly or stupidly, and that, indeed, there are profound differences between different parts of the United Kingdom. The position of the islands is very special, and we must take account of it.

It is also important to note that this damage limitation exercise on behalf of island hauliers takes place against a background in which the Government are imposing swingeing cuts in other forms of support for transport and communications to the islands. The abolition of the freight subsidy, which will involve losses of million of pounds to island communities, has already been mentioned. As has been pointed out, the abolition of that subsidy will force more haulage on to the roads and away from direct travel by ship. Hauliers will then, of course, incur the additional costs of carrying freight in lorries which now pay an additional tax.

There is also a continued squeeze on Caledonian MacBrayne and the support that it receives from the Scottish Office. All in all, the picture is very much of island communities continuing to be hit by a combination of measures introduced by the Government in reducing subsidy and imposing new levies and taxes where there was none before.

It has to be emphasised that communication is a vital lifeline to fragile and vulnerable island communities. I do not think that we as representatives of those communities can be satisfied completely with the concession from the Government, and I have no doubt that we shall return to the question in future.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful for the remarks made by my hon. Friends the Members for Salisbury (Mr. Key) and for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack). We have indeed tried to meet the legitimate needs and concerns of the smaller islands. We are supposed to be an island race, but I had never realised how many islands there were with small numbers of roads on them. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has just listed a couple more, which we shall undoubtedly add by secondary legislation. We shall consult freely to ensure that they are all on the list, and then there can be no doubt about which islands qualify for this special treatment.

On the question of the servicing of the vehicles, I shall write to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute about the particular point that she raised.

On the issue of proving that a lorry is island-based and the hon. Lady's other request that all weights of vehicles should be given the £150 concession, we asked ferry companies whether they reliably recorded the registration numbers of vehicles, and it seems that some do but some do not. There is the additional problem that, if an operator were applying for a licence for the year ahead, he would be providing documentation, if that system were accepted, for the previous year, which of course is not exactly the same thing.

Therefore, I think that we have got it right, to give the smaller vehicles an essentially unlimited mileage on the mainland, if drivers wish it, for the £150 concession, provided that they can show that they are island-based.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Larger vehicles—articulated lorries and vehicles which weigh more than 17 tonnes—may, as I outlined initially, make trips on the ferries to the mainland and may unload and load in the environs of the port, which is defined as being within 5 km. But if we were to agree that they could cover unlimited mileage on the mainland in addition, they would start to provide a form of unfair competition to operators based on the mainland, because they would be in receipt of a considerable and valuable concession. The difference between £150 and—possibly—up to £5,000 for the biggest articulated lorries would start to give them a considerable advantage.

Mr. Wilson: I would like to clarify which objection prevails. If the main objection is about the ferries, then, as the Paymaster General has indicated, it is a very flimsy ground on which to refuse to extend the concession.

I shall not take the time of the House, but it could be very easily established whether there was a pattern of regular travel between an island and the mainland. As the Minister recognises, some of the ferry companies keep such records. We are talking only about a handful companies at most, and certainly every hon. Member present is talking only about one company—the state-owned Caledonian MacBrayne. There is not the slightest difficulty in establishing the required information.

If the main objection is based on the other grounds that the Minister has given, I would challenge it differently. Since the amount of money involved is bigger with larger lorries, the real economic cost to the islands will be paid through that higher excise duty. I ask the Minister to look at that case in the same constructive spirit that he has applied to smaller vehicles.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am describing to the House how we have looked at it in great detail, and I have given a practical objection to what was a good and original idea—to use the receipts from the ferry tickets as a way in which to show that a vehicle is genuinely island-based.

Although, of course, the ferry operator Caledonian MacBrayne is familiar to the hon. Gentleman, I must remind him that other islands are not off the coast of Scotland. We are also referring to a number of English islands which are reached through a different operator, and it is our information that not all the operators reliably record the vehicle registration numbers. In addition, I cited the problem that documentation is retrospective, whereas the award of a concession is prospective: for the year ahead.

I was about to describe a more general and separate objection, which is that, if a large, valuable vehicle based on an island is given the right to undertake unrestricted mileage on the mainland for the payment of only £150 per annum, it would begin to compete unfairly with the mainland hauliers. I therefore think that we are right to restrict the concession to small vehicles for the unlimited mileage, with larger vehicles having to be either for island use or for undertaking journeys to and from the mainland.

I hope that we have met the main objections. I was certainly genuinely impressed by the case that was made. Of course we shall keep the matter under review, but I am not willing to make any further concessions now, because I believe that we have reached a sensible conclusion to a difficult and complex issue.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that it will be for the convenience of the House if I put all the remaining amendments together.

Amendments made: No. 62, in page 177, line 2, leave out

'with a revenue weight exceeding 44,000 kilograms'

and insert

'which has a revenue weight exceeding 44,000 kilograms and is not an island goods vehicle'.

No. 63, in page 178, leave out lines 22 to 26 and insert—

"'(2) The annual rate of vehicle excise duty applicable—

(a) to any tractive unit which is a showman's goods vehicle with a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms but not exceeding 44,000 kilograms, and

(b) to any tractive unit which is an island goods vehicle with a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms,

shall be the basic goods vehicle rate.'.

No. 64, in page 178, line 28, leave out

'with a revenue weight exceeding 44,000 kilograms'

and insert

'which has a revenue weight exceeding 44,000 kilograms and is not an island goods vehicle'.

No. 65, in page 179, line 5, at end insert—

'(19) The following shall be inserted after paragraph 17—

"Meaning of 'island goods vehicle'

18.—(1) In this Part 'island goods vehicle' means any goods vehicle which—

(a) is kept for use wholly or partly on the roads of one or more small islands; and

(b) is not kept or used on any mainland road, except in a manner authorised by sub-paragraph (2) or (3).

(2) The keeping or use of a goods vehicle on a mainland road is authorised by this sub-paragraph if—

(a) the road is one used for travel between a landing place and premises where vehicles disembarked at that place are loaded or unloaded, or both;

(b) the length of the journey, using that road, from that landing place to those premises is not more than five kilometres;

(c) the vehicle in question is one which was disembarked at that landing place after a journey by sea which began on a small island; and

(d) the loading or unloading of that vehicle is to take place, or has taken place, at those premises.

(3) The keeping or use of a goods vehicle on a mainland road is authorised by this sub-paragraph if—

(a) that vehicle has a revenue weight not exceeding 17,000 kilograms;

(b) that vehicle is normally kept at a base or centre on a small island; and

(c) the only journeys for which that vehicle is used are ones that begin or end at that base or centre.

(4) References in this paragraph to a small island are references to any such island falling within sub-paragraph (5) as may be designated as a small island by an order made by the Secretary of State.

(5) An island falls within this sub-paragraph if—

(a) it has an area of 230,000 hectares or less; and

(b) the absence of a bridge, causeway, tunnel, ford or other way makes it at all times impracticable for road vehicles to be driven under their own power from that island as far as the mainland.

(6) The reference in sub-paragraph (5) to driving a road vehicle as far as the mainland is a reference to driving it as far as any public road in the United Kingdom which is not on an island with an area of 230,000 hectares or less and is not a road connecting two such islands.

(7) In this paragraph—

'island' includes anything that is an island only when the tide reaches a certain height;

'landing place' means any place at which vehicles are disembarked after sea journeys;

'mainland road' means any public road in the United Kingdom, other than one which is on a small island or which connects two such islands; and

'road vehicles' means vehicles which are designed or adapted primarily for being driven on roads and which do not have any special features for facilitating their being driven elsewhere;

and references in this paragraph to the loading or unloading of a vehicle include references to the loading or unloading of its trailer or semi-trailer."'.

No. 66, in page 179, line 36, after 'weight', insert—

'(ba) the place where the vehicle has been or is normally kept,'.

No. 67, in page 181, line 4 at end insert—

'. In section 60(2) of the 1994 Act (orders subject to annulment), after "section 3(3)" there shall be inserted ", paragraph 18(4) of Schedule 1".'.

No. 70, in page 194, line 41, leave out 'that Schedule' and insert

'Schedule 1 to the 1994 Act'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 8

LIFE ASSURANCE BUSINESS

Amendments made: No. 35, in page 216, line 2, leave out from second 'business' to end of line 44 and insert

'with a policy holder or annuitant not residing in the United Kingdom, and

(b) in the case of reinsurance business, is—

(i) reinsurance of life assurance business with a policy holder or annuitant not residing in the United Kingdom, or

(ii) reinsurance of business within sub-paragraph (i) above or this sub-paragraph.'.

No. 41, in page 216, line 45, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'subsections (7A) and'.

No. 36, in page 216, line 45, leave out 'subsections (2) to (4)' and insert 'subsection (1)'.

No. 42, in page 217, line 7, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'subsections (7A) and'.

No. 37, in page 217, line 7, leave out 'subsections (2) to (4)' and insert 'subsection (1)'.

No. 43, in page 217, line 10, at end insert—

'(7A) Subsections (5) and (7) above do not apply if—

(a) the rights conferred by the policy or contract for the business are held subject to a trust,

(b) the settlor does not reside in the United Kingdom, and

(c) each beneficiary is either an individual not residing in the United Kingdom or a charity.

(7B) In subsection (7A) above—

(a) "settlor" means the person, or (where more than one) each of the persons, by whom the trust was directly or indirectly created (and for this purpose a person shall, in particular, be regarded as having created the trust if he provided or undertook to provide funds directly or indirectly for the purposes of the trust or made with any other person a reciprocal arrangement for that other person to create the trust),

(b) "beneficiary" means any person who is, or will or may become, entitled to any benefit under the trust (including any person who may become so entitled on the exercise of a discretion by the trustees of the trust), and

(c) "charity" means a person or body of persons established for charitable purposes only;

and for the purpose of that subsection an individual who is a trustee (of any trust) shall not be regarded as an individual.'.

No. 38, in page 217, leave out lines 28 to 35.

No. 44, in page 217, line 49, after 'from' insert 'trustees or'.

No. 48, in page 222, line 27, at end insert—

'Receipts to be brought into account

.—(1) For section 83 of the Finance Act 1989 substitute—

"Receipts to be brought into account

83.—(1) The following provisions of this section have effect where the profits of an insurance company in respect of its life assurance business are, for the purposes of the Taxes Act 1988, computed in accordance with the provisions of that Act applicable to Case I of Schedule D.

(2) So far as referable to that business, the following items, as brought into account for a period of account (and not otherwise), shall be taken into account as receipts of the period—

(a) the company's investment income from the assets of its long term business fund, and

(b) any increase in value (whether realised or not) of those assets.

If for any period of account there is a reduction in the value referred to in paragraph (b) above (as brought into account for the period), that reduction shall be taken into account as an expense of that period.

(3) In ascertaining whether or to what extent a company has incurred a loss in respect of that business any amount transferred into the company's long term business fund from other assets of the company, or otherwise added to that fund, shall be taken into account, in the period in which it is brought into account, as an increase in value of the assets of that fund within subsection (2)(b) above.

This subsection does not apply where, or to the extent that, the amount concerned—

(a) would fall to be taken into account as a receipt apart from this section,

(b) is otherwise taken into account under subsection (2) above, or

(c) is specifically exempted from tax.

Meaning of "brought into account"

83A.—(1) In section 83 "brought into account" means brought into account in an account which is recognised for the purposes of that section.

(2) Subject to the following provisions of this section and to any regulations made by the Treasury, the accounts recognised for the purposes of that section are—

(a) a revenue account prepared for the purposes of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 in respect of the whole of the company's long term business;

(b) any separate revenue account required to be prepared under that Act in respect of a part of that business.

Paragraph (b) above does not include accounts required in respect of internal linked funds.

(3) Where there are prepared any such separate accounts as are mentioned in subsection (2)(b) above, reference shall be made to those accounts rather than to the account for the whole of the business.

(4) If in any such case the total of the items brought into account in the separate accounts is not equal to the total amount brought into account in the account prepared for the whole business, there shall be treated as having been required and prepared a further separate revenue account covering the balance.

(5) Where a company carries on both ordinary long term business and industrial assurance business, the references above

to the company's long term business shall be construed as references to either or both of those businesses, as the case may require.".

(2) In section 432B of the Taxes Act 1988—

(a) in subsection (1) for the words from "brought into account" to "1982" substitute "brought into account, within the meaning of that section,"; and

(b) for subsection (2) substitute—

"(2) Where for that purpose reference falls to be made to more than one account recognised for the purposes of that section, the provisions of sections 432C to 432F apply separately in relation to each account.".

(3) In section 432E(1) of the Taxes Act 1988 for the words from "of the items referred to in subsection (1)" to "paragraph (b))" substitute "to be taken into account in accordance with section 83(2) of the Finance Act 1989 (that is to say, the aggregate amount to be taken into account as receipts reduced by the aggregate amount to be taken into account as expenses)".

(4) In section 436(3) of the Taxes Act 1988, after paragraph (a) insert—

"(aa) section 83(3) of that Act shall not apply;".

(5) In section 441(4) of the Taxes Act 1988, after paragraph (a) (and before the word "and" following that paragraph) insert—

"(aa) section 83(3) of that Act shall not apply,".

(6) In section 65(2) of the Finance (No.2) Act 1992 for paragraph (d) substitute—

"(d) section 83(2) of the Finance Act 1989 (amounts to be taken into account as receipts or expenses);".'.

No. 45, in page 223, line 3, leave out

'beginning on or after 1st January 1995'.

No. 46, in page 223, line 17, at end insert—

'( ) In section 444A of the Taxes Act 1988 (transfers of business) after subsection (3) insert—

"(3A) Any subsection (2) excess (within the meaning of section 432F(2)) which (assuming the transferor had continued to carry on the business transferred after the transfer) would have been available under section 432F(3) or (4) to reduce a subsection (3) figure (within the meaning of section 432F(1)) of the transferor in an accounting period following that which ends with the day on which transfer takes place—

(a) shall, instead, be treated as a subsection (2) excess of the transferee, and

(b) shall be taken into account in the first accounting period of the transferee ending after the date of the transfer (to reduce the subsection (3) figure or, as the case may be, to produce or increase a subsection (2) excess for that period),

in relation to the revenue account of the transferee dealing with or including the business transferred.".

( ) In section 444A(5) of the Taxes Act 1988 for "subsection (2) or (3)" substitute "subsection (2), (3) or (3A)".'.

No. 49, in page 229, line 28, after '82(1)(a)', insert—

'( ) section 83(3) of that Act shall not apply,'.

No. 39, in page 234, line 41, leave out from beginning to end of line 8 on page 235 and insert—

'"6A. In section 431D(1), the words "carried on through a branch or agency in the United Kingdom by an overseas life insurance company" shall be treated as inserted after the words "means life assurance business"." '.

No. 50, in page 235, line 40, leave out from beginning to 'substitute' and insert—

'.—(1) Paragraph 8 of Schedule 19AC to the Taxes Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) for "paragraph 1" substitute "paragraph 1C"; and

(b) for "the word '1982'" substitute "the words 'brought into account, within the meaning of that section,'".

(3) In sub-paragraph (2) for "paragraph 1(6), (7) or (8)" substitute "any provision of paragraph 1C".

(4) For sub-paragraph (3)'.

No. 51, in page 235, line 44, leave out '1' and insert '1C'.

No. 54, in page 235, line 45, leave out second 'and' and insert 'to'.

No. 52, in page 239, line 21, at end insert—

'.—(1) Schedule 8A to the Finance Act 1989 is amended as follows.

(2) For paragraph 1 substitute—

"1.—(1) In their application to an overseas life insurance company sections 83 and 83A of this Act shall have effect with the modifications specified in paragraphs 1A to 1C below.

(2) In those paragraphs—

(a) any reference to the Taxes Act 1988 is a reference to that Act as it has effect in relation to such a company by virtue of Schedule 19AC to that Act; and

(b) any expression to which a meaning is given by section 11A of that Act has that meaning.

1A.—(1) The reference in section 83(2)(a) to investment income shall be construed as a reference to such of the income concerned as is attributable to the branch or agency in the United Kingdom through which the company carries on life assurance business.

(2) The reference to assets in section 83(2)(b) (as it applies apart from subsection (3) of that section) shall be construed as a reference to such of the assets concerned—

(a) as are—

(i) section 11(2)(b) assets;

(ii) section 11(2)(c) assets; or

(iii) assets which by virtue of section 11B of the Taxes Act 1988 are attributed to the branch or agency; or

(b) as are assets—

(i) (in a case where section 11C of that Act (other than subsection (9)) applies) of the relevant fund, or

(ii) (in a case where that section including that subsection applies) of the relevant funds,

other than assets which fall within paragraph (a) above.

(3) In determining for the purposes of section 83(2) (as it applies apart from subsection (3) of that section) whether there has been any increase or reduction in the value (whether realised or not) of assets—

(a) no regard shall be had to any period of time during which an asset held by the company does not fall within paragraph (a) or (b) of sub-paragraph (2) above; and

(b) in the case of an asset which falls within paragraph (b) of that sub-paragraph, only the specified portion of any increase or reduction in the value of the asset shall be taken into account.

For the purposes of paragraph (b) above the specified portion of any increase or reduction in the value of an asset is found by applying to that increase or reduction the same fraction as would, by virtue of section 11C of the Taxes Act 1988, be applied to any relevant gain accruing to the company on the disposal of the asset.

(4) For the reference in section 83(3) to any amount being transferred into the company's long term business fund from other assets of the company, or otherwise added to that fund, there shall be substituted a reference to assets becoming assets of the long term business fund used or held for the purposes of the company's United Kingdom branch or agency, having immediately previously been held by the company otherwise than as assets of that fund or used or held otherwise than for those purposes.

The amount of the increase in value under section 83(2)(b), as it applies in relation to such a transfer, shall be taken to be an amount equal to the value of the assets transferred.

1B. The references in section 83A to the company's long term business shall be construed as references to the whole of that business or to the whole of that business other than business in respect of which preparation of a revenue account for the purposes of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 is not required.

1C.—(1) Where for a period of account any investment income referred to in section 83(2)(a) is not otherwise brought into account within the meaning of that section, it shall be treated as brought into account for the period if it arises in the period.

(2) Where for a period of account any increase in value referred to in section 83(2)(b) (as it applies apart from subsection (3) of that section) is not otherwise brought into account within the meaning of that section, it shall be treated as brought into account for the period if it is shown in the company's records as available to fund one or both of the following for the period, namely, bonuses to policy holders and dividends to shareholders.

(3) Where for a period of account any reduction in value referred to in section 83(2) (as it applies apart from subsection (3) of that section) is not otherwise brought into account within the meaning of that section, it shall be treated as brought into account for the period if it is shown in the company's records as reducing sums available to fund one or both of the following for the period, namely, bonuses to policy holders and dividends to shareholders.

(4) Where in any period of account any such transfer is made as is mentioned in section 83(3) which is not otherwise brought into account within the meaning of that section, it shall be treated as brought into account for the period in which it is made.".

(3) In paragraph 2(7) for the words following paragraph (b) substitute—

"and in paragraph (b) above "the specified portion" has the same meaning as in paragraph 1A(3)(b) above."

(4) After paragraph 2(7) insert—

"(7A) For the purposes of this paragraph any expression to which a meaning is given by section 11A of the Taxes Act 1988 has that meaning.".'.

No. 55, in page 239, line 33, after '(1)', insert

'The Taxes Act 1988 is amended as follows.

( )'.

No. 47, in page 239, line 42, at end insert—

'.—(1) The amendments made by paragraph 16 above have effect in relation to accounting periods ending on or after 1st January 1994.

(2) In the first accounting period of a company ending on or after 1st January 1994 in which the subsection (3) figure for any category of business exceeds the subsection (2) figure, the subsection (2) figure shall be treated as increased by an amount not exceeding the amount or aggregate amount of any subsection (2) excesses in relation to that category of business for accounting periods beginning on or after 1st January 1990 and ending before 1st January 1994, but not so as to produce a subsection (2) excess for that period.

For this purpose the subsection (2) excess for an accounting period beginning on or after 1st January 1990 and ending before 1st January 1994 shall be determined without regard to the fact that in any other such accounting period the subsection (3) figure exceeded the subsection (2) figure.

Expressions used in this sub-paragraph have the same meaning as in section 432F of the Taxes Act 1988.

(3) Where a transfer mentioned in section 444A of the Taxes Act 1988 took place at the end of an accounting period of the transferor beginning on or after 1st January 1990 and ending before 1st January 1994, section 444A(3A) shall have effect in relation to the transfer as if it read—

"(3A) Any subsection (2) excess (within the meaning of section 432F(2)) of the transferor for an accounting period beginning on or after 1st January 1990 and ending before 1st January 1994 which (assuming the transferor had continued to carry on the business transferred after the transfer) would have been available to increase the subsection (2) figure (within the meaning of section 432F(1)) of the transferor in the first accounting period ending on or after 1st January 1994 in which the subsection (3) figure exceeded the subsection (2) figure—

(a) shall, instead, be treated as a subsection (2) excess of the transferee, and

(b) shall be taken into account to increase the subsection (2) figure of the transferee in its first accounting period ending on or after 1st January 1994 in which the subsection (3) figure exceeds the subsection (2) figure, but not so as to produce a subsection (2) excess for that period,

in relation to the revenue account of the transferee dealing with or including the business transferred.

For this purpose the subsection (2) excess for an accounting period beginning on or after 1st January 1990 and ending before 1st January 1994 shall be determined without regard to the fact that in any other such accounting period the subsection (3) figure exceeded the subsection (2) figure.".'.

No. 40, in page 240, line 12, leave out sub-paragraphs (2) to (4) and insert—

'(2) Where the policy or contract for any life assurance business was made before 1st November 1994, the amendments made by this Schedule (and the repeals consequential on those amendments) shall not have effect for determining whether the business is overseas life assurance business.

(3) Where the policy or contract for any life assurance business effected by a company resident in the United Kingdom at or through a branch or agency outside the United Kingdom was made before 29th November 1994, subsections (5) to (9) of section 431D of the Taxes Act 1988 shall not have effect for determining whether the business is overseas life assurance business.'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 11

PERSONAL PENSIONS: INCOME WITHDRAWALS

Amendments made: No. 78, in page 246, line 41, leave out '70' and insert '35'.

No. 79, in page 247, line 37, leave out '70' and insert '35'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 14

VENTURE CAPITAL TRUSTS: MEANING OF "QUALIFYING HOLDINGS"

Amendment made: No. 72, in page 267, leave out lines 18 to 20 and insert—

'8.—(1) The requirement of this paragraph is that the value of the relevant assets—

(a) did not exceed £10 million immediately before the issue of the relevant holding; and

(b) did not exceed £11 million immediately afterwards.

(2) Subject to sub-paragraph (3) below, the reference in sub-paragraph (1) above to the value of the relevant assets is a reference—

(a) in relation to a time when the relevant company did not have any qualifying subsidiaries, to the value of the gross assets of that company at that time; and

(b) in relation to any other time, to the aggregate value at that time of the gross assets of all the companies in the relevant company's group.

(3) For the purposes of this paragraph assets of any member of the relevant company's group that consist in rights against, or in shares in or securities of, another member of the group shall be disregarded.

(4) In this paragraph references, in relation to any time, to the relevant company's group are references to the relevant company and its qualifying subsidiaries at that time.'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 17

SETTLEMENTS: LIABILITY OF SETTLOR

Amendments made: No. 73, in page 283, line 27, leave out from 'is' to end of line 30 and insert

'remitted to the United Kingdom in circumstances such that, if the settlor were actually entitled to that income when remitted, he would be chargeable to income tax by reason of his residence in the United Kingdom, it shall be treated for the purposes of this Chapter as arising under the settlement in the year in which it is remitted.'.

No. 74, in page 284, line 13, leave out from beginning to 'insert' and insert—

'.—(1) Section 677 of the Taxes Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)(b) after "the amount of" insert "that income taken into account under that subsection in relation to".

(3) After subsection (2)(f)'.

No. 75, in page 284, line 16, at end insert—

'( ) In subsection (9) after "one of the events specified in section 673(3)" insert "or, in the case of a sum paid on or after 6th April 1995, in one of the events specified in section 660A(4) or on the death under the age of 25 of any such person as is mentioned in section 660A(5)".'.

No. 76, in page 284, line 16, at end insert—

'. In section 678 of the Taxes Act 1988, omit subsection (7).'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 18

DECEASED PERSONS' ESTATES

Amendment made: No. 60, in page 290, line 48, leave out from 'above' to end of line 50 and insert

'("the deemed single interest") were an interest of—

(i) except in a case to which sub-paragraph (ii) below applies, the person in respect of whose interest or previous interest the payment is made;

(ii) in a case where the person entitled to receive the payment is any other person who has or has had an interest which is deemed to be comprised in the deemed single interest, that other person; and'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Schedule 29

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 56, in page 343, column 3, leave out lines 20 to 24.

No. 53, in page 343, line 53, column 3, leave out 'paragraphs 1(9) and' and insert 'paragraph'.

No. 77, in page 345, line 23, column 3 at end insert—

'Section 678(7).'.

No. 15, in page 346, line 11, at end insert—

'(8A) STOCK LENDING

Chapter	*Short title*	*Extent of repeal*
1988 c. 1.	The Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.	In section 129(1), the words "has contracted to sell securities, and to enable him to fulfil the contract, he".'.

No. 20, in page 349, line 34, column 3, leave out from beginning to end of line 35 and insert—

'In Schedule 9, in paragraph 27(4) the words from "who is required" to the end.'

No. 21, in page 349, line 36, leave out from beginning to end of line 41.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

7.40 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill consolidates the Budget strategy of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is to sustain and strengthen Britain's growing economic recovery. That is now moving ahead powerfully across a broad and virtuous front of low inflation, high exports, rising investment, falling unemployment and solid growth.

That picture is confirmed by last week's publication by the Central Statistical Office of the national accounts, which showed that Britain's national output rose by about 4 per cent. in 1994 as a whole—the highest rate for six years. Britain's is now the fastest growing major economy in Europe, and is forecast to remain so.

That growth has been led by exports, which increased in 1994 by 14 per cent. by volume and by 9 per cent. by value. Those are record-breaking achievements, and they will be helped to power ahead by several clauses in the Bill, which give exporting companies easier access to new sources of capital.

Our exporters are already doing spectacularly well not only in Europe but in the growing markets of the wider world. For example, last year our exports to Brazil increased by 27 per cent., to Singapore by 28 per cent., to South Korea by 28 per cent., to eastern Europe by 21 per cent. and to Malaysia by 35 per cent. The Confederation of British Industry survey published in March shows that the orders in British industry's export order books are at their highest point since records began.

Behind those excellent export figures lie many other success stories. Exports, of course, consist of visibles and invisibles. Invisibles have been consistently strong for many years, and they are now becoming stronger. They will be strengthened further by new clause 12, which was moved by my hon. Friend the Minister of State yesterday and which will establish a gilt repo market, and by schedule 8, which will make it easier for British insurers to do business in Europe and across the world.

As for visible exports, the success story that I can report to the House is the revitalisation of Britain's manufacturing industry exports. Britain is on its way back to being one of the successful workshops of the world, and manufacturing industry is playing a starring role in the recovery.

Output rose by more than 4 per cent. in 1994—the fastest rate of growth since 1989. Manufacturing investment is up by more than 8 per cent. and manufacturing productivity by 4.5 per cent. Manufacturing industry employment increased by 40,000 in the past three months—the best increase for more than 15 years—and unit wage costs in manufacturing industry fell last year, thus making our industry increasingly competitive in the world marketplace.

The clear message from business surveys and forecasters is that with the help of the measures in the Bill the strong performance by our manufacturing industry is expected to continue, just as we expect the surge in inward investment by overseas investors to continue. Many inward investors will be encouraged to come here by clause 35, which again sets Britain's rate of corporation tax as the lowest main CT rate in Europe.

I know that the Opposition rather like to make dismissive and pessimistic noises about inward investment. For example, on 9 May last year the deputy leader of the Labour party was rash enough to say:

> "After 15 years of this deregulation I don't see much inward investment flooding in".

As we know, the right hon. Gentleman's memory is a little defective sometimes. If he had to enlist the assistance of the constabulary to recognise his own Jaguar car, no wonder he finds it hard to recognise the great car factories that are springing up in Wales, Sunderland, Scotland and in the midlands as a result of inward investment. Perhaps the most appropriate response to that characteristically lugubrious forecast by Labour's deputy leader 11 months ago, would be the refrain from the old folk song, "Oh, no John, no John, no John, no."

The facts of inward investment are so positive and so good for Britain that what we should all be saying enthusiastically is, "Oh, yes Toyota, yes Nissan, yes Samsung, yes Ford Motor Company, yes we welcome you here." As about 635,000 jobs have resulted from inward investment, clearly one of the driving forces behind the welcome expansion of Britain's industrial base has been the simple fact that foreign investors are giving a huge vote of confidence to Britain's economy.

That is a remarkable contrast to the Opposition's vote of no confidence in the Bill that does so much to strengthen Britain's economy. It is a pretty sad reflection on the Labour party that it still takes the old neanderthal socialist view that a profit should be without honour in our own country.

Talking of prophets, I am sorry that the Opposition's in-house Cassandra, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) cannot be with us today. I understand that he is in Scotland—no doubt striving to stir up gloom and despondency there over the 18 per cent. annual productivity growth north of the border between 1990 and 1995, the 14.6 per cent. surge in Scottish manufacturing exports in 1993, and the 100 inward investment projects a year—two per week—currently coming into Scotland. I wonder whether he is even managing to sound gloomy about the BSkyB inward investment project that is creating up to 1,000 full-time equivalent new jobs in his constituency.

Conservatives will not let the doomwatcher from Dunfermline forget the most incompetent forecast of this Parliament, which he made on 17 March 1993:

> "I make one Budget forecast—that, after the Budget, unemployment will rise this month, next month and for months afterwards."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 289.]

What actually happened is that ever since the hon. Gentleman made his false prophecy unemployment fell—that month, next month and month after month for two years. Not since the Labour Government appointed a Minister for drought—

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne) *rose*—

Mr. Aitken: I think that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will remember that time. Not since the Labour Government appointed a Minister for drought has a Front Bencher's forecast been proved so resoundingly wrong.

Mr. Sheldon: Surely the biggest forecast of all was the 2.95 deutschmark, which failed miserably. The signal mark of the Government is that they failed to keep us in the exchange rate mechanism; the results of that failure of policy are around us now.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): It was a success.

Mr. Aitken: I am finding it difficult to follow the point that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne is making. Interest rates are not the subject of forecasts; we are not wise enough—or wild enough—to do any such thing. Certainly, compared with the forecast made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, we have made no mistakes at all.

Unemployment has fallen by 600,000 since that prediction was made, and it is still falling steadily at a rate of 1,000 a day. So the employment news, like the export news, the manufacturing industry news, the low inflation news and the economic growth news, is all good news. The good headlines about what is really happening in the economy will be helped considerably by the small print in the Bill and by the accompanying measures announced by the Chancellor in his Budget.

Work incentives, savings incentives and investment incentives are key ingredients of the Bill. The Government have recognised the cardinal importance of low rates of income tax to preserve work incentives, and the Bill takes a significant step towards our long-term aim, reaffirmed by the Prime Minister in his excellent speech in Birmingham on Saturday—a basic rate of income tax of 20p in the pound. Clause 33 widens the 20p band to £3,200—twice the increase necessary for indexation. That means that one in five of all taxpayers will now pay tax only at the lowest rate of 20p.

Just as employees are being encouraged by incentives to take on work, employers are being encouraged to offer work to new employees. From the day after tomorrow—6 April—employer national insurance contributions will be cut by 0.6 per cent. for employees earning less than £205 a week.

The Bill is doing its best to get more people back to work, by means of the incentives that I have mentioned, but we have not neglected those who are too old to work. The Bill increases the income limit for the age-related personal tax allowance by £430—well above the inflation indexation rate. In a full year, the measure hands back £200 million to nearly 3 million pensioners.

This is a Finance Bill for savers. It extends the very popular tax-exempt special savings accounts—TESSAs—by allowing those who have built up a nest egg in a TESSA to reinvest all or part of the capital that they have accumulated in a new TESSA up to a limit of £9,000 as

[Mr. Aitken]

soon as their account matures. It also widens the scope of personal equity plans, the enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital trust scheme to enhance the availability of finance and investment for industry, which is an important objective for the Government. The Bill's measures that achieve that should be widely welcomed by all those who understand how a modern economy works.

The Government have grave doubts about whether the Opposition understand how a modern economy works. In our debates, their main preoccupation has not been with Britain's soaring exports, falling unemployment or increasing investment and economic growth. They seem to have an incorrigible aversion to mentioning the good news that is strengthening Britain as a successful world trading nation. That good news includes the fact that we had a £2 billion current account surplus in the second half of last year.

Instead, the Opposition showed an obsession with tax loopholes, share option schemes and executive pay. The Bill has done a great deal to combat tax evasion but the great divide between the Government and the Opposition on the rewards for hard work and enterprise can be simply stated: we are against the abuses of commercial success, but the Opposition are against the rewards of commercial success.

Good rewards are the lifeblood of an enterprise and export-led culture. It is a sign of success when many good businesses, some good business leaders and many good employees get well rewarded as a result of their successful efforts. Such people do not deserve to be described as "fat cats" by Opposition Members. They are simply hard-working people who have earned their rewards because they have contributed to successful businesses.

We are determined to ensure that all Britain's wage and salary earners keep as much of their earnings as possible in their own pockets, and have to pay income tax only at a rate that is as low as we can fairly and prudently keep it. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made clear in his speech at the weekend, the time when we can start cutting taxes again is coming closer. When we talk about cutting taxes as soon as it is prudent to do so, let us never forget that sound public finances are a precondition for low taxation, and that sound public finances are what the Government are steadily delivering as we put the world recession behind us.

Although we had to make some unpopular tax increases and painful expenditure cuts, we are forecast to halve the nation's overdraft, or public sector borrowing requirement, between 1993-94 and this year. We plan to eliminate the PSBR and balance the budget by the end of the decade. Such good housekeeping is central to the Finance Bill and to the Budget, but it seems to be terra incognita to Opposition Front Benchers. All they seem to know about good housekeeping is the magazine of that name.

Whenever we try to pin down the Opposition about serious good housekeeping issues, they perform their unconvincing imitation of the three notorious monkeys—see no policy, speak no policy, have no policy. By contrast to those three monkeys, a central thrust of the Government's policy is that we continue to maintain a constant downward pressure on public expenditure. That is why the Chancellor's Budget contained the announcement that we were cutting £29.5 billion off the planned public expenditure totals during the next three years. The Bill continues that process.

I commend to the House the new clauses so ably moved yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State in relation to the introduction of an open market in the sale and repurchase of Government securities. That sounds a technical subject, but the results are far from technical. As my hon. Friend explained, the arrangements introduced by the new clauses should result in significant savings for the taxpayer on the £20 billion debt interest bill.

The Opposition do not have any serious proposals for controlling or reducing public expenditure. If one probes behind the Front-Bench monkeys' posture of see no policy, speak no policy, have no policy, one discovers pork barrel after pork barrel of ill-concealed public expenditure increases. For example, Opposition Front Benchers kept quiet about their policies on pensions when we debated clauses 56 to 59, which relate to pensions. It was with surprise that one picked up *The Observer* on 12 March to read the headline

> "Pensions for anyone of 60 says Labour".

The story went on:

> "Under plans to be unveiled by the Labour party this week . . . the proposals would mean that people could get a pension five years earlier than under government plans for a retirement age of 65".

The article reported that the shadow Social Security Secretary had persuaded Labour's Treasury team that his new policy would be cost-neutral. I hope that we can now be told the truth by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), and that he will unveil his miraculous cost-neutral policy that offers to pay pensions five years ahead of schedule. One estimate is that such a policy might cost the taxpayer £13 billion. We would all like to hear how it could possibly be cost-neutral, and the hon. Gentleman could also explain why he did not unveil that miraculous new policy during debates on the Bill. I think we should be told.

That is not the only explanation that we want. Veiled in the semantic obscurity of bland buzz words that are almost incomprehensible in their cost implications to the man on the Clapham omnibus, one will hear time and time again—especially in the speeches of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—expensive new Labour mantras such as "greater use of capital receipts", which is worth some £6 billion, "new regional assemblies and development agencies", "the introduction of a defence conversion agency", "a growth strategy for Europe"—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear.] Opposition Members are cheering, but they should wait until they hear the price tags. Reference is also made to "increased investment in economics and social fabric" and "an emergency employment programme to get people back to work", not to mention the notorious "post neo-classical endogenous growth theory".

What the artful dodgers on the Opposition Front Bench must face up to is that those high-falutin' plans add up to a number of public spending promises, and promises have prices. The real price that will have to be paid for such departures from the foundations of sound public finances on which this Bill is built is higher taxation.

The Opposition Front Benchers do not dare admit it, but the cat has been let out of the bag by the Labour party's most influential eminence rouge on its Back Benches, the former deputy leader and shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). His words in one of his many columns—this time in *The Guardian* on 13 March—will live in political infamy as they are quoted up and down the country in the coming months. He said:

> "Labour now has a clear choice. It can either be the Party of higher taxation and proud of it, or the Party of higher taxes which it is ashamed to describe, afraid to admit and incapable of calculating with any accuracy. It cannot be the low taxation Party."

Amen to that. The candid right hon. Gentleman has poured egg over the faces of the Opposition's Front-Bench team.

The Opposition like higher taxation, and they are proud of it. They will inevitably have to increase the PSBR to the point where the initials stand for plunder, spend, borrow and raid. They now want to oppose the policies in the Bill and the Budget which are underpinning sound public finances, improving exports, encouraging investment, reducing unemployment, creating the best growth record in Europe and offering the British people higher real disposable incomes. We are on the right track, and the Bill will keep us there. I commend it to the House.

7.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith: Unlike the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I shall talk mainly about the Finance Bill. First, let me dismiss what comprised 90 per cent. of his speech. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would be the first person not to take too much notice of what he reads in the newspapers, whether it be our plans or on other matters.

The right hon. Gentleman made claims about the state of the economy and the achievements of our exporters, but if he believes that the Labour party will let this Government, after all they have done, walk off with the credit for the hard graft of our exporters, workers and managers, he is a bit too arrogant and complacent and he does not understand the British people. They know the mess that the Government's failures have got this country into. They know about the huge and irresponsible borrowing that the Government have stacked up, and they know that the Government broke every promise they made before the election.

We hear talk from Conservative Back Benchers and from the chairman of the Conservative party, which the Chancellor is frantically trying to damp down, about tax cuts being on the way. That comes a bit rich from a Government who have not yet finished driving through all 20 of their tax increases since the election, which have added £812 extra in tax burden, year-on-year, to a typical family. All that, when living standards fell last year and are falling this year. That extra tax burden, which is in breach of every promise that the Chief Secretary and his hon. Friends made at the last general election, is what people will remember. I think that that takes care of 90 per cent. of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, and now to the Finance Bill.

The first thing to report is that this is a very different Bill from the one that confronted us on 17 January on Second Reading. The fact that it is so different is a great tribute to the work of my hon. Friends, the arguments that they mounted and the campaign that they undertook. Labour, assisted on occasion by some Conservative Members and rather less often by the Liberal Democrats, has forced substantial changes on the Government.

We started with the Government's momentous defeat on value added tax on fuel on the Floor of the House—we did not hear much about that from the Chief Secretary. In Committee, they were also defeated on the tax simplification proposal of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I understand that that was the first time in the memory of the Clerks that a new clause tabled by anyone other than the Government had been added to a Finance Bill.

Labour has mounted effective pressure in the country on the matters covered by the Bill, which forced the Government to back down, for example, on the extension of tax privileges for executive share options to part-time directors, when even Ministers had to recognise that what they were advocating was indefensible. There is a string of other changes, from vehicle excise duty to the level of pools betting duty, where the Government have been made to change their position, whether by the force of votes or public opinion, or the force of argument.

It is worth running through the changes that make this such a significantly different Bill: the Government's defeat on VAT on fuel on the Floor of the House, when we held it at 8 per cent; the forced withdrawal of the Government proposal to extend tax breaks on executive share options to part-time directors; the prevention, or at least the damage limitation exercise as my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) described it, of the imposition of vehicle excise duty on carriers on the Scottish islands and the Scilly Isles; the fact that we stopped the Tories increasing vehicle excise duty on farm vehicles, which was set to increase to a maximum of £5,000; the fact that we forced a cut in proposed vehicle excise duty on recovery vehicles, from the Government's proposed maximum of £5,000 to £750; the fact that, earlier today, we secured concessions on the tax treatment of capital borrowing from the Government for housing associations and universities; the fact that we defeated the Government in Committee, with the help of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, to secure examination of the simplification of the tax system; the fact that we successfully proposed taxation changes to assist settlements for accident and injury victims; the concessions that we won for disabled drivers of company cars; the exemption from duty for non-prize amusement machines; and the 5 per cent. reduction of pools betting duty, to 32 per cent. It is a formidable list.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman is using the royal "we" so wildly that I feel I must be listening to the film, "The Madness of King George". Not one Labour amendment was carried and so the idea that all that was due to Labour's influence is rubbish. My hon. Friends and I rightly listened carefully to representations from industry and others, but the notion that Labour should get one ounce of credit shows that power has gone to the hon. Gentleman's head.

Mr. Smith: The biggest concession of all, on VAT on fuel, was forced on the right hon. Gentleman and the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *rose*—

Mr. Smith: The fact that we have been so successful on this Bill is obviously getting to Ministers and is bringing them to the Dispatch Box. They are worried that we have been an effective channel for public opinion on

[Mr. Smith]

the issues in the Bill and that, one way or another, we have helped to secure so many changes; clearly, that upsets them.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman was so against the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel and power, why did not the Labour party support the amendment tabled by another Opposition party to reduce the rate from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent?

Mr. Smith: Because everyone knew that that was an opportunist amendment—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Conservative Members know that is true. That amendment could have resulted in the loss of the change in VAT to 8 per cent. It could have forced it back to 17.5 per cent., which is where the Conservative party wanted it. Having won that victory, we were determined that we would do nothing to put the rate at risk, nor will we do anything this evening that would put it at risk, but more of that later.

I was surprised to hear the Chief Secretary claim a share of the glory on the Government side for what has happened to the Finance Bill because he had little to do with it in Committee. On one visit, we saw him reading Will Hutton's book, which resulted not in radical amendments to the Bill but in a rather acerbic review in *The Sunday Times* in which he conceded that

> "British businesses are still finding it difficult to adjust to the new economic environment"—

that is one way of putting it. He continued:

> "Successful competitiveness can be uncomfortable."

That obvious reference to his rivalry with the Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), who is going to lead the Conservative party from the right in opposition, prompted me to compare their contributions to Finance Bill proceedings. I am sorry to say that it is not all good news for the present Chief Secretary, who has not been doing enough to display his talents. The sad truth is that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, when he was Chief Secretary last year, had spoken more after eight days of the Committee stage than this Chief Secretary did during the entire proceedings. The former Chief Secretary made three times as many speeches in total, five times as many interventions and managed to be present for 87 per cent. of the sittings, as compared to the present Chief Secretary's 44 per cent.

We have heard a good deal in this Finance Bill on performance-related pay. It seems that the matter is in the Chief Secretary's hands and that a bonus will shortly be transferred from the present occupant of the office to his predecessor, perhaps with a well-earned cut for the Financial Secretary, the Minister of State and the Paymaster General, who worked hard on the Bill, as we would all agree.

It would not be fair for me to refer to the work accomplished on the Bill without drawing the attention of the House and the country to the performance of the Liberal Democrats because it was an incredible record. Between them, they were present for barely half the time. They were missing for our crucial tied vote on pools betting duty, their representatives on the Finance Bill Committee are not even here this evening, and they did not turn up in Committee to move their new clauses on child care. It will not escape the notice of the country that, when it comes to action on child care or anything else for that matter, people can look with confidence to the Labour party, not to the Liberal Democrats. We have taken our opportunities to improve this Bill where they have relinquished theirs.

As a consequence, there is much in the Bill that is better than when it started. Areas of concern remain, however. Even with the small amendments to the regime on venture capital trusts, allowing a larger proportion of non-voting shares, which the Government conceded yesterday and which responded in part to points that my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) and I made earlier, we remain concerned that the venture capital trusts and enterprise investment scheme provisions in the Bill may do more to attract savings into property-backed, lower-risk investments than into the higher-risk, higher-tech areas intended, but we shall see what happens as the scheme proceeds.

As we said yesterday, we remain concerned, too, that the introduction of self-assessment in taxation contains some big hostages to fortune on which, as we enter a general election period, the Chief Secretary and his hon. Friends may yet have cause to regret opposing our proposed postponement.

When people look at the Bill, they will see that its most outstanding political aspect is the Government's defeat over the rate of VAT on fuel. People will remember that, when the Conservatives were banging through tax increase after tax increase—20 in total, adding up to an extra £812 imposed on a typical family—the only tax cut was in the prospective rate of VAT on fuel. They will remember that Labour's campaigning and votes, along with those of the smaller parties and a handful of Conservative rebels, won that tax cut for the general public. The Bill incorporates that victory, which is one of its most important features.

As I said in Committee on the Floor of the House, the Opposition intend to put neither that VAT victory nor their other gains at risk. That is why we shall not divide the House against giving the Bill a Third Reading tonight. No one should suppose, however, that this Bill is enough. Britain needs effective action for jobs, investment and partnership to create a truly dynamic economy and a fair society. For that, we need a different Finance Bill and a different Government.

8.10 pm

Mr. Forman: At the end of our debate on this Finance Bill, which has, on the whole, been good humoured, I can strike agreement with the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on one point: his strictures on the Liberal party. I have personal experience of coping with the Liberals in my constituency, and his point was well made.

The Finance Bill, and the two Budgets of which it is the legislative consequence, are the latest welcome instalment of the Chancellor's prudent and successful fiscal policy. It is prudent because it has sought to restrain public expenditure by some £24 billion over three years, off the control total. It has also sought to achieve a broadly neutral fiscal adjustment for 1995-96. It is successful because it has contributed to greater confidence in the financial markets, measures to improve the supply side of the economy and the continuing economic recovery based on non-inflationary growth, which, as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said, is helping to reduce unemployment by about 1,000 a day and to create new wealth and jobs.

The nature of that recovery and how we are prospering here and overseas has many interesting aspects. One of the more interesting facts that was not picked up in the Sturm und Drang of parliamentary questions to the Chancellor on Thursday was the point that he made in answer to a question about trade with the far east. He pointed out that

> "we have now restored the old level of investment that Britain used to have before its past portfolio went during the wars, and the flows into this country are extremely valuable—as valuable as visible trade to the well-being of this country."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1172.]

The importance of both inward investment, which is often debated in the House, and remittances, which is the point that the Chancellor was making, can be underestimated. In a global economy, we must all pay more attention to those valuable aspects of our income flows. Overseas assets can be beneficial to this country, as other countries such as Japan are finding. It is not just a matter of retaining confidence here to attract inward investment; it is also a question of creating a fiscal and monetary structure within which our firms, many of which are now multinational, can prosper and invest successfully overseas. This country can see the benefits of that repatriated income later on.

In those satisfactory circumstances, it would be folly for the House to follow any of the Opposition's economic advice. The House and the country should note that, in this respect, both the Labour and Liberal parties are, by instinct and tradition, high-spending parties.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): The Liberals have gone.

Mr. Forman: Yes, I see that they have gone.

If the Labour and Liberal parties are high-spending parties, they are unavoidably parties of high taxation and borrowing. I remind the House that the last Labour Government—that seems a long time ago—introduced the highest marginal rates of tax on income in peacetime history. The present Labour party has voted against nearly every income tax cut made by this Government over the past 15 or 16 years. Furthermore, records show that Labour Governments tend to borrow more than Conservative Governments. For example, the 1974 to 1979 Labour Government borrowed, on average, nearly 7 per cent. of national income a year whereas, since 1979, in spite of the difficulties of two recessions, we have borrowed on average 2 per cent. a year.

Not the least important point about that broad contrast between the two sides of the House is that the views that I now put to the House are largely shared by the unsentimental and realistic British public, particularly as represented in a recent MORI poll published in *The Times*. It showed that 62 per cent. of the middle classes expected a future Labour Government, were there to be one, to increase the burden of income tax; 23 per cent. thought that their standard of living would decline rather than improve under a Labour Government; 21 per cent. thought that a future Labour Government would not keep their promises; and 38 per cent. doubted—indeed, disputed—the idea that a future Labour Government would keep inflation under control. If the current political scene is a battle for the hearts and minds of the middle class and middle England, we can see that those people have already understood, perhaps more clearly than we sometimes give them credit for, exactly where the national advantage and their own advantage lie.

Mr. Betts: In response to the hon. Gentleman's comment that 21 per cent. of the middle class would not expect a future Labour Government to keep their promises, has he any idea what percentage of middle England would expect a Conservative Government to keep their promises, given what we have seen in the past few years?

Mr. Forman: I would need notice of that question, because the poll on which I draw focused principally on the Labour party's struggle to convince the middle class.

In case people are tempted to think that Liberal policy is anything more than what I believe it to be, which is a dilute version of Labour policy, they need only look at Liberal policy in areas of the country where, temporarily, the Liberals control local authorities to see the extent to which their spending policies are irresponsible and even feckless as they do not give correct priority to sensitive areas such as education.

I commend my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench for the various parts that they have played in this Finance Bill, and I commend the Chancellor and the Government as a whole on introducing yet another prudent and successful Budget.

8.17 pm

Mr. Sheldon: I rise only briefly to express my appreciation of the work of the Opposition Front Bench and the way in which they have handled this Finance Bill.

We are in the shadow of the consequences of black Wednesday. The Government pledged themselves to maintain a deutschmark at 2.95 and failed miserably when the crunch came. We now have a deutschmark at 2.20 or 2.34 and a dollar at 1.60. For the first time in my 30 years in the House, I feel that the exchange rate is about right. Until now, it has always been wrong. It is the English genius to achieve things through mistakes, and that is how the Government have brought about a proper and defensible exchange rate. I would not like it to go any lower. Every time that I have made this sort of speech, I have said that I wanted lower exchange rates to encourage investment and our manufacturing exports. Now we have it about right, so will the Government please just leave it alone and let it continue to provide the wealth that the country needs?

The Government will now make the great mistake of talking about future tax changes. They should understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer needs flexibility. One cannot decide those things two years in advance; surely the reversal of the decision on VAT on domestic fuel showed that. One must make a judgment at the time. It is wrong to limit the Chancellor in any way.

I would draw attention to the fine tuning that we now have using interest rates. Conservative Governments in the past always opposed fine tuning. Now they talk about quarters of a per cent. in those matters.

The monthly meeting of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England is one of the worst decisions of all. Denis Healey used to say to the Governor of the Bank of England, Gordon Richardson, "I wish I had your job." Today, the Governor

[Mr. Sheldon]

of the Bank of England has much more power than he ever had then. I am pretty sure that the present Chancellor of the Exchequer would like to change jobs, too.

Finally, I congratulate my hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench on achieving one of the great reverses, on VAT on fuel. That will be something for which they will be long remembered and long appreciated.

8.20 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Never in my parliamentary life have we debated the Finance Bill against such a favourable economic background; yet the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) says that we are in a mess. Underlying inflation 1.8 per cent. last month, exports soaring—we are in a mess. The balance of payments in balance—we are in a mess. Unemployment coming down month by month—and the hon. Gentleman says that we are in a mess.

The French level of unemployment is now—

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Townend: No; I have only four minutes.

The French level of unemployment, with a socialist President, is now 50 per cent. more than ours. The Spanish level of unemployment, with a Socialist Government, is treble ours. The budget deficit is decreasing and we have a budget deficit reduction plan that will bring us into balance by the end of the decade.

My only regret is that to bring that budget deficit under control we have had to accept tax increases, the last of which are in the Budget. I broadly approve of the Government's strategy, but everyone knows that I always prefer to cut public expenditure instead of increasing taxes. I welcome the fact that the Government now appear to have accepted that, henceforth, our first priority must be to cut public expenditure.

I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench that we need to launch a crusade against overmanning, extravagance and waste in the public sector. Wherever one looks in the public sector, at local government level or at national Government level, one can find glaring examples of the taxpayer's money being unnecessarily spent. I have about 20 examples here. Time will not allow me go into them, but I shall take them up in due course with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

The public sector is bloated. If one questions that point of view, one has only to consider the privatised industries. Who would have believed that they could slim down their work force so much while improving the service to the customer and reducing charges in real terms? Indeed, their great success is one of the reasons why we have been embarrassed by the profits made and the share options given. No one dreamed that the nationalised industries were so overmanned.

If we could achieve only 50 per cent. of the savings in manpower that the privatised industries have made or that every private firm that had to slim down during the recession has achieved, we would have no difficulty in cutting taxes substantially.

I hope that this Finance Bill marks the end of an era in two respects. First, never again should we have a Finance Bill as long as this. It shows, in my opinion, that the Inland Revenue is out of control. It is obsessed with the minutiae of tax avoidance and benefits in kind. The Institute of Chartered Accountants described the Bill as "another dose of obscurity" and protested about the complexity in drafting style. I therefore welcome the Treasury's proposals to consider giving the work of drafting future Finance Bills to the private sector.

I hope that the Bill before us will be the last Finance Bill for many, many years in which the overall burden of taxation is increased. I can assure the Chancellor that he will have all my support in achieving those aims. I am sure that, with our present Chief Secretary to the Treasury, after the spending round this year, when we come to the Budget in November, we shall see the start of many, many Conservative Budgets when the burden on the taxpayer is reduced.

The Conservative party is the party whose philosophy is that we should leave as much money as possible in the wage earner's pocket, because we believe that he can take decisions about the way to spend his money better than the Government can. The Opposition believe that they should take as much money out of the wage earner's pocket as possible, because they believe that the state can take decisions better than the individual. That is the big difference between us. That is the blue water.

I commend my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench for all their efforts to reduce public spending.

8.25 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The economic illiteracy that we have just heard, and that we heard in the opening speech, is great even by the standards of the Conservative Benches. The plain fact is that, when the Conservatives entered office in 1979, Britain stood fourth or fifth in per capita gross domestic product in Europe; we now stand 11th, sinking down the world league tables of growth and distribution. No economic legerdemain can reduce that fact.

I shall return to the Bill, because that is what we are here to debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First, it is an extraordinarily regressive Bill. In spite of the great victory won last November, when the proposal for VAT at 16 per cent. was defeated, nearly every measure proposed in the Bill—we do not have time to go through the clauses—has been regressive.

Secondly, where I do agree with the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) is that, at 351 pages, the Bill is far too long.

Thirdly, the Bill is absurdly complex—more complex than any comparable legislation for any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country of the same size.

Fourthly, it is a remarkably insular, inward-looking Bill. An amendment to clause 123, in which there was a suggestion of examining ways in which we might consider taxation internationally, was thrown out in Committee.

Fifthly, it is an extraordinarily short-term Bill. Thank goodness the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was successful in moving his amendment on shipping, with our support, and the Government finally accepted that, because that measure extended slightly the time scale to back the tax relief necessary for our shipbuilding industry. However, for every other measure, the continual refrain was of resistance to the development of what one might call patient capitalism.

Sixthly, without question, it was a Bill designed in the Ritz and very much for the Ritz. Treasury Ministers made their

"proper prostrations to the Gods of the market-place",

but underlying the focus of the Bill is a shift from a wage-earning to a rentier society. That should worry anyone who believes that income should be related to hard work, not to turning up now and then to sign off, or not as the case may be, on arms exports to a country under ban from the United Nations.

Seventhly, in the handling of the Bill there was some arrogance on the part of the Treasury Ministers. What does one expect from three Old Etonians and one Old Harrovian, all at Oxford? It was old England, which, thank goodness, was able to take some advice from new Labour. However, in spite of their politeness, their courtesy—which I acknowledge, because that is the class from which they come—there was a haughty disregard for any of the arguments made by Conservative Members, their colleagues. I ask for no pity or consideration for our opinions, but when their own side made sensible and helpful suggestions—of course very few of them coming from the Old Etonian and Old Harrovian gang—they were knocked back.

Eighthly, this is a profoundly anti-manufacturing Bill. I defy the Financial Secretary, in replying, to identify more than five clauses that will genuinely help industry. Last week, I had the honour of hosting a visit in the House from the Rotherham chamber of commerce. Those on the visit talked about education, skills and the lack of demand. There is nothing in the Bill that helps the manufacturing sector in a concrete way. I was particularly disappointed that the amendment on employee share ownership plans, which was moved by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and supported by me, was so scornfully rejected.

Ninthly, the Bill is for rentiers, not wage earners. Tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans have been mentioned. But we must be careful, because we shall face problems in the future if we focus only on unearned income and unearned rents instead of creating a society in which value is added by people's work and income comes more directly from that work.

Tenthly, taxation is more than a contract between Government and the governed. It is the definition of the duties and responsibilities that society accepts in exchange for the freedom to make and spend money as it wishes. It is the equilibrium which is so tragically lacking in our two-nation society. We live in a society of two unbalanced halves, which fiscal policy should seek to connect, one to the other.

We need a major reform of our taxation system. With this Finance Bill, the Conservatives have shown that theirs is the party of high taxation and low lies. Only a new Treasury Front-Bench team can put that right.

8.30 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I am sorry that we did not hear more from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury during the passage of the Finance Bill. He read his speech with feeling and we enjoyed it to some extent, but it was thoroughly unconvincing and demonstrated why the Government face difficulties.

It is not surprising that the Chief Secretary did not speak much about the Finance Bill, as he was not present in Committee very often. The only thing that can be said about him is that he was present on slightly more occasions than the Liberal Democrats, who were hardly there at all. One was bound to wonder why they asked for places on the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill—perhaps that is something that the Committee of Selection might want to take into account next year. *[Interruption.]*

Even as I speak, the Liberal Democrats cannot stand the heat and have withdrawn from the Chamber. The Liberal Democrat Benches now remain empty. I hope that those who sometimes pick up their press releases will ask them exactly how much time they spend in the Chamber when they are given the opportunity to talk about their economic policies or anything else.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) mentioned that the Chief Secretary was hardly ever in Committee. His absence lends some credibility to his claim that when he was the director of a certain company he did not spend much time there. Clearly, not attending meetings and not being there seems to be a trade mark of the Chief Secretary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East also said that the Chief Secretary spent some time reading Will Hutton's excellent book, which was indirectly plugged by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). I also noticed that for some time the Chief Secretary was reading a book entitled "The Law of Islam". I do not know why he was reading it, but perhaps, sooner or later, we will find out what he was so interested in.

The Chief Secretary's speech was unconvincing. He talked about success, but the truth is that people do not feel that they live in a successful country. They do not believe that they are being successful themselves and they do not believe that Britain is successful. The people feel cheated and deceived. They were promised tax cuts in 1992, but they got tax increases—there have been 20 different tax increases since 1993 alone. A typical family is paying £800 a year more in tax.

The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) talked about the instincts and philosophy of the Government and the Conservative party. We know the Government's instincts—to say one thing during the election campaign and to do completely the opposite thereafter. The Government said that they would reduce taxes year on year. Instead, they have increased taxes year on year. It is no wonder that people do not trust the Conservatives on tax or anything else.

It would have been interesting if, when the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) reviewed the opinion poll in *The Sunday Times*, he had told us its conclusion. If I am not mistaken, despite what he said, the majority of people, no matter where they stand—whether they are on middle incomes, lower incomes or no income—are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Government and do not believe one word that the Government say about taxation or anything else.

Just last weekend, we were told that there would be a Tory relaunch. We saw the Prime Minister appearing on the Anne and Nick show to announce his relaunch. The

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

relaunched Tory party is the party that we have known for the past 16 years. It is the party that is prepared to say anything to get elected and do the opposite once given power.

Over the weekend, the Tory party chairman said that he backed a proposal for a rolling programme of tax cuts. He said that that was an excellent idea. A few hours later, the Secretary of State for Employment said that he was not so sure. Tonight, the Chancellor told the Tory Back Benchers to dampen their expectations as there was no guarantee that the Government could deliver.

The Government strategy for relaunching themselves has fallen apart after three days. The truth is that the Government are bankrupt of ideas and have no idea about what to do with this country. What we see now is the Government's desperate attempt to cling to power by holding out the vague hope that there might be something better some time in the future.

We have had 20 tax rises since 1992. The Government may say that their instinct is to cut taxes, but their action shows something different. The only tax cut that we have had in 1995 has been a Labour tax cut, when VAT on domestic fuel was cut from 17.5 per cent. to 8 per cent. That is not all—as my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East said, the Opposition have won a string of victories over the Government.

One victory seems to sum up what is wrong with the Government. We heard about it from the hon. Member for Bridlington and the Chief Secretary when they talked about executive share options. This afternoon, the Government were forced to amend a proposal in the Finance Bill to ensure that part-time directors could not exploit the provisions relating to executive share options. What the Government said was instructive. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury seemed to extol the idea that people should be given executive share options without reference to the company's success. That was in stark contrast to the Prime Minister who, at the outset of the Finance Bill, said that nothing could be done, it was nothing to do with the Government and all to do with private companies. But half way through the spring of this year, in the midst of the Finance Bill, the Prime Minister suddenly arrived in the Chamber and said that the granting of share options and huge salary increases in privatised utilities could not be justified. He executed a complete U-turn, which was followed by another one two days later, when it seemed to be suggested that nothing could be done about it.

The Government's attitude to the unwarranted and excessive executive pay options and excessive pay rises in privatised utilities seems to sum up all that is wrong with the Government's tax policy—a complete and utter lack of fairness. They show a complete disregard for fairness, which should be installed within any tax system. Their attitude towards share options and the unjustified pay increases taken by the bosses of privatised utilities sums up everything that is wrong with the Government's approach to tax and fairness.

We welcome good news when we see it, but we criticise the problems that the country still has—the lack of manufacturing capacity, the lack of industrial policy and, above all, the lack of confidence in the Government. We are unimpressed by the casual promises being made by the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and other members of the Conservative party. People do not trust the Tories on tax or anything else.

We will not oppose the Bill tonight because it contains one crucial benefit for the majority of people in this country: the reduction of VAT to 8 per cent. That is what people will remember about the 1994-95 Finance Bill. They will remember that the Labour party brought the one tax cut for those who face so much hardship and misery.

We shall continue to hound the Government for their failures. We welcome any good news, but the Government have no answers and no suggestions about what we should do in future. The country has lost confidence in the Government. Later this week and at the beginning of next month the electorate in England and Wales will show that they have no confidence in the Government. It will not be long before the electorate turn to a party that has the answers and enjoys the confidence of the people in this country.

8.39 pm

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friends who spoke in the brief Third Reading debate for reminding the House of the positive measures in the Budget and the positive good news. Underlying inflation is below 3 per cent.—something we have not seen since 1961 for such a sustained time—unemployment is falling by 1,000 a day and the current account is in broad balance. We have inward investment, jobs and an economy that is growing and strengthening.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) was unable to tell his local business men what was in the Budget to help businesses. One of the largest measures, involving some £600 million, was actually for businesses. It was the transitional relief scheme for the business rates—something that had escaped his memory.

The Opposition failed to remind us of some of their new clauses, such as the one which, for the first time, would have provided tax breaks for tax planning. It had all the accountants in the country with their mouths watering. It proposed for the first time tax concessions for tax avoidance.

We heard nothing from the Opposition about this week's reductions in national insurance contributions—something that they overlooked—in addition to cuts in the previous Budget. The cost of hiring someone on half average earnings has fallen from £710 a year in 1993-94 to £610 in 1995-96.

The Opposition mentioned tax increases, but, for an average household, this week's tax increase amounts to no more than the price of a lottery ticket and is dwarfed by the £5 a week by which we expect households to be better off on average after tax and inflation.

There is, indeed, one party that has not come clean with this country on its tax policy—the Labour party. For five months, when the Finance Bill was in Committee, we asked Labour Members time and again basic economic questions. Will they spend more or less than a Conservative Government? Will they tax more or less than a Conservative Government? Will they borrow more or less than a Conservative Government? That is when the sound bites end and the air bites begin. Labour Members have no right to be taken seriously as a party until they come clean on their economic policy.

Nothing has looked so contrived as the Labour party's recent claim to be the taxpayer's friend. Could one imagine Labour Back Benchers piling into a room on the Committee corridor and giving the shadow Chancellor advice on how to reduce public expenditure and the burden of taxation? If they offered such advice, could one imagine him taking it?

The contrast between the advice that the Opposition receive and the advice that the Government receive could not be more stark. I note from today's *Daily Mail* that, whereas my colleagues talk to the Chancellor about reducing taxation, union leaders have been stridently reminding the Leader of the Opposition of their expectations. Not only do Labour Members portray themselves unconvincingly as the taxpayer's friends; they have also sought to represent themselves as standing up for the values of middle England. If they want to play political poker with the Conservative party on traditional values, we will take them on. When they have run out of chips, the Conservative party will have plenty left.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on motions 3, 4 and 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

Building Societies

That the draft Building Societies (Commercial Assets) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th March, be approved.

Charities

That the draft Charities (Trustee Investments Act 1961) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.

Family Law

That the draft Child Support and Income Support (Amendment) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 16th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Infant Formula

8.43 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I beg to move,

That the Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 77), dated 15th January 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th January, be revoked.

When the new regulations that we are discussing came in, all looked well, briefly. It seemed that at last we had law controlling the advertising of infant formula milks, but it soon became clear that the law was the weakest just where it was most needed. The new regulations allow the advertising of infant formula feeds in the health service, reversing a major part of the World Health Organisation code to which the Government signed up.

The new regulations allow advertising in maternity wards, clinics, doctors' surgeries and all the pre and post-natal wards, just where new mothers are most vulnerable, under the greatest pressure and in need of impartial information, advice and support, and just where the advertisers most want to get at them.

When the Government were consulting on the new regulations, they received 231 letters, 216 calling for a ban on advertising baby milk in the health service, from organisations including the British Medical Association, UNICEF, the Royal College of Midwives, the British Paediatric Association and all 48 of the relevant professional organisations. The only people supporting advertising of baby milk in the health service were the formula manufacturers themselves and—surprise, surprise—advertising agencies. To whom did the Government listen? The formula feed manufacturers.

Save the Children put the case clearly in a letter on 17 February, saying that it is

> "very disturbing to know that the views of all health, consumer and development bodies have been discounted and only the views of the baby food industry have been taken into account".

Even the baby food manufacturers acknowledge that breast is best. Some may say that I am a living example of that, having been breast-fed. Of course, I may have been a foot shorter and not quite as intelligent had I not been breast-fed.

Breast-feeding develops a better brain, providing vital materials for the links within the brain. Gastroenteritis is 10 times more likely among bottle-fed babies. Infant gastroenteritis costs the national health service £18 million a year. Breast-feeding is acknowledged to protect against respiratory infections, glue ear and diabetes.

The high sugar levels in bottle feeds are one of the major causes of tooth decay in babies, leading to 21,000 cases of dental work on infants and the massive amount of pain and suffering that that causes, yet the new law will allow bottle feeds to be described as "sucrose-free". Some research, still in its early stages, shows that breast-feeding also protects the mother from breast and ovarian cancer.

Humans as a species have been around for at least 4 million years. It stands to reason that the milk produced by our species for our species is best developed for our needs and we should do everything to promote breast-feeding.

Only last week I spoke to representatives of the industry, who told me that advertising is all about promoting one brand over another, gaining market share

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

and giving information to mothers. However, advertising is first and foremost about selling a product and often companies will sell their product using emotive and pressurising messages. One would have to be naive to believe that baby milk advertising is about giving impartial information to mothers.

We are not anti-choice on the issue; mothers have a right to choose whether to breast-feed. Some mothers are unable to breast-feed for a whole range of reasons and they need to be told which is the best infant formula for their babies by impartial professionals providing correct information, but giving advertisers the run of the health service is not the way to do it.

I am certain that we shall hear from the Government that mothers are grown-up adults who can make up their own minds on whether to believe the advertiser. I am even more certain that it has been a long time since any Conservative Members were in a maternity ward—*[Interruption.]* Of course, I am sure that that does not apply to the Minister, who looks far too young to be a mother.

I have here a so-called information booklet produced by the infant formula industry. It is supposed to be about breast-feeding. There are two huge centrefolds of babies, one with the caption:

> "I hope they give me Cow and Gate".

That is in the middle of a document about breast-feeding.

Another caption is even more disgraceful. It states:

> "Did you know it makes a baby's brain grow?",

referring not to breast milk, but to Cow and Gate. Bearing in mind the latest information on early links within the human brain developed by breast-feeding, that must be an exaggeration, to say the least.

All the images and words send out the message: breast is best, but bottle is just as good, which is simply not true. It is what the Government believe is the best way to give new mothers information about baby nutrition.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is not the hon. Gentleman slightly startled that there is currently one female on the Opposition Benches and four females on the Government Benches?

Mr. Jones: I am not in the least bit startled; it gives me something nice to look at—but I suppose that that is a sexist remark.

All the 48 professional bodies involved in the debate believe that advertising of breast milk substitutes should be banned. Mothers have a right to impartial information, which is currently being denied to them. United Kingdom baby food manufacturers admit to spending at least £4 million to £5 million on straight brand advertising. They also imply that they spend money on sponsorship, which we suspect totals at least £8 million. The Government cannot hope to match that figure, and they spend about £130,000 in supporting breast-feeding.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Really?

Mr. Jones: Yes, really.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman said that Conservative Members have not been in a maternity ward recently. I have not been in a maternity ward as a customer, but I regularly visit the maternity ward in my constituency at Christmas. Our hospital encourages women to breast-feed.

Mr. Jones: I certainly hope that it does. However, it also distributes booklets such as the one to which I referred earlier, which has "Cow and Gate" written all over it, and it distributes advertisements such as the one that I have just shown the hon. Lady.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hospitals in the hon. Gentleman's constituency may, but mine does not.

Mr. Jones: I am very pleased to hear that, but I would like to know how many women in the hospital in the hon. Lady's constituency breast-feed. Perhaps she might ask them that during her next Christmas visit; she may get a shock if she does. Perhaps she would like to give me the figures now.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I ask every woman in the ward whether they propose to continue to breast-feed, and three out of four say that they do.

Mr. Jones: I am very pleased to hear it, but that is not the kind of mainstream information that we have received and that the Government push out. I would like the hon. Lady to visit women in clinics and to ask them whether they are still breast-feeding. I think that she will find that they are not, because that is the current trend.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): My daughter-in-law is currently breast-feeding. Are there not statistics available which show the percentage of mothers in the United Kingdom who are breast-feeding? They reveal that the number is declining and that fewer women are breast-feeding now than were breast-feeding in 1980. Only 53 per cent. of mothers breast-feed their babies at age one week. That is only one statistic and there are more available. The evidence is quite clear.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He is quite correct and I shall refer to those figures in a moment. The fact is that many women would like to breast-feed—no doubt they are among the women whom the hon. Lady meets in her Christmas visits to the hospital. However, an awful lot of women do not continue to breast-feed and one of the reasons is the flood of advertising to which they are subjected.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): What?

Mr. Jones: The Parliamentary Secretary knows that the lowest estimate of spending by baby food manufacturers is £6 per baby. The Government spend only 16p per baby—that is hardly a level playing field. Because of the Government's shabby funding on promoting breast-feeding, for the first time UNICEF was forced to spend money in a western developed nation—in Britain in 1994. The Royal College of Midwives has been forced to produce a booklet that explains simply and fairly the nutritional advantages of mothers' milk over formula, because the Government have not done so.

The World Health Organisation code, which the Government supported and signed in 1991 and for which they reaffirmed their support in 1994, has been completely ignored. Allowing advertising in the health service represents a huge climbdown, and the Government should admit it. In another place, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Baroness Cumberlege, stated that the new regulations go beyond the minimum directive requirements of our WHO obligations. The WHO international code on marketing breast milk substitutes states very clearly in article 6.2:

> "No facility of a health care system should be used for the purpose of promoting infant formula or other products within the scope of this code".

The Government regulations allow advertising in

> "publications specialising in baby care and distributed to women through the health care system".

It is clear that the Government no longer support the World Health Organisation code.

In a letter of 27 February 1995, the General Synod of the Church of England said:

> "the new regulations . . . run counter to the cited articles of the International code".

When speaking on the subject on 22 March, the Parliamentary Secretary had to choose her words very carefully in order to continue the sham that the Government are still following the WHO regulations. She said that the Government now only "support the aim" of the code. We hope to hear better things than the hon. Lady's admittedly uncharacteristic bluster during the previous debate on this subject.

The code was never meant to be a list into which people could dip and take out whatever suited them at the time. It is a full and comprehensive safeguard, which was agreed to globally. Some 11 nations use the entire code as national law and five European countries have banned advertising of breast milk substitutes—that is, France—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has the hon. Gentleman read regulation 7? It states:

> "No person shall export from Great Britain to a third country an infant formula which is not—
>
> (a) labelled in an appropriate language . . .
>
> (b) labelled in such a way as to avoid any risk of confusion between an infant formula and a follow-on formula."

Some years ago, a bunch of clergymen asked me to allow a lot of powdered milk to be distributed free in third-world countries. I asked them whether they wanted to kill all the children, because the mothers would probably have used contaminated water and made extra-strong formula. The regulations are quite clear and they must be appended to every export from this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I have been rather tolerant with the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). It is a short debate of only an hour and a half and many hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye. Long interventions of that nature do not help.

Mr. Jones: I am not sure that the collective noun for clergymen is a "bunch"; possibly it is these days. I think that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) is slightly confused; we are discussing the effect of the international code in this country and not in foreign countries.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I will not give way again. We have a lot to get through.

I am sure that later in the debate other hon. Members will refer to independent surveys that have shown that mothers do not want to see a ban on advertising. In fact, I think that the Parliamentary Secretary may have referred to them in the debate on 22 March. That so-called independent bit of research has been undertaken on behalf of Bounty Services Ltd., one of the major distributors of baby milk advertising to mothers in the health service. That is hardly an independent source. I have read the frankly loaded questions in its "independent" questionnaire, and I could have easily written some questions of my own that would reverse the figures that will be cited later this evening. The first question in that independent research states:

> "There has been a voluntary code in the UK for some years now for the purpose of ensuring that infant formula milk advertising does not cause a reduction in breastfeeding. I believe that this voluntary code should be retained and not replaced with new laws
> agree disagree neither".

If one were to relate the truth of the matter—that there has been a voluntary code in the UK for some years now, which has not ensured that infant formula milk advertising does not cause a reduction in breast-feeding—I believe that the result would be completely different. It would be far better to ask women whether they would prefer a truly independent information package on breast-feeding. Then we would get overwhelming support from women.

We may also hear later how women give up breast-feeding because of the pressure of going back to work, which is simply not true. Most women stop breast-feeding in the first few weeks, long before going back to work. They stop because of the huge pressure from advertising and for social reasons. The truth is simple. Breast is by far the best. The Government are paying lip service to promoting breast-feeding while bottling out because of the demands of the baby milk manufacturers.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Ho, ho, ho.

Mr. Jones: I am glad that the hon. and learned Gentleman is awake.

The Government are more than willing to ignore the advice of all the relevant professional bodies, to put at risk the health of the nation and to increase the burden on the taxpayer simply to follow the now tired and discredited dogma that the free market always knows best. Where do those free market profits go? They go to Milupa in Germany; to Heinz and Wyeth, both of which are American companies, and own Farley's and SMA; and to Nutricia in Holland, which owns the good old English-sounding Cow and Gate.

The Government have made a serious mistake with the regulations. They should change their mind and ban baby milk and infant formula advertising as soon as possible, wherever it is promoted.

Let me leave the House with an analogy. Let us suppose that four foreign companies had developed a children's snack food, for example, which was pretty nutritious, providing most nutrients, but which caused increasing gastroenteritis and slowed brain development. Suppose that it was promoted through the education system to the tune of £6-worth of advertising per child. There would be uproar. If on top of that, once the food was tasted, the children could eat nothing else for six months, it would be a national scandal of enormous proportions. What we have in baby milk versus breast

[Mr. Jones]

milk is not too dissimilar to the example that I have just described. Baby milk should be available but should not be advertised. The regulations allow that and should be changed.

8.59 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): I should make it clear from the outset that I agree with everything that was said by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) about breast-feeding being the best means of nurturing a baby. I do not think that any of us dispute that fact. He raised many points about the immunity of the child, its resistance to gastroenteritis, and so on. We have no problem with that at all and entirely agree with him. The hon. Gentleman admitted that he was a breast-fed baby, whereas in the Adjournment debate on 22 March the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) confessed to being a Cow and Gate baby. When it comes to assessing in mature adulthood their intelligence or the way in which they have thrived, I cannot see very much difference between them.

Mr. Alex Carlile: That is an outrage.

Mrs. Browning: I apologise if the hon. and learned Gentleman is outraged. I am simply forming perhaps a feminine opinion of these things. We have heard a lot of male opinion in the debate so far.

The promotion of breast-feeding and the support for it is based on medical advice that is quite unequivocal about the advantages of breast-feeding, both for the mother and for the baby. Government policies have consistently supported breast-feeding, and that is reflected in the steps that we have taken, and are still taking, to promote it. I will cite two examples, but there are more. In 1988, the Government set up the very successful joint breast-feeding initiative, as a pilot project to assess new ways of supporting mothers who choose to breast-feed. In 1992, the national breast-feeding working group was set up and fresh guidance on breast-feeding based on its good work is soon to be issued to the NHS.

There is, then, no doubt about the Government's commitment to breast-feeding, and we believe that the final form of the regulations that we are debating today is compatible with our commitment to breast-feeding. Too often, the criticism that I have heard of the Government is that the regulations have failed to implement the World Health Organisation code. The hon. Gentleman mentioned it today. It was also mentioned in the Adjournment debate on 22 March, and I make no apology for repeating what I said then.

It is not the terms of the WHO code that the Government have to implement in their detailed regulations, but the terms of the European Community legislation. Those who have criticised the Government for not implementing the code also omit one important point. The code states, as does the EC directive—this is critically important, bearing in mind the criticisms that the hon. Gentleman has made—that Governments should implement measures in a way that is appropriate to their social and legislative framework. That is what we have done.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): That may be so, but is not this country free to improve on the regulations so that they are more in line with the WHO code of practice?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady will appreciate that what the Government have done is to put into legislation something that has worked as a voluntary code of practice for many years.

I will now deal with specific points about advertising. Long before the draft regulations were issued for consultation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced, in answer to a parliamentary question:

> "The Government are committed to ensuring that the existing restrictions on marketing are, at least, maintained."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. *680*.]

Bearing in mind that commitment, the Government thought it only right at least to explore other options in the draft regulations. Therefore, we initially proposed that the controls on advertising should be quite far reaching, allowing advertisements to appear only in magazines where the intended readers would be professionals involved in maternal and baby care. It was therefore no surprise that the proposed controls generated a considerable number of responses to the consultation, both from the general public and from hon. Members.

In the main, reaction was split between two opposing views. One view, while supporting the proposed advertising controls, held that the Government should go even further and use the directive's option to its full extent, banning all advertising of infant formula. The opposing view was that we should not use that option at all, but should stick to the minimum controls required by the directive. The latter view drew attention to the Government's policy of deregulation and the thrust of my Ministry's legislative programme: to introduce regulation only when there is no viable alternative.

There was also a strong feeling, which I share, that such strict controls would impinge on a mother's right of access to information. Following the Adjournment debate of 22 March, my robust defence of women's right not only to choose but to make informed choices is well documented. Mothers who are not able to breast-feed, or who choose not to do so, have a right to decide for themselves what is best for them and their children. Who are we to say that a mother cannot make a judgment for herself? But she should also have enough information to enable her to make an informed decision.

Industry takes the view—and many may agree—that advertising of infant formula is not about persuading mothers not to breast-feed but to bottle-feed their babies instead; it is about giving mothers who have already decided to bottle-feed information about the infant formulae available, so that they can make their own choices in regard to the products that they wish to select. While not denying the validity of such views, however, the Government are—as I have said—fully committed to supporting the promotion of breast-feeding. We were therefore very conscious of the fact that to adopt only the minimum in the directive would mean controls which were less restrictive than those already in place under the voluntary agreement with the industry. That, we decided, did not provide the support that the promotion of breast-feeding deserves.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): What is the advantage of the directive? Would it not be far better for us simply to make up our own minds?

Mrs. Browning: We are simply putting into law rules that we have had until now in the form of a voluntary code. We are not adding to regulation, or detracting from it; we are simply putting into law something which has worked well, and has been agreed voluntarily for many years.

It was only after careful consideration that we concluded that the option which best served the dual purpose to which I have referred was that which has operated voluntarily and, indeed, successfully in this country since 1983. That means that advertising of infant formula will be allowed to continue—

Mr. Martyn Jones: By what definition has the voluntary code worked? If the Minister is going by breast-feeding rates, let me point out that they have fallen slightly since the voluntary code has been in operation.

Mrs. Browning: I believe that the statistics have remained static during the operation of the code. A telling statistic, however, is the fact that in the five years before the introduction of the code—1975 to 1980—breast-feeding increased by 15 per cent.

Mr. Jones: Is the Minister blaming the Labour Government?

Mrs. Browning: No, I am not. It must be recognised that there is a range of influences on a mother's choice between breast-feeding and bottle-feeding. We want to encourage breast-feeding, but it is not just a matter of whether the mother sees an advertisement or not; I am sure that hon. Members appreciate that many other factors are involved in the decision.

Such methods are surely the best way to ensure that mothers who choose not to breast-feed make that choice in informed circumstances with professional advice readily available to them. That does not mean, as some would argue, that manufacturers will have even more freedom to advertise. In the past week or two, I have been concerned about some of the lobbying on the issue. It seems to imply that a free-for-all exists out there when in fact the reverse is the case.

A number of restrictions apply. Local health care units will continue to make their own judgment about baby care publications—containing permitted advertisements—which they wish to accept for distribution by them, or to be available in places such as waiting rooms of antenatal clinics. They will be screened by health professionals first. The wording of the regulation also specifies that such publications must be

"distributed only through the health care system".

It seems only sensible that professionals in the health care system have some controls over the publications distributed through that system.

Much has been made of the fact that, during the consultation, health professional bodies expressed support for a total ban on advertising, but the results of at least one independent survey, to which the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West referred, seem to suggest that some of their members think differently. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that a difference of view exists between the bodies which have made representations and the many thousands of individuals at the sharp end of health care.

The survey suggests that a ban on advertising infant formula is opposed by the majority of health care professionals involved in the care of mothers and babies. Surveys have shown that a wide range of complex social, cultural and psychological factors influence a woman's choice on how to feed a baby.

The people behind tonight's debate would have us believe that the restrained and limited amount of advertising that is permitted under the new regulations has an immense influence on mothers, and overrides all other considerations. I, for one, consider that to be nonsense and an insult to the intelligence of women, and especially of health care professionals, who will be able to monitor and vet the material.

9.11 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Last year I visited the special baby unit at Birmingham maternity hospital, which looks after premature babies. All are fed on human milk, mostly provided by the babies' mothers. Happily, there is a good record of survival, and most go home after their period in intensive care. However, one piece of information that I gleaned from my visit worried me: despite the fact that mothers had been able to express enough milk to meet their babies' needs while in intensive care, most went on to bottle-feed their babies once they had taken them home. Why should that be so, when no one doubts that all mothers want to do the best for their babies, which must mean feeding them in the way nature intended?

As we have heard, clear scientific evidence exists that not only is breast milk best, but the use of infant formulae is damaging to both babies' and mothers' health. Compared with breast-fed babies, bottle-fed infants are twice as likely to suffer from respiratory infections, and five to 10 times as likely to suffer gastroenteritis. Good evidence also exists to suggest that breast-fed babies turn out to be more intelligent—*[Interruption.]*—why that produces such humour, I do not know—and that breast-feeding reduces the risk of maternal breast cancer.

It is rare for a mother to be physiologically unable to breast-feed; yet it is sad fact that in Britain only about 60 per cent. of mothers start to breast-feed their babies and, worse still, after one week less than half of them continue, compared with Norway, for instance, where more than 90 per cent. of infants are still being breast-fed at three to four months.

I can testify from my own experience that breast-feeding is cheap, easy and convenient. Milk is available any time, day or night, at the correct temperature, avoiding the laborious processes involved in sterilising bottles and in infant formulae preparation. It is also enjoyable for both mother and baby, and best for the restoration of the mother's figure to its pre-pregnant state. With all those advantages, everything seems to be going for breast-feeding. Is it not strange, therefore, that so few women apparently choose to breast-feed? *[Interruption.]* I do not know why that creates such humour on the Conservative Benches.

[Dr. Lynne Jones]

The Minister alluded to a number of factors which affect a woman's choice. I agree that other factors exist apart from advertising. Of course, there is too much unsuitable promotion of the role of the female breast as a secondary sexual organ, which makes it difficult for many women and their partners to relate to the breast in its other important role. I do not deny that women's breasts can and do give considerable pleasure to both sexes, but is it not a reflection of our society's strange attitudes that the naked female breast, portrayed in a manner which objectifies women as commodities for male gratification, is regarded as an acceptable daily sight on the top and bottom shelves of our local newsagent's shop whereas a mother who discreetly breast-feeds her baby in a public place is frowned upon and made to feel that she is somehow behaving indecently?

Sir Teddy Taylor: Hon. Members should appreciate the content of the regulations. The hon. Lady speaks with great sincerity, but is she aware that if she or any of her colleagues sought to publish an article in a newspaper which did not state the benefits and superiority of breast-feeding they could be subject to a substantial fine under regulation 22? I am sure that everyone, like me, is interested in what she has to say. Does she not regard this as the most monstrous example of silly bureaucracy that the European Community has ever produced?

Dr. Jones: I think that anyone interested in this debate will regard that issue as a red herring when it comes to considering the needs of women and babies and the need to encourage breast-feeding. In fact, the EC directive gives considerable freedom to this country as to how to regulate such matters and, of course, the Government have already made clear their support for the World Health Organisation's code, which is perhaps more stringent.

I was referring to the attitudes which persist in society. I believe that they have a great deal to do with what amounts to considerable consumer resistance to breast-feeding, even though the Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I apologise to the hon. Lady and would be most grateful if hon. Members on the fourth Bench would hold their conversations elsewhere.

Dr. Jones: I was talking about the consumer resistance which persists despite all the expert opinion to the effect that breast-feeding is the ideal method for feeding babies. It is in this respect that advertising is of such crucial importance, as has long been recognised in the World Health Organisation code, which stipulates that there should be no advertising to the general public of formula or other products within the scope of the code. It is a much stricter code than that in the EC directive.

The code allows dissemination of information to health care professionals but, unfortunately, in the voluntary code operated by baby milk manufacturers since the World Health Organisation code was established, it has been interpreted as allowing the advertising of infant formula milks to mothers in publications distributed through the health care system. That is just at the point when mothers are most vulnerable, and it goes completely against the WHO code which states that no facilities in the health care system should be used for the purposes of promoting infant formula.

Baby milk companies spend anything between £5 million and £12 million a year on advertising—saturating hospitals and clinics with booklets, videos and leaflets, which pretend to promote breast-feeding while using subtle messages to undermine it. They always include the statement that breast-feeding is best, but the very juxtaposition of this information with the brand name implies that the particular product is just as good. A poster that I saw recently in my GP's surgery illustrates that point well. The logo of the company responsible for the poster was prominently displayed next to a picture of a mother breast-feeding her baby.

Interestingly, the information given by the baby milk manufacturers fails to identify the actual ingredients of the formula: cows' milk which may be supplemented with beef fat, maize oil, chicken egg or large amounts of glucose syrup. The information given is selective and creates the impression that breast-feeding is difficult and that artificial feeding presents few risks. These conflicting messages undermine women's confidence in their ability to feed their own babies.

In December 1993, it seemed that this would soon become a thing of the past when the Government, as we have heard, issued draft proposals for the implementation of the EC directive which would have banned baby pictures from tins, the advertising of infant formula to the public and the issue of free samples. The role of ensuring that all mothers received unbiased information and were given the help and advice that they needed in order to make informed choices would have been the responsibility of trained health care workers, not commercial marketing. Unfortunately, despite support for the proposals from major health bodies such as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Midwives, as well as the National Consumer Council and, in fact, some calls to strengthen the proposals to include follow-on formulae, the Government decided to put commercial interests before infant health.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Is it not clear from the directive that advertisers are required to indicate that breast-feeding is best?

Dr. Jones: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman was not here when I was talking about the nature of the advertising and the way in which that slogan is used to undermine breast-feeding rather than to promote it.

If Britain is to get anywhere near achieving the Government's targets on breast-feeding in the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", we shall have to learn from the experience of countries such as Norway. There is no promotion of baby milk in Norway. Since 1970, when breast-feeding rates there were similar to those in the United Kingdom—[Hon. Members: "He is going now."] That shows the interest that the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) has in the matter.

Since 1970, the Norwegian Government have had a strong policy of support for breast-feeding. All mothers have access to a mother-support network. That is to be compared with the attitude of our Government: in response to a question that I tabled in July asking what advice is given to employers about arrangements for encouraging mothers to continue breast-feeding after their return to work, the Government—both the Department of Health and the Department of Employment—unashamedly answered, "None."

If the Government are really serious in their stated support for breast-feeding, they should properly implement the WHO code and do more to promote breast-feeding through the health care system. Spending 20p per mother—compared with at least £6 per mother spent by baby milk manufacturers to promote their £119 million business—simply is not good enough.

9.21 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I am delighted to make what I hope will be a brief speech. I listened very carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) but I did not feel that his heart was in it. Having prayed against the regulations, it is ironic that only one Labour Back Bencher is here to support her Front-Bench team. There probably would have been more debate if the regulations had been debated upstairs.

The speeches of the hon. Members for Clwyd, South-West and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) contained a true sign of some of the thoughts of new Labour and of the Labour party. We have heard that they are anti-business, that they are anti-choice, and in condemning the fact that some European companies own companies here in Britain, we have seen that they are anti-EC investment in this country. I shall not follow the hon. Member for Selly Oak down the path that she took. I found some of what she said quite incomprehensible.

I am delighted to declare a constituency interest as Cow and Gate Ltd. has its headquarters in Trowbridge in my constituency—*[Interruption.]* I am proud to do so. The hon. Member for Selly Oak, in an intervention in the Adjournment debate of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) a couple of weeks ago, seemed in some way to question the fact that it was right for me to have introduced an Adjournment debate a year ago when I had a constituency interest in Cow and Gate. I should have thought that that is exactly what we are here for in the House of Commons—to represent businesses in our constituencies and to speak up for them and their interests. On this occasion, happily, the interests of my constituents and my own beliefs coincide, which of course does not always happen.

Cow and Gate has a long tradition, as my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out. I am happy to admit to being a Cow and Gate baby, as, indeed, did the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery in his Adjournment debate. The House may remember that the Minister who responded to the Adjournment debate that I secured a year ago was my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), my hon. Friend the Minister's predecessor. We had some trouble in ascertaining that evening whether he was a Cow and Gate baby. However, I notice that *The Daily Telegraph* today reports that he is due to start a crash diet, and I am sure that Cow and Gate will be able to come up with a suitable recipe to help him.

As the House knows, since 1983 the rules governing the marketing of baby milk have been enshrined in the voluntary code of practice, which will in effect be formalised this evening by the regulations. However, as the Minister has said, in some respects the EC directive being implemented does not go as far as the voluntary code, and baby milk advertising will continue to be allowed, but only in publications distributed through health care professionals and in trade journals.

For the past 12 years the voluntary code has been monitored by an independent committee, most of whose members are wholly independent from the infant formula industry. The committee considers complaints against the code, which historically and traditionally have come from pressure groups, not from the general public. Few of those complaints have been upheld.

Baby milk manufacturers have taken independent steps over the years to control their marketing—the most obvious being the banning of free and subsidised supplies to the health service some years ago.

Both inside and outside the House, much has been made of the World Health Organisation code, which, as the Minister has confirmed, Britain fully supports. The code rightly seeks to promote breast-feeding as the ideal means of feeding babies, but we all know that we do not live in an ideal world. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Selly Oak says, many mothers simply cannot breast-feed, or do not wish to do so. Ironically, it is often the infant formula manufacturers that provide most of the information that is available about breast-feeding.

Parents can obtain information about breast-feeding and all the other forms of baby feeding from a variety of sources—from health professionals, from the Government, from specialist organisations and, of course, from the manufacturers. All those sources have an important role to play, and the manufacturers provide a service to health professionals and to mothers through the distribution of leaflets and through sponsorship, training and advertising, as well as by other means.

Manufacturers promote not only breast-feeding but their own products. In all, the industry hands out about 5 million leaflets a year to about 800,000 mothers. Had the draft regulations, which I opposed this time last year, been accepted, that source of information for mothers would have disappeared altogether.

Since 1983, when the voluntary code was introduced—here I disagree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and with other Opposition Members—the breast-feeding rate has remained static, at about 65 per cent. How, then, can it possibly be said that the maintenance of the status quo has resulted in a drop in breast-feeding rates?

The difference between the new EC directive being implemented tonight and the WHO code of conduct is, of course, that by law the Government have to implement the directive. At a time when all Departments, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, were seeking to deregulate, we were faced with the prospect of the United Kingdom implementing a directive and going even further.

Given my past interest, I am pleased that the Government have pulled back from that intention. As has already been said, article 8 of the EC directive, which deals with advertising, says:

> "advertising of infant formulae shall be restricted to publications specialising in baby care and scientific publications. Member states may further restrict or prohibit such advertising."

Article 8 thus allows for advertising not only in specialised baby care publications, such as Bounty books distributed within the health care system, but in baby care

[Mr. David Faber]

and parenting magazines, such as *Mother and Baby* and *Practical Parenting*, which are readily available on general sale in newsagents.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The hon. Gentleman has correctly said that member states may further restrict or prohibit such advertising. Does he not accept that if we implemented the WHO code that is exactly what we would be doing? Does he support the code or not?

Mr. Faber: As the Minister has said, we as a Government support the code. However, I have said precisely why I support what the Government are doing: I do not wish to see over-regulation, least of all in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I was about to draw the attention of the House to regulation 17, which says that

> "No person shall publish or display any advertisement for an infant formula . . . except . . . in a publication specialising in baby care and distributed only through the health care system".

That clearly prohibits the more general advertising that would have been allowed under article 8, which other hon. Members—some of whom may feel that the regulations are too restrictive—and manufacturers would oppose.

Finally, a great deal has been made of the organisations that are opposed to advertising baby milk and of the representations that they have made to my hon. Friend the Minister. I disagree with the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West, who questions the validity of an independent survey carried out for Bounty. He is right that Bounty may not be independent, but the company which carried out the survey—Market Trends—is independent. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Gentleman may laugh, but is he saying that when MORI carries out a poll for the Labour party he would question whether MORI was an independent polling organisation because the Labour party had an interest in the result of that poll? He could not possibly say that.

The independent survey was quite categoric, and showed that 93 per cent. of bottle-feeding mothers opposed a ban on advertising, as did 74 per cent. of breast-feeding mothers, 68 per cent. of midwives and 64 per cent. of health visitors. As has been pointed out, the latter two groups are made up of professionals who would vet whether such material was suitable for distribution. Those experienced professionals, in my opinion, should be listened to.

It has been alleged that the industry spends some £12 million a year on promotional materials, but I do not believe that. I know what Cow and Gate's market share is, and how much it has spent to support that market share. Either it is infinitely more competitive than its competitors, or the true figure is much lower—perhaps less than half that figure. Of that expenditure, more than 40 per cent. goes on educational material.

The debate has been about freedom of choice and the right of a mother—who, whatever others may think, knows best—to choose what to do for her baby. The Government rightly acknowledge that breast is best, and we will do everything possible to promote that. Bottle-feeding is not dangerous—it is a matter of the degree of goodness for the baby. While cigarettes can still be freely advertised it would be ludicrous to ban the limited advertising of a legal and healthy product such as baby milk.

It would be insulting to mothers and to their intelligence to say that they cannot make a rational decision. *[Interruption.]* I hope that Opposition Front Benchers are paying attention.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I am not intervening just to prove that I am paying attention; I should like to make two points. First, my speech was not in any way diffident—this is an important issue, and I am very sincere about what I am saying—and, secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that baby milk is not harmful. Does he not consider a 10-times higher risk of gastroenteritis to be harmful?

Mr. Faber: Anyone would prefer babies not to have gastroenteritis, but I go back to what I said a few minutes ago. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Selly Oak said, many mothers are physically unable to breast-feed, and many do not do so for other reasons. It would be quite wrong to deprive them of the right to choose and the information that is available.

Since her well-deserved promotion, my hon. Friend the Minister has been an eloquent proponent of minimum interference mixed with plenty of good common sense. That is what we have in the regulations this evening, and I commend her on laying them before the House.

9.32 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) has represented his constituency interest well tonight. One could almost hear echoes of his distinguished grandfather as he told us that babies, apparently, have never had it so good.

I was lucky enough to have an Adjournment debate on 22 March to which the Minister replied. During that debate, I told the House that I was a Cow and Gate baby. Incidentally, I was born on the same day as the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who ate for both of us. The Minister told us during that debate that she was a mother-in-law. During her percussive reply to the debate—in which she showed a degree of petulance which, I suspect, she would not display in her relations with her offspring and offspring-in-law—she seemed to claim that those of us who criticised the Government for the regulations were somehow treating women as unintelligent creatures who were not able to make their own choice.

I too have a mother-in-law. Like the Minister, she is extremely charming, highly intelligent and very experienced and I have nothing but praise for her, even after more than a quarter of a century. I am afraid that, as an intelligent and wise woman, she would not agree for one moment with the hon. Lady.

As the hon. Member for Westbury said, in this country we have a breast-feeding rate of about 65 per cent. That is a great deal less than in some other countries, which have been much more successful in persuading mothers to breast-feed. I hope that the Minister will agree that the success of those countries is to be commended and that one should try to learn from it and to find out why, for example, there is a much higher breast-feeding rate in Norway. Is it because women in Norway are better at exercising choice? I doubt it. It is far more likely to be because the Norwegian Government have taken much more seriously the World Health Organisation's code and have enacted it.

During this debate, an unseemly war of words broke out on the fourth row back below the Gangway on the Government side between the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who were separated only by a nervous-looking referee. For this to be an argument about European regulations begs the question as to what level of action the Government should take.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) is right—the Government should be doing more to enable women to make that informed choice, which I, like the Minister, believe they can make. Unlike the Minister, however, I suspect that they are being influenced in the opposite direction.

Mrs. Browning: I do not want to hold up the hon. and learned Gentleman, but he will recall that in his Adjournment debate I asked him whether he felt that he knew better than the mothers of this country—it is on the record—and he replied, "I do."

Mr. Carlile: It is clear from the evidence that many mothers in this country who might be persuaded to breast-feed are being persuaded to bottle-feed. That is the issue. The answer that I gave to that question is reflected in the answers that are given by people who are much more expert than me.

I do not want to take up much time, as I had my opportunity to speak on the issue on 22 March and I will certainly not repeat what I said then, but may I remind the Minister that there have been extremely telling articles in a number of distinguished medical journals, which demonstrated through proper scientific protocols that breast-feeding gives remarkably important protection to babies? They are journals such as *The Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal*, the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, the "Journal of Paediatrics", the "American Journal of Epidemiology", the "New Zealand Medical Journal", the *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* and—probably the most distinguished medical journal of all—*The New England Journal of Medicine*.

The article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* was published in 1988 and written by Mayer and others. It demonstrated that the risk of the onset of diabetes is significantly reduced by breast-feeding. Diabetes is just one of the conditions to which the journals refer—others are breast cancer, respiratory infections and sudden infant death syndrome. Surely the Government should have done more than the minimum to reduce the incidence of that sort of damage and of those conditions.

Will the Minister answer one question that she did not answer in the Adjournment debate? Having drafted regulations that were considerably tougher than those that have been introduced, why did the Government change and dilute them? Although it would be cynical, the obvious answer—I am content to set it aside if she can give us a better answer—is that the Government were giving way to a large and significant lobby from the food industry.

The minimal regulations that have been introduced have taken matters not a jot further. The Minister has told us frankly that the regulations that were introduced simply put the voluntary scheme into statutory form. Is she proud of taking a step that is barely a step? Surely she should have gone further and taken some steps at least to the extent of the original draft regulations, which still fall short of the World Health Organisation code. That might have ensured better health for more babies through better health education for more young mothers.

9.39 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I believe that breast-feeding is best, but, like other hon. Members, I know that it is not always possible for mothers to breast-feed in what is a less than perfect world. I strongly support what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), said in her sensible and down-to-earth speech. I oppose the motion because it would place an unreasonable restriction on the advertising of infant and follow-on formulae. It would restrict the freedom of choice to which every mother is entitled.

I declare that I have a constituency interest inasmuch as Milupa Ltd. is located in my constituency, but I have no personal or financial interest in that firm. It is simply an important local employer in Uxbridge.

We heard this evening that the proportion of mothers who breast-feed to mothers who bottle-feed has hardly changed in the past 10 to 15 years, despite changes in marketing practice. No Government or commercial evidence exists to suggest that advertising has a significant influence on a mother's choice of feeding method. I know that a number of factors affect a mother's choice, as I have been married for 37 years and have a family of my own; I have therefore been able to observe some of those matters at first hand.

First, it is matter of personal preference. Many women prefer to feed their babies with infant formula rather than breast-feed them. Family and social pressures may cause a woman to make that decision. The advice that many women receive from health professionals may also lead to that decision.

The most recent Government survey gave the reasons why mothers choose not to breast-feed. First, 39 per cent. of all mothers and 47 per cent. of all first-time mothers said that they chose to use infant formula—bottle-feed—because it allowed other people to feed the baby. Secondly, there is the well-known and obviously acceptable reason that a mother has insufficient natural milk to feed her baby. Many mothers suffer physical discomfort, and some babies reject breast-feeding. Another reason is that of life style. We live in a society where the vast majority of mothers go out to work and therefore choose, by their own free will, to bottle-feed instead of breast-feed their babies.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shersby: No. The hon. Lady has had quite long enough tonight. I am under great pressure from my colleagues to be brief.

Some 39 per cent. of all mothers and 47 per cent. of first-time mothers quoted previous experience as a factor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) referred to the research by Market Trends Ltd. carried out in 1994. That research is persuasive because it shows that mothers want a ban on neither infant formula nor advertising, and that view is shared by a wide variety of health professionals. That survey found that 60 per cent. of health professionals were opposed to a ban. That figure included 68 per cent. of midwives and 64 per cent. of

[Mr. Shersby]

health visitors. Those professionals are constantly concerned with the care of mothers and babies, and their views must be taken seriously.

I submit that there is a need for advertising. It is an essential communications channel for all those involved in the food chain, such as manufacturers, retailers, distributors, health professionals and consumers. Advertising provides information about products, such as details of changes to packaging, formulations and product names. At least 100 changes are made to infant formula every year.

Mothers need to be confident that the products that they are buying are safe and of a high standard. Advertising identifies the brands to parents so that they can distinguish easily between different products. It is well known that branding provides a guarantee of safety and nutritional quality backed by a reputable company name. Those are important factors that any mother—or father, for that matter—would wish to take into account in taking what is essentially a personal decision.

Advertising also provides the mother with protection against the use of inappropriate products. It ensures healthy competition between manufacturers, which in turn ensures that product innovation has progressed considerably, which increases product choice.

Those are the principal reasons why I oppose the motion. There is a terrible tendency among some Members of the House to tell mothers what is best for them, a tendency to dictate what people should eat and drink, a tendency to quote from one world organisation or another. The fact is that the British do not like it. The British want a sensible regime of the type described so wisely by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary in her admirable speech. I therefore strongly oppose the motion, and I shall vote against it in the Lobby.

9.46 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): This is a terribly serious issue—in many instances, literally a life or death issue. It is a simple issue. It cannot be right to allow the advertising of infant formula and follow-on feeds in the national health service. Common sense tells me that that cannot be right.

Two things are evident. First, mother's milk is beneficial to babies. It follows that it is detrimental to babies not to have mother's milk. That is as true of human beings as it is of any other species. Anyone who has reared animals knows the effect of not allowing the young to have their mother's milk.

Secondly, it is evident that advertising influences behaviour. We have heard two speakers from the Conservative Benches who have had to admit that in their constituencies are commercial interests whose interests they have been, to some degree, representing. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) mentioned Milupa. It is worth mentioning that Milupa sponsored a hearing room in Hillingdon hospital—a room that is used by expectant mothers—and, following the exhibition of the word "Milupa" above the entrance to the hall, sales of Milupa milk increased there by 560 per cent. Obviously, advertising has that effect.

Bearing those two facts in mind, it is not surprising that people who know and understand the importance of mother's milk to children's health want to prohibit advertising of infant formula feed in the national health service. We have heard that 48 agencies, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives, wished the regulations to have that effect.

It is not surprising that that is the case, and it is not surprising that the baby food industry wants promotion and advertising to continue. Of course it does; it is in its interest.

To whom should we listen—the baby food industry or the health professionals? The answer is self-evident. My next question is rather sad: to whom is the Government more likely to listen—the health professionals or the food industry? I am afraid that the answer to that is self-evident. That is why it has become self-evident to right-thinking people that it is time for the Government to fall—[*Laughter.*] It is because of just that sort of thing. Conservative Members find that amusing, but we should consider the public's perception of the Government's line on the subject. I think that the Government's line will be regarded with repugnance, but without surprise, by the British public.

I wish to say something on the basis of personal experience. My children were not breast-fed, for reasons that I have discussed with my wife. She experienced some initial difficulty and in hospital she was discouraged from continuing to breast-feed after her first attempt. She admits that she was influenced by the promotional activities of the powdered milk manufacturers.

I have three children. When he was younger, the eldest suffered badly from migraine. The other two children both suffer from asthma. It is well known that those conditions are likely to be exacerbated if the baby was not breast-fed and did not have the advantage of such food. I do not think that many people would question that. It is highly likely that my children would have had better health, and my two younger children would have better health now, had it not been for the influence of the baby food manufacturers on my wife's decision. My wife recognises that.

My wife is a highly intelligent woman, but she concedes that at the time she was young, inexperienced and vulnerable in her immediate post-natal condition, and was influenced by the promotional activity. How much greater will be the influence on other mothers? It is evident that thousands of mothers will be influenced in that way. It cannot be right to allow that influence to be brought to bear on mothers in those circumstances when the crucial choice as to whether they will breast-feed is made.

The line peddled by the Parliamentary Secretary is unworthy of her. I shall support the revocation of the regulations, and so should she.

9.52 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I declare an interest in that my wife works at the centre for international child health, the research arm of Great Ormond Street hospital and a worldwide centre of excellence in the care of children.

The unanimous view of specialists at the centre for international child health is that the unnecessary use of formula feed is expensive, damaging to children and harmful to mothers. That view is based on experience from all over the world, including many countries where the activities of formula feed salespeople are harmful.

The Government have put a number of health professionals in an extraordinarily difficult position because they have set targets or suggested goals for the promotion of the best health care while at the same time frustrating the professionals in a variety of different ways.

It is important for me briefly to set out some of those frustrations. If the Government are determined to improve the promotion of breast-feeding, why are they so content with such poor performance relative to most countries in Europe? We know that they are in favour of it, because they state in the White Paper "The Health of the Nation":

> "the Government proposes to set up a national working group to help identify and take forward action to increase the proportion of infants breastfed both at birth and at six weeks."

I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will say what that group has achieved. I thought that she said in her opening remarks that, if we hang about for a few more weeks, as a result of its hard work there will be a new code. That seems a fairly minor achievement after three years of unremitting toil.

I did not understand why, if Ministers are confident that their promotion of breast-feeding is as effective as commercial promotion, in booklets and videos distributed throughout the health system—which is bound to be the most effective way of reaching the target audience—one of my hon. Friends said that there was some merit in confining advertising to specialist health journals. It seems improbable that there would be very much response to advertising in a motor cycling magazine, for example.

Specialists all over the world agree that breast-feeding is better for babies, better for mothers, much less expensive than bottle milk and proprietary feeds and, therefore, better for the all-round prosperity of low-income families; yet here in the United Kingdom, we seem determined to sustain the promotional efforts of companies whose commercial advantage must be to depress as far as possible the levels of breast-feeding. That makes very little sense.

The Government's problem will become more acute as they move into health promotion rather than simply curative medicine. Governments are mostly very poor at advertising effectively; it is particularly difficult for a Conservative Government, because Conservative Governments are always concerned lest the weight of taxpayers' money behind a Government promotional scheme should be seen as unfair competition to private sector advertising campaigns. Consequently, Governments feel paralysed and do not promote their cause with anything like the vigour of the people promoting the alternative cause.

If the Government are serious about promoting breast-feeding, they have to improve their performance a great deal more than they have done so far, and the almost unanimous voice of international specialists should be more influential. I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will understand the considerable frustration of the professionals who, on the one hand, are encouraged to promote the best of health and, on the other, are faced with an almost impossible position.

9.58 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Views have been expressed that breast-feeding is a good idea, and that the absence of it causes migraine—which surprises those who get migraines for other reasons. Others have expressed the view strongly that it is ridiculous to interfere with the freedom of mothers and commercial companies.

I hope that, before hon. Members vote on the motion, they will read the regulations, particularly regulations 21 and 22. Hon. Members must first appreciate that we are not voting on some magic idea of whether breast-feeding is a good or a bad idea. All we are doing is implementing a European regulation which has already been passed. People who speak those rather ridiculous, sentimental words and say that it is of great moment should admit to the world that we are merely implementing legislation that Europe has applied already.

There is also the question of the Euro-thought police. In this country, we accept that people should be able to argue for or against something. They may argue with great sincerity that breast-feeding is a great idea or that it is not such a good thing. Regulation 21 says:

> "No person"—

not me or any other hon. Member or any member of the public—

> "shall produce or publish any informational and educational . . . material"

that is aimed at mothers—mothers read most relevant information—which does not promote

> "the benefits and superiority of breast-feeding".

If academics, doctors or social workers think that that may be wrong, not only are they not allowed to publish their views but they could be fined under regulation 22.

Hon. Members who intend to vote for the regulations because they think that they are good and that it is exciting to do so should appreciate that they are voting in favour of interfering with people's liberty to discuss issues and to publish their views. The Parliamentary Secretary may say that that is rubbish, and that the regulations are aimed at commercial companies.

There are restrictions on the donations that commercial companies can make. They can make donations only with the written authority of the Secretary of State or in accordance with guidelines that she has drawn up. Commercial companies—the Cow and Gates of this world—are not allowed to make donations to anyone unless they make them subject to the rules drawn up by the Secretary of State under the European directive.

Finally, what the blazes is the point of having silly rules which were drawn up by a European directive? They restrict our freedoms. The House may take a wholly different view; hon. Members may think that these sorts of issues should be discussed and written about in newspapers and magazines for mothers with infants, and that we should examine all aspects of the issue. Our freedom of speech is being restricted and undermined. That is not funny. It is making nonsense of our democracy, nonsense of the House of Commons and nonsense of our debate.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) may yawn, but it is not funny. We are witnessing the death of democracy, and that matters. After the hon. Member has had a yawn, I ask him to read the document. If he does not, I hope that other hon. Members will.

10.2 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I shall make some brief observations on the subject. First, I am glad to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) in speaking in the debate. I understand that it would be a desperate situation if we all had to feed at the Euro-breast; that is something that we must avoid.

There is considerable confusion as to whether, by taking the voluntary system into a statutory form, there is any significant difference in the Government's policy on promoting infant formula products. If the Parliamentary Secretary can assure me that there will be no change from the proposals that were published originally, which had the blessing of the World Health Organisation and which tried to prevent persuasion being applied to those who are perhaps less able to understand and accept the arguments, I shall be satisfied. However, I believe that there have been changes, and representations have been made to me expressing great anxiety that what is now proposed runs counter to the original proposals, and the reasons for that have not been made clear.

10.3 pm

Mrs. Browning: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my remarks on the motion will be very brief. I am grateful to the Opposition for their generosity. Despite my reassurances to the contrary, a feeling has developed during tonight's debate that somehow the Government are anti-breast-feeding. I agree with everything that has been said about the benefits of breast-feeding. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) mentioned those benefits and I assure him that I do not disagree for one minute with what he said. *[Interruption.]* Yes, he was bottle-fed.

I understand the great strength of feeling that this issue generates, but let me reassure the House that the Government remain committed to the promotion and the protection of breast-feeding as the best means of nurturing a baby. I remain convinced that mothers have the intelligence to decide for themselves what is best for their baby. If they cannot breast-feed or there comes a time when the baby moves from breast-feeding to bottle-feeding, it is important that mothers have informed choices. It is quite appropriate that the information should be given to them by the health care professionals to whom the information is disseminated.

I repeat the central point, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) will note this: the controls on advertising that are laid down in the regulations are just the same as those that we have had for the past 12 years under our voluntary code. There has been no relaxation in the measures. The essential change is that, with the regulations, there will be statutory backing for those controls, and without them there will not. Those who are concerned about breast-feeding should welcome that change.

I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 233, Noes 258.

Division No. 128] **[10.05 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis

McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Barbara Roche and
Mr. Peter Mandelson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn

Robertson, Raymond S. *(Aberdeen South)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

Railways (South Yorkshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.20 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the issue of the future funding of railways in South Yorkshire. The debate is opportune and timely. I hope that the House will allow me to speak for the bulk of the Adjournment debate and then allow my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) to say a few words at the end—of course, with the Minister's permission.

The issue of the funding of railway services supported by passenger transport authorities after the metropolitan railway grant expires in 1996 is a pressing one. The passenger transport authorities are in something of a vacuum when considering their budgets for 1996-97 and, of course, thereafter. The issue is not confined to South Yorkshire but affects all passenger transport executives and passenger transport authorities across the country, but, as my constituency is in South Yorkshire, I shall confine my remarks to that area.

The financial support for local railways dates back to the Transport Act 1968. Under section 20, formal, legal agreements were to be made between British Rail and the passenger transport executives. Those agreements supported local services which, as a consequence, have expanded since 1968. The total number of passengers carried on PTE-supported services is now double that carried by the former InterCity business unit of British Rail and is about three quarters of the number carried on the former Regional Railways, of which, of course, PTEs were a part.

Therefore, in the country as a whole, and in South Yorkshire in particular, these supported services are extremely important. I shall emphasise that by highlighting some of the statistics for South Yorkshire.

It is estimated that the number of passenger journeys is about 6.2 million, which means 115,000 supported trains each year. The supported route mileage is 102.5; 35 stations are supported on the lines; and there are 54 million supported passenger miles and 56 supported staff. It is easy to see that the 6.2 million passenger journeys are extremely important to South Yorkshire.

Those journeys cover routes such as Sheffield to Doncaster, Sheffield to Kiveton Park, Sheffield to Morthen, Sheffield to Barnsley—my constituency, of course—Barnsley to Penistone, the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone, Barnsley to Darton, the routes from Doncaster to Kirk Sandall and Thorne going out to Scunthorpe, and from Doncaster to South Elmsall.

Those are obviously local routes in South Yorkshire, which involve Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster, and they are important for a number of reasons. Doncaster, Sheffield and Barnsley, in the South Yorkshire passenger transport area, are now the major centres of employment. Rail services at the appropriate times are essential to those areas.

Over the past 15 years—this has been well documented in other debates and I shall not rehearse the arguments—tens of thousands of jobs have been lost in the South Yorkshire area. In Sheffield, in the early 1980s, thousands of jobs were lost in the steel industry. In Barnsley and Doncaster over the past few years, jobs have been lost in the coal industry.

Therefore, the rail routes are in areas of low economic activity. If those rail routes were not supported by Government grant, they would not be viable in the private sector; they would be run down or, at worst, removed entirely. Therefore, those people living in those areas would not have the benefit of available rail travel. Barnsley and Doncaster are major towns and Sheffield, of course, is a city. There is a great concern that some routes are likely to be lost in that area. Some of those smaller towns that I mentioned are not easily accessible via road, especially in winter time, and particularly Penistone, which is an outlying village in a high area relying on rail travel.

The funding arrangements continued under section 20, which was known as the bolt-on initiative, until the Railways Act 1993, when the privatisation of the railways brought a new system and new structures for railways in this country and, of course, a different funding mechanism. It was recognised immediately that the charges paid by the PTEs in support of local services would increase. In fact, they have not only increased, they have gone through the roof. The charges have increased quite dramatically.

As a consequence, the Government were obliged to introduce a support mechanism, which became known as the metropolitan railways grant. That was a one-off grant for two years in 1994-95 and 1995-96, and was designed to cover the increased charges caused by the loss of cross-subsidy and the transparency which was imposed on railway costs. The idea that charges would be levied for the usage of railways and to increase transparency—as the then Minister put it—to ensure that PTEs could see exactly what they were paying for was debated at length throughout the passage of the Railways Act.

The increases, which were listed by the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) in a debate on 19 May 1994, were to reflect the full cost of privatisation, to ensure that there was transparency of Railtrack access charges, to reflect the rolling stock lease charges and to ensure that those charges covered the new investment, and to ensure a rate of return for Railtrack and for the rolling stock companies, which have become known as Roscos.

There was one interesting point in that debate, when the right hon. Member for Kettering said:

"The expenditure covered by this grant"—

the metropolitan railways grant—

"will fall outside the authorities' budget requirements,"

the local authorities of Sheffield, Doncaster and Barnsley,

"so it will not create any problems with regard to capping."—[*Official Report, Fourth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments*, 19 May 1994; c. 5.]

I mention that because, only today, we have heard that two of the authorities involved in the debate—Sheffield and Barnsley—are subject to the capping arrangements announced by the Secretary of State today in a written answer.

I mentioned increased charges, and I shall run through a couple of them.

The increases in expenditure listed by South Yorkshire passenger transport executive are dramatic. Train maintenance, for example, has increased from £2.7 million to £4 million, and infrastructure charges from £1.8 million to £9.5 million, so there have been massive increases in the charges levied against the passenger transport executives. At the bottom of the balance sheet for the 1994-95 budget, a level of funding of about £6.6 million has now increased to about £17.2 million. Charges have increased by about 156 per cent.

That increase has been funded by the metropolitan railway grant. But what will happen for the 1996-97 financial year, when the grant will have expired? I understand that additional funding will probably be available—although the Minister has given no commitment, and I hope that he will be able to enlighten us this evening—but that it will be paid to individual local authorities through the revenue support grant.

The money will be hidden in the methodology of the standard spending assessments—a methodology that I have criticised since 1990, when it was first introduced. Only last year, after the system had been debated in the Chamber over three or four years, the arrangements covering my constituency of Barnsley were altered so that although my local authority's standard spending assessment has been increased, the capping level means that it can spend only 0.1 per cent. above its SSA, compared with an average for metropolitan authorities of 5 per cent. above SSA. The Minister will therefore immediately appreciate the difficulties that local authorities could find in trying to fund passenger transport executives and rail services through the revenue support grant.

As I have said, we are still waiting for confirmation of what funding there will be, what form it will take and what method will be used. There is a sense of urgency now, in that PTEs have to decide by the end of May whether to support local services, because they must give 12 months' notice if they intend to withdraw from funding any of them.

An added complication is the fact that, according to the franchising director, franchises are likely to extend for seven years. How can PTEs decide whether to support local rail services without knowing how the grant funding formula will operate, or what level of funding will be available? It is impossible for them to decide which course of action to choose.

Over the next few weeks, South Yorkshire passenger transport executive must decide whether to support the same services as before or to give the 12 months' notice of withdrawal from the scheme. In South Yorkshire, we now face the ludicrous prospect of losing rail services on uneconomic routes—perhaps running fewer trains, or even losing altogether whole routes that are essential for the areas concerned.

It is vital that the Minister give South Yorkshire passenger transport executive some assurances, either tonight or in the next week or so, about the future funding formula. Bearing in mind the Government's attitude to authorities such as Sheffield and Barnsley, which were mentioned today in connection with capping arrangements, I hope that the Minister will give some consideration to our views on funding through the RSG.

Finally, I shall quickly raise two other related issues—timetabling and the fixing of fares. The PTEs want to retain influence over timetabling. They are paying for the routes, and they want to ensure that services run at times appropriate to the locality. Government assurances, dating

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

back to 1993, have been given on that subject, but I understand that Strathclyde is now having difficulties involving timetabling.

As for the fixing of fares, on through routes there is likely to be cherry-picking by the larger services, which will be able to undercut the fares set by the PTEs.

10.34 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I shall confine my remarks to the situation in my constituency. First, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) for initiating the debate, and for his generosity in allowing me a few minutes to emphasise the need to ensure the continuity of adequate funding to keep the rail services in Barnsley, West and Penistone.

My constituency is next to that of my hon. Friend, but it covers an extensive geographical area from the west of Barnsley town up to the Pennines. The railway loops my constituency, and connects Barnsley with Sheffield on the one hand and with Huddersfield on the other. The Sheffield, Penistone and Huddersfield line is particularly famed because of the beautiful countryside through which it runs, and for the magnificent viaducts at Penistone and at Denby Dale, the latter of which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman).

There are two issues which are enormously important to the development of Barnsley and South Yorkshire. The first is the rail connection between the rural and urban parts of the region, which is essential for commuters. My constituency has 20-odd villages in a rural area, and that is the local dimension to the major issue. The transport system is essential for the link-up with the national transport system, and it is also enormously important for the economic regeneration of the former mining areas. Many former miners travel to work in Sheffield and Barnsley, and some travel even further afield.

The second issue is that rural services are most important for the development of the tourist trade in Barnsley. My constituency is rich in early industrial sites, which have been made accessible by the heritage trail. The railway links the old industrial villages such as Elsecar on the east side of my constituency with Silkstone in the mid-part of my constituency. Both villages have made important social and economic contributions to the United Kingdom's early industrialisation.

Those two points were emphasised by the local chamber of commerce when it gave evidence in a submission to the Transport Select Committee, which took evidence on "The Future of the Railways in Light of the Government's White Paper proposals" in 1993.

The South Yorkshire transport executive has opened some of the older stations on the route in my constituency—for example, at Silkstone and Dodworth. These allow people who are commuting from the villages and tourists travelling in the area to have access to the villages, because there is a link with the bus service.

What I have said to the Minister emphasises the importance of the railway services to my constituency. As my hon. Friend has said, the current financial situation relates to the revenue support grant and to the metropolitan railway grant. These last only until 1996, but it has been estimated that the costs after privatisation will rise from £6.6 million to £17.1 million. That is an enormous increase, and we must bear in mind the fact that there will be no mechanism after April 1996 to continue grants.

I hope that, when the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, he will assure us that adequate finance will continue after April 1996, so that rail services in my constituency can be maintained by the passenger transport executive.

10.38 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I welcome the opportunity which this debate provides to provide some of the information which the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) have requested about the future funding of railway passenger services in South Yorkshire.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central acknowledged that the whole issue of future funding touches not just on South Yorkshire, but on all other PTEs in England and Scotland which support railway passenger services in their areas.

The PTAs are responsible for drawing up local public transport policies for the metropolitan areas outside London—six in England, and Strathclyde in Scotland. The membership is drawn from the constituent metropolitan district councils, and it is important that the body that sets the broad policy is made up of elected representatives of those constituent authorities to ensure local accountability for decisions taken, and to take into account the local needs that both hon. Members explained to the House.

The statutory powers for funding railway passenger services are set out in section 20 of the Transport Act 1968, which enables the PTEs to enter into agreements with British Rail to support railway passenger services. The PTEs contract individually with BR for the provision of the rail services in their areas. Central Government support to PTEs in respect of the net cost of the services has been channelled through the revenue support grant to the metropolitan district councils.

Before railway restructuring, PTE funding was provided solely through revenue support grant, and PTEs were charged by BR generally on a marginal cost basis for those services. Restructuring of the railways saw the introduction of a revised charging regime, involving the recovery of the full costs of access charges and rolling stock leasing charges. The full costs are much greater than the net costs that were borne previously. Without the full details of the prospective extra costs, it was not possible to feed an appropriate level of grant into the RSG process.

Consequently, to meet the extra costs facing PTEs arising from the change from marginal costs to full cost recovery, the Government introduced metropolitan railway grant as a transitional measure in 1994-95, to meet the funding gap between the bolt-on and the extra costs of the revised charging regime. I use the term "transitional" advisedly, because the Government have always seen MRG as a temporary measure.

The calculation of MRG takes as the starting point the services contracted for PTEs for 1993-94 and represents the difference between the costs of providing those services under the old marginal-cost basis and new full-cost basis. It is paid by my Department directly to English PTAs. Subject to Parliament, we also propose to pay MRG in 1995-96.

Consultation will shortly be under way on the proposed formula for MRG for 1995-96. We are aiming to send out the consultation document before Easter.

Given the temporary nature of MRG, we have been looking closely at the long-term funding for PTE rail services from 1996-97 onwards. To preserve the element of local flexibility inherent in the existing system, we are minded that funding should revert to channelling all support for PTE rail services through an enhanced RSG bolt-on.

The process of bedding down the new charging regime will be nearly completed this year, when finalised access costs for the period until 2001 will emerge from the regulator's review, and when rolling stock leasing charges are made known. That should enable the Government to enhance effectively the support for PTE rail passenger services through RSG, to reflect the net increase in the level of support required to maintain existing services in future years.

I am also aware of the concerns of the metropolitan district councils in respect of capping. We will seek, through the Department of the Environment, to take steps to ensure that the new arrangements for funding PTE rail services do not increase the likelihood of metropolitan districts being capped.

Our general approach on future funding is the subject of consultation with all the PTEs, and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. We have sought the views of the PTEs on that approach, and look forward to seeing a constructive contribution on the way forward from the PTEs and the AMA.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central was concerned that the funding might be lost in the myriad other elements of revenue support grant. We also consider the maintenance of some transparency in the funding mechanism important, and intend that it should be covered as follows. The new bolt-on total will be published in the local government finance report, as at present, and will make the new totals clear to all passenger transport authorities and metropolitan district councils.

The underlying formula will continue to be discussed through the standard spending assessment sub-group, will be determined by Ministers, and will be made freely available to the local authority associations, PTAs and individual metropolitan district councils. The allocation of each metropolitan bolt-on to the constituent district councils will continue to be on the basis of total resident population. We shall be ready and willing to write to individual district councils to confirm their allocation of the bolt-on. We shall also point out that the bolt-on results in a corresponding increase in standard spending assessment, and therefore a corresponding increase in RSG for that authority.

In respect of how the additional funding will work through the system, the overall control total for PTE-supported railway passenger services will be set by my Department, subject to the 1995 public expenditure survey determinations and the views of the Department of the Environment and, in the case of Strathclyde, the Scottish Office.

We see the overall control total for 1996-97 as reflecting such matters as the projected costs in 1996-97 of rolling stock leasing charges, train operating costs and track access charges. It will fall to PTEs to pay for the cost of any additional services that they may decide to introduce over and above those covered by 1995-96 support. The intention is to ensure that the support available in 1996-97 will be equivalent to the support available in 1995-96.

The provisional distribution formula—based largely on actuals—is intended to ensure, so far as is possible, that PTEs receive broadly the same funding to reflect the net increase in the support required to maintain existing services in future years. That current formula can be revised, if appropriate, to take account of the views of South Yorkshire PTA and PTE, and those of the other PTEs, PTAs and the AMA.

In the franchising process, the franchising director is required to give notice to the PTE of his intention to include, in the franchise agreement, provisions relating to the operation of any stations and light maintenance depots within the passenger transport area, and of his intention to issue an invitation to tender.

The PTE may respond to that notice within 60 days by submitting a statement which will, inter alia, specify the services in that area; the minimum level of quality of services so specified; and requirements with respect to the fares to be charged.

When such a statement has been submitted by the PTE, the franchise director will ensure that those services, and any minimum levels of quality or requirements with respect to fares, are included in the specification of the services in respect of which the invitation to tender is issued. Before entering into a franchise agreement, a PTE must obtain its PTA's approval of the proposed franchise agreement. The franchising director will specify any other services required for that franchise, and provide any payments under the franchise agreement in respect of such services.

I hope that what I have said makes the position clear in terms of the background, our intentions as regards future funding, and franchising. We want the PTEs to continue their valuable work in supporting railway passenger services in their areas, and to continue to play a key role in the new railway era. I hope that what I have said goes some way towards ensuring that they do, and that the consultations that are now under way, both about the future enhanced section 20 bolt-on and about MRG for the current year, will come to a speedy and successful conclusion. I recognise the importance to the PTAs and PTEs of putting an end to any uncertainty about the funding that will be available to them to carry out their important functions in future years.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 April 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I thank you warmly, Madam Speaker, for inviting me to open this debate. I was guilty of a solecism on the question of private notice questions yesterday. If today I commit any further solecisms—because I have never taken part in one of these debates before—I apologise to the House in advance.

I do not intend for a moment that, as radio broadcasts suggested overnight, this should be simply a debate on London health, although I have to say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health would have only herself to blame if it were. I shall be brief, because other hon. Members have other matters that they wish to raise.

We have debated London health on three occasions since the House reconvened last October—on 21 October, on 31 January in a general debate about the health service, and on 14 February. I did not speak in the third debate, because it was on the eve of the deadline for the consultation on Bart's. However, I spoke in the earlier debates, so I shall not rehearse my views on the London health position that I expressed on those two occasions.

On the first of those occasions, I said that I had sympathy for the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, both on the rationalisation of specialties in London and on what was argued to be the over-provision of London hospitals. Others will decide whether my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's cheerful casualness this morning on the subject of London hospitals was the most wholly constructive tone that could have been struck in the present circumstances.

On the question of Bart's, I have from the start recognised the difficulty of merging two great hospitals. Bart's has entered into the spirit of the merger conversations in an effort to make it a success. In one of my earlier speeches in the House, I commented on the way that the process was being managed and the sensitivity of the leadership being given to it.

In the context of the decision announced yesterday, I have to say that the stunningly juvenile trivialisation of an anti-Bart's press release that has emerged from the Royal London trust within the past month has in no way encouraged me to believe that the lesson was being learned about how sensitively that leadership has to be conducted.

The decision has now been taken, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health did not announce it to the House in person yesterday. She has specifically said that she wants to ensure that the ethos of Bart's is carried on into the new merged institution. Much will hang on what use is made of the Bart's site, which, in the minds of many who have been associated with Bart's, is hallowed ground because of the history of nine centuries of medical care on that site beside the great priory of St. Bartholomew.

How the use of that site is handled will play a large part, over the next five years, in the way that the merged institution will develop. I understand my right hon. Friend's difficulty about making a statement on that, beyond the relatively general remarks about a project team that she made in her written answer yesterday. Her announcement was about the decision to close Bart's, and it could not be complicated by other observations, which, at that stage, could not really be made. However, it is absolutely critical that that work goes forward in an imaginative way, and that it enjoys the Government's support.

I commented yesterday on my right hon. Friend's decision not to make a statement to the House. I understand that she would have received advice from her civil service advisers that, if she made a statement on one hospital, she would have to make a statement on all of them. If a hospital, however, has been around for 900 years, for it to receive its death warrant through a written answer does not seem to be wholly worthy of the traditions of our party.

I am afraid that my view of the manner in which the decision has been announced is that it bore signs of some of the insensitivity with which the proposed merger has been carried forward so far. I hope that everyone will have learnt a lesson from the episode, and that we can look forward to a better future than some of us might think we can look forward to.

10.10 am

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I wish to raise the subject of Nicholas Ingram, who was born in my constituency of Cambridge. He awaits a horrific death by electric chair in Georgia in the United States of America. His execution has been timed for 7 o'clock tomorrow, 6 April.

I must make it clear that in no way do I condone the crime of which Ingram was found guilty. I understand that he was convicted of tying a middle-aged couple to a tree as he burgled their home. He was 19 at the time. The crime was supposedly committed after a day's drinking and drug taking, during which he and an accomplice had already broken into two homes. Later, he shot the couple and the man died, while his wife survived.

I have the utmost sympathy with victim of that crime. I have not heard from her in the Ingram case, but I am sure that his execution will raise many unpleasant and difficult memories for her. If Ingram did commit that appalling crime, he should, of course, be properly punished. In all cases, the punishment should fit the crime. It should not be more barbaric, cruel and vicious than the crime which he perpetrated against his victim.

The intended method of execution—the electric chair—is performed only in the United States of America. Nick Ingram has been waiting for that for the

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

past 12 years. A misapprehension exists that execution by electrocution is painless and swift—it is not. Elsewhere, the overwhelming trend is towards more humane forms of execution.

I should like to describe what observers at previous electrocutions have reported. They have reported that the body turns bright red as the temperature rises, that the flesh swells and that the skin is stretched to the point of breaking. Sometimes, the prisoner catches fire, especially if he perspires excessively. The prisoner's fingers, toes and face are severely contorted. The force of the electrical current is so powerful that sometimes the eyeballs pop out and rest on his cheek.

The prisoner often defecates, urinates, vomits and drools. Witnesses have often heard a loud and sustained sound like bacon frying, and the sickly sweet smell of burning flesh permeates the air. In the meantime, the prisoner almost boils. The temperature of the brain approaches the boiling point of water, and when the post-electrocution autopsy is performed, the body is so hot that it cannot be touched by human hand.

When we speak about barbaric acts, that is what we are talking about. Execution is not instantaneous. Death is not painless. Torture is prolonged and painful. Victims can take minutes to die, or even to lose consciousness, and they struggle to free themselves from the excruciating pain.

Nick Ingram is a British citizen. He has been awaiting that horrific end for the past 12 years. He knows very well what happens to prisoners who are electrocuted. I ask the House to judge whether that punishment really fits the crime.

The sentence is decided by the Georgia Board of Pardon and Paroles. The legal adviser to that board has already said that he will listen to any appeal from the United Kingdom Government with the utmost gravity. In view of that, I find it extraordinary that the Prime Minister has felt unable to express any view on behalf of the UK Government.

I wrote to the Prime Minister about the matter last Thursday, and to date I have not received any reply. I was informed by a journalist on Monday that a letter from the Prime Minister was on its way to me. What is more, the journalist was able to tell me what that reply said. He told me that it differed slightly from that sent to Mrs. Ingram, Nick Ingram's mother.

To Mrs. Ingram, the Prime Minister said that there were no proper grounds for him to intervene. Apparently, Nick Ingram's dual nationality somehow takes away from the fact that he is, in all seriousness, a British citizen, having been born in my constituency. To me, the Prime Minister has apparently said that no formal grounds exist for him to intervene.

A great deal of difference exists between those two replies. If that is what the Prime Minister has said to me in his letter, an explanation is required. If no formal grounds exist for him to intervene, surely he can intervene on informal grounds. His recent trip to Washington would have been an ideal opportunity for him to take a view of the matter and to express it both to the President and to the authorities in Georgia.

Yesterday, a federal judge in Georgia threw out a civil rights lawsuit filed by Ingram, in which he claimed that electrocution was a cruel and unusual punishment, banned under the United States constitution, and inconsistent with a mature society. At a hearing this afternoon, two lawyers from this country will try to convince the board that Ingram was not mentally fit to stand trial for the murder of the Georgian man during the drunken robbery in 1983.

I make a plea yet again to the Leader of the House and to the Prime Minister to make it known to the Georgia Board of Pardon and Paroles that this country considers electrocution to be a barbaric method of execution, and that it should not be perpetrated in any civilised state.

It has been left to the European Parliament, which yesterday called on United States President Bill Clinton to spare the life of Nicholas Ingram. Klaus Haensch, the president of the Parliament, said in a letter to President Clinton yesterday that there was

"abhorrence in much of Europe for execution by electric chair".

All I ask is that our Government should do the same.

10.17 am

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I welcome the holding of this debate. It is a sensible adaptation of our procedures to continue to have general, open and, as a rule, relatively low-key debates before recesses.

At this time of year, my right hon. Friend the Lord President will be giving special attention to the programme for the next Session of Parliament. The newspapers have already picked up some ideas about what is in line, all of which sound highly desirable, but, in addition, I hope that my right hon. Friend will encourage his colleagues to include a construction contracts Bill, based on the proposals in the report of the Latham review.

We all know that our former colleague Sir Michael Latham is an especially assiduous and hard-working man, with a detailed knowledge of the construction industry. It is no surprise, therefore, that the proposals are carefully researched and widely supported in the industry.

The construction industry is, of course, of major importance to our country, especially these days, when the infrastructure needs to be developed and redeveloped efficiently and economically. The problems that the proposals deal with are serious and deep-seated, and lie at the heart of the complex contractual relationships that are negotiated between the many different parts of the construction industry day by day.

It is extremely bad for our country that that important industry should be continually distracted to the degree it is by argument about contracts and payments. The industry cannot sort out these problems on its own, but needs a Bill. I believe that the Latham proposals point the way.

I can see three reasons that might make the Government hesitate to legislate on the proposals, but, in my judgment, none is a show-stopper. First, they may be seen as introducing more regulations while the Government are trying to deregulate. Secondly, new regulations usually involve costs, and the Government are, of course, major buyers of construction. Thirdly, the proposals include legislation on late payment, which is something that we have resisted before, none more than me when I was a Minister and, for that matter, before and since being a Minister.

On the first point, I see the Latham Bill as an anti-paperwork Bill. The intention is to reduce the amount of paperwork as well as the amount of argument, both of which bedevil the construction industry. The Bill is designed precisely to minimise the arguments that ensue under the present contractual arrangements.

My second hesitation involves cost to clients, including the Government. However, the Bill is designed to cut costs, and Latham suggested that it would cut them by up to 30 per cent. Certainly every subcontractor now has to allow a huge contingency against contractual arguments and payment delays involved in the present system. Therefore, the Treasury should support the Bill.

Although I have worked for small businesses throughout my political life, I have argued against general legislation for statutory interest on late payment before, during and since my time as Minister with responsibility for small firms, and I remain firmly against it in general. Such legislation would be very complex, and would need to allow for different practices in different trades.

Small firms that cannot now lean on their large customers for payment would have the same difficulty in getting the interest. Of course, a very large number of small firms are retailers which take cash over the counter and which would be hit, not helped, by the introduction of statutory interest.

I am, however, convinced by the Latham report's suggestion that the construction industry is different. The cash flow, and hence the health, of the industry is seriously compromised by the present contract system, and the use that is made of every opportunity for a dispute to delay payment.

I therefore hope that my right hon. Friend the Lord President will do his best to include the Latham Bill in next year's programme, and will tell his colleagues, especially the Secretary of State for the Environment whose primary responsible it is, that there is support for just such a Bill in all parts of the House.

10.22 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I welcome this innovation of Adjournment debates in the morning instead of the afternoon, because I now have the opportunity to speak. When such debates took place in the afternoon after the business of the House, at about 3.30 pm to 4 pm, and we had only three hours, I usually failed to be chosen, so perhaps this innovation is a step in the right direction.

Although I want to get back to my constituency and family, perhaps it would have been wiser were the House not to adjourn so early for the Easter recess, but instead were to consider issues of grave importance not only to my constituents but to the country at large. I am thinking of the escalation of crime, especially joyriding.

In my constituency in the past few months, joyriders have killed numerous motorists who were unaware that they—the joyriders—were drunk or sometimes drugged, and had no licence or insurance. Two weeks ago, a young boy of 14, together with three other boys of the same age, took his parents' car. He was not licensed to drive and, at 14, was incapable of driving properly on the main road. He drove into another car at about 70 or 80 mph and killed the young lady who was driving and some others in the car.

On 12 March, I received a letter from the uncle of that young lady, Lianne Davies. I think that I should read to the House the sentiments expressed in that letter, because they encapsulate the problem and tragedy of joy riding. Mr. Davies wrote:

> "In the wake of the tragic death of my niece, Lianne Davies as a result of 'joyriding', I feel that something must be done to try and prevent this tragedy happening again and again. The whole of the community has been touched and angered at this tragic waste of a young life, someone who was just embarking on a new life with her boyfriend, Christopher, together with her young son, Thomas.
>
> Not only has this tragedy angered honest, hard-working and caring people at a local level but it has disgusted and angered people nationwide.
>
> The time has come to stop the minority in our area, and nationwide, 'ruling the roost' and laughing in the faces of so called law and order. We must now have a punish that befits the crime. Time and again these 'yobs' are getting off far too lightly. The person who drove the car which killed the Mansells, last August, received just 7 years and his accomplices are only on a charge of car theft. That driver is a murderer and should have been sent down for a minimum term not a maximum. The others in the car with him should be on a charge which is greater than just car theft.
>
> During the week after this terrible tragedy we are still hearing stories of cars being stolen in our area and in fact, in the early hours of Saturday morning the 11th of March, the day after Lianne's funeral, Maesteg town was cordoned-off to try and catch 4 'joyriders'.
>
> The issues, as we all know, are greater than just considerably increasing the punishments for car crimes. The underlying issues are those of discipline at home and in our schools. Human rights have swung too far in the favour of those who now turn around in school and say to a teacher, 'you touch me and I'll have you on a charge of assault'. The so-called 'do-gooders' in our society have ruined it with the softly, softly approach. Surely we must return to some level of common sense where a teacher is able to discipline a pupil, and a policeman can perform his duty without threat of losing his or her job. A few canes didn't do me any harm. The world and the 'law' has gone crazy. The police must have more powers to handle difficult situations.
>
> There is much more that could and should be said but what I, on behalf of Lianne's family, want is some sort of legislation which severely punishes car crime, and more police presence at all hours in the community to stamp out this crime and others, such as under age drinking, which is rife, and drug-taking. Punish the parents, punish the landlords, punish the criminals severely and let a prison be a prison not a community centre. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH."

Lianne's uncle suggests that, if I want to discuss the issues further with him, I should.

The whole town turned out at Lianne's funeral, and everyone shared the family's grief. One can imagine the shock of a parent who has reared a daughter and a son until they are 21 and 14 respectively, and who is informed, an hour after they have gone out for a ride in the car, that both children are dead. Nothing can compensate a father or a mother for the death of two children.

A month before Lianne's death, a father of 32 and a mother of 31 were driving home from the seaside on a Saturday evening. Another car, driven by a person who was unlicensed and under age, with three under-age people as passengers, drove down a hill directly into their car, killing them both and leaving a young son of three an orphan. That tragedy was caused by joyriding. It is high time that the House and the Government took action, together with the motor manufacturers, to try to resolve the problem, which would be in everyone's interests.

We should also have more police on the beat to ensure that joyriding does not take place. The incident I have described could have been avoided if the 14-year-old boy involved had been apprehended when he took possession of the car and before he went out driving. I appeal to the House and the Government to do something. If they do

[Mr. Ray Powell]

not, there will be further deaths as a direct result of joyriding by people who are unlicensed and who should not be on the road.

10.31 am

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) on his speech. He has expressed views that are shared on both sides of the House. I thank him for bringing the matter to the attention of the House; he deserves support.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to refer my remarks to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, because they specifically concern the final decisions on the reorganisation of local government in Devon. When the Local Government Commission for England first considered the matter, it went to a great deal of trouble and published three alternative suggestions for the reorganisation of Devon.

The first suggestion was for a unitary authority of four areas; the second was for a unitary authority of six areas; and the third was for Plymouth to change its status and, once again, to be a unitary authority, with the rest of Devon remaining the same.

There was much consideration of the proposals throughout the county, and the third proposal seemed to be fairly widely accepted, although not universally. As shown on page 104 of the commission's report, 31 per cent. of the county accepted the proposal, and a further 14 per cent. wanted no change. The commission's proposal was the nearest thing to leaving the county as it was. Everyone accepted that Plymouth, one of the largest cities in the country, should have its own unitary authority.

Much to everyone's surprise, when the commission made its final decision, it produced a recommendation that had never been put as an alternative, which was for Plymouth and Torbay to be made unitary authorities, with the rest of the county to remain the same. This immediately provoked an uprising—perhaps that is an overstatement: a considerable amount of adverse opinion—in the city of Exeter. Exeter is one of the oldest cathedral towns, and it could not see why the upstart Torbay should be given unitary authority status when it was not.

There were immediately problems in South Hams as well. For a local authority between Torbay and Plymouth, it was worrying that the two local government areas on either side might become unitary authorities. It was feared that one or other was likely to want to extend its boundaries and slowly to eat up South Hams. It has been mooted that perhaps South Hams should become a unitary authority.

My local authority of East Devon is remarkable, because it is one of the few local authorities in the country that has no debt in housing, or in anything else. That is a pretty remarkable achievement for a local authority at this time. East Devon has even allowed some of its capital allowances to be used by other authorities because it does not need them all. We have a pretty good local authority in East Devon.

East Devon is suddenly saying that, in view of Exeter's position, it should perhaps now be considered for unitary authority status by the Secretary of State for the Environment. East Devon is much larger than Torbay, it is much larger than Exeter, and it has a larger population than both areas. People ask why, if Exeter is being considered for unitary status, East Devon should not be considered.

From looking at the report of the Local Government Commission for England, I see that 14 counties in which it was originally suggested that unitary authorities should be created will not now, in the final recommendations, have unitary authorities, but will remain the same. The 14 counties are Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Wiltshire, Surrey, East Sussex, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. All will revert to their previous positions. Yet in Devon, contrary to the original recommendation, a new unitary authority is being suggested.

I point out to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that it is suggested on page 104 of the commission's report that there is

> "widespread support for unitary authorities for both Exeter and Torbay".

That is a massive overstatement. Many people have told me that, when an opinion poll was carried out in Torbay, they did not vote because the suggestion that Torbay should become a unitary authority was not an alternative given by the commission; they did not take it seriously.

The only people who voted were those who were keen to bring about a unitary authority. The other people did not bother, and did not think that the suggestion should be considered. I very much doubt, therefore, whether the words "widespread support" are accurate. Devon county council, East Devon district council, Mid Devon district council and, I think, Teignbridge district council were all very much in favour of the Local Government Commission for England's original recommendation—for the status quo to remain, except for Plymouth.

The great difficulty is that, when the measure comes before the House, it will be by way of statutory instrument, to which there can be no amendment. Therefore, we cannot vote on what the local people might like. We will either have to accept the measure or reject it absolutely. That puts some Members of Parliament—I believe that the same is true of counties other than Devon—in a difficult position.

Therefore, will the Secretary of State look at the matter again before he brings forward such a measure? If the majority of people throughout Devon were consulted, they would be more likely to support the commission's original recommendation—that Devon county council and Devon district councils should stay the same, and Plymouth should become a unitary authority. I believe that people would be much happier if we proceeded in that way.

10.40 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am aware that the debate is popular and many of my colleagues want to contribute to it, so I shall be brief.

I wish to follow the remarks of the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) and record, as people sought to do yesterday, the general dissatisfaction about the way in which a major health announcement was made yesterday.

I wish to place on record how extraordinary it was that such a major announcement—covering so many hospitals and constituencies, and involving so much money and emotional investment—should have been made by way of a written answer, particularly as the original proposal was announced in the House. In addition, we discovered that, on the same day, the Secretary of State for Wales was making a policy statement to the opposite effect.

The Secretary of State for Health will suffer as a result of the way in which the announcement was made. The right hon. Lady's failure to provide an opportunity for questions means that people's frustrations will be pent up until they can question her. I always thought that there was a majority in the House against the Secretary of State's proposals, certainly as they relate to the south London arrangements and Guy's hospital. She has done nothing to reduce that opposition, and may well have produced firmer opposition to Government plans. I fear that, as a result of the way in which she handled the matter yesterday, she will not have heard the end of it.

I shall flag up questions now to allow the Leader of the House to give the Secretary of State early notice of what she would have been asked about yesterday. If the Secretary of State accepts—as she appears to do by her written answer, her press statement and her letter to me and other colleagues—that there are preconditions for the closure of the Guy's hospital accident and emergency unit, and if those conditions are not met in three, four, five or six years' time, does that mean that the closure will not go ahead?

Those conditions are that the London ambulance service should be fully equipped and should do its job properly, that all other accident and emergency units in south London should be fully functioning and able to cope, and that there should be adequate funds. Logically, if the conditions are not met, the closure should not go ahead.

The health commission said that the closure should go ahead only if the preconditions were met. If that is so, has it been decided that the accident and emergency department will close if it will close only if certain other things happen? The truth is that it may close, so it would be far better to say that it will remain open but that, if various conditions are met, it may close. It would be better to do that than to blight the department for four years when, at the end of that period, it may still be needed and may stay open.

I have a set of questions involving Philip Harris house. The press release says that it will be in full use. The letter sent out to the chairman of the health authority said that it would be used substantially in line with original plans. Elsewhere it states that three quarters of the space will be used as originally intended. What is the truth? Is it not true that £1 million worth of equipment will have to be taken out of Philip Harris house so that it can be converted for uses other than those for which it was originally intended?

Is it not the case that, although the special trustees may leave their money in, Philip Harris, the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Kidney Patients Association are not willing to give their money and their money will be taken out? Is it not true that large parts of the building of Philip Harris house will not now be used as originally intended? Is that not madness, given that it is a state of the art building in the health service?

What about the other two newest buildings: Guy's tower and new Guy's house? In the past two weeks we have put it to the Secretary of State in a letter, and to other people in other ways that, suddenly, King's College London and the United Medical and Dental schools would not need as much space as before. Up to 20 floors in the two other newest buildings will be available. Why was that fact not dealt with in the written answer, the letter or the press statement? Why has no thought been given to those matters? Does it not materially change the logical way to plan when one of the prospective users no longer wants to use the site—as happened two weeks ago?

Was the regional health authority general manager correct to say that that development may mean that part of the Guy's hospital site—the new Guy's house and Guy's tower—may be disposed of? Does "disposed of" mean sold off, and does that therefore mean that part of Guy's hospital will be sold out of the national health service? If so, we should have been told. I do not think that a majority of the House would be in favour of that.

What about the worries that having a minor surgery unit and some non-emergency beds without intensive care or intensive treatment units is dangerous? The consultants say that they will not carry out such activities without intensive care back-up in case of emergencies. Is it not entirely irresponsible to have such units without that back up?

Why have we still not received the trust business case, which was meant to have been produced before the consultation began? In a letter to me yesterday, the Minister for Health said:

> "The full business case for the redevelopment of Guy's and St. Thomas' has been submitted to the South Thames Regional Office, and the Trust is now exploring private finance options. We look forward to seeing the completed full business case from the Guy's and St Thomas' Trust in the near future."

Not to have the business case at the end of the consultation or even on the day of the announcement, when it was meant to be the basis of the proposal for the hospital, is, to say the least, extraordinary, and probably hugely incompetent. How on earth can a decision be made when one of the decision's building blocks is not in place?

Have not all the consultants in the south-east of England said that they are dissatisfied with the proposals relating to neurosciences and paediatrics, will not use the services as currently proposed, and will send all their patients to Great Ormond Street hospital rather than elsewhere in south London? Has not the neurology debate involved various changes of view in recent weeks, some of which were raised at the regional health authority meeting, but none of which was addressed, let alone answered, in the Secretary of State's written answer, press statement or letters?

What will happen about the management of the trust—an issue raised by the hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) in last week's debate? Will we be left with a management—with the most highly paid chief executive in the land who was previously employed to run one of the two hospitals in the merged trust—which does not have the confidence of the people who work in and use Guy's hospital? I have never said this before in the House, but the chief executive has to go, and the management must be changed. It is entirely unacceptable that people are running the trust in a way that does not enjoy the confidence of any of the people in Guy's hospital. An urgent decision is needed, and the Secretary of State should ensure that it is taken in the next few days if there is to be any prospect of credible progress.

The written answer was two pages long. It would have been possible to make a statement of the same length. It was entirely unacceptable that such a statement was not

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

made. All the questions that remain to be answered will remain to be answered until they are answered fully. When they are answered, we may discover how illogical, inappropriate and unsupported the decision was. To quote what a Conservative Member said yesterday, it was at least—and to put it mildly—politically inept.

10.49 am

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Before I commence my remarks, I commend the speech of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). The more often such sentiments are expressed, the more likely it is that there will be action in the direction that we both want. May I offer the hon. Gentleman a word of advice? Perhaps he should have a word with some members of the magistrates bench in his area, some of whom I fear seem to leave all common sense behind when they are put on the bench and reach some very strange decisions and sentences. I am sure that the House was grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore for raising that issue.

As we are debating matters which should be raised before the adjournment for the Easter recess, which is the first main holiday of the year, I hope that it is appropriate for me to raise what seem to be unfair advertising practices by sections of the travel industry. There are two practices which are virtually scams inflicted on the travelling public. The first is that of holiday travel insurance.

At the moment, there are numerous advertisements for holidays at various discounts from 4 per cent. to 15 per cent. I have a copy of such an advertisement which is in general circulation. However, in order to obtain that discount, according to the advertisement to which I have just referred, it is necessary for the operator's

> "travel insurance to be purchased at the time of booking and as part of the same transaction."

That advertisement, and other similarly phrased advertisements, fail to inform the public of the very substantial commission paid on the travel insurance premium by the insurer to the operator.

The *Travel Trade Gazette* issued a list of insurers and the amount of commission payable. It is clear that up to 50 per cent. commission can be obtained by an operator. The usual level of commission is 40 per cent. to 45 per cent. for longer haul holidays. Therefore, someone booking a £400 holiday which was subject to a 7 per cent. discount would receive £28 off the cost. If there was a 4 per cent. discount, he would receive £16 off. However, that could result in that person paying back in insurance premiums, through the commission that is paid, more than the amount saved. That is not quite the bargain that the operators would like to let the public believe it is.

Some operators provide their own insurance, trusting that they will be able to make a handsome profit after having to pay claims. That practice reminds me of the collision damage waiver policies of some American car hire companies, which add enormously to the advertised costs of car rental. However, to revert to travel insurance, let me quote at length from the *Travel Trade Gazette*, which is one of the most authoritative journals on holidays and travel. It states:

> "The multiples generally charge more for their insurance than other travel agents, banks or building societies, to claw back the cost of offering holiday discounts. They offer a bad deal to families, whereas most independents offer discounts to children or cover them for free. A family of four travelling to Florida could pay up to £218"—

for their insurance—

> " with the multiples, when the net cost to the agent is £50. Underwriters and brokers see little hope of change while insurance is used to fund discounts . . . Commercial Union's Travellers Insurance Association manager . . . said high retail prices cause problems when customers were disputing claims.
>
> 'Travel agents put too much emphasis on making profits from insurance.'"

That would be bad enough, but other aspects of that policy must be aired. If a potential holiday maker has his or her own annual insurance, the discount may be withdrawn by the operator unless he or she agrees to sign an insurance indemnity.

I recently met the well-known television travel presenter, Mr. John Carter of "Wish You Were Here", who showed me a letter that he had received from a Mr. Cushway of Chelmsford. Mr. Cushway has his own annual insurance, but he was astonished to read the terms of the indemnity that he was expected to sign by the operator, "Going Places", if he did not take out the operator's insurance. The indemnity reads:

> "In consideration of Going Places agreeing to book my holiday/travel arrangements without proof of my insurance arrangements, I hereby agree on behalf of myself and (if applicable) My Party to indemnify and keep indemnified Going Places and the tour operator for any costs, claims, liabilities or any other losses whatsoever that are incurred by Going Places or the tour operator and which would otherwise have been met or satisfied had I taken out insurance with Going Places or the tour operator."

That means that if one received an injury resulting in a personal accident claim, even if that was the liability of the operator, the holiday maker would not be able to claim against the operator. Is it therefore no surprise that Mr. Cushway wrote:

> "After a careful read it appears that they are getting customers to completely indemnify both Going Places and the tour operator from 'any' claims. This also includes claims that are clearly the fault of these two companies ie: flight, hotel cancellation or overbooking."

I hope that hon. Members will agree that the public should not be subjected to practices like that. It would seem that steps should be taken, either to remove the condition of having to take out the operator's travel insurance or to make the amount of commission paid more public and to allow travellers to purchase their own insurance without signing an indemnity.

The other issue to which I want to refer briefly is that of flight fare advertisements. For years now, the travel pages of our newspapers, particularly the *Evening Standard*, and the teletext advertisements on television, have offered tempting offers of tickets to far-away places at very attractive prices. Unfortunately, a considerable number of those offers prove to be bogus. The excuse is that they are limited and are no longer available. However, at least one operator advertised services which never existed in the first place, let alone any fares that could operate on them.

Too many of the advertised fares are unavailable—*[Interruption.]* I was somewhat deterred there by an irrelevant intervention from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). As a result of the practice that I have described, many people will be paying far in excess of the amount that they thought they would be paying when they communicated with the advertiser. I once telephoned a company which advertised flights to the United States for £199. I was told that all those seats had gone. When I asked what the next cheapest category was, I was told £299, but there were no seats at that price available. I eventually paid £349, nearly double the amount originally advertised.

That somewhat unfortunate state of affairs has come to the attention of the Advertising Standards Authority, which has drawn up new guidelines for ticket advertisements. It has suggested that four main aims should be achieved. First, if flights advertised are not all available at the quoted fare, it should be clearly stated that flights are available "from" the quoted price. Secondly, the ASA suggests that there should be sufficient seats available at the price quoted to ensure

"that there is a reasonable prospect of obtaining the price that is advertised."

Thirdly, all fares should be available between one and six weeks after the appearance of the advertisement unless otherwise stated. Fourthly, multiple insertions of advertisements should not be made if there is a strong chance that the prices featured may change.

However worthy such guidelines are, there are serious questions to be asked about how effective they will prove in practice. For example, it will be up to local trading standards officers to investigate, but they already have to cope with the whole mass of consumer legislation and their efforts are likely to be patchy in effect.

The interesting factor is that the other bodies expected to check on the advertisements are the newspapers in which they appear, which have no direct knowledge whether advertised fares are available. An unofficial survey by *Holiday Which?* checked one edition of the *Evening Standard* advertising flights to Spain, and it was discovered that of the eight companies offering flights, only two could provide them at the cheapest advertised price.

What happens if a company is found to have transgressed the ASA code? After persistent contraventions—I stress that they have to be persistent—the authority can apply to the High Court for a restraining injunction. Only if the company continued to transgress, in breach of the injunction, would it be liable to prosecution for contempt of court. It is clear that in practice the code is difficult to enforce and does not work. The result is that the British consumer is being ripped off.

What redress is needed? I suggest, first, a clear and more effective sanction against such advertising, carrying heavy fines. Secondly, we could consider legislation similar to that being advanced in the United States, which specifically prohibits deceptive advertising. Thirdly, the Office of Fair Trading should conduct an investigation to find out whether such advertisements should be monitored so that action could be taken much earlier. If the United States Department of Transportation can take strong steps there is no reason why our Department of Transport, or the Department of Trade and Industry, cannot do the same.

The two problems that I have raised are blots on a successful British industry, and their removal would do much to raise its standing in the eyes of the public and enhance its image. It might even help bookings to pick up this year. If the industry cannot put its house in order, the demand for legislation will inevitably increase. Action is urgently needed if the consumer is to be properly protected against such scams. Holiday travel should be a pleasure, not an opportunity to be overcharged.

I hope that the Leader of the House will support my views and pass my suggestions to the relevant Ministers, and I hope that representatives of the media who may be with us will take on board the fact that this is a case of commercial sleaze—a subject with which they are much preoccupied—and perhaps give it some publicity.

11.2 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The debate began with an eleventh-hour attempt by one knight of the shires, the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), to save one of the London hospitals. Then we heard from another knight of the shires, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who wanted to save the old-fashioned Devon county council. There has also been an eleventh-hour attempt by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) to save a man's life in America. I shall make an eleventh-hour attempt to save 74 jobs for disabled workers at Remploy in Derbyshire.

We all know that Remploy has been a huge success. There are about 90 units throughout the United Kingdom, and as far as I know from my research, until now not one has been closed on commercial grounds. Closures have taken place only because of fires or other planning difficulties.

However, according to a lobby of disabled people who came to Parliament yesterday, the Remploy factory in Alfreton is to close. I have informed the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), in whose constituency the factory lies. He knows about the closure, says that he has made representations, and is fully aware of what I intend to say. I must raise the subject because many of the workers at the factory live in Bolsover; several more live in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

The factory employs 74 people, many of whom use wheelchairs. Others are epileptic, and they all have all the usual problems that disabled people face. Over the past two or three years we have talked about disabled people at length in the House, partly because of all the private Members' Bills that my hon. Friends have tried to introduce on successive Fridays. It is appalling that, with the Government-sponsored Disability Discrimination Bill, which talks about looking after disabled people's rights, on its way to the other place, 74 disabled people are being kicked out of their jobs in the middle of Derbyshire.

It will be said that those 74 people have been offered other jobs—that is the usual cry—but it is not easy for disabled people to travel long distances, and the proposal to shunt them along to Mansfield means an average journey of about 10 miles. Yesterday in the Lobby I spoke to someone from Clay Cross, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East, which is 12 miles from Mansfield. That person finds it difficult enough to travel the five miles to Alfreton, without piling on more by going to Mansfield and back.

It is a disgrace that Remploy is being allowed to shut the factory and that, seemingly, the Government are doing nothing about it. The people concerned have written to the Prime Minister but, as has been said earlier in the debate about other people, they are still waiting for a decent reply. I think that the Prime Minister passed the

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

letter on to one of the Ministers in the Department of unemployment. That is why, even at this late stage, the matter must be resolved.

On Friday 7 April a 50th anniversary celebration will take place at Remploy, and the directors in Cricklewood have had the cheek to invite the 74 people from Alfreton to travel down for a celebration party and to cut a cake, just days before 20 April, when their jobs will be cast aside. They will not go. Every one of the 74 workers is backing the trade unions' attempts to save the jobs. Incidentally, there are about six unions involved at Remploy, every one of them committed to fighting the closure. Those people will not go to the celebration because they do not find anything to celebrate in the fact that they are being chucked out of work.

I appeal to the Leader of the House to ask the Ministers responsible to act. I suppose that the subject comes under the Department of Employment, or possibly the Department of Trade and Industry—and of course it affects social security, too. We are often told, especially by Ministers, about the massive sums spent on social security and we all know that it costs about £9,000 per annum to chuck somebody out of work. Yet the proposal is to get rid of 74 jobs, which will cost the Exchequer—that is, the taxpayer—£9,000 apiece. That is crazy economics, and that is why Ministers should call on the directors of Remploy to ensure that the factory is not closed.

Now that the true figures have been revealed this morning by one of the groups of chattering-class people, which has told us that the unemployment statistics are wrong, we all know that what we have always said is true, and that there are at least 4 million people without a job. Now a further 74 people are to be chucked on the scrap heap to join that pile of human misery.

What about the work that the 74 people do? They produce jumpers for Marks and Spencer, and throughout the entire period of that production Marks and Spencer has not made one complaint about the quality of the goods. There is no argument for closing the factory on those grounds either. So what is the reason for the closure? As we all know, the reason is that there are people running Remploy who are hand in glove with the Government. Disabled people know that the only protection they have is through membership of a trade union, and all the employees belong to a trade union. We know that the Government have a thing about people who are members of trade unions.

I call upon the Minister to convey my message to his colleagues. The closure is due to occur on 20 April. There will be no celebrations for the employees of the Remploy factory in Alfreton, but there could be if the Government would listen to the people who came to lobby their Members of Parliament yesterday—as is their right—and to present petitions.

I now turn to another matter regarding a different lobby. Last week, 5,000 people came to lobby Parliament about education cuts, teachers' pay and the larger class sizes that will result from the Government's proposals for education. The people who came from Derbyshire to lobby their Members of Parliament had to take the day off to do so. Everyone should have the inalienable right to come to this place to petition Members of Parliament.

Fire fighters, teachers, parents and kids took part in that lobby and they presented a petition to the Prime Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and I helped them with their petition. What is wrong with people travelling to London to petition Parliament?

London is 150 miles from north Derbyshire, so when teachers and others travel to London to lobby Parliament they cannot work on that day. In the education debate that followed the lobby, the Secretary of State for Education, prompted by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), had the gall to attack those teachers for taking the day off. She talked about calling in the auditor. That is appalling. Not everyone can get to London easily or at the drop of a hat. People in many parts of Britain have to take time off work to carry out their duties of petitioning and lobbying their Members of Parliament.

I have a typical letter from one of the schools involved in the lobby in which it is made abundantly clear that no money was lost to the local authority as a result of its involvement. It has written to the Secretary of State for Education to say:

> "We regret the necessity of writing to you"—

that is the Secretary of State—

> "on the subject of your totally unfounded remarks made in the House yesterday on the subject of the presence of Derbyshire teachers at the lobby of their MPs".

It refers to the closure of the school in north Derbyshire and explains that the lobby:

> "was on a day already scheduled for inset. It therefore caused no inconvenience to pupils or parents, nor is there any accruing cost to the authority as the time lost will be recouped in a series of evening sessions which have already been arranged. You will note that the only cost has been to the teachers themselves".

Members can imagine how those teachers felt when they switched on their televisions last Wednesday and heard the Secretary of State attacking them for having the temerity to come to their Parliament to lobby Members and to petition the Prime Minister and others. It is the height of arrogance for the Government to attack people in that fashion. The Secretary of State for Education should have the decency to apologise to those teachers in accordance with the requests made in the letter.

I have spoken about two lobbies today. One concerns a group of disabled people who are fighting for their jobs. Surely the Government could intervene and call upon Remploy to keep the Alfreton factory open. Secondly, the Minister should have the decency to apologise for her unwarranted attacks on the teachers, parents and kids who came from Derbyshire last Wednesday to fight for teachers' pay, people's jobs and for a decent education.

11.13 am

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): As usual, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has given us a colourful account of various matters in his constituency. I regret his latter remarks about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education. Teachers and other professionals have ample opportunity to visit this place to lobby Members of Parliament or whatever during their holiday time.

The hon. Gentleman said that the teachers travelled to London on a training day. One is bound to ask why training days occur during term time when they could take place during school holidays. Children are often forced to take days off school because of teacher absences due to training or due to lobbies such as that described by the hon. Gentleman. There is ample opportunity for those activities to take place during the school holidays—which are substantial, although well deserved nonetheless.

I crave the indulgence of the House for a few moments as I wish to refer to a matter which has been discussed many times on the Floor of the House in the past few weeks. Education in Bedfordshire was the subject of certain comments by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, who referred to the fact that Bedfordshire education authority has mounted a massive campaign against the Government. Although the financial settlement is tight, I believe that it will benefit my constituents and the teaching profession as a whole.

In opening the education debate, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) made what I considered to be a most unfortunate speech—I have certainly heard him speak better on previous occasions—in which he castigated taxpayers for not pouring more money into the problem. That is a typical example of what Labour Members do if they are in any sort of difficulty—they chuck money at the problem and hope that it will go away. The Government take a more responsible approach. Many teachers, parents and school governors have written to Conservative Members about their difficulties and we could have agreed that more money would solve their problems. That would be the easiest way out. However, the Government are more responsible than the Labour party when it comes to spending other people's money.

In my county of Bedfordshire, the approach of parents to education ranges from the ignorant to the very genuine—obviously, the majority fall into the latter category. However, there are parents—some of whom may also have written to my right hon. and hon. Friends—who display an ignorance about the education system which makes me wonder whether they have any idea what happens to their children between the time they leave them at the school gates and when they collect them, or deputise someone else to do so, at 3.30 pm.

One constituent from the Sunden Park area was very abusive in his letter to me, using foul language which I shall not repeat to the House. I replied that as he was so oaf-like in his attitude to education he was not fit to have a child, let alone to demand that others look after that child on his behalf. Another constituent who wrote to me was distressed that the dinner supervisors could be made redundant due to education budget savings which would have to be made at the school. She protested that that would mean that she would have to pay more in child minding fees because her child could not come home for lunch when she was at work. Some parents use schools purely for child minding purposes and give no thought to education. That sort of ignorance distresses us greatly.

The education debate should add a new dimension to parental responsibility. Some 99 per cent. of parents are entirely genuine in their concerns. They have written to me to express their fears at what might happen as a consequence of the savings which have been threatened by, in many cases, Labour and Liberal-controlled local authorities and which must be made in accordance with the Secretary of State's strictures. Like the majority of counties, Bedfordshire received an increase in its education budget and in its standard spending assessment, although one would not think so from reading the letters. I hope that there will be greater involvement by parents in schools and that they will take more responsibility for their children's education. In many cases, they leave it totally to the teaching profession, feeling that once their children are at the school gates they are somebody else's problem.

I hope that there will be greater parental involvement in parent-teacher associations, which are doing reasonably well in my constituency but could do with a membership boost. I hope that there will be larger attendances at open evenings. One often hears from head teachers in particular the lament that parents do not turn up for open evenings and take no interest in their children's academic progress. I hope that more parents will stand for governing bodies. Sadly, in many schools where there are places for parents they have to be begged and cajoled to serve as governors, to assist schools and the community.

If the strictures rightly being placed on schools are to do positive good, parents should understand that while they may lobby Members of Parliament—rightly, as the hon. Member for Bolsover said—and councillors, they must play a larger part in the education of their children and the running of schools. I hope that the several hundred parents who wrote to me will make it their business to help to ensure that their children receive a decent education and will become personally involved in the running of local schools.

I am lucky to have in my constituency many excellent little schools and larger ones, and good teachers. However, I was disturbed to read national figures, which may not necessarily apply to my constituency, showing that the amount of time that teachers spend in the classroom is dropping. In some LEAs, teachers spend less than 70 per cent. of their time in front of classes during the course of a shortish day in terms of hours, albeit onerous in terms of the work to be done. Nevertheless, a figure of 70 per cent. or 75 per cent. is not good enough. Many savings could be made if the system allowed teachers to spend more time in front of their classes.

I mentioned in response to the remarks of the hon. Member for Bolsover the basis of so-called Baker days. At a time when teachers' holidays are rightly generous, it seems wrong for several more days to be taken up by training in school time. Only recently, a local school teacher was seen in town on a so-called Baker day, busily shopping for her family's needs. That may have been a minor exception, but it is incredible that training days must be taken when the school is open, when they could be held during the long summer holidays or other holidays that teachers rightly enjoy. To take a day away from teaching children is totally wrong.

Why is it—the hon. Member for Bolsover may have the answer—that despite the assistance that the Government have given teachers, the massive rise in salaries, way above inflation, that the profession has enjoyed, and the fact that the number of teachers has not fallen during the past few years, one third of 14-year-old children have a reading age of 11? Are teachers happy with that situation, and is the taxpayer getting value for money? The majority of teachers, certainly in my constituency, are first class, but when the taxpayer is expected to fund additional pay to a profession already generously remunerated by comparison with some others in the private sector, the taxpayer is bound to ask why it is that levels of academic achievement do not seem to match the needs of employers.

[Mr. John Carlisle]

I remain concerned at head teachers who almost avoid going in front of classes. One appreciates that there are problems of supply and sick leave. In some cases, the situation is exploited. We all know of cases of teachers on extended sick leave who cannot be got rid of for one reason or another. The opportunity exists for head teachers to spend more time in front of classes. They may plead that they have administrative duties, but in spending more time at their desks than at the chalk face they are failing in their duty to children.

I am close to the teachers in my constituency. In the past fortnight I have seen 24 head teachers in individual meetings. I am confident that my constituency has a first-class band of professionals, but improvements could be made to any system. I regret the campaign mounted by the Labour and Liberal-controlled Bedfordshire education authority which, in the words of the Conservative leader Mr. Philip Hendry, seems to want to heap a great deal of misery on parents, teachers and pupils for political advantage. When Bedfordshire's education budget was before the county council, two options were open—a 3.5 per cent. cut proposed by the Labour/Liberal majority and a 2 per cent. cut proposed by the Conservatives, which would have halved the number of proposed teacher redundancies. The council, being controlled by Labour and Liberal members, chose the former and then inevitably blamed the Government for the problems that would follow. It could easily have accepted a 2 per cent. budget cut, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on the Floor of the House.

Over the past five years, Bedfordshire has enjoyed a real increase of 30 per cent. in its standard spending assessment. Where has that money gone? As a Member of Parliament, I cannot blithely tell the local education authority, "Of course I will go to the Secretary of State for Education and ask that more money be poured into your pot and of course I can go to the Secretary of State for the Environment and ask him to raise the cap", if I am not satisfied that the money will be properly spent. When a local authority that receives such an increase over five years still pleads poverty, makes teachers redundant and imposes substantial education cuts, one is bound to ask where the money has gone.

I can give one example of the way that money was spent which may amuse Opposition Members—if not embarrass them, as it should. Bedfordshire recently received applications from 21 members of the public for a master's degree grant. As the House knows, many local education authorities do not have the money to fund such grants. A county council spokesman was quoted in *Bedfordshire on Sunday* for 29 January:

> "We have a general policy that we do not award discretionary grants for this type of degree."

Only one such grant was made. It was—surprise, surprise—given to Councillor Adrian Heffernan, the Labour councillor for Leighton Buzzard. All 21 applications from the public were turned down, but, extraordinarily enough, the Labour and Liberal-controlled local authority made a grant for a master's degree to the Labour county councillor for Leighton Buzzard. Opposition Members accuse us of looking after our friends. Bedfordshire stands accused by me and by my hon. Friends representing constituencies in that county of not spending its money correctly and prudently. Yet the authority was able to afford to give a grant—of all the applications, it was the only successful one—to a Labour county councillor. I should add that the councillor expressed some surprise and embarrassment that his was the only application to be approved. Never let us stand accused of looking after our friends, bearing in mind the example that I have given of what is taking place—perhaps in a tiny way in some instances, but in a considerable way in others—in education authorities that are under Labour and Liberal control.

Bedfordshire will battle through. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for putting us on our mettle and ensuring that we are giving the people of Bedfordshire value for money. I hope that the local education authority will take up the challenge, as have teachers, governors and pupils in my constituency. If the exercise is successful, as I believe that it will be, there may be openings for some form of growth next year. As things stand, however, the settlement was necessary and it has my full support.

11.30 am

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on her contribution to the debate. Her remarks were heard in silence by the House, which reflected their force. I hope that, even at this late stage, they will be conveyed to the Prime Minister.

There was not just one important and controversial announcement yesterday transmitted by means of a written answer that should have been transmitted through a proper parliamentary statement. Apart from the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for the Environment made a potentially important statement about mechanisms for water charging in future.

The good news was that water companies would be allowed to go beyond the year 2000 using rateable values as a basis for charging for water. Like so many other things, however, there was bad news as well. The bad news outweighed the good news. For the first time, the Secretary of State stated that official Government policy was that metering should be the norm as a means of charging for water in future. The right hon. Gentleman's statement will be profoundly depressing to many people and organisations throughout the country. I have in mind organisations ranging from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the National Consumer Council. Representatives of the water industry such as the Water Services Association and the Water Companies Association have warned of the problems involved in moving towards a compulsory system of water metering as the basis for charging for water.

There are some fans of compulsory water metering, including the Director General of Water Services, Mr. Ian Byatt. His enthusiasm for compulsory water metering is well known. Over some time, he and Ministers have undertaken trials to assess compulsory water meters. There have been many well-founded reservations about the usefulness of the trials. The first trials took place on the Isle of Wight and in Bromsgrove. If, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you decided to select representative areas to determine whether water metering was a good idea or a bad idea and whether there would be technical problems, I do not think that you would select places such as the Isle of Wight and Bromsgrove. They were selected, however, some years ago.

It is sometimes argued that compulsory water metering is a great environmental measure because it leads to the conservation of water. It is about time that the Government started to listen to those who say that if they, the Government, did rather more to reduce leakage of large amounts of water from pipes, much more could be done for conservation than would result from the imposition of compulsory water meters. If there is a conservation argument in support of water metering, I do not find it acceptable to say to consumers throughout the country that those who are expected to conserve water are those who cannot afford to pay their water bills. Compulsory water metering hits those on low incomes, those with large families and the disabled.

There are some people who can benefit from the introduction of water meters. For years, they have had the right voluntarily to opt for the installation of a meter. We are now faced, however, with the thin end of the wedge that will lead to compulsory water metering. Ministers have said that they are not looking towards compulsory water metering, but we have seen over the past few years that new properties have water meters installed.

A petition was presented to me a month or so ago from people in the Weoley Castle area of Birmingham. They had moved to a new housing estate. It was an example of new housing association property. My constituents are very pleased with their accommodation, but they were never asked whether they wanted water meters to be installed. They have the same needs now as they had when living in their previous homes but they had no choice when it came to the installation of water meters.

We are faced with a developing two-tier system. Some people are having water meters forced on them. In the long term, perhaps, everybody will be in that position.

There are other options. In December 1994, I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for the Environment, in which I asked him how much the water meter trials had cost consumers. I asked him also about the research that had been undertaken in assessing other charging mechanisms. The reply read:

> "The national metering trials cost £19 million. The Department of the Environment funded just under half of this amount. The water companies involved funded the rest. There are no proposals to undertake trials on other alternative charging mechanism."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 133.]

There we have it. In fact, there is work to be done. There are other options. For example, we could consider updating rateable values as a means of charging for water. There is a real argument to support that option. There is a real argument also in support of using the council tax as a means of charging for water. Water companies have said that we should examine how the council tax could be so used. What would need to be done to the tax bands? How far could the council tax be related to water charges? Unfortunately, the Government are not prepared to spend one penny to ascertain how the council tax could be so applied. They have ruled out the use of the council tax and have opted for metering, with no apparent justification.

I believe that the Government have adopted an opinion on what water, the supply of water and the reclamation of sewage are all about. Their opinion is very different from mine. It seems that the Government regard water as a commodity. They appear to take the view that we can have water in the same way as we can buy a pint of beer, or go to the local supermarket to buy other goods.

Water is not like that. It is the most essential public service. It will remain a public service whoever owns it, whatever the charging methods and whatever regulatory system is in place. Supplying water and reclaiming sewage are public services. It is about time that we recognise that and introduce suitable systems for charging for them. It is not acceptable to treat the supply of water in the same way as the supply of a pint of beer. It is no more acceptable than using such a charging mechanism for the emptying of our bins or for sending our kids to school.

We must recognise that water is a public service. I hope that, despite the written answer that appeared yesterday, Ministers will think again. I hope that the Leader of the House will provide time for a proper statement and debate on the water industry and the charging systems that should be adopted, fair and equitable systems that will be in the best interests of the most important people of all, the consumers—every one of us.

11.38 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I wish to raise three brief constituency matters before the House adjourns for the Easter recess. First, I was a member of this place when legislation was introduced in 1984 to enable television cabling to take place. In 1991, legislation was introduced to permit road works to take place as a result of cabling. We all have our views on cabling. Personally, I have no desire to sit down with a piece of machinery, flicking from channel to channel—I think that companies are offering 48 channels and that people will be able to shop by television, and there is also competition for telephones, and so on—but as a Conservative, I believe in choice and that the general public should have that opportunity.

Let me return to 1984 and 1991. Perhaps I was not listening carefully to the debates then, but I had no idea of the impact that cabling would have on one's constituency when the contractors arrived. My constituency does not primarily have paving stones; it has tarmac. Ever since United Artists moved to my constituency, we have found that, week in week out, month in month out, a number of problems have been caused: water works exploding, electricity cut off, people's cars blocked in—all manner of problems. Although I am delighted that United Artists has its eastern headquarters in my constituency, with all the jobs that that has created, I do not think that the House looked carefully enough at that legislation and its impact on the lives of our constituents. I am less than happy with the way in which the contractors in my constituency have carried out their work.

I must tell my colleagues on both sides of the House that when cable companies come to their constituencies—if they have not arrived already—they should learn by the mistakes from which my constituents have suffered over the past year. There was a public meeting in my constituency last Friday and a lively exchange between United Artists and my constituents. I hope that there will not be further problems.

The second constituency matter that I wish to raise is housing. My constituency has been privileged to sell the highest number of council and commission houses in the

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country. That policy was fought line by line by the two socialist parties—the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Of course, when it became popular and we won in 1983 and again in 1987, they changed their policy and became in favour of the sale of council houses. Then when we had the economic slump and mortgage rates increase, they decided that perhaps it was not such a good idea. Conservative Members have been entirely consistent on the sale of council and commission houses. It sickens me that socialist councillors in Basildon are running around the town at the moment, before the local elections are held on 4 May, trying to claim credit for matters for which they do not deserve any, and trying to pass on to other people criticism for which they are entirely responsible.

Thanks to our excellent Conservative-controlled district council in Basildon and the Department of the Environment, money has been put into the estates. Work is being carried out to fit new roofs for the Vange, Crudons and Five Links estates. Later this afternoon, I very much hope to have a successful meeting with a Minister from the Department of the Environment, because, although the Government gave a great deal of money to redevelop the Crudons estate, there has been what I would describe as uneven treatment between the people who still rent and those who have purchased their properties. I was told yesterday that 29 home owners will have to pay for their new roofs. That is totally unfair. I also believe that the Department of the Environment must do all that it possibly can to enable the Five Links estate to be redeveloped.

The final constituency point that I wish to raise concerns socialist-controlled Essex county council. It is interesting that, two years ago, the electorate in Essex were deceived into voting socialist. They were led to believe that both the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties had become respectable—in other words, that they were capitalists and that socialism had been put by the by. The past two years in Essex have been a shambles because of the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition. They are socialists through and through and have caused absolute chaos in my constituency and the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink).

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the vulnerable people in Essex who are suffering most because of the shambles caused by the socialist control of Essex? The old people and the disabled people are having their home care withdrawn. Because of the socialist control in Essex, £8.5 million was lost in the past year from the social service budget because the council was following politically correct policies.

Mr. Amess: I could not agree more. Two weeks ago, when Essex county council submitted its budget, the alliance did not have the stomach for what it had been doing, so it pulled out of the arrangement. A Conservative budget has rescued Essex county council. Quite wickedly, the socialists in Essex absolutely devastated care in the community, which had been carefully worked out. As a result of their wicked, cruel policy, our hospital waiting lists were growing, our accident and emergency queues were lengthening and it was taking much longer to have an operation. All that was the result of socialist-controlled Essex county council.

The socialists also caused chaos in education. They brought in, without any consultation, a policy of nursery education. I would have liked the issue of rising fives to have been addressed before they introduced that policy, causing great distress because of the differences between the schools that do not have nursery education and those that do. I congratulate the Conservatives on Essex county council who, as a result of their budget, have restored the Labour-Liberal alliance cut of £1 million. Primary education in Essex was going to be cut by £1 million. Care in the community has been restored as a result of the Conservatives. There will be no cuts in the fire service. That is all due to the Conservatives on Essex county council.

Two years ago, the general public in Essex were deceived by a new type of socialism, which I have seen change dramatically ever since I became a Member in 1983. On Monday, an historic debate took place. Every year, the University college of London holds a president's debate; it has done so for 166 years. The motion is that this house has no faith in Her Majesty's Government. Only once had that motion been defeated in the 166-year history of that debate, until last Monday. I am delighted to say that that motion was defeated and a great many young people who attended that debate had their eyes well and truly opened as to the reality of socialism, which is very much alive.

11.48 am

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I wish to associate myself with the difficult speech that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), at the start of the debate. I thought that she put the case for mercy on behalf of her constituent very well.

I shall concentrate mainly on the answer that the Secretary of State for the Environment chose to give in the form of a written answer, instead of a statement, to the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) yesterday about charging for water. The Leader of the House will know that, on several occasions since last September, when the water industry put its points in a well-worked-out document to the Minister, I have asked in the House when the response would be made and when we would have a debate on the issue.

I was, therefore, surprised and extremely disappointed that the Government's response crept out in a written answer the day before the Easter recess. The only good thing is that it is clear from the announcement that to extend the use of rateable values beyond the year 2000 will require parliamentary time after Easter. By raising the matter today, I seek to ensure that proper time will be given for a debate of the issue after the recess because everyone feels strongly about it.

As the Minister knows, the only region where there has been a drive towards widespread metering is the Anglian region, where it caused so much public antagonism and outcry that Anglian Water, concerned about its deteriorating public reputation, decided to drop its policy of compulsory metering and, along with companies throughout Britain, to start to offer a choice to its customers. We want to ensure that there is no element of compulsion, for owners of new or of old properties, in yesterday's written answer. That is by no means clear at the moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) was correct when he described the provision of water and sewerage as one of the most essential public services in Britain, not to be confused with a commodity that can be bought and sold by the pound or the pint.

The delivery of water and sewerage cannot properly be measured by quantity in that way. The industry recognises that the treatment plants, piping and sewage plants account for approximately 85 per cent. of the industry's costs in delivering the water and sewerage service. A minimal amount—15 to 20 per cent.—is related to the volume of water and sewage that goes through a system. Therefore, water is not like other utilities. Metering is inappropriate for water and sewerage.

With regard to conservation, the National Rivers Authority is concerned, first, to reduce leakage; secondly, to install more water-saving devices in people's homes; and, only then, to cut usage by metering, and it recognises that that has the disadvantage of putting pressure on families who are particularly hard up.

I tabled a question, the answer to which will appear in *Hansard* today, asking how popular metering is in areas such as Northern Ireland where it does not exist at the moment. The answer was that not one household in Northern Ireland has asked for its water supply to be metered. That should be borne in mind. If there is choice, people will choose to have their water and sewerage priced on the valid basis on which we have charged for water and sewerage for more than 150 years—property values.

The water industry, in its submission to the Government last September on property values, stated:

> "It is clear that a linkage to properties must remain."

Why have the Government refused to listen to the industry's clear argument and, indeed, rejected it? The policy is clearly put forward by the industry because it leads to immense administrative savings. Every metered bill has an individual charge which has to be measured and which may result in an argument about the amount on which it is based. A property-based charging system offers administrative savings by cutting the overheads of the water industry. That is what we all want. We do not want expenditure in the water industry to be wasted either on top salaries or on unnecessary administrative overheads.

I hope that the Leader of the House will draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for the Environment early-day motion 72, which was signed by no fewer than 210 hon. Members from all parties, recommending that probably the best way forward for charging for water and sewerage would be through an amended form of council tax bands, and saying that many finance officers in English and Welsh water companies are at a loss to understand why they cannot follow the lead set by Scotland in that regard.

The reason for that is that the regulator of the Office of Water Services and the Government have almost an obsession with water metering which is leading them against the principle of consumer choice, and that will cause problems for them.

In my area, Yorkshire Water took the step, endorsed by the board and the regional Ofwat customer services committee, of moving right away from compulsion, offering people in new and old properties a choice when it came to charging for water. That was popular in Yorkshire.

The director general's reaction was to write to every other water and sewerage company expressing his disappointment at what Yorkshire Water had done and saying that he would ensure that its policy was strictly time limited so that a property-based system opted for by one householder would not apply to any subsequent owner-occupier. That is a rigid and unnecessary interpretation of a rule leading down the road of compulsory water metering.

The Government missed a big opportunity yesterday to put charging for water on a sensible basis for the future. The only thing in favour of the Government is that yesterday's statement is strictly time limited. It has neither relevance nor credibility, because the water industry, its customers and the country are waiting rather impatiently for, first, the retirement of the water regulator and, secondly, the Government's defeat in the next general election. Only then will water and sewerage be brought firmly into public control where it rightly belongs.

11.59 am

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): As one who is associated with the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) in the all-party water group, I hope that Ministers will take account of their concerns—although I cannot associate myself with some of their comments, particularly the hon. Lady's final observations.

I also admired the powerful speech of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)—not for the first time. Some years ago, I agreed with what he said about the rights of grandparents. I hope that the Government will not be shy of moving in the direction that he suggested; after all, if Opposition Members can be rigorous about such matters, we do not want to be outbid by them.

I wish to raise several matters relating principally to local government. The first—of which I gave notice to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House during Thursday's business questions—I do not wish to pursue at length; I should prefer the issue of demographic assessments and their implications for housing developments in the regions of the south-west, particularly the counties, to be debated in one of our excellent Wednesday morning "subject" debates, so that a number of my hon. Friends who are equally concerned about it can participate. Nevertheless, I question here and now the assumption by demographic experts that the drift of employment to the south that took place during the 1980s and previous decades will continue into the next century. The recession, which is now ending, has made that a doubtful assumption.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to remind the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that I await the satisfactory outcome of a proposal to which it has objected, because it involves the use of grade 1 land—the proposal involving Longforth farm, in my constituency. The community actually wants a housing development there—which is more or less unique nowadays—because it would bring infrastructure benefits to a town that faces considerable problems.

Let me also put down a marker for legislation next year. I read in the press that legislation to abate noise nuisance may be postponed until the publication of the general election manifesto. I hope that that will not happen, because such legislation is badly needed. It irritates me

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that environmental health officers can go around bullying small shop owners because they have broken certain food hygiene rules, but can do nothing to stop noisy neighbours who make the lives of my constituents—and, no doubt, other people—absolute murder.

We have debated the implications of the local government settlement for education on various occasions, but the picture is changing. The capping criteria were confirmed yesterday. We should remember that each local authority's circumstances are different. A limited agreement has been reached in Somerset between my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) and me, and members of the leading group on the county council: they have agreed to take funds from other budgets and put them into education, and we have agreed to support their action in exceeding the cap by 1 per cent., provided that that money is also put into education.

If those councillors keep their side of the bargain, I shall certainly support them; but that does not mean that I agree with the way in which they are using their resources in other respects. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton (Mr. Carlisle) is not present, because he would warmly agree with me. The councillors are spending what will probably turn out to be hundreds of thousands of pounds on litigation, taking their case through the High Court to the Appeal Court and possibly further: they want to ban hunting on the Quantock hills, on the border between my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater. However we may feel about the issue—I know that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) disagrees with me—we must agree that that is not a sensible use of council tax payers' money, and it will not help Somerset's appeal to the Secretary of the Environment for more resources.

There has been a tight financial settlement for local government in the coming year. I hope that every local authority—Somerset probably has a better reputation than many others in this respect—will concentrate its resources on front-line services rather than on bureaucracy and other matters to which I have referred. I hope that Somerset has been dissuaded from setting up county council offices in all the small towns. I also hope that we shall have a better overall settlement next year, as do my hon. Friends, and that the Government will give serious consideration to the area cost adjustment.

In the mean time, as well as considering the way in which resources are allocated between different budgets, we must constantly ask whether schools are using their money effectively. I was delighted to read in *The Times* on Saturday that at long last—heaven knows, it has taken long enough—we are beginning to see certain reforms in schools. According to the article,

> "National tests for 11-year-olds are triggering a revival of traditional teaching methods in state primary schools . . . Multiplication tables, spelling bees, public gold stars rewarding children's progress and dividing classes by ability for some subjects . . . are making rapid returns as teachers revert to more formal techniques to prepare classes for government tests . . . Government inspectors have identified the sector"—

the primary sector—

> "as the weak link in state education and last year reported that one third of lessons for children aged eight to 11 were unsatisfactory."

I am delighted by that sign of improvement. National taxpayers and council charge payers who are paying for education, and for other local authority services, want the best possible value for money. I hope that we shall use the breathing space offered by the coming year's tight budgets to ensure that electors and children are given that value for money, before returning—I hope—to happier financial circumstances.

12.6 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I bet the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) that Somerset charge payers would consider pursuing hunters on the Quantock hills and securing a ban on hunting an excellent use of council money. No doubt I shall be able to debate the issue with him at some future time; but in the five minutes allocated to me I, too, shall speak of value for money. I refer to the value for money—or lack of it in my view—provided by the sale of county hall, the riverside building that was the subject of a recent National Audit Office report, which has now been sent to the Public Accounts Committee.

The building on the other side of the river is now in the hands of a Japanese company, Shirayama Shokusan. As the report admits, it is difficult to obtain details of the sale because of the confidentiality clauses inserted in the contract. Shirayama's original offer price was £60 million; but when the London School of Economics, which was also in the market for county hall, was forced to withdraw, Shirayama tried to force the price down.

The report describes the negotiations that followed. Eventually Shirayama paid the London residuary body £50 million, the extra £10 million being deferred. That £10 million was to be paid in instalments out of profits from the development of county hall, which Shirayama said would become a hotel. The payments would begin in 1997 and end in 2012. Amazingly, Shirayama's statement—quoted in the report—reads as follows:

> "Consequently, the family has no such illusions or expectations in making any profit from this investment—even for more than two decades."

I do not believe that London will ever see the deferred sum of £10 million, and that strikes me as a pretty rotten deal for Londoners.

What is this Shirayama organisation that now has possession of one of London's prime sites? It is a private company. No independently verifiable information was available either to the Government or to the London residuary body: it is all in the report. No bank guarantee was offered for the purchase price, and other than county hall the company has no known assets in this country. Despite all that, however, Shirayama's offer and its accompanying proposal were accepted gratefully by a grovelling London residuary body, supported by the Government.

What is Shirayama going to do with the building? Proposals reveal that it now aims

> "To develop facilities that are both exciting and unique for London itself—an attraction for the family such as a family entertainment centre. A more leisure and education orientated concept in comparison to having just a 'Hotel', which would comprise mainly of guests just sleeping over."

That is not the only thing that people do in hotels, as the House found out recently, but the original proposal for which planning consent was given was for a hotel. The company is now changing the proposal.

In November 1994, the concept of a hotel was dumped. Shirayama started talking about a Pacific Asia centre and suspended development pending a so-called London referendum on the use of county hall—what a way to handle a building on one of the prime sites of London, right opposite the Palace of Westminster. What sort of a deal is that for Londoners, who have been robbed by the London residuary body and that peculiar organisation called the Shirayama group, which is controlled by a family? Even the word "family" has a certain resonance in this context. It is not the nuclear family we hear about in this House; it is more like the family we hear about in the Mafia lands of Italy.

There is a public interest in the disposal of county hall that has been totally ignored. The way in which it has been handled by this second-rate, shoddy, incompetent, unimaginative bunch of Ministers must contrast with how Paris would have handled it. If Jacques Chirac had been responsible for the development—and he is a right-winger—what would he have done? Would he have handed it over to the Japanese? Of course he would not. The building would have been used imaginatively and it would be something of which all London could be proud.

Who can have any confidence in the Shirayama organisation to redevelop county hall, either in terms of a concept because it does not have one, or in terms of its future financial backing? The Government could still do something about it by extricating Shirayama from the deal, which I am confident will never turn into a proper development.

If the Government will not do so, I say to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that, as nothing will have happened by the next election, there is an opportunity for the next Labour Government to take back county hall and use it for the purpose for which it was constructed—as the home of a Greater London authority.

12.11 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The House should not break for the Easter recess without recording our congratulations to the parents of Gravesend grammar school for boys who voted by 70 per cent. to become a grant-maintained school. A number of my hon. Friends representing Kent have tabled early-day motion 962 recording that fact.

It was a successful campaign led by the chairman of the governors, Eric Hammond, who the House will recall was general secretary of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union. He led a successful campaign that was best described in the *Evening Standard* on 14 March, when he was quoted as saying,

> "It is not in our interests to be tied to an expensive bureaucracy."

By that, he meant Lib-Lab controlled Kent county council. He continued:

> "Like Mr. Blair, we are putting the interests of the children first. I would like to see the Labour party becoming wholehearted in its support for grant-maintained schools."

Gravesend grammar school for boys will join nine other schools in the borough of Gravesham that have become grant-maintained and have made considerable progress. St. George's Church of England school has put a great deal of money and effort into improving the site and Northfleet high school for boys said that freedom to allocate its resources has allowed it to invest in its curriculum, its buildings and better staffing and to transfer resources from administration to the curriculum.

Southfields school, which, sadly, under Kent county council control was at the bottom of the performance tables, has increased its staff by two, reversed and eradicated its deficit, put new furniture in every classroom and provided a new computer network for pupils, and its results are improving all the time. It is extremely encouraging.

The decision is notable because of the hostility of the Labour and Liberal-controlled Kent county council. When that unholy alliance took control of Kent county council, it immediately diverted £100,000 of education funds to fight grant-maintained schools. I have asked the council for the figure that it has spent so far on fighting grant-maintained schools, but it would not tell me. I have calculated that it is already up to about £250,000.

Last Wednesday, we had a debate on education cuts, during which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), speaking for the Opposition, alleged that

> "under the Conservatives, in the late 1970s, Kent county council undertook a major study of the impact of the voucher system in nursery education? Kent spent £9 million of public money on that experiment, and then abandoned it."

That was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and the hon. Member for Brightside went on to say:

> "Yes, it cost £9 million to undertake a prolonged experiment in one part of Kent. The fact that Conservative Members do not know what happened is a good reason why they should start to listen and to learn, instead of talking about inflicting vouchers on the rest of Britain".—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1037.]

Yesterday, on Radio Kent, the hon. Member for Brightside withdrew that allegation. He has been asked to apologise for misleading the House, but so far he has refused to do so. I must admit to a certain amount of sympathy for the hon. Member for Brightside because he received those allegations from the Labour group on Kent county council. They turned out to be bogus allegations and they have embarrassed the Labour party education spokesman in the House.

I have sympathy with the hon. Member for Brightside because now he knows how Kent parents have felt over the past few months as they have been fed a series of bogus figures by the Lib-Lab controlling group on the county council, which claims that Government funding has been cut when in fact it has been increased by 2 per cent. The Lib-Lab pact has imposed a 5 per cent. increase in its council tax demand in Kent and simultaneously is cutting school budgets in real terms, underfunding the teachers' pay settlement, slashing adult education funding by 20 per cent., cutting out discretionary grants to students and hitting many other services.

I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) whose county of Essex is suffering the same unholy alliance of Labour and Liberal Democrat. He told us that when it came to cutting the education budget—a proposal by the Lib-Lab pact—the Liberals lost their nerve and ran away, hence the Conservative budget, which would have preserved the budgets of schools, has been retained in Essex. I wish only that Kent had had typical Liberals who run away from hard decisions, so that a Conservative county council budget could have preserved education spending in our county. The people

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of Kent now have to watch their schools being under-resourced because the Labour party wants to make some cheap party-political point.

12.17 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I join hon. Members who condemned the manner of the Secretary of State's announcement yesterday about the future of London hospitals. It is a great pity that she did not listen to her Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for Wales. I should like to speak about two aspects of her announcement yesterday: first, her decision in relation to Guy's hospital and, secondly, her decision in relation to the kidney unit at Dulwich hospital.

This morning, like other hon. Friends, I received a letter from the Minister for Health. He says, by way of explanation for the decision yesterday:

> "In reaching this decision she"—

the Secretary of State—

> "has taken account of the concerns and views expressed during consultation, including those from local Community Health Councils and MPs".

Let me make it clear that, in the course of the consultation to which the Minister of Health refers, the health commission received 52 letters in favour of its proposals, the majority of which were from staff directly or indirectly associated with St. Thomas's hospital. It received 542 letters and 3,000 postcards against and the House received a petition presented by a number of my hon. Friends which comprised 1 million signatures pledged by people up and down the country in support of Guy's hospital.

The Minister's letter continued:

> "Guy's will continue as a major hospital, especially geared to the needs of local people."

It cannot do so without its accident and emergency department and the necessary in-patient beds to support the work of that department. Indeed, the proposals have been condemned by consultants at Guy's as being clinically unsafe. They do not believe that it is safe to conduct minimally invasive surgery without intensive care and other back-up facilities on site. It will put patients' lives at risk to shuttle them, as proposed, between Guy's and St. Thomas's if something goes wrong.

It is also important to remember that primary care in that part of south-east London is among the worst in the country. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us whether she intends to put in the £28 million that the health commission said would be essential to ensure that improvements in the quality of primary and community health services could be achieved.

The Minister's letter refers to the accident and emergency department not being closed until alternative and related services are fully equipped to provide improved services for patients. We want to know whether that £28 million will be invested, as without it those improvements cannot be achieved.

I want to raise the issue of the Dulwich kidney unit, which is to be moved to Guy's hospital in the face of opposition by every member of staff and every patient at the unit. The Secretary of State should never again come to the House and say that the national health service reforms are about patient choice. If they were, patients at the kidney unit—all of whom suffer from long-term and disabling diseases—would have been listened to and their unit would not have been tampered with.

12.21 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I want to refer to the opposite side of the coin from the many hon. Members who have referred to the way in which local government spends money. I want to talk about how it raises money, with particular reference to the rating revaluation and the uniform business rate. I want to raise three particular issues, but first I shall put them in the context of a constituency which, in the summer of 1993—the year in which businesses were revalued—received assisted area status on the ground of endemic high unemployment, and whose country areas are already covered by the Rural Development Commission in recognition of rural poverty and deprivation.

The first issue is tourism, which is important to my constituency, and caravan holiday parks. There has long been a debate about how we rate holiday homes. Agreement was reached in 1990, but this year the Valuation Office unilaterally threw out that agreement, with the net result of an increase in rateable value at some of the caravan parks of, for example, 130 per cent. for one farmer, of 120 per cent. and 110 per cent. for the two parks belonging to Cinque Ports Leisure, 165 per cent. for Oakley Leisure, and 200 per cent. for Shearburn.

Notwithstanding the transitional grant, it does not take a genius to work out that even at the end of five years, those businesses will not even reach their uniform business rate level by the time that they have to be revalued again. I strongly recommend that the Valuation Office sits down with the industry and works out a long-term solution to the problem of valuing caravan parks, so that businesses do not face such crippling demands.

My second point relates to the pub industry. Those of us who have followed the issue for some time know that beer orders have led directly to some very large rental increases by companies such as Inntrepreneur. I understand that, in the revaluation, the Valuation Office had to take the size of rentals into account. The only problem is that many of the pubs are now being let to holding managers—so that the companies can hang on to the licences—at rents of anything between nothing and £160 per week. It is hard when a local pub faces an average increase of 50 per cent., with some such as the Queen's Head at Icklesham and the Bridge Inn at Winchelsea facing double that. Again, I recommend that the Valuation Office takes into account the reality of pub rents in that sector and significantly reduces the valuations, taking a more realistic account of the rents being charged in Inntrepreneur pubs.

Finally, I want to refer to the discrepancies between similar businesses in similar locations. Some of the discrepancies in Hastings have been very large. I was first alerted to the problem when one business woman told me that she had had an increase of 35 per cent. in an area where, over seven years, her takings had gone down from £3,000 to £700 a week. Since then, complaints have poured in from all sectors, including manufacturing and coastal amusements. Of course, in the latter case the problem has been eased because of the provision in the Finance Bill relating to amusement machine tax. Businesses feel very sore about the valuation increases.

The differences between businesses have resulted in an average—calculated by Hastings borough council—increase of 30 per cent. for leisure businesses and 26 per cent. for commercial businesses.

My hon. Friends the Members for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) wish to be associated with my remarks about this problem. East Sussex has two district valuation offices—one in Brighton, where the average increase in rateable value has been 5 per cent. for Brighton, 5 per cent. for Hove and 6 per cent. for Lewes; and one in Eastbourne, where the average increase has been 24 per cent. for Wealden, 20 per cent. for Rother, 17 per cent. for Hastings and 22 per cent. for Eastbourne. Nobody understands why there should be such a difference. The Valuation Office must investigate that fully and at least run some test cases to find out where the discrepancies have arisen and why.

In the meantime, valuation offices will be swamped with appeals, some of which started a few days ago. The problem will take years to sort out, so the effect on business cashflows will be drastic. Businesses need reassurance that the problems will be resolved, that the appeals will be heard quickly and that financial hardship will be minimised. Perhaps the increases should not be enforced until all that is sorted out.

12.27 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Several hon. Members have raised the issue of education cuts. In Derbyshire, there is great anger and bewilderment about education cuts in that county, which are shared by teachers, parents and governors. I have previously explained the details of those cuts to the House.

The bewilderment arises because people do not understand how the Government can act in the way that they have with standard spending assessments over a period of time, without taking into account the position in schools. If only, somehow, Members of Parliament and others could get the ear of the Secretary of State and explain the details, perhaps, as with taking icons to the tsar, the position would be understood and she would respond. However, that is not the case. The Government understand the position, but they are unwilling to change. That fact has created considerable anger.

A number of teachers were among those at the demonstration, rally and lobby last Wednesday, when constituents presented massive numbers of petitions to hon. Members representing Derbyshire. If one had asked those teachers why they has come on that lobby, they would have said that they felt that it was their duty to be there. They never imagined that, in any circumstances, they would turn up at a lobby on educational matters, but the circumstances have forced them to do so.

Councillors and, in particular, governors in Derbyshire have been placed in the most unenviable position. The problem for governors is whether to set deficit budgets or to resign from their positions. In Dronfield school in my constituency, a number of governors have taken the resignation route. That has occurred with the entire body at Newbold school in the Chesterfield constituency. Individuals have had to make almost impossible choices. No one should be placed in the position in which parents, teachers and governors have been placed in Derbyshire. That view must be clear to the Government before we go into recess.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned disablement and the closure of the Remploy works at Alfreton, with the loss of 74 jobs. I associate myself entirely with his comments. It will be no surprise to the Leader of the House that I should like to use this opportunity to say something more about disablement and the treatment of disabled people.

The measure that all organisations representing disabled people want to become law—the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—has been shunted away, and has had to stand in a Committee queue. Its consideration by the House is being held up. A number of private Members' Bills have been introduced. Four have already been dealt with, and the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill is in Committee.

The Government have had no dispute with any of those Bills. Two of them have been Government Bills and have been picked up by private Members. Despite the fact that the Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was supported by 175 votes to nil, and despite overwhelming support across all parties for that measure, the Government have quietly pushed the thing away—we have not seen blood let on the Floor of the House, as happened in the previous year—so that it must stand in the queue in the Committee corridor. That wait must end.

I hope that the Bill in Standing Committee C will get through this morning and that, after the Easter recess, we will be able to move forward with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Much must be done in connection with that Bill, given that it fills the gaps in the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill. I hope that the Leader of the House will respond to ordinary hon. Members' concerns that the measure that they strongly supported has not been given the proper consideration that it should have received.

12.33 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I say how grateful the House is to my right hon. Friend Leader of the House for being here for the debate? He sets a standard that will be difficult for his successor to follow, and he has covered most Government Departments.

Having served both as a junior Minister and, while the Chief Whip allowed, as the parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), I am reminded of the two words used in memorial to his father—fairness and integrity. Those characteristics are common to his father, to him and to the Secretary of State for Health.

There are two sides to the health issue. One involves the revelation in today's *Daily Mail* that the Labour party does not propose to spend new money, that it wants to use tricks, and that it thinks that the health service makes a minimal contribution to the health of the nation. That issue deserves a debate by itself.

On the changes in London, for some time, I have been campaigning to persuade the Ministry for Defence to let go of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwich, which it said that it would need until the end of the century. I said that it would change its mind. I also told the local health commissioning agency and the Greenwich Healthcare trust that they should try as hard as they can to bring most of Greenwich district hospital and Brook

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

general hospital services across Shooters hill to the Queen Elizabeth military hospital site. I am glad that yesterday's announcement confirmed that.

Although arguments persist about the neurosciences and neurosurgery—they have been going on since before I was a Member of Parliament and I first heard them in 1974—it is right to move in the cardio-thoracic services, although, over the decades, many campaigns have taken place to keep regional services outside the centre of London. I suspect that, in time, the commissioning agencies will allow neuroscience departments to be based further out from London, whether at Queen Mary's hospital, Sidcup, or further out on the line from Maidstone to Guildford.

I have talked to doctors in Greenwich and those covering my constituency of Eltham. They want decisions to be made. When I ask them whether Guy's and St. Thomas's acute services are duplicated, they say no. I understand that the medical staff at Guy's and St. Thomas's agree that those services should not be duplicated and that, whichever site is chosen for the main acute hospital, people will benefit if they are brought together. The longer the delay, the more resources are sucked out of the region between inner and outer London—the location of my constituency—and the worse services become.

Secondly, I wish that the media and Members of Parliament would say more about the development of primary and community services. In my constituency, the Feathers project, the Hilltop nursery at Memorial hospital and the developments in general practitioner services have made an immense difference to people's lives.

I do not want to get into a vendetta with the *Evening Standard*. However, I was rung up by one of its journalists this morning who said that it was conducting a survey into whether Tory Back Benchers would vote against the Government or with the Labour party on a debate on London's health service. I asked what the question was. He said that it is all about Bart's, so I said that some concerns existed in relation to Bart's, but that that was not the issue that most people were getting excited about.

The journalist then said that the question was not about Bart's but about something else. I said that I was not capable of commenting on such matters, but that I could tell him that yesterday's announcement in a written answer about developing community, primary and hospital services for people in my constituency was much to be welcomed, and that I would give my loyal support not only to the Government but to the practice of developing medicine, which had a continuity going back even to the last Labour Government.

12.37 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I shall be as brief as I can. I know that most people blanch when hon. Members say that, but I shall try to stick to that promise.

On yesterday's announcement—if that is what it was—on changes to acute service provision, particularly in our part of south-east London, I endorse what other hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), have said about the validity of the process. A distinct feeling exists in my part of Lewisham that yesterday's announcement was simply the latest stage in a conspiracy to reduce hospital provision in south-east London, and London generally, which was launched pre-Tomlinson, and which has been unaltered by anything that has happened.

I served on an area health authority—the Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark area health authority—in 1976. I went on to serve on its successor—the Lewisham and North Southwark district health authority. In 1976, at least 16 hospitals existed in south-east London alone. Today, there are but four, so it is not the process of change that people in south-east London are worried about; it is the nature of that change.

The old area health authority had to be suspended by the then Secretary of State, Patrick, now Lord, Jenkin, because of its refusal to support the closure of St. John's hospital in the early 1980s. That hospital has closed. Therefore, the process of change in health care acute provision in south-east London is nothing new.

It is the third time in precious few years that a major consultation exercise has taken place in Lewisham and in my part of south-east London. The first was on the establishment of the then "flagship" Lewisham and Guy's trust. The second was after that was dismantled and Lewisham was set up as a separate trust and Guy's and St. Thomas' were put together for other reasons, and the third has been on the future of those plans since. On every occasion, there has been overwhelming opposition but it has counted for nothing at all. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) detailed the figures involved and the petition that was presented to the House.

Most of the responses to the health authority's most recent consultation document came from people in my part of Lewisham, apart from those which came from people in the area immediately around Guy's hospital itself, which is understandable. That was largely because those people use Lewisham and King's predominantly for accident and emergency services and know that those hospitals cannot cope as they are, let alone if the accident and emergency department at Guy's were to close.

Even if the money earmarked for improvements at Lewisham, for example, were spent, it would be enough only to bring that hospital up to an acceptable standard. At a recent meeting with the regional health authority, one of the officials admitted that the department was undersized. When I asked him what that meant, he said that it was too small and inadequate. I hope that there will be opportunities for the House to debate and vote on these matters, which is the least that the people of south-east London deserve.

12.42 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): We have had a useful morning of speeches, which has proved the wisdom of moving this debate to Wednesday mornings. The fact that 20 Back Benchers have contributed is probably a record, and it is important that we maintain this sort of opportunity for hon. Members. I should like to comment on as many as possible of those speeches, but 20 is a lot so I may have to be brief. I congratulate the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) on setting us off to such a good start by proving that a very strong case can be made in a short and concise speech.

The point that the right hon. Gentleman made about the way in which the death warrant for Bart's has been issued in an answer to a parliamentary written question is one that should concern the whole House. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House share his concern not only about the decision that was made yesterday but about the way in which that decision was announced to hon. Members. We should not underestimate the importance of abiding by the appropriate procedures in such cases.

Several hon. Members raised the question of health care in London and the decision by the Secretary of State for Health yesterday. The points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) as well as by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will have to be taken on board. It is important that the House has a full opportunity to come back to the issue.

As my hon. Friends have said, it is a question not just of the Secretary of State not consulting but of deceiving people and pretending that the Government are listening to patients when, in fact, they are depriving patients of choice and not creating the localised hospitals that the Secretary of State for Wales advocated just this week. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said, it is not the process of change that alarms people but the nature of the proposed changes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) made a very sensitive speech dealing with the difficult issue of her constituent Nicholas Ingram, who is awaiting execution in the United States. Every hon. Member should be worried about that case, and the silence in which my hon. Friend was heard demonstrates that we all understand the difficulties facing her constituent and his family. I hope that the Prime Minister will hear of her comments and take heed of her request.

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) raised again the subject of construction contracts, which was raised in a similar debate before the previous recess. We share many of his concerns about the future of the construction industry. I hope that, as well as noting the points that he made, the Government will take on board the need to release the capital receipts of local authorities, which would do much more to boost the construction industry and quickly counter problems such as unemployment. I do not understand why the Government refuse to act upon that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) raised another problem which concerns hon. Members on both sides of the House—the dangers of joyriding and the tragic deaths that have occurred in his constituency and, I am afraid, in all too many of our constituencies. Many of us are extremely worried about that. It is a fact that, compared with 1979, we now have twice the chance of becoming victims of car crime and three times the chance of becoming victims of burglary or violent crime. Many people do not understand why crime has risen so dramatically under the Government or why the Government do not take those problems more seriously.

The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) raised points about local government with which I do not want to deal in detail. However, with any local government reorganisation, there is always the problem of balancing decisions made on the basis of numbers with decisions about what constitutes a local community. I do not think it should be just a numbers game.

The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry), who I am glad to see here, raised some very real problems associated with the travel industry and in particular those affecting our constituents who think that they have got a good deal and discount only to find that they have not got all that they expected because of the ties that go with the deal. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that, while I share his concerns, some of which have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), it would have been wise, especially today, for the hon. Gentleman to have mentioned his interest in the travel industry, if only to say that his comments were not based on any self-interest.

Sir Peter Fry: Would the hon. Lady like to specify what self-interest I am supposed to have? I have been in the House quite long enough to know that I must declare any interests. I have no interest in the travel industry. Would she substantiate that challenge or kindly withdraw it?

Mrs. Taylor: I was simply referring to the fact that the Register of Members' Interests says that the hon. Gentleman is associated with the coach industry and with the Sally Line. I am not saying that he was speaking on their behalf but it would have been wise to declare that interest to show that he was not.

Sir Peter Fry: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The interest, which relates to advice given to the Sally Line and to some coach operators, is nothing whatsoever to do with the advertising of air fares or holiday insurance. That surely is stretching the argument about interest far too far. If we are going to get that kind of jibe from members of the Opposition Front Bench, perhaps it is time that some of us got back at some Opposition Members who are taking money and not declaring it in the Register of Members' Interests.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I think that hon. Members are fully aware that it is up to the hon. Member concerned if he or she feels that an interest should be declared.

Mrs. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that if the hon. Gentleman has any such information he should contact the Registrar of Members' Interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned job losses at Remploy in his constituency. Many of us are concerned about the long-term future of Remploy and understand the difficulties that face many disabled people working in those situations. I know that travelling to appropriate places of work is particularly difficult for disabled people. I also share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that the Government's unwillingness to consider his Bill further and give it time is causing difficulties for many people.

I found incredible the comments of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) about education. I found his speech incredible. He made many attacks on teachers for taking Baker days which were, of course, introduced by a Conservative Government. More incredibly, he criticised pupils for not learning enough and tried to blame teachers. He made the strange suggestion that there were more teachers now than there had been. I have checked the figures. In 1979, there were 425,000 full-time equivalents in England and Wales. In 1993, the last year

[Mrs. Taylor]

for which figures are available, there were 365,000—a drop of 60,000. That means that class sizes are increasing and that there are now more than 1 million children in primary classes of more than 30. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the quality of education, he should pay more attention to the need to reduce class sizes.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: No because I have no time.

The issue of the water industry was raised this morning. My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) have ably outlined the difficulties that will face us if the Government try to impose on the regulator an instruction to introduce compulsory water metering. During their time in the House, both my hon. Friends have highlighted the problems of the water industry, and are to be congratulated on that.

If we have compulsory water metering or any forced extension of water metering, it will be hard on many people, including those who can least afford it, but who need the service. The water industry was developed as a public service because of public health considerations. If we go down the wrong track and if people are unable to afford this vital service—it is not a commodity—we shall create many problems for ourselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough has had much success in her campaign on water, not least getting Yorkshire Water to abandon its approach to compulsory water metering. I hope that other water companies will follow suit. Compulsory metering is not the answer to conservation problems or to the problem of pricing; my hon. Friends are right. I have learnt with interest that the water industry itself—both the Water Services Association of England and Wales and the Water Companies Association—has criticised the decision by the Secretary of State for the Environment. It says:

> "We hope this doesn't mean the thin end of the wedge towards universal compulsory metering for all domestic customers. We would certainly fight that on behalf of our customers very hard indeed."

Even the industry does not agree with the Secretary of State for the Environment, whose announcement yesterday was worrying.

This has been a useful debate despite the limited time. I congratulate right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part and I hope that we can use such occasions equally well in future.

12.51 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I am obliged to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for allowing me a few precious seconds from his time to enable me to record, as I am sure the House would like me to do, my thanks to not one, but three Secretaries of State for the Environment for the introduction, on behalf of all my constituents, of a unitary authority—the first in the United Kingdom—which met on Monday this week. Does that not show that Conservatives believe in a lighter touch on the tiller of government? At a stroke, the Isle of Wight has gone from being the most over-governed constituency in the United Kingdom to one of the least governed.

12.52 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), for whose words I am grateful, has increased to 21 the number of people who have spoken from the Back Benches in this debate. That is a record, certainly during the three years in which I have wound up these debates, and amply justifies the combined efforts of myself, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) which succeeded in reinstating, in the new form of "matters to be considered", what used to be known as the recess Adjournment motion.

Most hon. Members, recognising that I am likely to be under some time constraint by the end of the debate, have kindly acknowledged that what they are principally asking me to do is to ensure that their points are passed on in the appropriate quarters. I immediately give that undertaking. There is, however, one additional point to insert which enables me, I hope with absolute justification and courtesy, to avoid commenting on four or five speeches.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) by now will know, and as the world will know shortly through the annunciator, his private notice question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has been granted for this afternoon. There will, therefore, be opportunities for my right hon. Friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and the hon. Members for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) to raise further the matters they have sought to raise with me today. I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is alerted to the points that they have raised with me.

I shall briefly deal with as many of the speeches as I can comment on in the seven minutes remaining to me. Like everyone who has spoken in the debate, I understand and respect the reasons for the way in which the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) referred to the case of her former constituent, Mr. Ingram, and his situation in the United States. Hon Members also have every understanding of the efforts that Mrs. Ingram is making. The hon. Member for Cambridge referred to the letter the Prime Minister had written to Mrs. Ingram, of which I have a copy. My right hon. Friend concluded:

> "With the deepest regret, there are no proper grounds for the British Government to intervene with the state of Georgia."

I cannot add to that from the Dispatch Box, but I will, of course, ensure that the hon. Lady's remarks this morning are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his return from Washington later today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) spoke about the Latham report to which, as he knows, I have adopted a sympathetic approach. I can tell my right hon. Friend, as he probably already knows, that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is prepared, in principle, to consider legislation on contractual matters relating to the construction industry and that he intends to issue consultation papers shortly. In my capacity as the person responsible for the legislative programme, I can tell my right hon. Friend that I have taken careful note of his remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) referred to a number of aspects of education in Bedfordshire and made points about parents, teachers and the county council. He will not expect me to be able to cover all of them. However, I make the point that the updated parents charter launched in June 1994 makes a significant contribution to, and underpins, the efforts of parents in taking the interest in education that my hon. Friend is rightly anxious to see.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) attracted sympathy from all hon. Members with his remarks about joyriding and about crime generally. I say, gently, that the hon. Gentleman might have referred, in calling for the Government to take action, to the fact that it is only three years since the Government took speedy action and introduced the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Act 1992. The Act significantly increased the penalties available for the kind of joyriding that the hon. Gentleman described. More recently, we ensured that secure training orders, under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, would apply to persistent joyriders between 12 and 14. I remind the hon. Gentleman that his party abstained from the vote on the proposition, and therefore did not support it.

The Government have acted significantly to increase the penalties for causing death by dangerous driving. Fourteen to 17-year-olds can be detained under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 for up to the adult maximum of 10 years. That Act was affected by more recent legislation concerning the adult maximum. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the problems have been, and will continue to be, taken seriously.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) made some points about local government in Devon which he wanted me to pass on. Some of the points were made directly to me only last weekend or the weekend before when I undertook engagements in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). I am getting representations about Devon from all directions; I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is aware of them.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a number of points about Remploy. I hope that he will acknowledge that the Government give substantial support to Remploy—about £90 million a year out of a total support of employment programme of £140 million. The Government cannot, of course, entirely insulate Remploy, any more than any other company, from competition, although they are working with the company to tackle the current downturn in textiles and are helping it with diversification programmes. On Alfreton, the hon. Gentleman might have acknowledged that in the proposals currently under discussion—the merger date has been postponed until the discussions with the employees and the unions have been concluded—the company would intend to ensure that transport was available for those who needed it and would meet any additional transport costs. If the proposal were to be adopted, at least some of the hon. Gentleman's objections would be met.

In the remaining minute, I clearly do not have time to cover the subjects of water charges, education and other matters in Kent and Essex, population growth in Somerset, county hall and the like. I have taken careful note of all those points and I shall ensure that they are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Although we have a few more hours to go, I shall conclude by wishing the Chair and the House a happy Easter recess.

Compulsory Purchase (Compensation)

1 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I am glad to have this brief opportunity to raise the matter of statutory compensation for individuals whose land has been taken, used or damaged and whose entitlement to compensation arises from some provision in law. The scope of my concern includes the taking of land for highway works, the use of land for pipelines and cables, and damage to land caused by coalmining. A number of my constituents have concerns and interests in those categories, and there can be few Members of Parliament who do not have constituents affected by those matters.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment in his place. Although I shall touch on matters that concern both the Department of Transport and the Department of Trade and Industry, the responsibility for administering the compulsory purchase procedure rests with the Department of the Environment.

My concern is not on this occasion about the use of compulsory powers. I am focusing on the right of those affected to be paid proper compensation and, where there is any dispute, to secure a just and proper settlement. It is contrary to the intention of the law and to natural justice for claimants to be exposed to excessive delay and considerable costs in order to secure payment where they reasonably believe that the compensation offered is inadequate.

Where a claim arises, the parties normally seek to settle the amount of compensation by negotiation; where they cannot reach agreement, there is a right to refer the matter to the Lands Tribunal. That tribunal is a division of the High Court, and it has the duty to resolve disputed valuations that arise in a wide range of circumstances.

Appeals to the High Court can be made relatively easily by way of case stated by the tribunal. For many, that arrangement works perfectly well, but it takes a considerable time for a case to be brought before the Lands Tribunal, and the costs involved are invariably substantial. I make no criticisms of the Lands Tribunal, but its provision is not enough to secure justice for those who are entitled to, but lack, compensation.

The tribunal is not a suitable remedy, because many of the sums in dispute amount to only a few thousand pounds. Not many people will assume the risk of instructing counsel, their solicitor, their chartered surveyor and, where necessary, other experts, to prepare a case for the Lands Tribunal to pursue a claim of perhaps only £5,000. The cost of those advisers will be considerable, and the fees will be payable as the case progresses—spanning perhaps two, and often more, years.

Sustaining the case, evaluating the arguments and attending to all matters without knowing the outcome places considerable stress on all those involved. Farmers are usually naturally isolated in their business, and the stress involved can have a damaging effect on their health and viability. The risk of being faced with the costs of the other party to the dispute is a further major deterrent to going to the tribunal.

The incidence of delay and risk, and the need for constant reappraisal, is a normal, necessary and unavoidable part of going to law. But it must be remembered that the claim that I am discussing arises because the claimant has had his land taken, used or abused by the other party, usually under the provision of statutory powers, for a particular purpose. The claimant sometimes has no choice but to go to law. But that approach can effectively deny him the right to his due compensation.

I can illustrate my concern by reference to three scenarios. The first involves the taking of land by the Department of Transport—now the Highways Agency—for a new road scheme. Many property owners suffer loss during the construction period, for which they should be paid compensation. In a paper sent to the Department of Transport on 18 February 1994, the Country Landowners Association set out 23 cases of serious loss to landowners.

The cases ranged from cows that had died after eating hay in a field into which noxious dust had blown, the loss of production in a factory after a drain became blocked by silt and the building was flooded, and the loss of water from a metered farm water supply pipe that had to be diverted, but was faultily reinstated. All those losses arose as a direct result of the construction works for which the claimants' land was acquired. The losses were undeniable, but liability for the claims was denied by the Department of Transport and, in the case of the dead cows, the contractor had gone out of business.

Settlements are made on the basis of third-party claims, but they are made at a low level, without admission of liability. The claimants feel, rightly, that they are entitled to compensation for their true loss. They decide, however, that the difference between the offer that they may receive and their full loss—or their full loss when no offer is made—is too little to justify a reference to the Lands Tribunal. As a result, they feel—and are, in truth—let down and cheated by the system.

Secondly, the right of water companies to serve notice on owners and occupiers, and subsequently to enter on to land to carry out work, can create difficulties. The claimant is left to make a claim on the water company after the works have started, and he will still be seeking payment for the whole or part of his claim for loss of value and disturbance when the works are finished, and sometimes long after. That allows the water companies, which are now in the private sector and aim to maximise profits for their shareholders, to use their powerful position to oblige the claimant to come chasing after them for compensation.

I know that water companies claim that they do not abuse their powers and, from their perspective, they may be right in most cases. But for the landowner and occupier, the position is different. The right to use the land must, without demur, be made available to the water company, and it is then a matter of trying to settle the proper basis for compensation. That is akin to a stern chase—trying to catch up a departing body from behind.

The problems for claimants include disputes over the basic value of the land, the cost to the business caused by the works themselves and the reinstatement costs of works to the surface, to land drains and to non-agricultural properties. Where the claim is not agreed—the negotiations are often difficult—the owner has the option of accepting the water company's offer, having already suffered the works, or of taking the matter to the Lands Tribunal.

Few people have taken water companies to the tribunal, because the disputed sums are usually too small for it to be worth while. Water companies know better than anyone else that the cost and risk of a reference encourages, if not obliges, the claimant to accept their usually inadequate offer.

The third scenario is the worst to come to my notice. It concerns one of my constituents, who is currently awaiting the outcome of arbitration with British Coal following subsidence damage to his property. My constituent could not settle the claims for compensation by agreement and was obliged, because of the severity of his problems, to take the matter further. Rather than refer his problems to the Lands Tribunal—a draconian step, for the reasons that I have already given—my constituent opted for the alternative of arbitration.

The latest Government advisory leaflet applicable in such circumstances states:

> "you have the right to take the matter to the Lands Tribunal. However, in the majority of cases arbitration offers a cheaper, quicker and less formal way of resolving disputes. You have the right to choose arbitration as an alternative to the Lands Tribunal."

In the event, however, recourse to arbitration for my constituent has proved to be something of a nightmare, and the very negation of cheapness or informality. In that context, I hasten to add that I make no comments on the merits of the case before the arbitrator, which is still under consideration. Nor do I make any criticism of the part played by British Coal in the unresolved claims subject to arbitration.

My criticisms are directed at the official advice given to claimants who may hesitate to go to the Lands Tribunal. In the case of my constituent, which is now subject to arbitration, British Coal judged that the issues involved and the possible consequences in terms of wider compensation claims flowing from the outturn of the case, made it prudent for it to take steps—which naturally British Coal could afford—to protect itself.

British Coal duly instructed counsel, and it was necessary and prudent for my constituent to do the same. Many issues were raised during the arbitration hearings which required the involvement of many advisers, who prepared expert evidence and attended the arbitration. I could not attend any of the 25 days of the arbitration hearing, which were spread over 12 months, but the costs in the matter for a private citizen have been unimaginable. My constituent will have committed more than £100,000 in pursuing his case by the time the arbitrator gives his decision.

That is not low cost. It is not informal. Whatever the merits of the case—that, I repeat, is for the arbitrator alone to consider, and I make no comments on it—the route suggested by the official Government guidance is misleading. It has resulted in financial and emotional strain on my constituent, which cannot have been the objective of arbitration as propounded in the official guidance. It comes much closer to a Lands Tribunal hearing.

I should therefore like to propose two changes to the existing procedures to provide for greater fairness and accessibility. First, the claimant should have a right to require a dispute to be referred to mediation. That is an established yet informal basis for settling matters between two parties. It involves an independent assessor who is trained in the discussion and resolution of disputes. He hears the case of each side, with each party normally attending in person with the assistance of an adviser such as a surveyor, lawyer or other expert.

The mediator talks with the parties to try to ensure a shared and compatible understanding of the issues and arguments involved in the circumstances, and to facilitate the acceptance of a settlement which recognises the strengths and weaknesses, or rights and wrongs, of each side. That is an informal process with separate discussions at the outset and, often, a round table discussion as matters progress. That process has proved effective in other spheres, and it has been used extensively to good effect in other areas of dispute, particularly in the construction industry. It is cheap and quick.

Mediation can do much to ensure the payment of proper compensation to claimants. If they are unhappy about a settlement, they can seek mediation and have their arguments heard and debated with the other side. Often that opportunity will be enough to resolve the claims on a basis acceptable to both sides. More than 80 per cent. of cases referred to mediation in other areas of dispute are resolved by agreement, such is the benefit of structured discussion between the parties.

The party in the dispute which enjoys the benefit of rights given by Parliament should be obliged to agree to the process where the claimant seeks mediation. However, the process is not, and cannot be, binding, and the ultimate right to refer a matter to the Lands Tribunal should remain. The process should be monitored, and an independent person should be appointed to supervise the process and to make recommendations to fetter the power of any party where that party consistently fails to reach agreement or accept the outcome of the mediation process.

My second proposal is aimed at those instances where a point of law or clarification arises. Mediation will not be appropriate where a matter of principle affecting the compensation code is involved. In such cases, a direct reference to the Lands Tribunal can be made, but again, the claimant may be deterred from pursuing what he considers to be a just entitlement to a higher payment than the offer he has received.

In such circumstances, the party liable to pay the compensation under statute should pay the costs of the reference to the Lands Tribunal to establish the point of law. When that has been determined, the parties should negotiate again and, in the absence of agreement, should seek mediation or go to the Lands Tribunal. That choice should again be for the claimant to decide.

In order to ensure that injustice is removed from the process of assessing compensation, which I have only illustrated, I hope that the House will support me, and that the Government will accept the need to make the resolution of disputes over proper compensation truly accessible, informal and low-cost.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) for bringing this important subject to the attention of the House. He has explained most eloquently the concerns of his constituents, and he will probably find that those concerns are shared by many constituents of other right hon. and hon. Members.

As my right hon. Friend acknowledged, he has touched on several areas that are primarily the responsibility of other Ministers, particulary those in the Department of

Transport, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Lord Chancellor's Department. I trust that he will forgive me, then, if I am a little cautious about trespassing into their territory and refrain from addressing directly the details of the cases to which he referred. I believe that my right hon Friend accepts my difficulties in that regard.

My Department has overall responsibility for setting the legislative framework in which compulsory purchase orders are made and under which the compensation code for such orders is applied. My right hon. Friend may rest assured that there is no shortage of advice as to how we could improve the system, and the issues he has raised are among those to which our attention has often been drawn.

I fully appreciate the distress that can be caused to people when confronted with a compulsory purchase order. The Government are keen to ensure that such distress is minimised for all concerned—ensuring prompt settlement of compensation claims is just one element in that process. I am sure everyone would agree that claimants should not be subject to excessive delay, and should not have to meet additional costs in order to secure the compensation which is rightly theirs.

Equally, however, there will always be occasions when it is impossible to reach agreement on the level of compensation to be paid, or where there is a dispute about some point of law. What we seek is the most efficient means of settling such disputes. My right hon. Friend has suggested one way of dealing with them, and his ideas are interesting and extremely valuable.

However, I think it may be worth while spending a few minutes explaining how the Lands Tribunal came into being. It was set up by Act of Parliament in 1949 to replace a system which provided for disputes to be decided by official arbitrators appointed from a panel. The president and members of the tribunal are appointed by the Lord Chancellor, who, in consultation with the Council on Tribunals, has a general responsibility for the statutory provisions that apply to tribunals and other forms of arbitration.

It is clear to me that there are two principal reasons for going to the Lands Tribunal—and I note that my right hon. Friend acknowledged those reasons. The first reason is to reach agreement on the amount of compensation, and the second is to resolve some point of law. In the latter case, I think that there can be no argument that the role of the Lands Tribunal must be maintained. It has had the key role in interpreting the statutory framework of the compensation code and establishing how the provisions work in practice. It would be foolish to do away with that body of experience and knowledge, and I acknowledge that that is far from being what my right hon. Friend suggested.

It has become almost proverbial wisdom to say that the delay and costs of Lands Tribunal hearings are a deterrent. However, I suspect that some of the criticisms levelled at the tribunal are, on closer inspection, a little harsh. The worries about delay are twofold; first, the time it takes to secure a hearing, and secondly, the procedures adopted during the hearing itself.

However, the parties to the dispute can both help to ensure delays are minimised, and I believe that my right hon. Friend will accept that fact. The delay in securing a hearing date often arises from the conduct of the parties themselves, and when the case is heard, it proceeds at a pace largely determined by the parties.

For example, the tribunal will normally permit adjournments where active negotiation is taking place, and will normally meet the wishes of counsel, solicitors and expert witnesses so far as is reasonable. It is also possible—at the discretion of the tribunal, and if all parties agree—to determine the case on the basis of written representations.

Furthermore, there is much concern about costs. The general principle of the compensation code is that the costs of a claim are regarded as part of the consequential costs of the compulsory acquisition. As such, they will normally be reimbursed by the acquiring authority. In addition, it is possible to adopt a "sealed offer" procedure similar to a payment into court, which allows either party to ensure that costs do not go beyond what they can afford.

Even so, there have been from time to time calls for a new system to replace or work alongside the Lands Tribunal. Various reports have suggested a more informal procedure for settling disputes—usually, something akin to the small claims court.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Country Landowners Association has recently prepared a draft policy paper on "Compulsory Acquisition and Payment" which suggests, among other things, the introduction of a non-binding mediation process to resolve some cases without the need to go to the Lands Tribunal. We are still considering the many suggestions in the paper. We are also aware that the mediation proposal has support from other respected bodies, including the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the National Farmers Union.

I know that there is always a concern that such papers will be warmly welcomed by Ministers, and then studiously ignored. I hope that I can assure my right hon. Friend that, this time at least, that will not be the case. Indeed, senior officials from my Department are meeting representatives from the CLA next week to discuss the ideas in the policy paper. My right hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment in detail on the CLA's proposals at present, but we shall set out the Government's response to them in due course.

Instead, I shall address some of the points that my right hon. Friend raised. He suggested that, where a compensation claim gives rise to consideration of a point of law, a direct reference to the Lands Tribunal should be made before returning to mediation, and that, in such circumstances, the acquiring authority should pay the costs of the reference to the Lands Tribunal.

In fact, I understand that that may already be possible under the current statutory arrangements. Under the Lands Tribunal rules of 1975, the tribunal has the power to order any preliminary point of law to be disposed of at a preliminary hearing. That power is frequently invoked, and has the advantage that the parties need not incur the costs of compiling evidence on valuation until the preliminary issue, which may determine liability, has been decided. Where the preliminary issue is of general significance in other cases, it would, I agree, seem reasonable that the acquiring authority rather than the claimant should bear the costs.

However, for straightforward matters of disagreement over compensation, I can see a case for seeking alternative methods of resolving disputes. Indeed, there are already other options available. It is open to the acquiring authority and the claimant to put their case to informal arbitration without the need to refer to the Lands Tribunal.

I acknowledge that that does not address my right hon. Friend's argument that a statutory right for claimants should exist. However, although I do not entirely rule that out, I am sure that he will appreciate that such a scheme would need careful consideration, not least because we would need to be clear about its precise relationship with the Lands Tribunal. It must not be forgotten that, in most cases, compensation is settled by direct negotiation involving professionals and experts engaged by the parties, so the costs of such arrangements may not in practice be less than a reference to the Lands Tribunal.

I freely admit that, in any assessment of the current arrangements for compulsory purchase and compensation, we are hampered by the lack of recent research and information to support the arguments one way or the other about how the system operates, and its impact on those affected. To fill that gap, my Department has signalled the intention to fund a research project to consider, among other things, how existing compulsory purchase order procedures could be improved, and how those at the sharp end feel about the system.

My right hon. Friend and the CLA may rest assured that we shall use their valuable contributions to inform and direct that research. When the results are available, we shall be in a much better position to assess how the current system operates in practice, and to pinpoint exactly what room there is for improvement.

I started by expressing my unwillingness to wander into areas for which my Department does not have direct responsibility. However, I do not wish to leave the subject without making some brief general observations on the points that my right hon. Friend raised about third-party claims, about British Coal and about water companies' rights of entry. He will appreciate that I cannot speak in detail on the cases he mentioned, but they raise some issues of general interest that I am sure that he would like me to address.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the paper presented to the Highways Agency by the Country Landowners Association. That must be a matter for the two bodies to discuss between themselves, and I hope that it will be possible to make progress soon. However, I understand that the agency does not consider that the paper properly reflects the legal and contractual position.

In most cases involving damage to property during construction, liability is clear, and the claims are dealt with by the contractor's insurers and loss adjusters, or by the district valuer acting on behalf of the agency. The burden of proof of the validity and the amount of claims is essentially the same. In only a handful of cases is liability in dispute, and it is those cases that cause real difficulty.

The Highways Agency is currently discussing with construction industry representatives ways in which the delays in dealing with such claims might be overcome, but I am sure that there can be no disagreement with the principle that we must do what we can to avoid a situation in which genuine claimants are unduly penalised because of a dispute between other parties as to liability.

My right hon. Friend raises a particular concern about the powers available to privatised water companies, but the broad issue is one that applies and has applied to all statutory undertakers, both before and after privatisation. Such bodies have a statutory responsibility to provide a public service, and Parliament has consistently recognised their need for powers to acquire land compulsorily and to enter on to land in order to discharge that responsibility.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the issue of compensation for the laying of sewers and water pipes was considered in the Water Industries Act 1991. That provides that, where pipe-laying work leads to depreciation in the value of land, the claimant may receive compensation for the loss in the value of his interest, and for any damage caused in the same way, as if there had been a compulsory acquisition. Resolution of disputes over compensation are dealt with by the Lands Tribunal, which applies the normal compensation rules.

The issue, then, is the suitability of the Lands Tribunal to decide such cases—a point that I have already addressed. However, I must make it clear that there would be no question of utilities' using such powers to maximise profits; the compulsory powers remaining with nationalised industries after privatisation relate only to the statutory functions of those industries, and cannot be used to acquire or to enter on to land not needed for those functions.

As for subsidence, my right hon. Friend will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to discuss the particular case here and now, as the arbitrator has yet to reach his conclusions. However, it is important to recognise that the statutory framework in relation to coal-mining subsidence is significantly different from that connected with the use of compulsory purchase powers or compulsory access rights.

The primary obligation in the relevant legislation is to repair any damage attributable to coal-mining subsidence. Compensation arises only where repairs are not practicable or effective, and is paid in lieu of the primary obligation to repair. The basic obligation, then, is not to compensate but to repair.

Of course disputes arise from time to time. As my right hon. Friend said, the subsidence legislation already provides a means of resolving them. For householders, there is a special low-cost arbitration scheme, which in the vast majority of cases provides a quick and inexpensive solution to disputes. The costs of the scheme are generally borne by the public purse and by the industry, so the claimant normally has to contribute only a modest fee. Apart from the costs of the scheme, each party bears its own costs.

For more complex cases, a general arbitration scheme is available. That is based on the normal principles of arbitration—that each party bears its own costs during the proceedings, and that, in his findings, the arbitrator may ultimately rule that one party shall meet some or all of the costs of the other party. Similarly, where cases go to the Lands Tribunal, the tribunal has powers to award costs at its discretion.

I reiterate that I have considerable sympathy with the concerns that my right hon. Friend has expressed and, like him, I wish to see a system in place that will enable swift and fair compensation for those affected by development undertaken for the general good of the community. I cannot offer any commitments about how the Government will tackle that, but I can assure my right hon. Friend and those whom he represents that the Government are actively considering the ideas that he and the Country Landowners Association have put forward. Clearly, however, we must avoid rushing to replace a tried and tested system with one that might prove less satisfactory in the longer term.

Privatisation (Costs)

1.30 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I sought this debate largely because of a constituency interest. My constituency in central Lanarkshire has been particularly devastated by the impact of the restructuring of the steel industry. My personal assistant, Mr. Frank Roy, is a former shop steward from Ravenscraig steel plant, which is no more. I am conscious that my constituents worry that privatisation has been not only in their worst interests but perhaps in the worst interests of the whole United Kingdom.

I do not necessarily wish to make partisan points, and I do not intend to rehearse the arguments against privatisation. We know where the Government and the Opposition come from on the issue. We are anxious about the impact of privatisation on the utilities themselves and in a broader setting. I would like the Financial Secretary to outline the costs, both hidden and obvious, of privatisation over a period.

We have teased information out of the Government about the costs of privatisation. That has led to some concern about what the accounts of the Exchequer reveal about how much privatisation has actually cost the taxpayers of this country. The Earl of Stockton in another place referred to privatisation as selling off the family silver. The Earl, who was an alumnus of my university, made a witty analogy between privatisation and the great homes of the nation. He referred to selling off the paintings, the furniture and the family silver. In reflecting upon his remarks this morning, I admit to some concern about the fate of his family company, given the speculation about the future of Macmillan. But that is an aside.

It is obvious that the key beneficiaries of privatisation are institutions in the City. Those of us who have been involved in private sector flotations know the substantial fees that are totted up by City advisers. There is concern in the House and elsewhere that some advisers who have been involved in the privatisation process have acquired Tory grandees on their company boards shortly after the privatisations have taken place. The merchant banks, accountants, lawyers, public relations consultants, stockbrokers and technical consultants have an opportunity to put their noses in the privatisation trough.

Only last week, the Financial Secretary admitted that the Government have spent some £136 million advertising privatisation share issues in the past 10 years. Since 1985, advertising costs for the flotations—there have been about 18—have ranged from £1.1 million for the sell-off of Northern Ireland Electricity to the £21.4 million which was spent on the 1986 "Tell Sid" campaign to persuade the public to buy shares in British Gas. I wonder whether Sid will tell us what will happen to the disabled when we address the issue of competition in the gas industry.

The three-stage sell-off of British Telecom cost £35.6 million over eight years in advertising terms alone. That sum beggars belief. That money could have been better spent in the public sector, rather than lining the pockets of advertising agencies and their spin-off agencies.

I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for referring to Scotland, but it is obviously at the forefront of my mind. Some £5.3 million was spent advertising the sale of the Scottish electricity companies. That amounts to more than £2 for every adult in the country.

It is recognised that Opposition Members are very disturbed about the extent to which industries were undervalued in the first place. That undervaluation is also a cost of privatisation. The Government undervalued the assets, heavily hyped their sale through advertising the share issue, and in many cases wrote off debts of billions of pounds beforehand.

To give another Scottish example, at the same time as many Scots were enduring the shameful humiliation of poindings and warrant sales because they had incurred debts as a result of the poll tax—I know that the Financial Secretary is concerned about that issue—the state was writing off £1.5 billion in debt for the Scottish electricity companies.

A poinding or warrant sale is the most depressing, degrading and humiliating way of recovering small debts. A sheriff officer arrives at the house of an harassed family, who are usually in some distress because they cannot pay their debts. The sheriff officer, who is often assisted by the police, can enter that house and go through every item of the family's belongings—from the kitchen table and chairs to televisions and radios—and put an often derisory value on those items. That exercise is often undertaken for the recovery of debts of only £200 or £300. I have witnessed warrant sales—in fact, I spent much of this week trying to prevent one from being inflicted on one of my constituents.

I feel quite bitter when I see that the Government are prepared to write off quite substantial debts in order to make companies that are about to be privatised more attractive for a general share issue. I remind the Financial Secretary of the words of his colleague John Maples, that the rich get richer on the backs of the rest of us.

It is very difficult for me to explain to my constituents—indeed, I would not try to explain it to those who are enduring the humiliation of warrant sales—how that can happen. The only similarity between the way in which the Government write off the debts of companies which are about to be privatised and the sheriff officers is that they both have very flexible attitudes towards the true value of assets.

I accept that many individuals made quick killings from initial share offers when they sold their shares to the institutions which are the current shareholders. The broad base of share ownership in this country has narrowed considerably. Water industry shares were sold at £6.5 billion in 1989, and they are now valued at £12 billion. There have been £2 billion in dividends since 1990. Shareholders get the money and the opportunity to laugh all the way to the bank, but the taxpayers are suffering, and the nation as a whole is impoverished as a consequence.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Member said that the broad base of shareholding has narrowed. Does she accept that there are now more shareholders than trade unionists, and that, as a result of privatisation, the number of individual shareholders has more than doubled?

Mrs. Liddell: That is a very quick political point to make. Yes, there are more shareholders than trade unionists, and undoubtedly some trade unionists hold shares. That is partly because the Government have been intent upon attacking trade unionists and reducing the number of people in employment in this country, thereby making them less eligible for membership of a trade union.

There has been dramatic restructuring within the privatised industries, with a consequent reduction in employment. House of Commons Library figures reveal that about 127,000 jobs gross have been lost in the privatised sector. I accept that every company, whether private or public, has to go through periods of restructuring, but that restructuring is taking place at a time when the labour market is under considerable pressure. It is also a time of rising unemployment.

What are the hidden costs of privatisation? Many companies restructure—often code for downstaffing—because it looks good in their annual reports. That makes it easier for a company chairman to laud a company's performance before his shareholders and to increase the share price. A number of privatised companies have employed senior executives as consultants. They are given a golden handshake, but return as consultants or redesign themselves as sole traders, sometimes in the form of consultancy companies.

I do not shed any tears for them, but for employers at a lower level who find themselves out in the cold. If they redefine themselves as sole traders, they are re-employed on temporary contracts with their former employers as members of a casualised work force. They do not enjoy the minimum employment protection that exists even under a Conservative Government.

There is an even less glamorous aspect of privatisation. Only last week, the Equal Opportunities Commission published its analysis of the impact of private contracting as a result of compulsory competitive tendering in the public sector, and the conclusions are horrifying in 1995.

That research showed that women in particular, members of the ethnic minorities and disabled people have suffered dramatically from CCT. Eighteen months ago, there was public outrage when auxiliary and domestic staff and porters at Glasgow Royal infirmary were re-employed by private contractors at lower hourly rates and with fewer holidays. Only a public outcry from the highest to the lowest in the community stopped that happening.

Less publicised cases arise daily. As a consequence, wages paid in the public sector—particularly to women—have fallen by as much as 25 per cent. Many women working in public sector cleaning and catering have to take on multiple jobs—often below the minimum part-time hourly rate, so they are not eligible for state benefits, including maternity allowance. They often have short-term contracts that make no provision for holidays or holiday pay. If they cannot work during school holidays, they have to claim social security benefits—which is a cost to them and to the nation.

Tomorrow, local government elections will be held in Scotland. Seeing the Press Gallery almost empty, I reflect on the halcyon days when there were reporters in the Press Gallery. When I was a Press Gallery reporter, a distinguished BBC reporter who, sadly, died last week reminded reporters every time they left the Press Gallery that Scotland is different. If only someone had reminded the BBC and "Panorama" of that last week, there might have been a different outcome to events in the courts.

If I may refer to the local government elections, there is a hare-brained race to reorganisation of Scotland local government, leading to more privatisations, particularly of essential services such as the education advisory service and catering in Strathclyde. That will produce further casualisation of the work force and additional concealed costs for the public and taxpayers.

The Government continue their reckless pursuit of privatisation, having learnt nothing from the costs incurred by early privatisations. Last week, my party's transport team published "The Runaway Train: The cost of rail privatisation", showing that the cost of privatisation—based on Government figures and figures published in *Hansard*, would be in excess of revenue.

I seek a reassurance that the Government are not turning a blind eye to the costs of privatisation. Obtaining accurate information from them is like drawing teeth. We want to know the real costs in terms of unemployment and the cost to customers. Before the Financial Secretary reminds me that, under privatisation, some customers will have lower bills, I remind him that others will pay more. Fortunately, Labour managed to stop water privatisation in Scotland, but many people are paying increased water charges in England and Wales.

Will the Financial Secretary acknowledge that not everyone gains under privatisation? May we know the true cost of privatisation to the Exchequer and to society? May I have a reassurance—although I doubt that the Financial Secretary can provide one—that my constituents, who have suffered from steel privatisation and other privatisations, can look forward to a better future? I believe that they can only do so under a Labour Government. I do not expect that the Financial Secretary agrees.

1.45 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): The last sentence is about the only one with which I do agree.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) for choosing this important subject for debate. She focused on the costs of privatisation. I hope that she agrees that, if one is to have a balanced perspective, one must consider not just the costs but the benefits. I hope, in a short speech, to redress the imbalance in the hon. Lady's speech.

A great deal of preparatory work must be done if one is to enjoy the receipts and other benefits of the Government's privatisation programme. Industries must be restructured and streamlined. Contracts must be put in place where none existed before. Potential shareholders must be informed by a prospectus of what they would be buying, and the general public must be kept informed. All that costs money and fees, but such preparatory work has produced massive benefits.

I was slightly surprised at the hon. Lady's speech, because the Leader of the Opposition has spent months touring the country to reform clause IV and telling the public that the state no longer needs to own massive, formerly nationalised industries. In 15 minutes, the hon. Lady, in a revisionist speech, cast doubt on Labour party policy on privatisation and nationalisation.

Mr. John Marshall: Can my hon. Friend say how much the taxpayer receives in revenue from the profits of privatised industries, compared with the amount of money that the taxpayer met in subsidies to British Steel, Rover, British Airways and British Coal when they were in the public sector?

Sir George Young: When we entered office in 1979, the nationalised industries were costing the state £50 million a week. The industries that we subsequently

[Sir George Young]

privatised are now producing revenue of £50 million a week—a massive fiscal turnround, of real benefit to taxpayers.

Mrs. Liddell: As the Financial Secretary is explaining the great worth of privatisation, perhaps he will explain why the Government decided not to privatise the Post Office.

Sir George Young: A large part of the Post Office is already privatised. Most sub-post offices are already in private ownership. The hon. Lady may know that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is reflecting on how best to proceed with the Post Office.

Privatisation works. The hon. Lady did not say that privatisation and public ownership did not work. Before I entered the House, and while the hon. Lady was working as a reporter in the Press Gallery, I was working in a nationalised industry. I can tell her that nationalisation jolly well did not work. There were enormous concealed costs in state ownership.

Mrs. Liddell *rose—*

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady had 15 minutes to make her case, and in courtesy to her, as well as to the House, I must answer her points.

In the days of nationalisation, we had debates about losses, debts, high prices, poor investment decisions, shoddy service and the holder of the latest strike record. In other words, there were costs under nationalisation. There were costs for every householder and business in the land. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has reminded us, they were costs for taxpayers.

The hon. Lady may like to recall what the Leader of the Opposition said about privatisation. He asserted

"it is barely an issue that prices will rise because of privatisation."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1988, Vol. 143, c. 684.]

In fact, the cost of domestic electricity has fallen by 8 per cent., excluding value added tax, over the past two years. Under the Labour Government, electricity prices increased in cash terms by 2 per cent. every six weeks. There is a dramatic contrast between public and private ownership.

I do not blame those who worked in the nationalised industries, especially as I was one of them. It was the nature of state ownership, with its excessive centralisation and inevitable short-termism, that was the root of the problem. Privatisation has shown that it can rescue businesses and services from what was a rather depressing scenario.

The domestic consumer has seen dramatic improvements in standards. Privatisation has turned inward-looking businesses into successful ones often globally. I shall mention a few. The House will be interested to know that 45 countries throughout the world have benefited from the skills, knowledge and experience of British Gas since privatisation. Rover, which was once the basket case of the British car industry, is now exporting its Discovery model to Japan.

The hon. Lady mentioned the employees of former nationalised industries. Does she believe that those who now work for British Airways want to be taken back into public ownership? British Airways is now the world's favourite airline. It carries more international passengers than any other carrier. It is a real success story. Back in 1979, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) described British Airways as "a potential pantomime horse" of capitalism. How wrong he was. The hon. Lady talked about British Steel. In 1979, it was making losses of £1.7 billion. It is now an industry in profit.

The hon. Lady should reflect on the costs to the country's export position if the Government had adopted what I believe to be her rather short-term view of public ownership. We have heard something today about the wider cost of full public sector services. The hon. Lady mentioned local authorities. Compulsory competitive tendering and privatisation mean that homes and businesses can buy services at competitive prices instead of subsidising them through taxation. That has been of much greater importance to United Kingdom businesses and their customers that the hon. Lady realises.

I shall illustrate my argument by talking about telecommunications and energy supply, which are two key services to virtually every home and business in the country. Telecommunications account for about 2 per cent. of gross domestic product. Electricity and gas together account for a further 2 per cent. The services that they provide are crucial to the competitiveness of each and every business. If telecommunications and energy providers perform badly, other industries feel the pinch. If they are free to charge too much for too little, millions of individual customers pay over the odds for a second-rate service. It is they who suffer.

Privatisation has led to vastly improved investment levels and service standards. Before privatisation, it was the taxpayer who inevitably underwrote investment. After privatisation, companies facing competition and regulation had to shape up their act. The hon. Lady bandied a few figures about. Let us consider some more.

British Telecom has invested a massive £22 billion since privatisation. Mercury has invested £2.7 billion. Mobile phone companies have invested a further £2.6 billion. Investment by British Gas has tripled in real terms in the seven years after sale. The water companies have invested over £12 billion in the five years since privatisation, 75 per cent. more in real terms than in their last five years in the public sector.

Increased investment has clearly had an impact on quality. Everyone now has a real choice of telephone service. People no longer wait to be connected to a telephone service. British Gas now responds quickly to faults. In virtually all cases, supply is restored within 24 hours. No longer must busy customers wait in all day when they would rather be about their business. All utilities now offer timed appointments. Britain's water is now among the cleanest in Europe, despite being cheaper than water in most other European countries.

Let us consider what investing for quality has cost the consumer, and perhaps pause over some of the telling interventions of Opposition Members in previous debates. For example, we were told that 16 million British Gas customers could expect only one result—increased gas prices, higher than the rate of inflation. That was not a startling new Government announcement. It was a forecast made by a Labour Member. It was just a little bit out: since privatisation, the average household gas bill has fallen by 20 per cent. even after inflation. We were told that a minimum estimate of the cost of privatisation to the consumer in terms of increases was 20 per cent. That was said by a Labour Member in the Opposition's haste to oppose electricity privatisation. Wrong again: privatisation has brought down the cost of electricity to the domestic consumer by 9 per cent. in the past two years, even after taking inflation into account.

If hon. Members want to make a phone call when they leave the House to go on a well-earned recess, I am happy to tell them that the three-minute local peak rate call now costs less in cash terms than it did on privatisation. They will find a phone box much more readily, and when they do, it will be working.

The House may recall the scaremongering of the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme). He said in 1983 that the public telephone box could be threatened by extinction. That was a far cry from reality. The number of BT call boxes has increased by over 50 per cent. to 127,000, and 96 per cent. of them work at any one time, compared with about 75 per cent. back in 1987.

It is tempting to tease the hon. Lady about her party's record in getting figures right. The serious point is that her attack on privatisation is narrow and misinformed. At the beginning of her speech, she talked about costs. On average, each privatisation has cost only 2.8 per cent. of the proceeds that have been raised. Those narrow figures belie the knock-on benefits to consumers of which I have spoken. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South reminded me, privatised industries are contributing about £50 million a week to the Exchequer in taxes and dividends. That is surely relevant.

The criticisms that we have heard about the privatisation programme have ignored improvements in quality, reductions in price and improved service. They ignore the new export potential that privatisation has brought to the country. They ignore also the fact that privatisation has underpinned London's position as the premier centre for financial services and privatisation expertise, which is now being exported throughout the world.

Privatisation has brought solutions, ideas, innovation and investment. I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government will continue down that road. We shall proceed with privatisation—the hon. Lady mentioned British Rail—and take forward the private finance initiative. We shall bring the private sector into areas previously thought to be the preserve of the public sector. We shall continue to apply principles of quality and service in the heart of government and to local services.

A great wave of reform has swept the public sector over the past 15 years. That has set the framework for UK excellence at home and abroad. The Government are proud of their record. We are not complacent, and the process will go forward.

Estate Duty

1.57 pm

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am most grateful to Madam Speaker for allowing me to raise this matter today. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary for attending to respond on behalf of the Government. I make no apology for adding to his work, for I am about to talk about a glaring injustice in our tax system.

The advantage of Adjournment debates is that a Minister can be asked to consider an injustice. Where it is correctible, as this one is, he can correct it. We all know that Ministers are so busy—I sympathise with every busy Minister—that it is hard for them to find time to examine difficult cases in detail. An Adjournment debate causes them to do just that. I feel sure that my right hon. Friend has carefully considered the matter and will agree that I am highlighting a glaring injustice in our tax provisions.

Estate duty was abolished more than 20 years ago, but, amazingly, it lives on in a few areas. I shall not list them all. The only one with which I am concerned is the vexed question of taxation of reversionary interests. It is in that area that an appalling anomaly occurs, because of two facts: first, rates of estate duty in the past were very much higher than rates of inheritance tax today; and secondly, there has been appalling inflation over the past three or four decades. I am not in any way arguing that the law has been incorrectly applied in this case, because clearly it has not. The objection of my constituent, Mrs. Findlater, is not that the law has been incorrectly applied but that the law itself is completely without justice.

Fortunately, the Government are contemplating making changes to the law affecting inheritance tax. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a speech on Saturday in which he said:

> "I also hold dear the belief that people should be able to hand on security to their children, cascading wealth down the generations. Over the last decade we've doubled the threshold at which inheritance tax becomes payable. It's been difficult to go further in the last two or three difficult years. But I'm committed to doing so as soon as we can afford it."

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said similar things on earlier occasions about wealth cascading down the generations. I very much agree with him.

The timing of my debate is opportune. I hope that if my right hon. Friend changes the law and rates for inheritance tax, he will solve my constituent's problems as well. I shall now explain the problem. It really is very simple.

In 1957, Mrs. Findlater's mother died. Mrs. Findlater inherited, under her mother's will, a reversionary interest in another estate, which was subject to a life interest but which did not expire until 1990, when the beneficiary who enjoyed the life interest died. In much simpler language, and putting it bluntly, although Mrs. Findlater inherited the money in 1957, she could not get her hands on it until 1990. Because she could not get the money when she inherited it, she sensibly opted—as any reasonable person would if they were allowed to under the law, and Mrs. Findlater was—to defer paying the tax that was due on it until she did get the money.

That event—getting the money—occurred 33 years later. An innocent observer might think that, with all the inflation that we have had in those 33 years, what Mrs. Findlater

[Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd]

would have paid, had she not exercised the option to defer, would not have been very much in today's money. So why is she so upset? Well, because the law is not like that. The law in this area is the proverbial ass. It operates in an outrageous, unjust and utterly perverse way. In 1957, the relevant part of the estate about which I am speaking was worth about £10,000. Because of other funds making up the whole estate, at that time the relevant part would have attracted duty of 12 per cent.—some £1,200. By 1990, that £10,000-odd estate had grown to £124,139. No one should think that that was because of skilful investment. It was because of inflation, and inflation is the responsibility of Government. Indeed, as we all know, it is caused by Government. That £124,139 has borne tax, not at 12 per cent. but at 50 per cent.—£62,069.

I hope that my right hon. Friend and every other hon. Member in the House is wincing. I certainly am. Tax at 12 per cent. in 1957 had risen to 50 per cent. in 1990. Furthermore, the capital transfer tax office also made a demand for interest—all within the law—of £3,404. What a business! I must point out that, in its generosity, the capital transfer office has been good enough to make a remission of part of that charge. I suppose that we should be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the high table.

There we see why such indignation has been caused to that family. The fund is valued on its present rather than its historic value, but tax is charged according to estate duty scales that were in force in 1957, under, I may add, a tax law that was abolished for normal purposes in 1975. The amount of tax taken, which would have been 12 per cent., was in fact 50 per cent. in 1990. As must be clear to any impartial observer, my constituent has been punitively taxed on an inflationary gain.

As I have mentioned, there are clear signs that the Government are thinking of relaxing further the impact of inheritance tax. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is able to do so in his autumn Budget, I very much hope that he will address the problem of Mrs. Findlater and others in a similar position. There cannot be many people in such a position, and it should be of little cost to the Exchequer to rectify the problem.

I must point out to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that, if the Government relax the impact of inheritance tax but fail to address the problems of Mrs. Findlater and people like her, the sense of injustice felt by such people will be deep and abiding. The equitable solution to the problem is to tax such a fund at its present value, by applying present rates as well, not at the historic rate, which leads to such manifest unfairness.

I look forward to the next Budget, confident that the timing of this debate must be right, for my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary must, now that the Finance Bill is nearly law, be about to consider matters such as inheritance tax for our right hon. and learned Friend's next Budget. I wish my right hon. Friend well. I invite him to see that justice is done and I look forward to seeing the promises of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put into effect. Mrs. Findlater, too, wants to see wealth cascading down the generations.

1.58 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) on securing the debate. I know that he has taken a keen interest in Mrs. Findlater's case for some time. I pay tribute to the way in which he has pursued this case on behalf of one of his constituents; I read every letter in the file that was placed before me. I can understand the distress and indignation of Mrs. Findlater and her family, which my hon. Friend so eloquently conveyed to the House. In my reply, I shall deal with the general principles behind the liability to estate duty that Mrs. Findlater has had to face, and then touch on some of the other points that my hon. Friend made.

Estate duty was one of the forerunners of the present inheritance tax regime. It lasted from 1894 until 1975. The last Labour Government abolished estate duty, replacing it with capital transfer tax, which combined an estate tax with an immediate tax charged on lifetime gifts.

Since taking office in 1979, the Government have reformed the taxation of estates significantly, consistent with our stated objective of allowing individuals to pass on more of their wealth to the beneficiaries of their choice, free of the burden of taxation. We replaced capital transfer tax in 1986 with inheritance tax, abolishing the immediate charge on lifetime gifts in the process. Estate duty was a tax on property passing on death. It included the deceased's own assets, any trust property in which the deceased had an interest in possession—for example, a life interest—and gifts made shortly before death.

In some respects, the estate duty and inheritance tax regimes are similar, but there are some important differences, one of which involves the treatment of interests in expectancy. It may help if I briefly explain what that is. Essentially, it is the right to receive property or an interest in that property at some future date. It is most commonly encountered in settlements and will trusts. For example, a husband could provide by will that a capital sum be settled on his wife, so that she may enjoy the income from the settled fund for the rest of her life, and on her death the capital would pass to their son. In this example, while the wife lived, the son has an expectant interest in the capital.

Interests in expectancy are usually of some value, so they can be bought and sold in an open market like any other asset, and this does indeed occur. Under estate duty, it was considered appropriate that an interest in expectancy passing on a person's death should be taxable on the death.

I have already mentioned that the treatment of inheritance tax differs. Nowadays, we no longer generally tax an interest in expectancy in this way. We will usually do so only if the interest was purchased by the deceased. Since 1975, the way in which we tax settled property generally has changed, and we now believe that trusts are adequately taxed without having to include most interests in expectancy.

I will not detain the House by arguing the pros and cons of the estate duty regime. Suffice to say that at the time it was thought appropriate to levy tax on an interest in expectancy but, as I have said, that is generally not so now.

Under estate duty law, the executors or administrators of an estate had a choice concerning payment of duty on an interest in expectancy. They could either pay it straight away, with the duty on the rest of the estate or, alternatively, they could elect to postpone payment until the interest fell into possession.

If payment was postponed, for the purpose of determining the estate duty on the rest of the estate, a discounted or actuarial value of the interest at the date of death was adopted, and the estate duty on the interest itself was charged according to the value of the interest at the time when it fell into possession, taking into account the value of the rest of the estate as previously ascertained.

The facility for deferment of duty on interests in expectancy essentially recognised the relatively illiquid nature of the asset, as in the example described by my hon. Friend. There were other cases where payment could be postponed for similar reasons. Deferment was also available for woodlands, recognising the long-term nature of forestry enterprises, and heritage quality chattels included in an estate were exempted from duty conditional on appropriate undertakings being given concerning the retention and preservation of the chattels. That recognised the importance of preserving our national heritage.

Reverting to interests in expectancy, the executors had to elect, on delivery of their account of the estate to the Inland Revenue, whether to pay estate duty on the interest at once or, instead, when the interest fell into possession. If they elected to pay at once, duty was assessed on the market value at the date of death of the right to receive the capital sum at a future date.

If they elected to defer payment until the estate receives the interest, estate duty is payable on the open market value at that time of the actual assets accruing to the estate. The rate of duty is ascertained, as my hon. Friend explained, by the aggregation of such value with the value of the rest of the estate as previously ascertained. If, as usually happens, the value of the accruing assets is greater than the value of the expectant interest at the date of death, it bears a higher rate of duty than the rest of the estate—again, as in the example given by my hon. Friend. That is because estate duty had progressive rates, dependent on the size of the estate, rather than a single rate as we now have under inheritance tax.

The option on payment of duty on an interest in expectancy is not considered to have been exercised until the grant of representation has been obtained. Until then the election can be made even though the person with the prior interest may have died in the meantime. Moreover, in practice, the option is not treated as finally exercised until the accountable person pays what purports to be, and is accepted as, full duty in respect of the rest of the estate.

Having explained the background to the claim to estate duty, I come to the particular case that my hon. Friend has raised today.

Mrs. Findlater's uncle died in 1952 and by will left his residuary estate on trust to his widow for life, or until remarriage, and on her death the capital was to be divided between his two brothers absolutely. The father of Mrs. Findlater was one of the brothers. He also died in 1952 and left his entire estate, including the interest under the will trust, to his widow. She assigned that interest in 1953 to her daughter, Mrs. Findlater, and died in 1957. Since the gift of the interest in expectancy was made within five years of her death, it became liable to estate duty on her death.

As the executrix of her mother's estate, and the person accountable for the estate duty on the interest in expectancy, it was Mrs. Findlater who had the option of either paying the duty on the interest in 1957, with the interest being valued at that time, or when the interest fell into possession, and valued at that later time. In the event, no duty was paid on the interest in expectancy in 1957, as the second option—to defer payment—was exercised. I understand that Mrs. Findlater was professionally advised.

The life tenant lived on for another 23 years. As my hon. Friend said, she died in 1990, which event triggered the estate duty liability that had been deferred since 1957. The will trust fund created by Mrs. Findlater's uncle had, not surprisingly, increased in value significantly over those 23 years, so the value of the interest gifted to Mrs. Findlater was worth a lot more now than the expectant interest would have been in 1957.

The enhanced value of the interest and the estate duty rate structure in force in 1957 meant, as my hon. Friend pointed out, that the deferred charge was much higher than the original charge on death would have been. That is, I think, the crux of the matter raised by my hon. Friend. Mrs. Findlater, and indeed my hon. Friend, are asking whether it is right that an asset which would have been charged at a relatively low rate—6 per cent.—in expectancy, in fact ends up being charged at nearly eight times that rate—50 per cent.—in possession. That is the nub of the dilemma that my hon. Friend has put before the House.

I have to say to my hon. Friend that, whatever one now thinks of the rates of duty which existed in 1957, Mrs. Findlater exercised the option to defer the duty with the benefit of professional advice, and in the full knowledge that duty at the appropriate rate would have to be paid at a later date. That is, if I may say so, the chance that one takes by deferring a tax liability for an undetermined period free of interest.

I believe that Mrs. Findlater does not dispute the legal basis of the claim for estate duty, and nor does my hon. Friend. But they believe that there is a moral basis for reducing the charge. I have to say that to do so would be unfair to the vast majority of taxpayers in identical circumstance whose interests have already fallen into possession. It must be right that all those who deferred their liability in the full knowledge of the consequences should be treated in the same way.

My hon. Friend asks whether it was right that such a large amount of estate duty should now be levied. He put the proposition to the House that we should now extinguish those outstanding claims. Alternatively, he may have in mind some form of indexation relief, or a lower scale of rates of duty, to reflect the lower tax rates applying to deaths that occur today.

My hon. Friend asked us to reflect on his proposition, but one must put one or two counter arguments. During the period that we are discussing, no account of inflation was taken for any direct taxes, but this was before the days of hyper-inflation under the 1970s Labour Government.

Indexation for capital gains tax purposes was introduced by the Government in 1982, by which time estate duty had already been abolished for more than seven years. It was therefore unnecessary to consider indexation for estate duty purposes, and I think that the same applies now.

Sir Lennox-Boyd: The portion of the estate fell into possession in 1990—there was inflation throughout.

[Sir Lennox-Boyd]

If there is to be indexation for capital gains tax from 1982, why cannot people in those situations be helped too? It is monstrously unjust.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has to reflect on whether he would extend the same treatment for which he is asking on behalf of his constituent to everybody who in 1957 deferred payment, subsequently paid duty and is, in effect, in exactly the same position as his constituent. If he is to advance the case for his constituent, in fairness he must offer that same retrospective opportunity to everybody who, under estate duty, was offered the same decision that Mrs. Findlater was offered. There are severe consequences if one is to do that. If one does not do that it would be wholly unfair on those estates where a duty has already been paid with or without the deferment option. It would also be unusual if we were now to try to revise tax legislation which had been repealed decades ago.

Abandoning the remaining deferred claims for estate duty on expectant interests, as advocated by my hon. Friend, would also lead to pressure for, and an expectation of, similar concessions in relation to the other deferred estate duty charges that I mentioned earlier, in particular those for heritage property.

In any event, my hon. Friend is well aware of the well-established conventions regarding retrospective reliefs. Even if some form of concession applying solely to interest in expectancy were possible, it would not be possible to apply it equitably in accordance with the spirit of the taxpayers charter.

I understand from my hon. Friend's body language that my remarks have not been wholly welcome, but I hope that they have helped him to understand the basis for the estate duty charge and persuaded him that, in the case of his constituent, the charge was consistent with both the relevant law and the treatment of other taxpayers.

At the end of his speech, my hon. Friend mentioned inheritance tax. In recent years the Government's aim has indeed been to reduce the burden of taxation, thus allowing our citizens to pass more of their wealth to their chosen beneficiaries and simplifying the tax system. Since the introduction of inheritance tax in 1986 the Government have doubled the threshold in real terms: at £154,000 for 1995-96, it is more than twice the average price of a house in the United Kingdom. We have also abolished the immediate charge on lifetime gifts, and effectively exempted family trading businesses and farms from inheritance tax.

I am pleased to say that, as a result of that and other improvements that we have made, fewer than one in 30 of all estates now pay any inheritance tax. The vast majority of people can leave their homes, savings and other possessions to their children, or other beneficiaries of their choice, without having to worry about those inheritances being taxed.

We stand by our commitment—of which my hon. Friend reminded us—to reduce the burden of inheritance tax still further. We are, of course, mindful of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the weekend, and we shall seek in future to make such improvements as are consistent with the prudent management of the economy.

2.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

2.30 pm

On resuming—

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Crown Post Offices

1. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many letters his Department has had, including those forwarded by hon. Members, in favour of transferring Crown post offices to agency status, and how many opposing this change; and if he will make a statement. [16434]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): Since Post Office Counters Ltd. started its Crown post office conversion programme in 1989, my Department has received a wide range of correspondence commenting on the programme, most commonly on proposals for individual offices. However, summary records of the numbers of letters received and the views expressed in them are not maintained.

Mrs. Roche: I am interested to hear the Minister's reply. I hope that he will listen to the more than 3,000 people in my constituency who have written to me protesting about the change in Muswell Hill post office from a Crown post office to an agency one. I hope that he will take into account that people in my constituency do not want their post office, which they very much value, located in a butcher's shop or a greengrocer's, which are currently among the proposals. I hope that he will take that into account and instruct the Post Office accordingly. If the Post Office proceeds with that proposal, in the words of one of my constituents who formerly voted for the Conservatives, it will lose the support of all those who voted Tory at the last election.

Mr. Eggar: I know that the hon. Lady has had a chance to discuss the matter with the Post Office as part of the consultation. It is, of course, a matter for the Post Office. I can assure the hon. Lady that the Post Office is aware of her strong views. I understand that it has been in correspondence with her in addition to the meeting and that it is looking at possible sites for an agency office.

Mr. Fabricant: Are not many of the people who are concerned that some of the best post offices may become non-Crown post offices in fact referring to sub-post offices which are not Crown post offices, and does not some of the best service come from the sub-post offices, which are already in the private sector?

Mr. Eggar: The sub-post offices are extremely efficient and highly regarded by almost all their customers and are an absolutely critical part of the post office network. When surveys have been done after conversions to the private sector, a very high level of customer satisfaction has been revealed.

Privatisation

2. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what countries have sought his Department's advice on the privatisation of nationalised industries. [16435]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My Department has had discussions on the privatisation of nationalised industries with a wide range of countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia the middle east and the far east.

Mr. Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. When he gives advice to those countries, does he point out that the privatised nationalised industries have increased productivity and share ownership on the shop floor as well as throughout our nation and have made a substantial contribution to the Exchequer with millions of pounds of corporation tax as well as to the balance of payments with the export of technology and expertise? With the abolition of clause IV, are not the Opposition yet again following where we have led for many years?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The world is interested in the programme that Britain has pioneered in privatising the nationalised industries. The nationalised industries were costing the taxpayer £50 million per week. They are now contributing £50 million a week in positive cash flow to the Exchequer from taxes on their profits. That is a remarkable achievement. It is therefore no surprise that so many countries around the world are looking at those examples and copying exactly what we have done.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the people from abroad who are making inquiries about the privatised industries in Britain that when he privatised British Coal he sacked 31,000 miners, closed 31 pits and then sold off the English part of the industry to Mr. R. J. Budge, whose financial base is very shaky? Mr. Budge put in a bid of £900 million; then somehow or other the right hon. Gentleman's Department reduced the tender by £100 million. If that was not a fiddle, I do not know what is.

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell those people from abroad that in respect of all the other industries that have been privatised, the only beneficiaries have been the water board chiefs and the other utility chairmen who have made a small fortune while thousands of people have been chucked on the scrap heap?

Mr. Heseltine: You might wonder, Madam Speaker, whether repealing clause IV has made any difference.

Mr. Dover: Does my right hon. Friend agree that for many countries throughout the world the important thing is cash flow? Does not the sale of nationalised industries, together with the fact that there will be no further outgoings of taxpayers' money—plus the income referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field)—show that the cash flow of those countries will greatly benefit from the sale of nationalised bodies to the private sector?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why so many Governments are looking to the process of privatisation to strengthen their economic base. The fact is that industries and companies which 15 years ago were soggy, producer-dominated, trade-union-dominated monopolies are now world-class companies winning for Britain in the four corners of the world.

Dr. John Cunningham: Has the right hon. Gentleman warned those inquirers about how many billions of pounds consumers of water and electricity have been charged as a result of privatisation? Has he warned them, for example, that if North West Water shared its profits

50-50 between consumers and shareholders, it could reduce every consumer's bill by £50 a year? Has he warned them about the rip-offs on share options and salary increases to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) rightly drew attention?

Has the right hon. Gentleman, as a golden shareholder in the National Grid Company, given any warning to National Grid about its tax avoidance schemes in Dublin and the Channel islands which are ripping off the taxpayer? Consumers and taxpayers are being ripped off by privatisation. How much has the taxpayer lost as a result of offshore tax dodges by National Grid, and does the right hon. Gentleman defend that?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman has shown us exactly the sort of support that British privatised companies would get from a Labour Government. While my ministerial colleagues and I spend our time travelling the world helping to sell British expertise and products produced by the British privatised industries, all that the Opposition can do is find nit-picking complaints in the hope of discrediting one of the most successful changes in industrial ownership in this country's history.

Takeover Bids

3. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy concerning possible takeover bids for the privatised utilities. [16436]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): Takeover bids for the privatised utilities are subject to normal merger control procedures. However, special arrangements apply to mergers between water companies.

Mr. Williams: Now that the Government's golden shares have been lifted, the privatised utilities will become very juicy targets for a plethora of takeover bids. Why is the Government's regulatory framework so hopelessly weak as to allow massive profits and a host of boardroom excesses? What hope is there for effective regulation if a privatised utility is taken over by a large conglomerate?

Mr. Evans: As I have said previously when dealing with questions about the Trafalgar House and Northern Electric issue, the powers of the regulator remain, whether or not there is a takeover. I note that there is some argument in the press to the effect that the whole business of the bid for Northern Electric was a factor which led the regulator to reopen the question of prices. I remind the hon. Gentleman that under the last Labour Government the price of electricity went up by 2 per cent. every six weeks. Under the present Government, the price of electricity has fallen. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that our water companies' average price is the lowest in Europe and that their investment is the highest in Europe? Surely what is important is the service to the customer, not who owns the individual company.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. The water companies' record not only in the matters to which he has drawn attention, but in terms of investment, has been spectacular and contrasts markedly with investment when they were in the public sector under the Labour Government. Some £12 billion has been invested in the water infrastructure. It would be helpful if Labour Members paid due credit to that.

Mr. Wigley: What powers will the Government use to prevent a takeover in the event of an offer being made for a company such as Welsh Water? That company has a large retained profits level, which only this week has come under criticism from Ofwat in Wales. Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government will intervene to ensure that no such takeover took place?

Mr. Evans: I should point out two factors to the hon. Gentleman. Not only has significant investment taken place in the water industry in Wales, but, as the hon. Gentleman in particular should be aware, Welsh Water is slightly distinct from other water companies in that the 15 per cent. share which applies in relation to the special shares of other water companies is retained by Welsh Water and can be changed only by a 75 per cent. vote of shareholders. In the circumstances, that should be of some solace to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. O'Neill: Can the Minister confirm the rumours that are circulating about a change of ownership Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear? Has the Government's policy on that matter changed? If so, will he ensure that, before any sales are made, an announcement is made to the House?

Mr. Evans: I am not sure how that question fits in with the general line of the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). As so many stories from so many different directions have been produced so often by Opposition Members, I do not propose to engage in rumour-mongering with Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen.

Manufacturing Base

4. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he proposes to regenerate Britain's manufacturing base. [16437]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): The latest figures show manufacturing output up 4.3 per cent., productivity up 4.6 per cent. and exports up 14 per cent. on a year earlier. The Government's policies to help manufacturing and other businesses to win are set out in last year's "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" White Paper. We will publish a second White Paper containing further initiatives soon.

Mr. Mackinlay: We have all those "ups", but what are they up on? Is it not a fact that the country's manufacturing has not increased substantially for 20 years? How can the Government claim to take pride in the nation when they have presided over a haemorrhaging of our manufacturing base? Why are their friends—employer and industry representatives and the banks—pointing to the country's great skills shortage? Are not the Government selling the country short in all sectors, especially manufacturing?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman shows all the dangers of coming to the House with a rigidly prepared supplementary question. Three years ago, in the middle of the recession, his comments might have had some validity, but I remind him of my answer—manufacturing up, exports up on last year, productivity up, investment up. The only thing that is down is unemployment. It is all good news.

Mr. Knapman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the export-led recovery is becoming apparent even to a few of the more thoughtful Opposition Members? Will not that awareness be assisted by the recent £1 billion export order won by Lucas Industries in my constituency?

Mr. Page: I can but agree with my hon. Friend. The growth that we are seeing in the United Kingdom can only be regarded as miraculous. For the first time, we have stability in world trade and we have arrested a decline which has been going on for decades. The sort of order to which my hon. Friend referred is good news.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister aware that, in terms of gross domestic product, our manufacturing base is well below that of France and Germany and is still not recovering at the right speed? Should not there be more co-ordination between the Exchequer and the Department of Employment? Is it not strange that, while the Department of Trade and Industry is trying to do one thing, the Department of Employment is cutting the enterprise allowance scheme and the Chancellor of the Exchequer refuses to believe that 35 per cent. of people in this country work for small and medium-sized firms which need finance and help?

Mr. Page: There is a philosophical divide between our two parties. We do not believe in such centralised plans. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the success of the National Enterprise Board set up by Labour to try to help British industry: it cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds. I must also point out that the White Paper entitled "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" is the most positive way to help British industry take forward a wide range of best practice benchmarks and develop its export potential.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British silverware industry is rightly renowned throughout the world for the quality of its work and that that quality is synonymous with the British hallmark? May I congratulate him and his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry on their robust and successful defence of the British hallmark last week in Brussels against determined attempts by the Germans and Italians to consign it to the dustbin of history?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend's position has always been very clear and I thank him on behalf of the Department for his robust support in producing such a successful result.

Balance of Trade

5. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current deficit in the balance of trade for manufactured goods. [16438]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): In 1994, United Kingdom exports rose to all-time highs, reducing the trade deficit in manufactures by £500 million to £7.5 billion.

Mr. Grocott: I am not sure whether the Minister is proud of that answer, but will he take this opportunity to remind the House of some salutary economic statistics? In the second quarter of 1979, under Labour, there was a surplus in manufacturing trade of £1 billion, whereas in the fourth quarter of 1994, under the Conservatives, there was a deficit of £2 billion. Are not those figures a reflection of the vandalism perpetrated on our manufacturing base, especially in my region, the west midlands? Will the Minister in a spirit of humility initiate urgent talks with those who were Ministers in the Labour Government to discover how Labour succeeded with manufacturing trade where the Tories have failed?

Mr. Needham: May I, in all humility, spell out to the hon. Gentleman the record of his party? I refer not to the second quarter of 1979 but to the fact that between 1974 and 1979 manufacturing output went down by 3 per cent. Between 1979 and 1994, manufacturing output went up by 9.5 per cent. Between 1974 and 1979, manufacturing exports went up by 11 per cent., and between 1979 and 1994 they went up by 80 per cent. Between 1974 and 1979, manufacturing productivity went up by 5.5 per cent. whereas between 1979 and 1994 it went up by 73.5 per cent. I thank the hon. Gentleman for asking such a helpful planted question.

Mr. Brooke: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the shift from the third world to the first world in the direction of exports between 1979 and today? Does not that expansion into high-tech exports bode extremely well for the future?

Mr. Needham: In 1979, it appeared that British industry was in long-term, irreversible decline, helped by the Labour party. Since 1985, the share of Britain's trade has stabilised and is now, if anything, going up. That is an enormous credit to our private sector, which has been set free by the Conservative Government and is now competing throughout the length and breadth of the world at the most competitive edges of technology.

Mr. Hardy: After 15 years of failure, we need not merely a temporary miracle, but a sustained one. Is there any prospect of that being maintained by a Government who, in the case of the steel industry, have deliberately allowed unfair competition to go unchallenged and have created a situation in which unfair competitors in Europe will take much more advantage of their protection when the going gets a bit more difficult, as it is bound to do if this Government stay in office much longer?

Mr. Needham: We need no lectures from the Opposition about looking after our industries in Europe. We need no lectures from a party which knows little about industry and would succumb to the first blow that it received from Europe. The hon. Gentleman referred to British Steel. In 1979, nationalised industries cost the taxpayer £50 million per week. Those now privatised industries currently contribute £50 million per week to the Exchequer. That is a miracle which even the Opposition could not reverse.

European Navigation Satellite System

6. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport about ensuring United Kingdom industrial involvement in any future European global navigation satellite system; and if he will make a statement. [16439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): My noble Friend Viscount Goschen, Minister for Aviation and Shipping, and I have agreed a common approach to the European global navigation satellite system programme. Our Departments are together contributing some £5.2 million which, added to contributions from UK industry, will provide an effective basis for UK involvement in the programme.

Mrs. Gillan: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his welcome announcement of that £5.2 million funding, which will support our UK industry in the new area of navigation by satellite? I do not want to sound ungrateful when the new funding has just been announced and I know that the plans from the European Space Agency have only just been forthcoming, but could my hon. Friend give me and the UK industry an assurance that there will be funding in the medium term to build on this excellent up-front funding?

Mr. Taylor: It is always a pleasure to be chivvied by my hon. Friend, especially in space—[HON. MEMBERS: "Which space?"] We seem to be getting into holiday mood, for which I blame myself. The importance of the global navigation system and the ARTES 9 programme is that they are likely to lead in the long term to controlling the movements of all civil aircraft, the movement of ships and, ultimately, the monitoring of road transport. It is therefore essential that British industry should play a full part. We have put up money which British industry is more than matching. I am in negotiations with the European Space Agency to ensure that we can accept the whole of the amount that British industry is putting up. It is difficult for me at the moment to forecast future public expenditure survey rounds, but my noble Friend Viscount Goschen and I are looking closely to see what more we might do in this programme.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the Minister agree that with this navigation system and all other areas of space involvement, if we do not actively involve ourselves European-wide, give the encouragement that is necessary to the industry and assist in restructuring the industry so that it can face the challenges from the United States, we shall be pushed out of this area altogether? Does the Minister raise these issues when he is talking about trade with people from the United States who are constantly telling us about their record on free trade when indirect subsidies from the American Government are being poured into their space and aerospace industries, to our detriment?

Mr. Taylor: I am well aware of the pricing policy which can occur in some American companies and I have alerted my European colleagues to it. We are busily restructuring the industry. One of our largest companies in the space sector, Matra Marconi Space, is now a 50-50 joint venture with the French. There is a new arrangement between Matra Marconi Space and Alcatel for a new series of the Eutel satellite programmes. We are well placed to win competitive bids. My big problem at the moment is to persuade the European Space Agency to let contracts competitively rather than on the basis of Buggin's turn or juste retour. I will raise that point at the ESA ministerial conference later this year.

Cable Communications

7. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has had with the Cable Communications Association to discuss projects in schools, hospitals or other community-based institutions. [16440]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I often meet and correspond with the Cable Communications Association. I have also had positive discussions with individual cable companies about connections to community-based institutions within their franchises.

Mr. Butler: Is my hon. Friend aware that ever since the first modern computer, the Colossus, was constructed at Bletchley Park, which is now part of Milton Keynes, Milton Keynes has led the way in information technology of all sorts? Is he also aware that the excellent schools and colleges and both universities make great use of the present facilities? Can my hon. Friend confirm that schools—not just those in Milton Keynes, but those elsewhere so that they can catch up with us—will be able to connect into the cable systems and take full advantage of them so that our children are well equipped for the future?

Mr. Taylor: I had the great pleasure of being in my hon. Friend's constituency in Milton Keynes not long ago during Science, Engineering and Technology Week. I pay tribute to all that is being done within that hive of activity, particularly in high technology. The Cable Communications Association has undertaken to ensure that all schools in the areas for which it has franchises will be connected. It is going much further by developing a series of classrooms without walls programmes to ensure that multimedia techniques are available for children in this country. British Telecom is also doing an enormous amount for schools with its campus series. We are making rapid progress. Last week, the Department and industry announced the schools on-line project.

Shipbuilding Industry

8. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about future prospects for the shipbuilding industry. [16441]

Mr. Eggar: I welcome the steps that the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry has been taking to improve its competitiveness in the face of very challenging market conditions.

Mr. Hutton: Is not the arrival into the United Kingdom this week of the new P and O cruise liner Oriana yet another example of the decline of Britain's historic shipbuilding industry? Is the Minister aware that that will be felt particularly strongly in my constituency, where the previous Oriana vessel was constructed in the late 1950s? Why have the British Government not shown the same level of patriotism and support for our shipbuilding industry as other foreign Governments in the European Union have shown for theirs? Is that not a further example of the decline in the British industrial base caused by the Government's negligence?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman seems unaware that P and O asked all three British yards to bid for the building of the vessel and all three declined to do so for their own commercial reasons. A significant number of firms supplied equipment for the Oriana and much of the outfitting work was done by United Kingdom firms.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Minister endorse the efforts being made by Harland and Wolff to diversify its product range and to develop further its international competitive position by seeking to establish co-operative agreements with overseas yards such as Kawasaki and Daewoo? Does he agree that that is one of the ways in which all British yards can help to secure their future?

Mr. Eggar: As I believe the hon. Gentleman is aware, I paid a visit to Harland and Wolff and I shall shortly meet again its chief executive, Mr. Per Nielson. The yard is making strenuous efforts to diversify. I have set up a group among the oil companies to look at the possibility of producing floating production vessels at the Harland and Wolff yard and other yards in the United Kingdom. The initial results of that study are encouraging. Ultimately, Harland and Wolff must be able to compete effectively with other yards, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Export Promotion

9. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export promoters have been seconded to his Department from the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [16442]

Mr. Needham: Last July, the Department achieved its aim of recruiting 100 export promoters—high-calibre senior managers with export expertise, on secondment from the private sector, who have become a major success in helping Britain to win business overseas.

Mr. Spring: I salute the Department of Trade and Industry's initiative. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that excellent marriage between the public and private sectors is contributing greatly to the staggering success of British exports, notably to Latin America, the Indian sub-continent and the Pacific Rim, with all the job creation opportunities which flow from that to Britain?

Mr. Needham: In agreeing with my hon. Friend, and without wanting to be invidious with regard to naming names, because all the export promoters have done a remarkable job, may I say that one promoter, Linda Boize, is working on an order for Thailand worth £360 million. The Thai Government have told us that that project could not be carried out anywhere but in Britain. It is being carried out as a result of the work of Linda Boize and her colleagues.

Mr. Harvey: Can the Minister give the House an absolute assurance that there have been no exports or arrangements for the sale of electro-shock equipment involving any British companies since 1984?

Mr. Needham: The answer is no. That has nothing whatsoever to do with export promoters. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know how export promoters can help companies in his constituency, he might like to ask questions about the subject in hand.

Mr. Enright: Despite the admitted success of the people we have sent out, will the Minister explain why, in the 12 years after 1979, this country lagged behind all the G7 countries and all the European Union countries apart from Denmark, our beloved Greece and even Spain, with regard to the rise in exports? That was the case despite North sea oil and the gift that it provided.

Mr. Needham: I have bandied statistics with the hon. Gentleman and I was grateful for his recent work in Austria. However, we are lagging behind no one. Since 1981, our exports have increased faster than those in Germany, Japan and the United States. That is not a bad record. As I told the hon. Gentleman—he clearly did not hear this last time—our share of world trade has stabilised since the mid-1980s and, if anything, it is increasing. Under the Labour Government and previous Governments, it had suffered 100 years of inexorable decline. The change has come because of the policies followed by this Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the very considerable increase in our exports to Latin America which coincided with the appointment of the new export promoters, notably covering Colombia and Brazil? Can we hope for a further increase in the number of those excellent people, combining private sector skills with those of the outstanding diplomats in our embassies and commercial missions over there to increase British exports yet further?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend has a great knowledge of that part of the world and he has helped us as a result of that knowledge. He is perfectly right to say that we have eight export promoters for Latin America who are working as a team and doing an enormous amount through the links to Latin America campaign, which I hope hon. Members on both sides of the House will make use of in their constituencies, to show the opportunities that exist in Latin America for British business. I am convinced that the export promoter initiative will be a crucial ingredient in restoring the level of trade which this country used to enjoy in Latin America and which, since the 1920s, unfortunately has been declining, although it now seems to be on the way up again.

Manufacturing Investment

10. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change between 1979 and 1993 in the proportion of gross domestic product invested in manufacturing industry in (a) the United Kingdom, (b) Germany and (c) Japan. [16444]

Mr. Needham: The latest figures show that the United Kingdom invested 2.2 per cent. of gross domestic product in manufacturing industry in 1992 and 3.1 per cent. in 1979. Comparable figures, for which the hon. Gentleman asked, for Japan and Germany are not available, not least because Germany did not exist in 1979.

Mr. Berry: Does the Minister consider that the decline in the share of GDP invested in manufacturing industry over that period might explain why, under this Conservative Government, Britain has had the worst growth record and the highest levels of unemployment since the war? Does the Minister consider that it might also explain why Britain has had the worst economic performance of any of our major industrial competitors? Does he not also consider that it suggests that quoting statistics on economic performance over the past 12 months might be seriously misleading?

Mr. Needham: It is always a privilege to have another lecture from a lecturer among Opposition Members, who, as usual, know nothing about industry. As the hon. Gentleman asked about Germany, I can respond only about western Germany. Since 1979, manufacturing productivity in the United Kingdom has risen nearly two and a half times as much as in western Germany. Since 1979, our exports have risen faster than in Germany.

It is nonsense to claim that this country's economy is not competing effectively with the rest of the world. When the hon. Gentleman is not lecturing, why does he think that we have managed to attract 40 per cent. of Japanese investment in Europe while Germany has managed to attract only 17 per cent? Why does he think that the same applies to investment from the United States, in respect of which Germany has attracted investment of only 9 per cent? The facts speak for themselves. The hon. Gentleman should be proud of the fact that, in Bristol, he represents a city which, under this Government, is increasing its share of world trade faster and faster.

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that often it is not so much the quantity as the quality of manufacturing investment that is important? Is it not also important to remember that manufacturing investment statistics do not include items such as research and development in pharmaceuticals? Do not British pharmaceutical companies, whether owned by overseas companies or by United Kingdom companies, lead those of Japan and Germany?

Mr. Needham: Of course my hon. Friend is right, and he is also right to stress the importance of the quality of manufacturing investment. In the last days of the Labour Government, when billions of pounds were used to subsidise nationalised industries, much of that money appeared in the figures as if it were manufacturing investment, although it did nothing for exports, for productivity or for competitiveness. Most of what it was subsidising had to be closed down, because it had been invested in the wrong products.

Mr. Bell: Everyone, both in the House and in the country, knows that last year when the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), now Secretary of State for National Heritage, talked about high dividends and low investment, he was promptly denounced by Lord Hanson, who contributed £120,000 to the Conservative party and then sent a letter to the Prime Minister denouncing the right hon. Gentleman. When it comes to high dividends and low investment, we know full well where the heart of the Tory party is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question?"] The question is: in heaven's name, who runs the Department of Trade and Industry when it comes to investment? Is it the President of the Board of Trade or is it Lord Hanson?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman talks about investment regardless of the quality of that investment, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) referred—

Mr. Bell: I asked about Lord Hanson.

Mr. Needham: I am talking not about Lord Hanson but about the question, which concerned investment. The hon. Gentleman, who is more sensible than most Opposition Members about such matters, will know that if manufacturing productivity has increased two and a half times faster in the United Kingdom than in Germany, that has to reflect the quality and importance of British investment over that period. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] That is the answer.

Mr. Sykes: As everybody who works in the private sector relies on the competitiveness of his company not only in Europe but elsewhere abroad, will my hon. Friend tell Opposition Members and the rest of the world what effect the social chapter and the minimum wage would have on manufacturing investment in this country?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend knows a great deal about that subject and has been involved in business all his life, so he knows perfectly well that the social chapter would impose a massive additional burden on industry, because it would reduce support through arrangements such as family credit. The consequences for British competitiveness and profitability would be dire indeed. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) knows that perfectly well, but he does not know what to do about it.

Post Office

11. **Ms Hoey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has had with the Post Office to discuss its future. [16445]

Mr. Heseltine: I most recently met the chairman and chief executive of the Post Office on 2 March.

Ms Hoey: As the Secretary of State has met the representatives of the Post Office, and does so regularly, when will he give the House and the country some idea of his vision for its future? Is he not aware that the Post Office desperately wants to be given commercial freedom within the public sector? There is almost united support for that idea in the country, and there would be support in the House, too, if legislation were introduced. Why will the right hon. Gentleman not make the simple decision to give the Post Office the opportunity to operate commercially within the public sector?

Mr. Heseltine: Because it is not possible to have commercial disciplines in the public sector.

Mr. Jenkin: May I inform my right hon. Friend that when I ironically congratulated the leader of one of the Post Office unions in my constituency on the success of the anti-privatisation campaign, he confessed to me that he rather regretted having won that victory? Can we cease to tie our hands behind our backs in expounding the virtues of a privatised Royal Mail, and may we have an assurance that when we win the general election, at the top of our agenda will be a plan to set the Royal Mail free so that it can expand its markets throughout the world?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes an important point. No one would be happier than I to see Royal Mail join the large number of other privatised industries that are winning battles for Britain across the world.

Business Links

12. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the business links scheme is on target operationally and financially; and if he will make a statement. [16446]

Mr. Heseltine: I have stated on a number of occasions that the programme is well on course to reach its target for a national network in England of around 200 business links by the end of 1995. In addition to receiving a contribution to start-up costs, business links have been assured of on-going funding from my Department for the delivery of counselling and business support services. They are also financed by partner contributions and charges for services.

Mr. Mudie: The House will have noted the President's answer on the financial side, but will he concede that the success of that well-intentioned venture has been jeopardised by a series of blunders which have been extensively catalogued in an internal audit report? I see that the President smiles at that remark. As the internal audit report shows that taxpayers' money will go in at greater levels and for longer periods, does he not think that the report should be published, or is it a case of spending taxpayers' money without explanation or apology?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I think that the hon. Gentleman should respect the rights of Ministers to conduct internal investigations into projects which they are establishing. That is exactly what we have done. I do not think that it adds to the confidence in the regimes that we are establishing if reports are leaked before time and if misjudgments are then paraded in newspaper headlines.

The programme enjoyed all-party support, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to this important innovation. The business links machine is capable of delivering the most sophisticated range of support for small and medium companies that this country has ever seen. That machine—which will amount to some 200 outlets—will be in place by the end of the year.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on 27 January I opened the business links office in Market Harborough? The taxpayer is already getting good value for money because many of the small and medium businesses that trade around Market Harborough have made good use of that office for their benefit and for that of their employees and the British economy.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will be glad to hear that we raised a glass of champagne to him on the day that he opened the business links office.

Dr. John Cunningham: The President should be a bit more candid about his internal audit document which comments on the progress of the business links programme. The document—a copy of which I have here from his Department—does not confirm what the right hon. Gentleman has said. In the document, his own civil servants say:

> "The medium and long term viability of established business links is uncertain".

It also says:

> "We found that the financial appraisal of BL business plans has in general not been sufficiently rigorous".

It goes on to say:

> "The Department was exposed to financial risk and potential embarrassment".

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), but I am sure that he realises that we do not allow quotes at Question Time. I think that he has forgotten that fact.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the President confirm that the document says that payments made under the scheme before September 1994 were ultra vires? We believe that that is the case. Why, in his rush to proceed, has the President taken what was a very good Labour party idea—for which, as he said, there was all-party support—and put it in such jeopardy?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall try to explain to the House what the issue that has given rise to such interest is about. It is very simple. When we established business links, we had to decide whether we would provide a 100 per cent. subsidy from the centre for a period without question.

It was clearly put to me by the partners in the business links venture—the training and enterprise councils, chambers of commerce, local enterprise agencies, local authorities and the Confederation of British Industry—that they did not want a 100 per cent. subsidy from Government because it would then become a central Government organisation and they wanted local initiative, local discretion and local flexibility. I totally support that view.

One of the ways in which that can be assured is by those partners contributing to the funding, both by subvention from the partner organisations and by way of charges raised from individual companies which take advantage of the service. As, by definition, the need for charges will not come on stream for two to three years on the scale envisaged, one cannot guarantee at the outset the precise level of charges that will be raised. It is perfectly possible for someone to produce a report and say, "You can't be sure that you'll get the money." There will inevitably be questions.

I believe—there is perfectly good evidence for doing so—in the charges that we have made for consultancy schemes and in hard charging for export advice. I believe also that small companies will find those services worth paying for, but I cannot prove that in advance. The only way would be to do exactly that which the partners do not want—underwrite the whole lot from the beginning, at the taxpayer's expense. I refuse to do that.

The scheme which we put in place is imaginative and constructive. It was designed with the local element much to the forefront. As my hon. Friend the Member for Market Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and other right hon and hon. Members said, the important thing is to make the scheme work and to give it every support. It is not controversial. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) rightly said that it featured in the Labour party's manifesto. I do not know how it got in that manifesto, but it did. Before the right hon. Gentleman gets carried away, I shall point out that it was featured in the Liberal manifesto. If there is one thing that creates anxiety in my mind, it is that I introduced an idea to which both main Opposition parties subscribe.

Telecommunications Companies

13. **Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to assist British telecommunications companies to develop commercial involvements in European and other markets. [16447]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are continuing to press for rapid liberalisation of telecoms services and infrastructures in the European Union and world wide. The Overseas Project Board and Overseas Trade Services help operators and suppliers win a greater share of overseas business.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend agree that one reason that British telecoms companies are so successful in Europe is that this country and the Government set the worldwide agenda for privatisation, liberalisation and a sound regulatory framework? Does he agree also that another manifestation of the same success factor is the level of inward investment by cable companies?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This country is a test-bed for the development of the information infrastructure. We welcome inward investment, which has created jobs and helped to advance our technological base more rapidly. Most companies that have invested in this country are now also exporting to its benefit. There are also several joint ventures such as GPT, between GEC and Siemens, which has a massive telecoms contract in Moscow. The competitive instincts of the British market are leading us to succeed in other markets. I look forward to further developments in all aspects of the infrastructure—fixed link, mobile, supplies and services—around the world, as other countries follow our lead and liberalise their infrastructures and services.

Manufacturing Industry

14. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to expand manufacturing industries; and if he will make a statement. [16449]

Mr. Page: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that a substantial part of British manufacturing is accounted for by small firms? What are the Government doing to assist the vital part of the economy that they represent?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of the important contribution made by small and medium enterprises—the proverbial acorns from which we hope oaks will grow, which contribute 25 per cent. to our gross domestic product. As my right hon. Friend the President just said, 200 business links have been created, which will give business men a single coherent signpost to advice, market research and other necessary services to help them expand. That will prevent them from being pushed from pillar to post. Most important of all is a proper, stable economic climate with low inflation and low interest rates, which gives the best basis for British business.

Mr. Purchase: Is it not pathetic that Conservative Members ask questions about expanding British manufacturing, given that a Conservative Government wiped out one third of Britain's manufacturing base in the 1980s? As things hot up as the consequence of an undervalued pound, capacity is insufficient to meet export demand. The Government preach their record, and it gives us no pleasure to make the other argument. The Government are wholly responsible for wiping out one third of this country's manufacturing capacity, particularly in the west midlands.

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear my answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock, in which I said that investment, exports, productivity and manufacturing were up. The hon. Gentleman seems to be ignoring the huge success of the Invest in Britain Bureau, which has brought into the country more than 300 companies in the manufacturing sector and created about 84,000 jobs. It is certainly helping to fulfil and expand Britain's manufacturing base.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend recall the frequent references of Labour Members to reports made by the Engineering Employer Federation a year or two ago, when those reports contained fairly depressing news? Has he noted the silence on the Opposition Benches since the Engineering Employers Federation began to report that orders, investment and manufacturing output were up? Is there not something wrong when Opposition Members talk only about bad news for Britain?

Mr. Page: I can only agree with my hon. Friend. The Labour party seems to ignore the forecast that is being produced by the CBI, which suggests that in its view manufacturing investment will be up by about 8 per cent. this year. The London business school is saying that it will be up by about 15 per cent. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research is forecasting 9 per cent. Not all of them will be right, but they are all pointing in the right way. That shows that success is with us. It is all good news.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister not realise the offence that it causes to the public when they hear the self-congratulatory nonsense to which we have been listening and compare it with their experience of life? The people of Scotland have witnessed under this Government a reduction in the number of manufacturing units from more than 4,500 to 3,000. Manufacturing employment has been reduced from 563,000 jobs to 300,000. Does the Minister not realise that it is that sort of experience that will contribute tomorrow to the slaughter of the Tories in the Scottish local government elections, and next month in the English and Welsh local government elections? Even if his colleague, the President of the Board of Trade, succeeds to the position that he covets, such statistics will be hung round the neck of the Government for many years to come.

Mr. Page: If the BBC were here, it would be banning that broadcast. It would be against the rules. Investment in Scotland has been at record levels. In the manufacturing sector, there has been an increase of about 25,000 jobs throughout the country. We can see the results overall. Every day, 1,000 jobs are being created. Unemployment has been decreasing by 1,000 a day over the past two years. These are enormous successes that should not be left on one side.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is evidence of a growing success of manufacturing industry, and not merely through the Engineering Employers Federation, where even small firms are starting to recruit? There is news from the Machine Tool Technologies Association to the effect that the machine tool industry is operating on a considerable balance of trade surplus, and has been for some time. Is that not a knock in the eye for Opposition Members, who seem always to see their duty to write down and write off British industry as much as possible purely for party political reasons?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend produces the Machine Tool Technologies Association as a classic example. I can only agree with him. I hope to be travelling with a delegation to Milan to try to increase export potential in the next few months.

Manufacturing Investment

15. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with representatives of manufacturing industry about the availability of long-term finance; and if he will make a statement. [16451]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has frequent discussions with representatives of manufacturing industry. Many of these cover long-term finance. The Government can best encourage investment in manufacturing industry by providing a stable macro-economic environment based on low inflation and sound public finances.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Minister aware that I was talking the other day to a member of the northern branch of the Engineering Employers Federation? He said that the greatest obstacles to the expansion of his business were the greed, myopia and excessive short-termism of British banks. Does the Minister's Department have plans to do anything about that, or is his party too deeply in hock to the bankers?

Mr. Evans: There is no more ludicrous a spectacle of new Labour than the hon. Gentleman presenting himself as the champion of manufacturing industry. May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that, during the 1980s, business investment in this country grew faster than in any other Group of Seven countries except Japan? Opposition Members may shout about it, but that is a fact.

Mrs. Peacock: Does my hon. Friend agree that many manufacturing industries, particularly in west Yorkshire—and in my own constituency since 1984—have been investing money since the early 1980s? Does he further agree that a slightly more sympathetic venture and help from banks would now be a great advantage to all those industries?

Mr. Evans: I think that my hon. Friend will be aware of the loan guarantee scheme, which is run through the Department of Trade and Industry. Changes were introduced in the Budget, to do with capital gains tax reinvestment, single company personal equity plan schemes and employee share schemes. A number of measures were taken to help investment, but I very much take on board the point that my hon. Friend makes. We are looking to the banks to make their contribution as well.

Business Links

16. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on business links in the North West. [16452]

Mr. Heseltine: Twelve business link outlets are currently open in the north-west. Approval has been granted for a further nine. Assessment panels will consider further proposals in April, June and September. When the regional network is complete, there will be more than 30 outlets.

Mr. Miller: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the statement that there was greater scope for direction at the earlier stages of the scheme, by his Department? If so, what assessment has he made of the damage that that has done to the potential of the scheme in the north-west? More important, what steps has he taken to correct that weakness?

Mr. Heseltine: I explained to the House a few minutes ago that we have tried to preserve a balance between ensuring that quality is consistent across the whole network and ensuring the flexibility that the local partners quite understandably want. I believe that, from all the evidence available to me, we are making good progress in that direction. Recently, I spent a day at a major conference of business link chief executives, and the mood of optimism was extremely encouraging.

Post Office

17. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he intends to take to allow commercial freedom for the Post Office; and if he will make a statement. [16453]

Mr. Heseltine: The Post Office operates several businesses. We are actively engaged in widening the opportunity for Post Office Counters Ltd. and are helping to automate its services. We will announce any plans to change the present arrangements governing the remainder of the Post Office in due course.

Mr. Barnes: In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey), in connection with Post Office commercial practices, the President said that it was impossible to have commercial freedom operating in the public sector. Would he like to explain the blinkered economic thinking behind that set of ideas?

Mr. Heseltine: Absolutely. I do not understand how, if a taxpayers' guarantee stands behind a business, it can operate in total commercial freedom.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we were to give the Post Office within the public sector greater commercial freedom it would mean greater borrowing, which would be added to the public sector borrowing requirement and would eventually lead to higher taxes?

Mr. Heseltine: All those things would, of course, come within the Treasury rules, and that is something that no Government have ever been able to avoid. The House would have to answer basic questions about what it would expect me to do about Parcel Force, which is losing a significant amount of money travelling up and down the roads, in competition with private sector companies that could not survive with a financial regime of that sort.

Privatised Utilities (Executive Pay)

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures have been taken to prevent very

large pay and share option increases being provided for executives of privatised utilities. [16455]

Mr. Eggar: Pay increases for executives in the privatised utilities are a matter for the companies and their shareholders, not the Government.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that the public are increasingly concerned that the Government seem so loth to take any action to stop the obscene payments that have made to some of the chief executives and other officials of the privatised utilities? May I suggest that, as far as North West Water is concerned, where a large part of our bills is for long-term capital investment, the consumers should be given shares in respect of that investment and thereby given a say in what Sir Desmond Pitcher and others should be paid.

Mr. Eggar: The Labour party simply does not understand the benefits of privatisation—the improvements in the quality of service, the reductions in price and the benefits to consumers overall. The hon. Gentleman and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen are completely captured by the politics of envy.

Exports

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the level of exports over the past year. [16456]

Mr. Needham: During the past year, British exports have broken all records, resulting in the lowest visible trade deficit since 1991. Exports are predicted to grow by a further 10 per cent. this year. In 1994, visible exports earned £135 billion, with volume and value up by 11 per cent. over 1993.

Mr. Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this is the first time that economic recovery in Britain has been export led? Does that not underline the fact that Britain's economic recovery is soundly based and we can look forward to another two and a half years of rapid growth?

Mr. Needham: I hope that I can say to my hon. Friend that we can look forward to many years of export-led recovery, and that is a triumph for British industry and the British Government.

Health Services (London)

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the health service in London.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The decisions that I announced yesterday follow four separate statutory consultation exercises about hospital changes in south and east London and around Barnet and Edgware. In each case, the decisions measure up against the Government's key objectives for improving the health service in London—to strengthen specialist services by concentrating them in centres of excellence; to preserve and enhance medical teaching and research in the capital; to provide more modern acute hospital services closer to the major centres of population; and to release money to increase investment in family doctor and community health services which are badly needed in parts of the capital.

Those key elements of the Government's strategy will be familiar to the House. I set them out in a statement at the time of the publication of the Tomlinson report, and again when I announced my response. They have been frequently debated. I said on those occasions and I say again: the objectives of this strategy enjoy widespread support within the clinical and academic worlds and from independent commentators such as the King's Fund. The need for change in London is widely recognised, and widely recognised as long overdue.

I hear and understand the concerns that have been expressed, not least by right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). We considered very carefully the points made during the consultations, including those made by right hon. and hon. Members in their meetings with the Minister for Health and me. In particular, I was struck by the points made about the pace of change and the extended time scale of some of the announcements yesterday respond to those points.

Let me make it absolutely clear that no accident and emergency facility, or indeed any other, will close until Ministers are satisfied that the alternative facilities are not only available but capable of providing an improved service for patients.

My right hon. Friend asks specifically about the financial implications. The changes announced yesterday will be backed by £400 million of capital investment. That is on top of the £210 million that we are already spending on improved primary care. That is a substantial investment in a modern health service.

That money will buy, among other things, a new NHS hospital for Greenwich, an upgraded hospital in Barnet, complete with a state-of-the-art accident and emergency department and a world-beating centre for neurosciences and neurosurgery at King's. It will support the changes at the Royal Hospitals trust and Guy's and St. Thomas's, which will develop them as centres of supreme excellence in treatment, teaching and research. In addition, we are investing substantially in other hospitals such as the Homerton, Lewisham, King's and the Royal Free.

Aside from the direct clinical benefits, we expect those changes to lead to substantial revenue savings which we estimate will be of the order of £75 million each year once the changes are complete. That is money which can and will be invested elsewhere in the health service, both in community health services in London's areas of greatest need and outside the capital.

I say to the House that, at the moment, rather than getting £75 million out, we are putting in £28 million each year, supporting the duplication and fragmentation of services around the four areas covered by my announcement. That must be a good exchange by anyone's standards.

For St Bartholomew's and the Royal London, capital investment will total nearly £240 million. It is expected to deliver revenue savings of £30 million a year; the current subsidy for the trust is about £8 million a year.

Let me say to my right hon. Friend that the changes that I announced yesterday, which take our strategy forward, are not primarily about finance. *[Interruption.]* These changes are about improving the quality of care. They are about better specialist services, where medical expertise is enhanced by bringing clinicians together to benefit from each other's ideas; they are about better teaching and better research, and about linking world-class hospitals to multi-faculty colleges; they are about equipping modern hospitals to respond more flexibly to the pressures that they face, and harness the awesome advances in medical technology; and they are about providing more health care where Londoners need it most badly—in their communities, their doctors' surgeries and the streets where they live. It is on that basis that I made my decisions.

Change is never easy, but to fail to deal with the need for change in London would be to fail to deal with the needs of Londoners. I am determined that, as a result of these changes, we shall have a health service in London that is fit for the 21st century, in which we can all take great pride.

Mr. Brooke: I thank my right hon. Friend for answering my question. Her policy of rationalisation and the concentration of specialties in London enjoys considerable support among Conservative Members; against that background, will she answer a number of specific questions about Bart's?

First, can my right hon. Friend tell us anything about the current state of negotiations with the City corporation about a continued health service on the Bart's site? Does she recognise that Bart's is a national—and, indeed, international—asset, and that, in a post-industrial society, such assets are of great importance in communicating British medical excellence to the world?

Secondly, can my right hon. Friend outline as far as possible—I recognise the difficulties—her plans to ensure that the national asset to which I have referred is protected and enhanced in the merger at Whitechapel? What will be the future deployment of the historic site at Smithfield? I use the word "historic" in a living rather than a heritage sense.

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate my right hon. Friend's recognition of the need to rationalise and concentrate services. That message has been repeated time and again over the past 80 years, but with increasing intensity in recent years.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

My right hon. Friend asked what stage had been reached in discussions with the City corporation. I am glad to say that a memorandum of understanding is likely to be agreed between the corporation and the local health authorities next week. Their ideas have been based very much on the Newchurch report, in the hope of a practical response to the present-day needs of the local community.

My right hon. Friend referred to the national and international significance of the hospital's ethos and work. I said explicitly in my statement yesterday that I wanted that ethos and culture to be preserved and enhanced during the move—albeit a move to the Royal London. That tradition is important, and, as my right hon. Friend knows, I fully appreciate the long history of St Bartholomew's; but other hospitals have been able to move successfully.

For example, St George's moved to Tooting, although that took 21 years. I do not think that 21 years of indecision would benefit my right hon. Friend's constituents, or the eminent professionals who work at this distinguished hospital.

As for the site, I announced yesterday that a project team would look for practical options fitting to the site on which there has been such a history of excellent medicine over many hundreds of years. I can inform the House that Sir Ronald Grierson has agreed to chair that committee. I hope that Lord Rees-Mogg will also be a member of the committee as well as a number of other distinguished academics and clinicians.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Lady should know that her announcement of the closure of Bart's and the London Chest will be greeted with dismay and anger in east London. We do not expect our services to improve; we are fearful that they are deteriorating.

When the right hon. Lady says that there is widespread acceptance for the plans, is she not aware that, apart from what the first King's Fund report said and Tomlinson backed up, a succession of reports since then have revealed that, far from being over-bedded, London is short of beds in a major way?

When the right hon. Lady speaks of having gone through a consultative process, is she not aware that, at every stage in the consultation, her proposals have been resisted by the people directly concerned and by the community health councils? Is it not becoming a farce to speak of consultations which have no effect whatever on the area authorities, the regional authorities or the Secretary of State herself?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is my task to make sure that decisions are taken only when, after careful discussion, I am satisfied that they will lead to improvements in health care. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I know his part of London extremely well. I know the dearth of primary and community services and the benefit to his constituents of the £210 million being invested in primary care in London.

As for beds, all reports have reinforced the dilemma of excessive duplication of specialty beds. The difficulty is that the specialty beds are in units below the size necessary to gain the full benefits of research teams and managing a modern health service.

When the right hon. Gentleman considers the specialty reviews chaired by eminent clinicians, many of them leading members of the royal colleges, he will see time and again the message repeated—as it was in the King's Fund report and the Tomlinson report—that the duplication and fragmentation of the specialty units mean that we do not get the maximum benefit from the substantial professional and financial commitment that we are putting into health care in London. To achieve precisely that excellence and quality of care, it is necessary to take those decisions.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that democratic politics is about delivering to people what the majority want, and not about telling the majority of people what they should have? Does my right hon. Friend not accept now that she is doing the wrong thing, in the wrong way, at the wrong time and in the wrong place? Finally, now that my right hon. Friend has had time to reflect on her precipitate decision, which she clearly took after seeing my colleagues and myself with a weekend intervening, will she recognise that perhaps the decision was the wrong one? Will she now reconsider it?

Mrs. Bottomley: I well understand my hon. Friend's strong commitment on behalf of his local hospital and the service it has provided to his constituents. I also heard my hon. Friend saying that he has had 25 meetings on the issue.

The need for modernising the health service and bringing together state-of-the-art accident and emergency departments is repeated time and again by clinical standards advisory groups and the teams of professionals, who time and again argue about the better clinical outcome of a consultant-led service. I know that my hon. Friend felt strongly about questions of timing, transport, the ambulance service and the improvement in primary care. I hope that he will feel that, in my announcement yesterday, I have indeed considered all those elements of his requests. He knows that the health authority will be consulting about what further uses could be developed at the Edgware hospital, to fit the needs of the community not only for today, but for the next century.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Secretary of State accept that she made a grave mistake by not coming to the House to make her announcement? It is the national health service, not the Secretary of State's health service, so should not serious weight be given to the public's views about the proposals on which she consulted? If, for example, in relation to Bart's, Guy's or any other hospital, 1 million-plus people take one view, and, as in the case of Guy's, 23 people take a different view, and if the right hon. Lady then takes the view of the 23, would it not be wrong to say that she has listened to the public consultation?

The right hon. Lady said that accident and emergency units would close in five years' time, on the assumption that the remainder of the health service in London could provide an alternative. What guarantee can she give that there will not be just as much need then for the units that are in place now?

How much of the money that the right hon. Lady has announced is new money? Is it not the case that none of the capital money is new money? In view of her letter to the chairman of the South Thames regional health authority, it appears that the local commission's bid for another £29 million as the minimum needed to make the changes viable will have to be met from the regional budget, not by any additional Government money being provided as a result of her announcement yesterday.

Mrs. Bottomley: In the hon. Gentleman's lengthy contribution to the debate in the House a week ago, to which my hon. Friend the Minister for Health responded, he praised the consultation process in his area. The reconfigured proposals and the change of timing have arisen very much out of the consultation process, listening to the concerns of local people. However, the argument remains about the need, over time, to concentrate essential in-patient acute services on one site and to develop at the Guy's end a state-of-the-art centre for diagnostic day-care treatment and services.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman will see that development increasingly being regarded with great respect, not only in this country but internationally. He knows that there are proposals for Guy's to accommodate some elective work and some mental health services, over time. However, above all it is the commitment to integrating clinical services with research and education—having the research campus at the Thameside site—which is spoken of with great respect and excitement by many people in the clinical field.

On the question of accident and emergency departments, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments of Sir Norman Browse, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, and Howard Baderman, a doctor and an adviser to the chief medical officer, who time and again talk about the great number of A and E departments in London, far above need—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am quoting Sir Norman Browse and Howard Baderman. They also talk about the importance of quality, and of having a consultant-led service.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that there will be no change in his A and E department until we are satisfied that proper alternative arrangements are in place to provide the service that his constituents need.

On the question of money, over time there is certainly no justification for London having a subsidy in transitional relief. London needs to come into better balance. The capital money is new money, to be developed over time to ensure that we can actually deliver world-class hospitals. It is new money.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot allow these long exchanges to continue with so many Members seeking and deserving to put questions to the Secretary of State. I ask for brisk questions to the Secretary of State. I hope that she will also co-operate by giving brisk replies.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have not yet met one individual in my constituency who agrees with the changes? Secondly, years ago I fought to retain grammar schools because of their long traditions. Hon. Members on this side of the House are destroying the same traditions in the hospitals, which is a form of vandalism. Is she aware that many people do not believe—and figures support their view—that we have too many hospital beds in London?

My constituents want little hospitals that they can get to and walk to, and where they can visit their people in the evening. That is the factor involved in the attack on Edgware hospital. From there, my constituents must drive six and a half miles to Northwick Park hospital. It will take anything up to one and a quarter hours. One could be dead by the time one arrives.

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept my right hon. Friend's comments about his constituents' attachment—which I share—to the existing pattern of services, but I can refer only to the comments of Professor Nick Bosanquet, who said:

> "London health services may have had a glorious past but their quality in the future depends on our willingness to face up to the difficult choices now."

Mounting evidence exists about the clinical outcomes of different styles of treatment and patterns of care. It would be negligent of the holder of my office not to take seriously mounting and pressing evidence from leading clinicians.

My right hon. Friend will know not only that, in his region, he has access to Northwick Park, the Royal Free and the brand new Barnet general hospitals, but that the service at Edgware hospital will continue to provide for the vast majority of patients who use it. It has an out-patients department and a minor injuries clinic, and it will look to see what other services it can provide in relation to the needs of an increasingly aging population. Those are the health needs of today and tomorrow.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Is the Secretary of State aware of both the anger and incomprehension among staff at the Brook hospital, particularly those in the neurosurgical team? Why have neither she nor officers of her Department held any discussions with that team, and why have they ignored all its advice to her Department, especially in relation to its concerns about the separation of neurosurgery from other acute and trauma work?

When she says that she wishes to place services nearer to the patient, is she aware that regional specialties at Brook hospital serve south-east London and Kent? Does it make any sense to move them closer to central London, so that no neurosurgery unit exists from Dover to Lambeth?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am particularly pleased to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point. The neurosciences were the one area where we did not accept the specialty review proposals that I described. That was because the recommendation of Sir Michael Thompson, the vice-chancellor and principal of the university of Birmingham, who led the London research review, identified the institute of psychiatry at Denmark Hill as a unique opportunity to build a centre of excellence.

I have received a letter from Sir Michael Thompson, in which he says—

Madam Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State will have seen the number of hon. Members who wish to question her on the statement. I have already asked her to give brisk answers, and I hope that she will paraphrase the letter.

Mrs. Bottomley: Very quickly. Sir Michael merely said that the chairman of the expert group on neurosciences, Professor Ingrid Allan, stressed the eminence of the institute and the special health authority, and, in particular, its high reputation from an international point of view. He said:

[Mrs. Bottomley]

"You are to be congratulated on your action, which will create a unique centre where the results of a leading research group will more readily benefit the patients of the NHS."

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when she made a statement 13 months ago, I complimented her on grasping the nettle of London hospital reorganisation? I continue to admire her courage in tackling the issue, but may I plead with her, in doing so, to show rather more sensitivity than she has in the past couple of days? She has made several references to consultation, but does she agree that consultation implies listening to what people have to say and taking account of their views?

My right hon. Friend must be aware of the volume of opposition—much of it well informed and well argued—to the proposals made by Guy's and St. Thomas's hospital trust as to the reallocation of services between the two sites. Will she take that into account? May I invite her, as I suspect that she may not have done so, to read the report of last week's debate, in which I and a number of other hon. Members raised several pertinent concerns about Guy's and St. Thomas's, to which we have received no response whatsoever? Will she consider them, and my alternative suggestions as to the way forward? May I urge her, even at this late stage, to think again?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend, certainly for his comments to the effect that the nettle has to be grasped. There is little doubt that delay and uncertainty will not serve London's health professionals or patients. Change has to be addressed. It is always possible to look for further options. These decisions are finely balanced, and the one that he describes is one of the most finely balanced, as I think he will remember I said explicitly in my previous statement. I can assure him that I have read the debate of a week ago, which was answered by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

We have taken the view that the issues raised have been thoroughly and properly addressed in what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) identified as a particularly thorough consultation process. It is now for the trust, in association with the local health authority, to start specifying in a more detailed manner the way forward, but what I am clear about is that Guy's will remain an outstanding name associated with research and education.

The opportunity, for example, to bring the school of nursing to join the medical school is one of great importance, and, as King's joins the medical school, the advantage for medical schools outside London of associating medicine with biomedical sciences will lead to even better standards.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): May I return to the Secretary of State's rather evasive answer about money? So that no one is in any doubt, will she confirm that she will make £29 million available as requested by the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority—extra, new money that has not been raided from any other budget? Will she give the House that unequivocal assurance?

Mrs. Bottomley: What I have made clear is that the money will be available to invest in the capital programmes necessary for the changes envisaged. After all, this is the Government who have put £1.3 billion into the health service this year, and that is new money. We would not have made our announcement until confident that, year on year, the money—the taxpayer's money—would indeed be available. In the case of the Guy's and St. Thomas's project, that amounts to a new capital programme of £90 million.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My right hon. Friend will know of my concern about Edgware hospital. This afternoon she has stressed the need for greater primary health care, so will she say how much additional money she intends to put into additional primary health care in Barnet?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will have heard me say that the total amount now going into primary health care is about £210 million, funding about 1,000 new initiatives. The range of family doctor services and hospital-at-home schemes throughout London is phenomenal. I believe that the figure for my hon. Friend's constituency is £15 million, but I am somewhat hesitant to say so dogmatically, and I will confirm the figure to my hon. Friend.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Secretary of State aware that nothing has made this Government more unpopular in London than her complete unwillingness to listen on the matter of hospital closures? Is she aware that ordinary people in Hackney are very angry about the closure of Bart's, because promises of money for the Homerton and promises of money for primary care are just promises? We know that, in losing Bart's, we are losing access to a world-class facility.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady has had a phenomenal investment programme at the Homerton hospital, in the area where people live. With the Homerton hospital, she is in the same position as her right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). Lewisham hospital and King's College hospital have multi-million pound programmes, because health care must be delivered where people live.

It is outrageous for the hon. Lady to say that her constituents should be destined to travel needlessly for routine health care. I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Health have visited Homerton hospital, so we are well aware of the enormous investment programme and the changes under way there.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) spoke about the regional specialties that are presently at the Brook. May I turn to the local needs, and thank the Minister of State and his predecessor for helping to get the co-operation in buying the Queen Elizabeth Military hospital so that it can succeed the Brook on the other side of Shooters hill, and bring much of the acute work from Greenwich district hospital?

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend. There will be a significant improvement. As he well knows, the present buildings are quite unsuited to the delivery of modern health care. His constituents and people in Greenwich will undoubtedly benefit.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Would the Secretary of State like to know that the people of east

London will be outraged by her remarks about casualty and emergency? Is she aware that she is closing casualty in central London, while in Newham, where people do live, we have an eight-hour wait for casualty and emergency?

In respect of concentration on one site at Whitechapel, is the Secretary of State aware that she and her Department have consistently made wrong calculations about demand for the ambulance service? If she can make wrong calculations on a relatively simple matter, should she not retain the buildings at Bart's and the London chest hospital until the demand is shown? Would it not be irresponsible for her to do anything else?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman has repeatedly and rightly referred to the problems faced by the London ambulance service. There has been significant improvement in the standards being delivered by the service, and we hope to see more. He will also know that the outcome for individuals in an accident depends largely on a paramedic arriving swiftly at their side.

Thereafter, having a high-quality accident and emergency department with all the specialty services around it is important. The hon. Gentleman will know that London is very much better provided with accident and emergency services, even after any number of changes being debated today, than other parts of the country.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend well knows that primary care in London has, for far too many years, been worse than it is anywhere else in the country. The quid pro quo for Londoners of all these changes is that primary care should be brought up to the standard of the rest of the country. Will she now accelerate the movement of resources even more quickly into the provision of primary care services all over the capital—in outer London as well as in inner London?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend. The work undertaken by the London initiative zone and the primary care support force, which is always slower to start with, will now accelerate. One thousand projects funded to the tune of £210 million have been an excellent start. With the new regions, we want to ensure that the changes are spread, as my hon. Friend says, not only in inner London, but in outer London and through into the home counties. Londoners must have the standard of primary care that others have.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As the Royal Free Hampstead trust in my constituency will, according to newspaper reports—which are increasingly becoming the only way of obtaining information from the Department of Health—be expected to take up the slack occasioned by the closure of Guy's and Bart's, certainly for accidents and emergencies, will there be new money for the Royal Free hospital for the undoubted expansion of the capital scheme and the undoubted increase in staff and nurses? Will the Secretary of State therefore cancel the proposal to reduce the ambulance service in Cressy road in my constituency from its present six ambulances to two?

Mrs. Bottomley: I always find it ironic when Labour Members preach to us about resources. I happened to work with the health service when the Labour party was in power and cut nurses' pay and money for the health service. The Conservative party puts much more money into the health service.

As I am sure the hon. Lady knows, her health authority is currently deciding that it wishes to send more patients to the Royal Free and take them away from some of the hospitals that they used to use. We have equitable funding, in which money is allocated to the London health authorities, taking account of their need. It is a national health service, and it is only right to have a national approach to the allocation of resources and for that money to be spent fairly and effectively.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): My right hon. Friend has some arguments in her favour on central London hospitals. She has not succeeded as a senior member of the Cabinet, because, having listened to hard-faced accountants and bureaucrats in her Department and elsewhere, she has not then taken her own essential, human, social, clinical, medical and political judgments.

That is why I am glad that you, Madam Speaker, have given me permission to raise on the Adjournment tonight the future existence of Edgware general hospital. The proposal to close the accident and emergency unit is outrageous. Consultations with the local public were dismissed out of hand by Sir William Staveley in his regional health authority final consultation meetings. My right hon. Friend must think again about the proposal—it is different from central London; we do not have enough medical facilities, and the other hospitals are too far away.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will clearly have time to develop his arguments at even greater length this evening. Decisions are made on the basis of improving the quality of clinical care. He will know that the development of a massive £29 million new hospital in Barnet will have an impact on the provision of services locally.

But Edgware hospital will continue to provide for at least half the accident cases who can be treated without a specialist service, and about 80 per cent. of those who use the hospital for out-patient appointments. We believe that it will be able to develop even greater services in response to the needs of an aging population in the light of the consultation that I know the health authority intends to begin shortly.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): The Secretary of State in her statement stressed the fact that a new hospital would be opened in Greenwich. She conveniently forgot to mention that the price paid would be the closure of two existing hospitals, as well as the loss of the two regional specialty units.

Does she not recognise that the overwhelming weight of local opinion argued that two hospitals were necessary in Greenwich, and that two into one would not go? Does she not recognise that her decision flies in the face of local opinion in Greenwich as well as everywhere else in London? The people of London are sick to death of seeing their health service being cut, cut and cut again by a Minister who puts finance ahead of every other consideration.

Mrs. Bottomley: In recent years, the people of London have seen record levels of immunisation, cancer screening, treatment and care. It is no good the hon. Gentleman dismissing that as though he disregards the evidence.

Mr. Raynsford: Record waiting lists.

Mrs. Bottomley: Last year, there was a 25 per cent. fall in one-year waiters. The hon. Gentleman is right—

[Mrs. Bottomley]

there is more to do. The health service needs rationalising, just as health services in similar capital cities around the world need rationalising. It is clear that the Labour party will never be a party of government, because it can only be a party of protest. Facing the issues fairly and making difficult decisions is part of government. The Opposition have the luxury of constant populist protest.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Has not the population of London fallen over several decades, with many people migrating to counties like Essex? Is it not equally true that local health authorities in Essex and the other home counties have had to make difficult decisions on rationalisation and the improvement of their health services, and they have had to do so without the benefit of full and fair capitation, because money is also being tied up in London in a system which, as yet, is unreformed?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I have the responsibility for a national health service. The problems in London have occurred because the population has declined overall over the decades. People in the home counties would rather go to excellent hospitals closer to home. Medical advances mean that lengths of stay have fallen dramatically. New technology and diagnostic and day techniques mean that the need for beds and buildings is not the prime criterion. We want appropriate modern facilities for a top-quality health service as close as possible to where people live.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): Apart from asking the Secretary of State why, if this is such good news, she had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the House to make this statement, is she aware that Lewisham accident and emergency cannot cope as it is today, and that the regional health authority admits, in its own curious words, that it is "undersized"? The investment planned to cope with the additional burden as a result of the closure of Guy's could be used today to make it serve the purpose and needs it faces at the moment, let alone what will happen when Guy's closes.

What can the Secretary of State say to the people of Lewisham, who have been involved, for the third time in five years, in a major consultation exercise involving acute service provision in London, only to see their views completely and utterly disregarded?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will know that there has been formidable investment at Lewisham hospital. Similarly, King's hospital—which some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents may use—has experienced £8 million-worth of investment. There has been a £3 million investment at Lewisham. That is a hospital in which we are investing close to where people live.

At the same time, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that a significant number of people still use A and E departments in London because the primary care services are not yet good enough. He represents an area which has a formidable programme of investment in GP and primary care services. I believe that that is the way to a better balanced and a better-quality health service for his constituents.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Since the main arguments for these controversial changes rest on academic and clinical considerations, would my right hon. Friend consider asking the senior academics and clinicians to go out and campaign for the changes? If they are prepared to advise her in private and in reports that this makes sense from a medical and clinical point of view, should they not speak in the same vein?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has made a point of great importance. He will be aware that Lord Annan, Lord Flowers and Sir Stuart Sutherland have spent a great deal of time trying to deliver precisely that objective. Four multi-faculty colleges with the hospital clusters around them is the way to provide world-class centres for research and education. The report from the leading members of the royal colleges in respect of delivering the change has been extremely important and significant. However, I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend: the louder they speak, the greater confidence that will carry.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): As someone who has been, and remains, a long-standing patient at Bart's, and as someone who spent several weeks being treated on its wards; as someone who has spoken to nurses, doctors, administrators, and patients and visitors on the wards and the general public downstairs in the A and E section of Bart's, can I tell the Secretary of State that the overwhelming opinion in Bart's is that the hospital should stay open? Why does she insist on taking on public opinion in that part of London where people say, "Let us keep our hospital"? That is what the people are saying and that is what they want. Why can they not have it?

Mrs. Bottomley: I totally accept the deep loyalty felt by people who work in hospitals, particularly those who work in Bart's, as my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) spelled out so forcefully. However, if we are to have a comprehensive service, free at the point of use and able to pioneer new treatments, such as gene therapy for cystic fibrosis, artificial livers at King's and the new breakthroughs identified by the Medical Research Council, we must address the need for change. That is why the Wellcome Trust, the Medical Research Council and many others have commended the commitment to address those underlying issues.

The hon. Gentleman is right, in that there is a tension between the wishes of local people and the need to deliver clinical excellence. I believe that I must be guided by the need to provide the best possible clinical and health care service for the people of this country, but that we should do all we can to ensure that we take people with us, and that there is a warm welcome for them as they come together on another site.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, outside London, it will be regarded as good news that she has taken the decisions, which have been made more difficult by the fact that so many of her predecessors ducked them? Does she agree that, even after all those changes have been made, London will enjoy a network of hospitals that will be the envy of the rest of the United Kingdom? Does she further agree that, for the average Londoner, the urgent need is to improve the primary health care system, exactly as she has proposed?

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will the Secretary of State tell the House what precise arrangements she believes would have to be put in place before the accident and emergency unit at Guy's could be closed? What would be the cost of converting Philip Harris house for the new arrangements that she proposes, and how much money from charitable funds would have to be repaid?

Mrs. Bottomley: I made it very clear that, before it will be possible to close the A and E unit at Guy's, there must be significant improvements in the ambulance service, together with a judgment, connected with the improvement in primary care, as to the likely use and capacity of the St. Thomas's A and E department. Of course, that is one of the largest units in London, taking about twice as many ambulance cases a day as the unit at Guy's. The hon. Lady will remember that, when I made my statement a year ago, that was one of the key factors in deciding which should be the primary site for the acute in-patient hospital—a strategy supported by people on both sites.

Philip Harris house will be used for about 75 per cent. of its original purposes, and I am pleased to say that the special trustees have said that they will support the plan, and are discussing the possibility of contributing to the intended modifications. Other special trustees will consider their position.

Ms Ruddock: What will it cost?

Mrs. Bottomley: The modification may cost about £10 million, although that could be a high estimate.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Much as I should like to deal with some of the more general aspects of the statement, especially the political implications for those who represent London seats, I shall restrict myself to one particular aspect—the closure of the Brook hospital, and the specialist neurosurgery required, which, according to the programme, will now be supplied by King's. All the specialists to whom I have spoken—and several have been on the telephone to me today—are extremely worried about that prospect, because of the distance to be travelled by what are usually acute cases.

As my right hon. Friend knows, over the past two weeks there have been two incidents in which patients have had to be taken long distances. One patient in Maidstone had to be taken to Southampton for treatment, and the other, from Sidcup, had to be taken to Leeds. I shall not go into detail about those cases, because some of the events are the subject of legal activity. However, the thought that in future all such cases will have to be taken to King's frightens the specialists.

In London, we are short of suitable beds for specialist neurosurgery. Although King's has specialist services, do we not now have the opportunity to concentrate in the long term on the services required to meet the need in a place that people in south London, Kent and the adjacent areas can use more easily, without having to travel long distances?

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear with me, but I must quote to him something that the chairman of the neurosciences review said—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Forgive me, Madam Speaker, but the decisions are too important to be taken without independent, authoritative clinical advice, as I hope my right hon. Friend will agree. He said:

> "The historical fragmentation of neurosciences in London and the south east has limited the development of large tertiary centres of excellence, which is the accepted pattern in the rest of the UK. Whilst much good work is being done in the smaller units, in some fields it is tending to fall behind the rest of the country."

It is that unique opportunity to move the service to a research and teaching centre that gives London its prime position not just nationally but internationally. I sought to reinforce the point from the vice-chancellor of Birmingham university, that it was a unique opportunity to have a unique service on Denmark Hill. I believe that that is the proper justification for taking a decision that I well understand that local people might have wished had gone a different way.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister explain to the people of my borough who love, admire and respect Bart's hospital, but who also recognise it as a valuable institution and as their local hospital, what will happen to the land and the site when that hospital is closed altogether? Who will make money from that sale?

Is the Minister aware that there is already enormous pressure on the casualty units at the Whittington, Royal Free and Homerton hospitals and at University College hospital as a result of the closure of Bart's? Is she prepared to close more casualty units and create even longer waiting lists, with more people waiting on trolleys for operations or emergency treatment, as currently occurs throughout north London?

Mrs. Bottomley: The difficulty in London has been created because we have so many small hospitals, and it is much harder to manage the peaks and flows of patient care. At times, there is a great rush to use a hospital, and at other times it is under less pressure. The recent report about neurosciences again made the point that larger units can manage their beds better. That message was reinforced by the inner-London chief executives' report about trying to strike the right balance as we change and move forward.

We measure the outcomes of the service; we now have clear targets in terms of the patients charter. The current service is quite different from that provided in the past, and health authorities must deliver results.

As far as the Bart's site is concerned, I think that I made it clear to my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) that we have set up a project team to consider options in light of the history of a place which has been associated with state-of-the-art medicine and research. Similarly, I hope that the City of London initiative will show results shortly, with a memorandum of understanding to provide a service for local people.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to respond to the consultation document in relation to Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals by extending the time that the accident and emergency service at Guy's will remain open until the end of 1998.

As to Bart's and the Royal London hospital trust, as an outer London Member I am concerned at the enormous capital investment that is involved. My right hon. Friend cited the figure of £240 million. However, my recollection is that the consultation document referred to a revenue saving in that trust of just over £22 million. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that that represents good value for

[Mr. David Congdon]

money? Will she consider whether some of the other options, which might involve a rationalisation against both sites, merit further deliberation?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can give my hon. Friend a very clear assurance on that front. He will know that the hospitals involved have a considerable backlog of maintenance, amounting to about £87 million. We estimate that the gross capital spend would be about £239 million, and that land sales would realise a considerable sum. The revenue savings would be about £30 million per year, and that investment is very justified.

I must make it clear that the guiding principle is not efficiency or streamlining costs, important though those issues are: it is to concentrate centres of expertise so that they can compete into the next century.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Does not the Secretary of State realise that everything that she has said this afternoon is completely at variance with the everyday experience of Londoners? Why has she failed completely to answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who asked what the knock-on effect would be for hospitals such as the Whittington, which serves my constituents? Its services are already overloaded, and it is currently cancelling acute operations because it has run out of money. How will the Secretary of State address the needs of people such as my 78-year-old constituent whose prostate operation was cancelled for that reason?

Mrs. Bottomley: There are problems with the health service in London, which is why it is so necessary to address change. The other day, the King's Fund said that there are real problems in developing primary care and concentrating specialty services. To stand still, or allow the service to fossilise, will not address the real needs of the hon. Lady's constituents or those of my hon. Friends in developing a health service fit for the 21st century.

As for the hon. Lady's constituents, there has been a fall in the number of people waiting for treatment a long time. There has already been considerable investment in primary care. I hope that that will result in even better standards and quality for the hon. Lady's constituents in the months and years ahead.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents must currently travel up to 60 miles to receive treatment at more expensive specialty units in London? Will she confirm that rationalisation of hospital provision in London is a necessary first step to establishing new specialty centres outside London and closer to where large numbers of people live?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is increasingly true that people would rather be treated closer to home. Rapid investment in the health service throughout the country, and certainly in the home counties, means that care for which previous generations travelled to London can be provided locally. That is precisely the dilemma. Provided that we ensure that London centres maintain a prime position in research both nationally and internationally, some of my hon. Friend's constituents will want still to receive treatment in London for state-of-the-art, pioneering or perhaps experimental care—but they will want routine health care close to home.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): After all the comments, I hope that the Secretary of State realises that her case is as dubious as her excuses for not putting her case to the House. Will she acknowledge that even the proposals that stem from the Tomlinson review have been widely attacked as wrong and damaging? For example, plans for Edgware hospital were never even part of that review, but result—as do the near-closure of University College hospital and the threat to Bart's and Guy's—from the internal market introduced by the right hon. Lady's disastrous so-called reforms?

Why has the Secretary of State ignored the anger of local people? She is aware that past cuts already mean fewer acute beds left in London than in any other major British city. How many more beds will be lost as a result of the proposals that the right hon. Lady announced today?

Does the right hon. Lady accept that her obstinate refusal to call a halt to closures and to make a fresh assessment of health needs in London is leading directly to the closure of renowned centres of excellence such as the London chest hospital, Bart's, and even Guy's? All known conversions of accident and emergency units to minor injury units have always been a precursor to the hospital becoming a major casualty.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the East London health authority, whose detailed business case has not yet been put before the right hon. Lady, agreed to proposals to close the London chest hospital and Bart's only if £238 million for redevelopment was absolutely assured? The Secretary of State's letter refers only to that funding being a high priority, which she also said about the funding needed for Guy's and St. Thomas's. Will the right hon. Lady give a categorical assurance that the demands made of her by the East London health authority will be fulfilled?

Does the Secretary of State realise that the proposals for Guy's will leave 17 floors empty, and that the facilities now provided will have to be recreated? Philip Harris house, which has a purpose-built, state-of-the-art cancer unit and renal facilities, will be used for only three years, and 18 desperately needed intensive care units with state-of-the-art facilities that are being fitted even as we speak, will be ripped out as soon as that house is handed over. Does not the Secretary of State realise that that is clinical and financial vandalism?

Will the right hon. Lady find Government time—for the first time in her history as Secretary of State for Health—for a debate on the Floor of the House, once we have an opportunity properly to assess the implications of the proposals?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Lady is a real example of turning the clock back. Her predecessors in her job recognised the need for change in London. Alongside the right hon. Lady's approach to every other health issue, she is out for consultation or a moratorium. She never faces a difficult decision.

We understand that the Leader of the Opposition is now saying, "No more money." How will the right hon. Lady cope with no more money, no difficult decisions to be faced, support for every protest and the inflaming of every pay claim? Goodness knows what would happen to the health care of Londoners. Those of us, unlike the right hon. Lady, who were working in Brixton and Peckham when there was a Labour Government, were aware of the misfortune of the entire process. I know exactly who would be the first to suffer if ever there were a party such as the right hon. Lady's in government.

We have comprehensively discussed the issue facing London, except that I have not properly informed the right hon. Lady and others of the extremely encouraging progress at University College hospital, which is now under way. It is part of the picture of four multi-faculty colleges with a cluster of hospitals round them.

The issue is not primarily about hospital beds. It is a matter of having the right services in the right place. We need beds. We need low-tech beds, as Professor Jarman has said time and again. That is why it is so important that there are about 1,800 low-tech beds in the pipeline. It is very important that that programme should go forward.

I have given a clear commitment that the money is available. Of course there must be detailed plans before final approval is given. London needs clear progress. We do not need further hesitation. We need to build for the future, for the 21st century. The right hon. Lady and the Labour party offer dither, delay and, once again, interminable review.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): We have just heard locally that we shall have to take another 10,600 houses in the part of Kent which I represent as part of the continuing expansion of the population, which is moving out of London. To hear London Members complaining about a six-mile journey to hospital makes some of us laugh. We are grateful to my right hon. Friend for having set up the necessary changes to ensure that we in Kent are beginning to secure the sort of resources that will make it possible for us to treat ex-Londoners and native inhabitants of Kent to the highest standards, which would be impossible if the changes were not made.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend warmly for his remarks, which are precisely to the point. In London, hospital care has been excessively identified with buildings and institutions. In the home counties, there is a much higher standard of primary and community care. We need a better balance. As my hon. Friend has said, when the population moves to the home counties, people are reluctant to travel. As I have said time and again, I am passionately committed to our prime position internationally. This country is the place where breakthroughs take place.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Will my right hon. Friend address the serious transport issue in Barnet, which is the borough in my constituency? There is a physical block in the middle of the borough—the A1. Endless cars and lorries use the road during daytime hours, and that block is life-threatening. Will my right hon. Friend consult the Department of Transport? Will she assure the House that the new accident and emergency department at Barnet general hospital will not open until she is entirely satisfied that lives will not be put at risk because it is not possible to cross a physical barrier?

Mrs. Bottomley: I undertake to my hon. Friend to have precisely those discussions. I have made it clear in my announcement that the decision is subject to completion of the new phase at Barnet, to improvement in primary care, to necessary changes in the London ambulance service, and to being satisfied on transport issues.

My hon. Friend will be aware of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). He said that people from London are often unaware of the much greater distances that people travel to an accident and emergency department outside London. It is getting a paramedic to the scene in the swiftest possible time that appears to be the crucial factor in preserving life.

Ferry Safety

4.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on ferry safety.

The tragic loss of the Estonia raised again the question of safety of roll on/roll off ferries. Work has taken place in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and, notably, within the International Maritime Organisation's panel of experts on possible ways of enhancing their safety. This work includes computer-modelling research, which I instructed the Marine Safety Agency to undertake. The research investigated the effect that bulkheads might have on survivability in the event of water invading the car deck.

The preliminary findings provide new insight into how ships can be designed or redesigned to avoid future losses such as the Herald of Free Enterprise and the Estonia. They show that the fitting of transverse bulkheads can further enhance the survivability of a ship with water on its car deck. The degree of enhancement will depend on the initial survivability standard of the ship. The higher the survivability standard, the greater the effect of fitting transverse bulkheads.

In the light of that research, I believe that it is incumbent on the Government, with operators and the international maritime community, to seek to agree further improvements to survivability standards and to introduce transverse bulkheads to roll on/roll off ferries as appropriate. As always, consideration of these measures must include evaluation of the potential safety benefits and costs involved.

The preliminary results of the research were made available to the IMO's panel of experts, whose interim report to the Maritime Safety Committee has just been issued. The panel recommends enhancing both the damage and the intact survivability of roll on/roll off ferries by requiring them to be able to survive with levels of water on the car deck. These recommendations point to the fitting of transverse bulkheads. The panel's conclusions and recommendations on enhanced survivability and other aspects of ferry safety will be considered by the Maritime Safety Committee in May, with a diplomatic conference to adopt amendments to the Safety of Lives at Sea convention likely in November. I will ensure that the United Kingdom will be closely involved in those discussions. Although the panel's many detailed recommendations will require full and careful analysis, I wish to place on record both our appreciation for the work that they have undertaken to date, and our support for the general thrust of its recommendations.

With regard to existing survivability standards, I am publishing today lists of the roll on/roll off ferries currently serving United Kingdom ports. These show whether they meet the survivability standards introduced by the IMO in 1990—referred to as SOLAS 90—or when they need to be modified in accordance with the north-west European ferry stability agreement, which applies SOLAS 90 to roll on/roll off ferries built before 1990. A copy of the lists and an explanatory note have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): We welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement on damage stability standards for ferries operating in UK waters, and what he said on transverse bulkheads, which is important, but is he aware that the concerns of the British public about ferry safety go much wider than the narrow range of issues that he has touched on today, in particular, public access to information in a readily understood form on ships, safety standards, crew competence on board ship, the proper enforcement of safety standards, and assurances on evacuation arrangements? Will he now ensure that the travelling public are able to use that information and to make informed choices regarding the ship on which they wish to travel? Will he now urge the ferry operators to link individual ferries to timetables, so that the public have some control over the safety of the ferries on which they travel?

Regarding the list that the Secretary of State is publishing today—we welcome it—of passenger ferries not meeting SOLAS 90 standards, will he confirm that 27 of those vessels will still not have to comply for another nine years and that a further 18 will not have to comply for another 12 years? What action is he taking to secure international agreement or, if necessary, to act unilaterally to reduce the still unacceptably long delays in implementation?

Is not it clear anyway that the SOLAS standards, even under the revised 1993 agreement, are inadequate when they are concerned only to ensure stability against waves of up to 1.5 m in height? Is not that much too low and does not it mean that SOLAS standards will be ineffective in the rougher seas when they are most needed?

How can the public have confidence in the Government's commitment to safety on ferries when the right hon. Gentleman, in a letter of 21 December 1994, a copy of which I have here, said that he was postponing delegating to classification societies the responsibility for hull and machinery surveys on ro-ro ferries and other passenger ships because of

> "the widespread perception in the marine insurance industry and elsewhere that safety standards would deteriorate",

yet he still proposes to go ahead with that later this year?

Is not it deeply cynical to put off the privatisation exercise temporarily because of the Estonia, yet still proceed with it now when it is widely regarded as dangerous, and even the Minister of State on 7 December last year has roundly condemned many classification societies as incompetent or worse?

How, equally, can the right hon. Gentleman say that he has an overriding commitment to ferry safety when at the same time he has cut the staffing of his Department's Marine Safety Agency by 15 per cent. in the past year?

The right hon. Gentleman omitted today the human factors which are known to be instrumental in some 85 per cent. of all marine casualties. Will he accept that his announcement today will be of limited use unless skilled and experienced British officers are available to maintain high operational standards in the ro-ro ferry sector?

Will the right hon. Gentleman further accept that that is now severely threatened by the catastrophic decline in United Kingdom seafarer training levels? Is he aware that while in 1981 some 5,200 cadets began training, the number today has dropped by no less than 90 per cent? What further action will he now take to restore training to the much higher levels that are still needed?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that, with the growing use of low-cost non-EU crews on UK-registered ships, it is vital that communication with crew and passengers in an emergency is immediately understood? Will he now withdraw his proposal to end the requirement that UK-registered ships must have British officers?

Increased competition and the growing presence of flag-of-convenience services present a real threat to the future of cross-channel safety. The right hon. Gentleman's commitment to safety will be judged not merely by his statement today, but by whether he is prepared to override his and his party's instincts for deregulation and privatisation which are so inimical to ferry safety.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the welcome that he gave to my statement—I think—and the joint view that we have taken in welcoming the result of the research that I commissioned, the fact that it has been forwarded to the panel of experts and that it is now being taken seriously along with others as the industry operators and Governments together turn to considering whether further steps can appropriately be taken to enhance even further the already high standards of ferry safety. I am glad that we agree on that.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about concerns on safety. They are understandable concerns. It is part of the responsibility of the House not unnecessarily to stoke up inappropriate or ill-founded concerns about safety and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman that he fell some way short of doing that. I agree with him that it is important for the public to have easy access to information. I note his suggestion that ferries should be linked to timetables, and I will convey it to the operators.

As I have said at the Dispatch Box before, we should have liked agreements on SOLAS 90 to be implemented earlier than was possible. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the International Maritime Organisation wanted a SOLAS 92; we rejected that, and consequently became involved in the north-west European ferry stability agreement. We are seeking to build on that. We shall continue to press for implementation of the highest possible safety standards, as quickly as possible.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned classification societies. He does not appear to understand that 80 per cent. of the inspection work to which he refers has already been done by classification societies; we are talking about adding another 5 per cent. of the total work. The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind: he must decide whether he considers the continuing debate about ro-ro ferry safety to be a legitimate part of our overall aim of establishing the greatest possible ferry safety. I believe that it is, and until I am satisfied that the discussion has been concluded we shall retain it as part of our general goal.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the Marine Safety Agency. He has been told before—as have his hon. Friends—that the number of inspections will not be reduced, and that there has been no reduction in the work done by front-line inspectors. I am seeking to establish as much common ground as possible, however. The hon. Gentleman spoke of the importance of crew communication, and on that we are as one.

I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is important to stress that 50 million passenger journeys a year are made safely in and out of British ports on roll-on/roll-off ferries. That is a remarkable record, and a tribute to the current safety standards. It is, however, no cause for complacency—which is why I asked for the research to be done, and why we shall apply it vigorously.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Select Committee on Transport has just begun an inquiry into cross-channel safety? I endorse what my right hon. Friend has said about the large number of journeys taken each year in conditions that show that ferries must be very safe; but is it not welcome that the possibility of greater chances of survival has resulted from the research?

What will my right hon. Friend do in the IMO about the new research? It would obviously be better for him to work within the IMO if that is possible, but if it proves impossible—as happened with SOLAS 90—will he arrange something along the lines of the north-west European ferry stability agreement, so that we can have higher standards in the United Kingdom even if we cannot secure them through international organisations?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said; I agree with all of it. I was aware of the Select Committee inquiry, and look forward to giving evidence in due course.

I thank my right hon. Friend for what he said about the new research, and for the compliment that he paid it in bringing it to the House's attention as soon as possible. That was, I think, the right thing to do. I assure him that we shall try to apply the lessons of the research and other information through the IMO: I agree that that would be the best way in which to proceed. I hope that we shall succeed, but I do not rule out taking the alternative steps that he mentioned should that prove necessary—which I hope that it will not.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): This is a timely statement, given that great many of our fellow citizens will be using ro-ro ferries during the Easter holidays. I am glad that the Secretary of State has come to the House now. There are obviously some important questions. Given that there was a seven-year delay between the tragedy of the Herald of Free Enterprise at Zeebrugge and that of the Estonia, can the Secretary of State assure us that the lessons that were learnt from the previous incident were available by the time of the Estonia? Why does it seem that no modifications had been made to prevent a second tragedy?

More importantly, and along the lines of the right hon. Gentleman's statement this afternoon, can the people using the ferries over the next few weeks be assured that the lessons that have been learnt from both episodes are sufficient to ensure that design and operation in future, when the modifications have been made, or the withdrawal of ferries to which the modification cannot be applied, will provide reassurance of complete safety? Survivability is extremely important and the schedules that the Secretary of State has made available to us show that it will be a long time before some ferries meet those standards.

Finally, how many ferries have changed their flags since SOLAS 90 was introduced? The right hon. Gentleman refers to a number in his explanatory notes, but no numbers are given. Clearly, it is a matter of great concern not just to people in the industry, but to people who use ferries generally.

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and his welcome, which I appreciate. All the

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recommendations that arose out of the inquiry into the Herald of Free Enterprise seven years ago were implemented and that has been a major source of reassurance in the intervening seven years. There is no final report yet on what happened to the Estonia. It would appear that the bow doors were torn off and there was damage to the internal bulkhead, but at the moment there is no definitive report, and we await that.

The hon. Gentleman and I share a common concern to reassure people, while not being complacent, that the Marine Safety Agency has responsibility for the safe passage of marine traffic in and out of our ports. It is satisfied with the standards and advises me that it has no concerns. I reinforce the point that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to support. The number of journeys in and out of British ports every year is a reflection of the high standards that we enjoy. That is no reason to seek to prevent those standards being enhanced, particularly if it can be done on an international basis, and that is what we shall seek to do.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Does my right hon. Friend secretly share my disappointment at the somewhat grudging response to his statement this afternoon? It must be right to ensure that matters relating to the basic structure of roll on/roll off ferries are attended to ahead of almost anything else, however important, when further research and discussion takes place.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support and encouragement. I shall resist the temptation other than to say that I am grateful for the support that has been forthcoming across the Chamber.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Since the Secretary of State is doing such a good job of throwing out all the politically difficult questions from his Department before the next general election, will he go even further than he has gone today and announce firmly that the Marine Safety Agency, which has responsibility for bow inspection and the maintenance of a high level of safety on all the ferries going in and out of the country will not have its staff cut and might even consider moving its office from that well-known seaside resort of Orpington to somewhere slightly nearer the coast? Will he ensure that in future not only will there be tight controls over any operating ferry that comes into the country, but that if the timetable for the implementation of the changes that he has mentioned this afternoon becomes too elongated, he will take direct action and not wait for other people?

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank the hon. Lady and I interpret at least the first half of her question as a welcome for my announcement. She has maintained a consistent interest in these matters, although I am having difficulty persuading her of the consistency and truthfulness of the answers that I regularly and similarly give her. I assure here that the number of inspections will be maintained and the front-line staff involved in surveys and inspections will be retained. I hope that that will encourage her along the road towards accepting what I am telling her.

On the hon. Lady's last point, I reiterate what I said in my statement—that it was as a consequence of work that I asked the Marine Safety Agency to do, which culminated last November in my inspecting bow doors, that I asked the agency to do further work. It has reported on the improvements that transverse bulkheads can bring to survivability in certain circumstances. I took that seriously enough to bring it to the House, so the hon. Lady should not underestimate my determination to move forward.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend take account of the Scandinavian ferry disaster, where insufficiently clear instructions were given to the passengers when there was a fire on board? Will the transverse bulkheads hinder exit procedures? Will he ensure that the advice given by the Consumers Association about checking that passengers actually understand the safety announcements is acted upon?

Dr. Mawhinney: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. We have welcomed and accepted the recommendations of the panel of experts, some of which dealt with evacuation procedures. We are happy to accept them.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that current regulations do not include maximum hours for officers and crew on duty for normal purposes? Why is that? Will he also confirm that, as a result of his announcement, at some stage in the future no ship operating on a British ro-ro service will be without transverse bulkheads on its main car deck? If so, will he tell us in what year he expects that to be in operation?

Dr. Mawhinney: As I made clear in my statement, I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's last question. I made it abundantly clear that we need to have a series of discussions and investigations and that further work needs to be done.

What I have brought to the House today is, in effect, a statement of principle. Work has been done that has shown that enhanced survivability can result from the putting in place of transverse bulkheads. We now need to work with other Governments, with operators and with agencies—in particular, the International Maritime Organisation—to give effect to the added safety that the bulkheads or equivalent measures would achieve. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that I will push forward in that direction with vigour, as will my officials in discussions within the IMO and within the panel of experts. We will not allow others to deflect us from putting in place standards that will even further enhance public confidence in the safety of ro-ro ferries.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I commend my right hon. Friend on his measured response to recent tragedies, especially in the light of the many safe ferry journeys from British ports every year. What is the Government's attitude likely to be if, in due course, the IMO fails to recommend the fitting of transverse bulkheads?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) said earlier, it would be far better to reach agreement within the IMO. He then put to me the possibility that that might not happen and asked whether we would then consider something equivalent to a north-west European agreement—and I will. If that offers the sort of reassurance that the House seeks, I am happy to give it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. Gentleman said that there were 50,000 safe journeys. What does that mean? Fifty thousand people walk the streets of Chesterfield every day and get home safely. It does not mean anything. It needs only one ferry to go down and 200 or 300 people will lose their lives.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that one fellow, for certain, will be clapping his hands at what the right hon. Gentleman has said today—Jeffrey Sterling, the head of P and O? He could have been required to insert transverse bulkheads in all his ferries, had this Minister had the guts to do that to achieve proper safety measures. The reason why this Minister has done nothing today but waffle is that Jeffrey Sterling puts money into the Tory party.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am sure that the House is grateful for the hon. Gentleman's typically generous and kind-hearted welcome to what is an important statement on ferry safety. With a little more attention, he would have heard that there are 50 million—not 50,000—safe passenger journeys a year in and out of UK ports. He will be interested to know that it was, as he contemptuously puts it, this Minister who commissioned the research, and who brought its results for the first time to the House, which his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and other hon. Members welcomed. The House will draw its own conclusion, but it should not be surprised that, yet again, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is marching in the opposite direction from everyone else.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Nineteen million people passed through Dover port last year using Dover's ferries, and they had good and safe journeys. May I declare my interest as someone who went on our ferries last week? We have the latest television monitoring system, early warning lights on bow doors, and better-designed bow doors than any other ferry system and service in the world. Our ferry systems include bow doors that have been designed very differently from those on the Estonia.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who speaks with great authority on these matters. As I said to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), the measures that he mentioned and that are in place were precisely those included in the recommendations of the Herald of Free Enterprise inquiry. All were accepted and put in place. That is the sort of reassurance that the travelling public have a right to expect. I hope that they will feel that today's statement will add to that sense of reassurance.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): May I add my grudging welcome to the Secretary of State's announcement? I say "grudging" because, after all, the European Gateway sank because of the free surface effect, which could be combatted only by transverse bulkheads. The Herald of Free Enterprise sank because of that effect, which could have been combatted only by such bulkheads.

The survivors and families of the people who died on the Herald of Free Enterprise will be asking why it has taken until now for the announcement to be made. May I ask a further question, in which the hon Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) might be interested? SOLAS 90 gives survivability of only 30 minutes in 1.5 m waves and search and rescue helicopters require one hour to get into the Dover straits from the British mainland. Will the Secretary of State reconsider that issue in particular, because it is obvious that, if a major problem arose in the Dover straits, insufficient search and rescue cover exists? The Secretary of State's Department agreed about that.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome—I shall leave out the word "grudging". He asks a reasonable question. I am advised that, during the Herald of Free Enterprise inquiry, transverse bulkheads were examined, but the conclusion was reached that they would not be of additional safety value. I challenged that by asking for further research to be undertaken and I have brought that research to the House. I attach importance to it—I hope that that is clear from my statement and from the way in which I have answered questions.

Because I attach importance to that research, I intend to ensure that it is progressed in such a way that, in due course, the hon. Gentleman will be less grudging in his welcome. He is right to say that the Dover straits are the busiest waterway in the world. He is not right, however, to say that helicopter cover from both sides of the straits is inadequate.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will the Secretary of State recognise that the Dover straits, which he has just said are the busiest crossing point, are heavy with other traffic using that part of the English channel? Does he accept that obviously inherent dangers exist there? There is increased pressure because of competition from the channel tunnel. Will he make it clear that the Government intend to ensure that passenger safety comes before quick turnround times and other factors in that competitive industry, that safety will be the No. 1 priority, and that ships are made absolutely safe?

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): We in Larne have run second to Dover. Last year, 2 million people travelled through the port from the Scottish ports of Stranraer and Cairnryan. To give confidence to the growing number of people who travel as tourists into Northern Ireland, will the Secretary of State give a further assurance that the highest standards are being maintained on cross-channel ferries, and that the inspection level will not be diminished? I commend him on the action that he has taken to date, and ask him robustly to persuade the people who should be persuaded on early implementation of the research's conclusions.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I shall continue to be as robust as he would wish and, perhaps, even expect me to be in the circumstances. I pay tribute to the ferry safety levels around the coast, including ferries that sail in and out of Larne. As he will know, because he generously accompanied me, I had the pleasure of visiting Larne port just a few weeks ago.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has the Secretary of State read the reports by the Consumers Association, the Royal Institution of Naval Architects and the Institute of Marine Engineers, which all say that the SOLAS 90 standards are not the highest but the bare minimum standards agreed as a compromise at the International Maritime Organisation? Out of its 150 members, only 15 have competent marine architects. Most of those run under flags of convenience, where the interest is in profit, not safety.

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) is right. SOLAS 90 would have applied to the Estonia, but that sank like a stone. Although engineering differences exist between many ferries, the same principles apply to them all. All the disasters have occurred through a combination of human error and fundamentally unsafe and unstable design. As long as 20 years ago, the Government and the industry were told that that design would cause disasters. We have had disaster management.

Terrible events have occurred and solutions have come years after. After reading those reports, I assure you, Madam Speaker, that my family will not be travelling on any roll on/roll off ferry. The Secretary of State talks of people being alarmist, but does he think that the relatives of the people who died in the Scandinavian Star, the Estonia and the Herald of Free Enterprise would have appreciated a little alarm from parliamentarians before those terrible tragedies took place?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman will speak for himself. He has done so and he does not take many hon. Members with him. He is certainly not taking any Conservative Member with him as he indefensibly tries to whip up scare stories that are designed to put people off a ferry service that is among the safest in the world. I say, I think for the fourth time, that there is no basis for complacency. That is why I asked for the work to be done, why I brought the results to the House for the first time, and why we will, as I said to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), continue to pursue that robustly. I remind the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) that, if it had not been for the UK Government, there would not have been a SOLAS 90.

Points of order

5.8 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This morning on the radio and on television, it was widely reported that a statement would be made to the House on the future of dental services. We now find that a statement has been made by way of written answer. It refers to the reduction in dental treatment available on the national health service, to a system for charging to be renegotiated locally, and to a system of charges for community dental services to be introduced. Is not it appalling that, on a matter as important as that, and about which we have been waiting to hear for many months, no statement has been made in the House? Could you clarify whether anything in the House's rules prevents a Minister who has answered a private notice question from coming back here to make a statement on such a matter?

Madam Speaker: Certainly, if any Secretary of State sought to return to the House to make a statement, I would be here to hear it but I have not been informed that such a statement is to be made today. As the House knows, it is up to the Secretary of State when making such a statement to determine whether it is to be done by means of written answer or orally at the Dispatch Box. I have no influence or authority over that.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall making a statement to the House prior to the Second Reading debate on the Disability Discrimination Bill in which you said in effect that there were no procedural problems in progress on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. However, some procedural peculiarities seem to have developed in Committees dealing with the Bills that are being debated before that Bill. I am thinking especially of Standing Committee C which is debating the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill and where debates are being strung out by 50 amendments having been tabled on a measure about which there is no dispute. In any event, it was initially a Government Bill although promoted by a private Member. In the circumstances, would it be possible for you to call for reports from the Chairman and Clerks of the appropriate Committees in order to discover what is happening?

Madam Speaker: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is referring to tedious and lengthy or filibustering remarks in particular Committees, although I am sure that he is not making such allegations. However, if that is the case, I am sure that the Chairmen of the appropriate Committees will report to me. It is not for me to ask them to do so; they will report to me anything untoward takes place.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I regret having to return for the third time in as many weeks to a matter that I understand has also been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and others. The problem is that we are not getting answers to questions that we table to Ministers; Ministers are denying us information, refusing to make statements in the House and giving only written answers. The Government are becoming less and less accountable to Parliament and the public. Democracy is approaching crisis. What are we going to do? I know that in your rulings you say that it is not within your power to do anything about these matters, but who is listening?

Madam Speaker: I am listening. The hon. Gentleman can sit down. He is making a great many wide allegations, but I take the matter seriously. I have already examined one example provided by a Back Bencher but there was no substance in it whatsoever. If the hon. Gentleman will give me examples of his not receiving information when that information was available, I shall certainly look into the matter as thoroughly as I have done in other cases.

Discrimination (Genetic Information)

5.12 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prevent discrimination against people who have had genetic tests or have a genetic predisposition to disease, and to guarantee the privacy of such persons.

I bring this issue to the attention of the House to highlight some of the problems faced by people who have a genetic predisposition to disease although they have not as yet developed any symptoms of the disease.

Last week, we had a useful discussion on an amendment to the Disability Discrimination Bill, which was moved by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). I supported the amendment, which would have given people with genetic predisposition to disease the same protection as those who are already disabled. I am sorry that the House did not support that amendment, but I understand that some right hon. and hon. Members took a contrary view because they felt that the issue was a great deal more complex than suggested by the amendment. However, I was encouraged by the Minister's comment to the effect that the Government's door would be open for further discussions. That was one of the most encouraging remarks made during that debate.

I am sure that the Minister and others will be looking carefully at the recommendations of the report by the Select Committee on Science and Technology into human genetics, which will be published in the summer. That inquiry will encompass much wider issues than those covered in the Bill. However, I hope that the Bill will encourage dialogue between the Association of British Insurers and the Genetics Interest Group so that some sensible proposals can be agreed to deal with the difficult ethical, legal and social issues relating to the rapid advances taking place in human genetics.

The Genetics Interest Group has brought to my attention a number of cases involving people with genetic disease who have been discriminated against by employers, building societies and insurance companies. This sometimes happens because of ignorance, as the following case shows.

A senior town planning officer with a London borough developed sickle cell disease. It is a hereditary blood condition that can cause painful crises which result in hospitalisation. The crises are exacerbated by cold, damp and stress so it is important that those affected have adequate housing and secure financial arrangements.

In his first post, the officer was able to join the local government superannuation scheme without any difficulties. Three years later, he was offered promotion with another London borough. Getting the job was not a problem, but continuing his membership of the superannuation scheme caused major problems, despite the fact that he was already a member and had been for three years. Continuing his membership required several additional medical examinations and took six months to resolve. That is inexcusable for someone who is already part of a superannuation scheme and shows that the medical officer did not really understand the problem.

Another man was employed as a project manager in the oil and gas industry. One of the benefits that came with this employment was a free subscription to a private medical insurance scheme. He became ill and had to take

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

a significant amount of time off work. He was referred to a Harley street specialist who determined that he had haemochromatosis.

The specialist, the tests and the week in hospital were all paid for by the private medical insurance scheme. However, following a further medical examination, the private medical insurer wrote to say that, as the man now had a medical condition that required continuing treatment, the company would not continue the insurance. From responses to various letters that he has written to private medical insurers, the man understands that he can obtain medical insurance but that such insurance will exclude cover for haemochromatosis and related conditions. When he asked what the related conditions were, he could not obtain an answer.

Like me, that man finds it unacceptable that insurers can throw someone out of a scheme and says that he hopes that it will one day be illegal to exclude people who become ill after joining a scheme. He also believes that insurers should be forced to give their definition of related conditions because what worries him is that whenever he tries to claim on his health insurance the insurers will claim that the condition is related to haemochromatosis.

At the moment, no insurance company in the United Kingdom requires people to take a genetic test before they can be insured, but I am worried that market pressures will lead to such a requirement as more tests become available. For example, if a rogue insurance company wanted to offer low insurance premiums for health cover, it could do so by requiring people to take a genetic test and then refusing cover for those who were found to be predisposed to genetic disease. The pressure on other companies to follow suit would be great, and it is of the utmost importance that it should be illegal for insurers to require people to take a test, even if they have a strong family link with a particular disease.

In many cases, there is at present no advantage to an individual in knowing that he is predisposed to some diseases as they are diseases for which there is no cure, although that may change in the future. As medical research advances, it is possible that genetic diseases such as cystic fibrosis will be fully treatable by gene therapy, but, at present, I would not want to know if I were likely to contract Alzheimer's disease as there would be absolutely nothing I could do about it. However, I would like to know whether I have an inherited trait to hyper-cholesterolaemia which may cause me to have a heart attack or stroke. If this is the case, with a low-fat diet and plenty of exercise, I can drastically reduce the risk of contracting this disease.

It is beneficial for individuals to know about their predisposition for reasons other than the one I have just mentioned. A case has been quoted to me of a family whose child has tuberous sclerosis. This disease can affect any part of the body with small tumours which can appear from birth. In some cases, the symptoms are so mild that people do not realise that they have the disease until it affects them in mid-life. If a child is found to have the disease, it is certainly advantageous for the parents to be screened because they can then make an informed decision about whether to have any further children should one of them be found to carry the gene.

In some cases, it is beneficial for people to have genetic tests, but it can be disadvantageous to have a genetic test for insurance purposes. Even if the insurance company does not require a person to have a test, it is commonplace for companies to ask applicants to disclose the results of any medical test that they have had. If people feel that they will be discriminated against if they have had a positive test, they will probably make the decision not to have a test or at least to defer it. This can be harmful to them if they do not make the necessary changes to life style which would reduce the risk of becoming ill and it might be harmful to their future children if they are carriers of unsuspected diseases.

It would, therefore, be helpful to require insurance companies to allow people to keep the results of any medical tests completely private. However, the insurance companies have made an important point, which is that if someone has a test which confirms that they are virtually certain to become ill, it will be beneficial for them to take out millions of pounds' worth of insurance as they cannot lose by it. This would be unfair as it would mean that individuals would benefit from prior knowledge. It is rather like betting on a horse race when the result is fully known. I believe, however, that it is appropriate that those people should be able to get at least some protection against risks that they acquire through no fault of their own. There is a strong case, therefore, for limiting the total amount of insurance money paid out to a single individual in the case of a genetic disease and for ensuring that those costs do not fall too heavily on a single insurance company.

There are many possible ways in which to deal with the problem. The one I propose is as follows. I suggest that the costs should be borne collectively by the policyholders of all insurance companies. In this case, a levy would be imposed on all companies that cover a particular disease and the proceeds of the levy would be used to pay out to those who ultimately contracted the disease. That would protect individuals and individual companies which might, by chance, find that they had insured a disproportionately large number of high-risk individuals. There is a direct analogy with car insurance. Car insurers maintain a financial pool which they use to compensate any of their members who are involved in car accidents with people who are, illegally, not insured.

Under the arrangement I propose, people with a predisposition, as a group, would receive a subsidy from those with no such predisposition. A strong case can be made for imposing a ceiling—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Janet Anderson, Dr. Jeremy Bray, Ms Judith Church, Mr. Alan Howarth, Sir John Hannam, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mr. Alan Williams, Ms Margaret Hodge and Ms Tessa Jowell.

DISCRIMINATION (GENETIC INFORMATION)

Mrs. Anne Campbell accordingly presented a Bill to prevent discrimination against people who have had genetic tests or have a genetic predisposition to disease, and to guarantee the privacy of such persons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 April, and to be printed. [Bill 97.]

Orders of the Day

Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION

'. Schedule (*Schedule to be inserted in the Licensing Act 1964 after Schedule 14*) shall have effect in relation to the rights of bar workers in relation to work during the previously restricted hours on Sundays.'.—*[Mr. George Howarth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.24 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 1, a new schedule:—*'Schedule—*

SCHEDULE TO BE INSERTED IN THE LICENSING ACT 1964
AFTER SCHEDULE 14

"SCHEDULE 15

RIGHTS OF BAR WORKERS AS RESPECTS SUNDAY WORKING

General Interpretation

1.—(1) In this Schedule, except where a contrary intention appears—

"the 1978 Act" means the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978;

"bar work" means work in licensed premises or clubs licensed to sell intoxicating liquor mainly or wholly involving the serving of drinks to customers or the performance of ancillary tasks;

"bar worker" means a person employed to do bar work, and includes a person employed as a manager of licensed premises or the tenant of licensed premises;

"club" has the same meaning as in Part II of this Act;

"the commencement date" means the day on which this Schedule comes into force;

"dismissal" has the same meaning as in Part V of the 1978 Act;

"licensed premises" has the same meaning as in section 60 of this Act;

"notice period", in relation to an opting-out notice, has the meaning given by paragraph 6 below;

"opted-out", in relation to a bar worker, shall be construed in accordance with paragraph 5 below;

"opting-in notice" has the meaning given by paragraph 3(2) below;

"opting-out notice" has the meaning given by paragraph 4(3) below;

"the previously restricted hours" means the hours from 3pm to 7pm on Sundays;

"protected", in relation to a bar worker, shall be construed in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3 below.

(2) Subject to sub-paragraph (3) below, the following provisions of the 1978 Act—

section 151(1) and (2) (computation of period of continuous employment), and

section 153 (general interpretation),

shall have effect for the purposes of this Schedule as they have effect for the purposes of that Act.

(3) For the purposes of this Schedule, section 151(2) of the 1978 Act shall have effect with the omission of the words from "but" onwards and Schedule 13 to that Act shall have effect with the following modifications—

(a) in paragraph 1 for the words "paragraphs 3 to 12" there shall be substituted "paragraph 4 or paragraphs 9 to 12",

(b) paragraph 3 and paragraphs 5 to 8 shall be omitted, and

(c) in paragraph 4 the words "which normally involves employment for sixteen hours or more weekly" shall be omitted.

(4) Where section 56 of the 1978 Act (failure to permit women to return to work after childbirth treated as dismissal) applies to an employee who was employed as a bar worker under her contract of employment on the last day of her maternity leave period, she shall be treated for the purposes of this Schedule as if she had been employed as a bar worker on the day with effect from which she is treated as dismissed under that section.

Meaning of "protected bar worker"

2.—(1) Subject to paragraph 3 below, a bar worker is to be regarded for the purposes of this Schedule as "protected" if, and only if, sub-paragraph (2) or (3) below applies to him.

(2) This sub-paragraph applies to any bar worker if—

(a) on the day before the commencement date, he was employed as a bar worker,

(b) he has been continuously employed during the period beginning with that day and ending with the appropriate date, and

(c) throughout that period, or throughout every part of it during which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, he was a bar worker.

(3) This sub-paragraph applies to any bar worker whose contract of employment is such that under it he—

(a) is not, and may not be required to work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours, and

(b) could not be so required even if the provisions of this Schedule were disregarded.

(4) In sub-paragraph (2)(c) above "the appropriate date" means—

(a) in relation to paragraphs 7 and 8 below, the effective date of termination,

(b) in relation to paragraph 10 below, the date of the act or failure to act,

(c) in relation to sub-paragraph (2) or (3) of paragraph 12 below, the day on which the agreement is entered into,

(d) in relation to sub-paragraph (4) of that paragraph, the day on which the employee returns to work,

(e) in relation to paragraph 14 below, any time in relation to which the contract is to be enforced, and

(f) in relation to paragraph 15 below, the end of the period in respect of which the remuneration is paid or the benefit accrues.

(5) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (4)(a) above, "the effective date of termination", in any case falling within paragraph 1(4) above, means the day with effect from which the employee is treated by section 56 of the 1978 Act as being dismissed.

(6) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (4)(b) above—

(a) where an act extends over a period, the "date of the act" means the first day of the period, and

(b) a deliberate failure to act shall be treated as done when it was decided on,

and in the absence of evidence establishing the contrary, an employer shall be taken to decide on a failure to act when he does an act inconsistent with doing the failed act or, if he has done no such inconsistent act, when the period expires within which he might reasonably have been expected to do the failed act if it was to be done.

(7) Where on the day before the commencement date an employee's relations with his employer have ceased to be governed by a contract of employment, he shall be regarded as satisfying the conditions in sub-paragraph (2)(a) and (b) above if—

[Mr. Michael Morris]

(a) that day falls in a week which counts as a period of employment with that employer under paragraph 9 or 10 of Schedule 13 to the 1978 Act (absence from work because of sickness, pregnancy etc.) or under regulations made under paragraph 20 of that Schedule (reinstatement or re-engagement of dismissed employee), and

(b) on the last day before the commencement date on which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, the employee was a bar worker and was not employed to work only on Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

3.—(1) A bar worker is not a protected bar worker if—

(a) on or after the commencement date, he has given his employer an opting-in notice, and

(b) after giving that notice, he has expressly agreed with his employer to do bar work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

(2) In this Schedule "opting-in notice" means a written notice, signed and dated by the bar worker, in which the bar worker expressly states that he wishes to work on Sunday or that he does not object to Sunday working during the previously restricted hours.

Notice of objection to Sunday working

4.—(1) This paragraph applies to any bar worker who, under his contract of employment—

(a) is or may be required to work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours (whether or not as a result of previously giving an opting-in notice), but

(b) is not employed to work only on Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

(2) A bar worker to whom this paragraph applies may at any time give his employer written notice, signed and dated by the bar worker, to the effect that the bar worker objects to Sunday working during the previously restricted hours.

(3) In this Schedule "opting-out notice" means a notice given under sub-paragraph (2) above by a bar worker to whom this paragraph applies.

Meaning of "opted-out bar worker"

5.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (5) below, a bar worker is to be regarded for the purposes of this Schedule as "opted-out" if, and only if—

(a) he has given his employer an opting-out notice,

(b) he has been continuously employed during the period beginning with the day on which the notice was given and ending with the appropriate date, and

(c) throughout that period, or throughout every part of its during which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, he was a bar worker.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1) above "the appropriate date" means—

(a) in relation to paragraphs 7 and 8 below, the effective date of termination,

(b) in relation to paragraph 10 below, the date of the act or failure to act,

(c) in relation to sub-paragraph (2) or (3) of paragraph 13 below, the day on which the agreement is entered into, and

(d) in relation to sub-paragraph (4) of that paragraph, the day on which the employee returns to work.

(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2)(a) above, "the effective date of termination", in any case falling within paragraph 1(4) above, means the day with effect from which the employee is treated by section 56 of the 1978 Act as being dismissed.

(4) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2)(b) above—

(a) where an act extends over a period, the "date of the act" means the first day of the period, and

(b) a deliberate failure to act shall be treated as done when it was decided on,

and in the absence of evidence establishing the contrary, an employer shall be taken to decide on a failure to act when he does an act inconsistent with doing the failed act or, if he has done no such inconsistent act, when the period expires within which he might reasonably have been expected to do the failed act if it was to be done.

(5) A bar worker is not an opted-out bar worker if—

(a) after giving the opting-out notice concerned, he has given his employer an opting-in notice, and

(b) after giving that opting-in notice, he has expressly agreed with his employer to do bar work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

Meaning of "notice period"

6. In this Schedule "notice period", in relation to an opted-out bar worker, means, subject to paragraph 11(2) below, the period of three months beginning with the day on which the opting-out notice concerned was given.

Right not to be dismissed for refusing Sunday work during the previously restricted hours

7.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) below, the dismissal of a protected or opted-out bar worker by his employer shall be regarded for the purposes of Part V of the 1978 Act as unfair if the reason for it (or, if more than one, the principal reason) was the the bar worker refused, or proposed to refuse, to do bar work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) above does not apply in relation to an opted-out bar worker where the reason (or principal reason) for the dismissal was that he refused, or proposed to refuse, to do bar work on any Sunday or Sundays during the previously restricted hours falling before the end of the notice period.

(3) The dismissal of a bar worker by his employer shall be regarded for the purposes of Part V of the 1978 Act as unfair if the reason for it (or, if more than one, the principal reason) was that the bar worker gave, or proposed to give, an opting-out notice to the employer.

(4) Section 142 of the 1978 Act (contracts for a fixed term) shall not exclude the application of section 54 of that Act (right of employee not to be unfairly dismissed) in relation to any dismissal which is unfair by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) or (3) above.

8.—(1) Where the reason or principal reason for the dismissal of a protected or opted-out bar worker was that he was redundant, but it is shown—

(a) that the circumstances constituting the redundancy applied equally to one or more other employees in the same undertaking who held positions similar to that held by him and who have not been dismissed by the employer, and

(b) that the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for which he was selected for dismissal was that specified in paragraph 7(1) above,

then, for the purposes of Part V of the 1978 Act, the dismissal shall be regarded as unfair.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) above does not apply in relation to an opted-out bar worker where the reason (or principal reason) for which he was selected for dismissal was that specified in paragraph 7(2) above.

(3) Where the reason or principal reason for the dismissal of a bar worker was that he was redundant, but it is shown—

(a) that the circumstances constituting the redundancy applied equally to one or more other employees in the same undertaking who held positions similar to that held by him and who have not been dismissed by the employer, and

(b) that the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for which he was selected for dismissal was that specified in paragraph 7(3) above,

then, for the purposes of Part V of the 1978 Act, the dismissal shall be regarded as unfair.

Exclusion of secion 64(1) of Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978

9. Section 54 of the 1978 Act (right of employee not to be unfairly dismissed) shall apply to a dismissal regarded as unfair by virtue of paragraph 7 or 8 above regardless of the period for which

the employee has been employed and of his age; and accordingly section 64(1) of that Act (which provides a qualifying period and an upper age limit) shall not apply to such a dismissal.

Right not to suffer detriment for refusing Sunday work during the previous restricted hours

10.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraphs (2) and (4) below, a protected or opted-out bar worker has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that the bar worker refused, or proposed to refuse, to do bar work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) above does not apply to anything done in relation to an opted-out bar worker on the ground that he refused, or proposed to refuse, to do bar work on any Sunday or Sundays during the previously restricted hours falling before the end of the notice period.

(3) Subject to sub-paragaph (4) below, a bar worker has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that he gave, or proposed to give, an opting-out notice to his employer.

(4) Sub-paragraphs (1) and (3) above do not apply where the detriment in question amounts to dismissal.

(5) For the purposes of this paragraph a bar worker who does not work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours is not to be regarded as having been subjected to any detriment by—

(a) any failure to pay remuneration in respect of bar work on a Sunday which he has not done,

(b) any failure to provide him with any other benefit, where that failure results from the application, in relation to a Sunday on which the employee has not done bar work, of a contractual term under which the extent of that benefit varies according to the number of hours worked by the employee or the remuneration of the employee, or

(c) any failure to provide him with any work, remuneration or other benefit which by virtue of paragraph 14 or 15 below the employer is not obliged to provide.

(6) Where an employer offers to pay a sum specified in the offer to any one or more employees who are protected or opted-out bar workers or who, under their contracts of employment, are not obliged to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours, if they agree to do bar work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday during the previously restricted hours—

(a) an employee to whom the offer is not made is not to be regarded for the purposes of this paragraph as having been subjected to any detriment by any failure to make the offer to him or to pay him that sum, and

(b) an employee who does not accept the offer is not to be regarded for those purposes as having been subjected to any detriment by any failure to pay him that sum.

Employer's duty to give explanatory statement

11.—(1) Where a person becomes a bar worker to whom paragraph 4 above applies, his employer shall, before the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which that person becomes such a bar worker, give him a written statement in the prescribed form.

(2) If—

(a) an employer fails to comply with sub-paragraph (1) above in relation to any bar worker, and

(b) the bar worker, on giving the employer an opting-out notice, becomes an opted-out bar worker,

paragraph 6 above shall have effect, in relation to the bar worker, with the substitution for "three months" of "one month".

(3) An employer shall not be regarded as failing to comply with sub-paragraph (1) above in any case where, before the end of the period referred to in that sub-paragraph, a bar worker has given him an opting-out notice.

(4) Subject to sub-paragraph (5) below, the prescribed form is as follows—

"STATUTORY RIGHTS IN RELATION TO SUNDAY BAR WORK

You have become employed under a contract of employment under which you are or can be required to do Sunday bar work during previously restricted hours, that is to say, work serving drinks on a Sunday between the hours of 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

However, if you wish, you can give a notice, as described in the next paragraph, to your employer and you will then have the right not to do Sunday work during previously restricted hours once three months have passed from the date on which you gave the notice.

Your notice must—

be in writing;

be signed and dated by you;

say you object to doing Sunday bar work during previously restricted hours.

For three months after you give the notice, your employer can still require you to do all the Sunday bar work your contract provides for. After the three month period has ended, you have the right to complain to an industrial tribunal if, because of your refusal to do Sunday bar work during the previously restricted hours, your employer—

dismisses you, or

does something else detrimental to you, for example, failing to promote you.

Once you have the rights described, you can surrender them only by giving your employer a further notice, signed and dated by you, saying that you wish to do Sunday bar work during the previously restricted hours or that you do not object to doing such work and then agreeing with your employer to do such work on Sundays or on a particular Sunday."

(5) The Secretary of State may by order amend the prescribed form set out in sub-paragraph (4) above.

(6) An order under sub-paragraph (5) above shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

Effect of rights on contracts of employment

12.—(1) Any contract of employment under which a bar worker who satisfies the conditions in paragraph 2(2)(a) and (b) above was employed on the day before the commencement date is unenforceable to the extent that it—

(a) requires the bar worker to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours on or after the commencement date, or

(b) requires the employer to provide the bar worker with bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours on or after that date.

(2) Except as provided by sub-paragraph (3) below, any agreement entered into after the commencement date between a protected bar worker and his employer is unenforceable to the extent that it

(a) requires the bar worker to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours, or

(b) requires the employer to provide the bar worker with bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

(3) Where, after giving an opting-in notice, a protected bar worker expressly agrees as mentioned in paragraph 3(1)(b) above (and so ceases to be protected), his contract of employment shall be taken to be varied to the extent necessary to give effect to the terms of the agreement.

(4) The reference in sub-paragraph (2) above to a protected bar worker includes a reference to an employee who, although not a protected bar worker for the purpose of that sub-paragraph at the time when the agreement is entered into, is a protected bar worker on the day on which she returns to work as mentioned in paragraph 10 of Schedule 13 to the 1978 Act (maternity).

[Mr. Michael Morris]

13.—(1) Where a bar worker gives his employer an opting-out notice, the contract of employment under which he was employed immediately before he gave that notice becomes unenforceable to the extent that it—

(a) requires the bar worker to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours after the end of the notice period, or

(b) requires the employer to provide the bar worker with bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours after the end of that period.

(2) Except as provided by sub-paragraph (3) below, any agreement entered into between an opted-out bar worker and his employer is unenforceable to the extent that it—

(a) requires the bar worker to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours after the end of the notice period, or

(b) requires the employer to provide the bar worker with bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours after the end of that period.

(3) Where, after giving an opting-in notice, an opted-out bar worker expressly agrees as mentioned in paragraph 5(5)(b) above (and so ceases to be opted-out), his contract of employment shall be taken to be varied to the extent necessary to give effect to the terms of the agreement.

(4) The reference in sub-paragraph (2) above to an opted-out bar worker includes a reference to an employee who, although not an opted-out bar worker for the purposes of that sub-paragraph at the time when the agreement is entered into, had given her employer an opting-out notice before that time and is an opted-out bar worker on the day on which she returns to work as mentioned in paragraph 10 of Schedule 13 to the 1978 Act (maternity).

14. If—

(a) under the contract of employment under which a bar worker who satisfies the conditions in paragraph 2(2)(a) and (b) above was employed on the day before the commencement date, the employer is, or may be, required to provide him with bar work for a specified number of hours each week,

(b) under that contract, the bar worker was or might have been required to work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours before the commencement date, and

(c) the bar worker has done bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours in that employment (whether or not before the commencement date) but has, on or after the commencement date, ceased to do so,

then, so long as the bar worker remains a protected bar worker, that contract shall not be regarded as requiring the employer to provide him with bar work on weekdays in excess of the hours normally worked by the bar worker on weekdays before he ceased to do bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours.

15.—(1) If—

(a) under the contract of employment under which a bar worker who satisfies the conditions in paragraph 2(2)(a) and (b) above was employed on the day before the commencement date, the bar worker was or might have been required to work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours before that date,

(b) the bar worker has done bar work on Sunday during the previously restricted hours in that employment (whether or not before the commencement date) but has, on or after the commencement date, ceased to do so, and

(c) it is not apparent from the contract what part of the remuneration payable, or of any other benefit accruing, to the bar worker was intended to be attributable to such work,

then, so long as the bar worker remains a protected bar worker, that contract shall be regarded as enabling the employer to reduce the amount of remuneration paid, or the extent of the other benefit provided, to the bar worker in respect of any period by the proportion which the hours of bar work which (apart from this Schedule) the bar worker could have been required to do on Sunday during the previously restricted hours in the period (in this paragraph referred to as "the contractual Sunday hours") bears to the aggregate of those hours and the hours of work actually done by the bar worker in the period.

(2) Where, under the contract of employment, the hours of work actually done on weekdays in any period would be taken into account in determining the contractual Sunday hours, they shall be taken into account in determining the contractual Sunday hours for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1) above.

Proceedings for contravention of paragraph 10

16. Sections 22B and 22C of the 1978 Act (which relate to proceedings brought by an employee on the ground that he has been subjected to a detriment in contravention of section 22A of that Act) shall have effect as if the reference in section 22B(1) to section 22A included a reference to paragraph 10 above.

Restrictions on contracting out of Schedule

17.—(1) Any provision in an agreement (whether a contract of employment or not) shall be void in so far as it purports—

(a) to exclude or limit the operation of any provision of this Schedule, or

(b) to preclude any person from presenting a complaint to an industrial tribunal by virtue of any provision of this Schedule.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) above does not apply to an agreement to refrain from presenting or continuing with a complaint where—

(a) a conciliation officer has taken action under section 133(2) or (3) of the 1978 Act (general provisions as to conciliation) or under section 134(1), (2) or (3) (conciliation in case of unfair dismissal) of that Act, or

(b) the conditions regulating comprise agreements under the 1978 Act (as set out in action 140(3) of that Act) are satisfied in relation to the agreement.

Transitional modifications relating to maternity cases

18.—(1) Where—

(a) an employee exercises a right to return to work under Part III of the 1978 Act (maternity), and

(b) because amendments of that Part made by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 (in this paragraph referred to as "the 1993 Act") do not have effect in her case, her right is a right to return to work in the job in which she was employed under the original contract of employment,

the preceding provisions of this Schedule shall have effect subject to the modifications in sub-paragraphs (2) and (3) below.

(2) In paragraph 1(4), for "her contract of employment on the last day of her maternity leave period" there shall be substituted "her original contract of employment".

(3) In paragraph 2(7), for paragraph (b) there shall be substituted—

"(b) under her original contract of employment, she was a bar worker and was not employed to work only on Sunday during the previously restricted hours."

(4) In this paragraph and in paragraphs 1 and 2 above as modified by sub-paragraphs (2) and (3) above, "original contract of employment" has the meaning given by section 153(1) of the 1978 Act as originally enacted.

Dismissal on grounds of assertion of statutory right

19. In section 60A of the 1978 Act (dismissal on grounds of assertion of statutory right) in subsection (4)(a), after "or" at the end of paragraph (i) there shall be inserted—

"(ia) Schedule 15 to the Licensing Act 1964, or".

Dismissal procedures agreements

20. In section 65 of the 1978 Act (exclusion in respect of dismissal procedures agreement) in subsection (4), after "section 60A(1)" there shall be inserted "or the right conferred by paragraph 7 or 8 of Schedule 15 to the Licensing Act 1964".

Conciliation

21. In section 133 of the 1978 Act (general provisions as to conciliation officers) after "or" at the end of paragraph (a) there shall be inserted—

> "(aa) arising out of a contravention or alleged contravention, of paragraph 10 of Schedule 15 to the Licensing Act 1964; or""

Application of certain other provisions of 1978 Act

22. In the following provisions of the 1978 Act—

section 129 (remedy for infringement of certain rights),

section 141(2) (employee ordinarily working outside Great Britain, and

section 150 and Schedule 12 (death of employee or employer),

any reference to Part II of the 1978 Act includes a reference to paragraph 10 of this Schedule."

Mr. Howarth: We debated this issue on Second Reading and in Committee, although not in connection with the new clause. The new clause would introduce a new schedule to the Licensing Act 1964, which would be inserted between schedules 14 and 15, which refer to the rights of bar workers in respect of Sunday working. The purpose behind the new clause is a matter of conviction for my hon. Friends and me—the belief that workers who are expected to work on a Sunday and who will be covered by the changed arrangements implicit in the Bill should be protected from being forced to work on a Sunday by the Bill, or, more importantly, by their employers.

The new clause defines a protected bar worker, so that such workers can be included, or in some cases excluded, from our proposed new schedule. We also provide an objection procedure whereby those who are covered by the new arrangements have the opportunity to give notice in writing to their employer that they object to working additional hours on Sundays, and a procedure whereby employers can state their position.

Proposed paragraphs (6) and (7) provide protection for workers who object, so that they cannot be dismissed or have punitive action taken against them by their employers because they have lodged an objection to working on Sundays under the conditions implicit in the Bill. The proposed new schedule also provides for statutory rights for those workers, and a framework in which those statutory rights can be operated. It also provides for transitional arrangements, especially for maternity cases. Many people will agree that there should be some limit, and that pregnant women should be treated slightly differently.

I will not detain the House long, because I realise that everyone is desperately eager to be about business other than discussing the Bill; we have had plenty of opportunity to discuss it elsewhere. There is, however, an issue of principle involved.

I support—some of my hon. Friends did not—the general thrust of the Bill on the basis that Sunday is a family day, which gives the opportunity to enjoy a range of leisure facilities. Equally, we believe that those who are expected to work to provide those additional leisure facilities during the extra hours that will be available should have rights, and that the two sets of rights need to be brought into balance. That is the purpose behind our proposed new schedule.

Those who have to work on a Sunday should have the option of being able to set aside some part of the week or some part of Sunday to spend time with their families—perhaps to spend time visiting a bar facility, under the new provisions, or a restaurant. All we are saying is that two sets of rights have to be considered. We believe that new clause 1 and the new schedule that it would introduce are one way in which to do that.

We do not want to create disharmony. We believe that the Minister has made concessions on other matters, and that he will make some others later this afternoon. We feel, however, that this is an important issue, and we hope that, even at this late stage in the proceedings, the Government will accept that there is a proper case to be made, and that we have made the proper case that the rights of workers who are expected to work on a Sunday should be taken into account.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I rise to declare that I am a consultant to the Society of Licensed Victuallers, and the legislation will apply to the majority of its members. They would be wary of a Bill passing through the House without any objection.

My only objection is that, too often, it is the employees who are mentioned. The average licensee has a living to earn; he has to pay high wages these days. He will certainly have to pay much higher wages for Sundays, Christmas day and Good Friday. I am surprised that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, needs to introduce the Bill, because surely deregulation is the name of the game. We should free up the hours completely, not necessarily have a nibble at them from time to time.

5.30 pm

I have already led a delegation to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. The retailer—I shall call him that, for that is what he is—is over-legislated for in this sector. I can understand the fears about the employees, but they have an easy means of presenting their fears—by withdrawing from their work.

I cannot see why we need more regulation in an industry that uses mainly part-time workers for the busy times of the business week. If the landlord can induce his staff to keep working throughout Christmas day, Sundays or Good Friday, it is up to him to see whether he can achieve that through local negotiations. I cannot see why the state needs to become so involved in the legislation.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Is the hon. Gentleman not aware of the fact that, in London and other large cities, there are many illegal immigrant workers, particularly Australians, who work without a licence and are therefore prepared to work for low rates lest they be reported?

Mr. Hill: I am sure that the Home Office has a way of dealing with illegal immigrants; I am sure that it is constantly sending out people to identify them. That is not the way that the landlord of an establishment would care to operate. He does not have to ensure that someone has a work permit if he comes to work two hours on a Sunday afternoon. That is up to the Home Office, which has abysmally neglected that part of the labour market.

This country's immigration policies are lax. I am surprised at that, because my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is generally at the cutting edge of the right, and does not always stand back. The immigration problem is another problem—it is not something that the landlord can do anything about. All he can do is employ people to work the hours.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for going away—I am sorry, for giving way. That was a Freudian slip. The Bill meets my hon. Friend's aims: it deregulates the position in respect of Sunday afternoons. It may not do as much as my hon. Friend would wish in terms of the evenings. While I agree that the new clause would be regulatory, I should have thought that my hon. Friend would want to give the Government some credit for having extended consumer choice, and for introducing what is generally a deregulatory measure.

Mr. Hill: I thank my right hon. Friend for those few words, but the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) clearly said that the Home Office, indeed the Minister of State, would be making other concessions. I was not too clear about what they were.

Mr. George Howarth: I do not want to test the hon. Gentleman's patience, but I was not expecting any concessions from the Government on new clause 1. The Government may make concessions on other parts of the Bill.

Mr. Hill: I am reassured by that. Bills can be dangerous, as they can be added to in future by other political parties that do not necessarily have the same leanings as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. The fewer pieces of legislation there are—this is one Bill that I should have thought was not needed—the fewer restrictions there are. I do not know whether we need a giant prayer against every bit of legislation that affects the licensee.

If there is anything to be done to ensure that the licensee and the employees have a future, preventing the illegal importation of vast quantities of drink along the south coast would be a good thing. I would be more than satisfied if a Bill were introduced on that subject.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has his own very strange interpretation of the Bill. Even those who have criticised it on the grounds that it greatly extends the hours for which public houses are open, without resolving some of the problems associated with that, would have to concede that it is undoubtedly a deregulatory Bill. It sweeps away restrictions on the times at which licensed premises can open on Sunday afternoons, Good Friday and Christmas day—a subject on which the Government have said that they will make a concession.

I am in the strange position of having my name attached to every amendment on the amendment paper today, for a series of different reasons. In the case of the new clause, it is because it follows very much the lines of a new clause that I moved in Committee, which was designed to secure some protection for people who will be obliged to work on Sundays.

A minute or so ago, the subject of illegal immigrants working in the licensed trade was mentioned. A employer has some responsibility to satisfy himself that someone he employs is legally entitled to be so employed. The Department of Employment also plays a significant role, so the position is not quite that described by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test.

The primary concern of the new clause, as with the new clause that I moved in Committee, is the large number of people, including licensed house managers and bar staff, who feel extremely vulnerable to pressure to work on Sundays, when they want to set aside at least an hour or two to be with their own families. That fear is genuine and cannot be discounted. The Minister of State and Conservative Members must weigh that fact against the advantages that they see in deregulation.

The Minister and Conservative Members had to make a similar consideration when the House removed most of the restrictions on Sunday retail trading. At that stage, the House decided that it was necessary to make provision—at least to protect those who entered the retail trade without knowing that they could be legally required to work on Sundays.

When those people entered the trade, it would not have been legal for them to be required to do so in a great many of the larger shops. That provision was included in that measure. The Bill contains similar provisions in relation to Sunday afternoon trading in pubs, clubs and off-licences. We are looking to see whether we can provide some protection for the staff involved.

It is unfair and complacent to ignore the feelings that have been expressed. The National Association of Licensed House Managers has been the strongest in expressing those views and has pointed to the contractual obligations under which managers will be required to open their premises for all the legally permitted hours. Bar staff comprise a much less organised group; some of them are part-time and some are dependent on that income. Many of them are women, who are perhaps supplementing a severely diminished family income by working in pubs and clubs. They may want to keep their job, but not have to give up family time on Sundays. That is why some of us thought that such protection was a necessary feature of the Bill.

I am glad that we have returned to the subject now, and I urge the Minister of State to think carefully about the position of those who do not enjoy the genuine freedom of choice that he seeks to give to consumers. I can understand the Minister's desire to give consumers that freedom of choice and, to a point, landlords are being given greater freedom of choice in so far as the landlord has a real freedom to decide whether to open his premises.

However, some landlords will not want to be left behind if a neighbouring premises opens on Sunday afternoons. In that case, the premises that opens on a Sunday afternoon may attract the clientele that the other premises attracted earlier in the day, because those people will know that they can stay for longer in the public house that is open all afternoon. Some landlords may feel pressure to open on Sunday afternoons.

Some people may have freedom of choice, but when the Bill is finally enacted, many people will lose a freedom of choice which they possess at the moment. That is the freedom to spend a limited amount of time on Sunday afternoons with their families, or doing whatever else they want to do on a Sunday afternoon. As the law does not currently allow pubs to be open on Sunday afternoons, they know that they cannot be required to work then.

The Bill reduces some people's freedom. Ministers must recognise that. One way to do that would be to include provisions along the lines of new clause 1.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I repeat the registered interest, which I still have in the licensed trade, that I declared on Second Reading and in Committee. I am still a non-executive director of the family company I disposed of at the end of last October. As I have said before, I still have a vestigial interest in the licensed trade. I am also the vice-chairman of the parliamentary beer club, which I believe is the largest all-party group in the House, as it now has nearly 200 members.

Mr. Beith: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the parliamentary group which takes an interest in non-profit-making members' clubs is a larger group still, by quite a margin.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), who moved the new clause, is seeking to attach the provision to the Licensing Act 1964. That is a very curious mechanism to use through the vehicle of this small and quite limited Bill. The hon. Gentleman has tried to attach to the back of this small Bill a major change in the employment conditions that would apply to bar staff, licensed house managers and tenant licensees.

Anyone who comes to work in the licensed trade fully expects to do so on Sundays. I accepted in Committee that there is a change with regard to Sunday afternoons, but the new schedule applies to the present restricted opening hours on a Sunday.

People who work in the licensed trade are aware of the present Sunday opening hours. I can see no possible reason why the draconian new schedule should be included in the Bill in order to give rights which were specifically excluded when the House debated Sunday trading during the last parliamentary Session.

I was one of the first people to initiate such a protection with regard to Sunday trading, when I introduced a private Member's Bill two years ago. I had the first schedule for protection for workers in my Bill. I recognised that people who were suddenly confronted with the possibility of working on Sundays, when they had been taken on to work six days a week, should have some protection and a right not to work on Sundays.

If the new schedule is included in the Bill, we would make life very difficult for the licensed house managers and tenant licensees if they found that all their staff wanted to opt out of Sunday working. Under the terms of the new schedule, as I understand it—perhaps the hon. Member for Knowsley, North will correct me if I am wrong—all bar staff throughout the country would be given the right to opt out of Sunday working. I am sure that it is not intended that pubs should close on Sundays, but that would be the effect if the staff opted out of Sunday working.

In Committee, we discussed at some length what would happen to the people who work in pub restaurants, who may well work through Sunday afternoons at the moment, as restaurants serving full meals may open during the afternoon break on a Sunday. Waitresses, waiters, kitchen staff and chefs would not be covered by the proposal. We would have a curious situation, whereby the kitchen and dining room staff would not be covered, but bar staff would be covered. The bar staff could opt out of Sunday working, but the catering staff could not. As some people will do both bar and catering work during the week, deciding which is which on Sundays would be a problem.

The new schedule is a very good try on the Opposition's part, but it is not a realistic proposition to be added to this small Bill.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), I supported the Bill on Second Reading because it makes perfect sense for Sunday licensing hours to be liberalised. I support the new clause and the new schedule to the Licensing Act 1964, for several simple reasons. First, it creates a better balance in the Bill between the rights of consumers and the legitimate rights of people who work in the bar trade on Sundays.

The proposal also creates greater consistency between people who work in on and off-licence premises. As the Minister accepted in Committee, there is at the moment an anomaly between people working in on and off-licence premises on a Sunday. A person working in an off-licence premises on a Sunday currently has the protection afforded to workers under the Sunday Trading Act 1994 not to be compelled to work on a Sunday against his or her wishes.

At the moment, that protection does not extend to people working in on-licence premises. The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said that it was important to have consistency and not to create too many anomalies. Without rehearsing our arguments in Committee, my point is that, unless the Bill is amended in the way that we propose, it will simply add further anomalies and inconsistencies to the law. That is a bad thing.

It is right in principle, for the reasons given by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), that, when we, through our law-making powers, change the employment conditions of workers who currently cannot be required to work between 3 pm and 7 pm on Sundays, and make it likely that those people will be required to work those hours, we must produce a framework of protection which will allow workers, for whatever reasons—and hopefully for reasonable grounds—to decline to work those hours and to say to their employers that it is not feasible or practical for them to work those hours. People may have other commitments, perhaps of a religious, social or family nature, which would make it difficult for them to work such hours. Those are the points which the new clause and the new schedule seek to address.

For those reasons, I support the new clause and the new schedule, and I hope that the Minister will have something positive and constructive to say about those issues.

Mr. Enright: I support the new clause, and I want to give a practical example. I also recognise that, no matter how we do this, there are bound to be anomalies with deregulation. However, I want to describe an anomaly which should not arise.

As a concrete example, I refer to Hemsworth Conservative club. That club has more members than voters by quite a considerable margin. The club steward was once nearly sacked for putting my poster in his bedroom window, but fortunately good sense prevailed, because the committee was controlled by good Labour men at the time.

However, people like that club steward are going to be controlled by small committees, be it the Hemsworth Conservative club or the Pontefract RAFA club. Small

[Mr. Enright]

committees will say, "Thou shalt work on a Sunday afternoon," when clearly the terms of the contracts of the people involved were for very limited hours of working, particularly in some of the smaller clubs. That will no longer be true, because the clubs will get greedy when they see what the next-door club is doing. Similarly, when clubs see what the adjacent club is doing, they will do the same. So I certainly give my full support to the new clause and the new schedule.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) expected, I am not sure whether I can assist him by accepting his new clause. I must confess that I was slightly alarmed when my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) began to speak, because I thought that he was attacking the Bill rather than expecting me to accept the Opposition amendment. I hasten to reassure my hon. Friend, because I had no idea that my reputation with him was such that he thought that I would give in so easily, even before the hon. Member for Knowsley, North had been offered the support of his hon. Friends.

I am interested to hear from the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) that not only is the Leader of the Opposition embracing Conservative policies, but the men of Hemsworth are embracing the Conservative club—a reverse takeover of truly alarming proportions.

Mr. Enright: May I reassure the Minister by telling him that, when I applied for membership, I was instantly refused?

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman were to read out the speeches that the Leader of the Opposition has been making in support of the policies that we Conservatives have espoused for some time, and to say that he adhered to those principles, he might yet be able to join the Hemsworth Conservative club. He could even go a stage further, and vote for the Conservative candidate there when the time comes.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North made the case for the new clause persuasively, as he did in Committee, and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) cited the protection already given to people who work on Sundays as a result of the Sunday Trading Act 1994 and the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, the former of which provided protection for shop workers, and the latter for betting shop workers.

However, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will recall that, during the passage of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act, we debated whether the right should be extended to stable lads as well as betting shop workers. We decided then that it should not, because stable lads could be expected to work on Sundays anyway. That is the distinction here too.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said, people who work in the licensed trade already expect to work on Sundays, so they are in a different position from shop workers in England, if not in Scotland, who could not have expected to do so. For those reasons, I do not think that there is a parallel, so it would not be right to extend employment protection as has been suggested.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) put forward an ingenious argument by pointing to the anomaly between the treatment of employees in off-licences and those in other licensed premises.

I now come to the part of my brief marked, "Use only if pressed". There is an anomaly, and the hon. Gentleman is right to mention it, but the people who work in off-licences are shop workers, and as such already have the right to decline Sunday work. It would be irrational for the law to pretend that employees in pubs, restaurants, hotels, sports clubs and so on are shop workers and should therefore have the same rights, simply because the premises in which they work happen to have liquor licences.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the difference, but it stems from the fact that we dealt with the previous set of anomalies that arose in relation to shop workers, when it was felt that it would not be right to distinguish between people because of the differences between the products sold in the various shops. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in the end the distinctions in the Act, such as they are, were made according to the size of premises.

Mr. Hutton: While the Minister is dealing with my argument, will he also deal with the fact that workers in off-licences, who now have the protection of the Sunday Trading Act, could legitimately have been asked to work on a Sunday before enactment, as well as after? I am afraid that his argument does not hold much water.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman's argument was that we must avoid anomalies, yet he seeks to create another. In so far as an anomaly exists between workers in off-licences and others, it does so because the House took the view that it would be wrong to distinguish between the rights of workers on Sundays according to the nature of the product being sold—in this case, alcohol in off-licences. The hon. Gentleman proposes that, because the distinction exists as a result of the previous legislation, we should create another anomaly in the Bill, covering a particular period.

Incidentally, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham was not quite accurate in his description of the amendment. The proposal is not that all workers in pubs on Sundays should be protected throughout their day at work; the amendments relate only to the period between 3 o'clock and 7 o'clock in the afternoon. If they were accepted, we should have put on to the statute employment protection for workers in pubs between 3 o'clock and 7 o'clock.

Some years on, when everyone had got used to the change in the law, some people may look upon that as rather an oddity, just as, in the context of this debate, people who make a careful study of the legislation, such as the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, may find an oddity in the treatment of people in off-licences, which under the Sunday Trading Act are shops.

Therefore, ingenious though the hon. Gentleman's argument is, it is not sufficiently persuasive to enable me to commend the new clause and the new schedule to the House. I ask the hon. Member for Knowsley, North to withdraw the new clause rather than pressing it to a Division, so that we can make progress. No doubt he will already have considered my arguments and the reasons behind them.

Mr. George Howarth: There is a difference of approach between the Minister and ourselves, which is to some extent exemplified by what his hon. Friends have said. The kernel of the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test seems to be that there is an equal relationship between bar staff and the breweries, managed houses or whatever that employ them.

However, whatever the nationality of the bar staff, all too often the relationship is not as balanced and equal as the hon. Gentleman implied. Especially nowadays, when one cannot walk out of one job into another, rights need to be protected in those circumstances. It is not a simple matter of a discussion between employees and employers, because such discussions never take place on an equal footing.

The hon. Member for Gillingham did not quite understand my amendment. I can understand why, because it is extremely complicated to deal with deregulation of the licensed trade on an incremental basis. But if the hon. Gentleman reads the new clause and new schedule again, he will discover that, as the Minister conceded, the new schedule would apply only to the additional hours covered by the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman has a wider objection, which has been well rehearsed, but the specific point that he made on this occasion does not apply to the amendments.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I was taken with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, to which no one has yet responded. What about the thousands of people employed in restaurants within pubs between 3 o'clock and 7 o'clock on Sundays? There appear to be no problems or difficulties with those people, so why should there be problems with people employed to dispense drinks? I cannot see the difference.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Member for Gillingham and, seemingly, the hon. Member for Wirral, South, assume that, if the protection were to become law, all the workers covered would inevitably try to make use of it. Most workers will probably simply accept the extra hours, but for the minority of people with a valid objection, our suggestions set out a procedure that they can go through, and even provide opportunities for employers to state the terms on which objections are not acceptable.

All that is covered, but amending deregulation legislation as it goes along is a complicated business, and we understand how confusion can arise when people hear what we are saying. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enfield) made some useful points, particularly in relation to the Hemsworth Conservative club. It is perhaps representative of the feeling all over the country that the Hemsworth Conservative club is a bastion of Labour party support.

6 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): For the purpose of clarification, as the Yorkshire neighbour of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enfield), I should point out that the hon. Gentleman was refused membership of the Hemsworth Conservative club not because he is a member of the Labour party, but because control of that club has fallen into the hands of the Militant Tendency.

Mr. Howarth: One of my party pieces is to discuss in some detail Trotsky's theory of transitional demand—which, by the way, I do not support. In the present circumstances, I think that it would be straying too far from the terms of the legislation to enter into a discussion about the Militant Tendency. While my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth continues to represent that constituency, the Militant Tendency will never be allowed in the Labour party. The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) will have to make his own arrangements about dealing with that group in the Hemsworth Conservative club.

I do not think that we should take too much to heart the fears that Government Members have expressed. The Minister's remarks have not changed my views, and I do not think that they have changed those of my hon. Friends. However, with leave, I will withdraw the new clause, safe in the knowledge that our colleagues in another place will take the opportunity to raise the issue again when it comes before them.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

PERMITTED HOURS IN LICENSED PREMISES

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 1, leave out lines 5 to 12 and insert—

'—(1) Section 60 of the Licensing Act 1964 (permitted hours in licensed premises) shall be amended as follows.

(2) For subsection (1)(b) (Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday) there shall be substituted—

"(b) on Sundays, other than Christmas Day, and on Good Friday, the hours from twelve noon to half past ten in the evening; and

(c) on Christmas Day, the hours from twelve noon to half past ten in the evening, with a break of four hours beginning at three in the afternoon.".

(3) At the end of subsection (6) (off-licences) there shall be added the words ", and the permitted hours on Sundays, other than Christmas Day, and on Good Friday shall begin at ten in the morning".'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 6, after 'Friday', insert

'for the words, "Christmas Day" there shall be substituted the words "(other than a Sunday which is Christmas Day)".'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 8, at end insert—

'(1A) After section 60(1)(b) of that Act there shall be inserted the words"; and

(c) on Christmas Day, the hours from twelve noon to half past ten in the evening with a break of five hours beginning at two in the afternoon.".'.

Government amendment No. 17.

No. 5, in clause 2, page 1, line 14, leave out from 'clubs)' to end of line 15 and insert—

'(a) for paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(a) on days other than Christmas Day, the general licensing hours, and"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), for the words "on Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday" there shall be substituted the words "on Christmas Day" and in sub-paragraph (ii) of that paragraph for the word "two" there shall be substituted the word "three", and for the word "three" there shall be substituted the word "two".'.

Government amendments Nos. 18 to 25.

Mr. Forsyth: Very strong views were expressed during the Committee stage of the Bill about the inclusion of Christmas day in the terms of the legislation. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson)

[Mr. Forsyth]

is not present in the Chamber, because in Committee he said that there was no point in hon. Members attending if Ministers were not prepared to listen to their arguments.

I listened to the arguments on this occasion. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the Opposition spokesman pressed me on the matter. Since then, a number of other hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), have approached me about leaving Christmas day licensing hours as they stand at present.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said in Committee—and I agree with him—there is nothing in the Bill which would require public houses to open for the additional hours on Christmas day. Most public houses do not open for the full hours that are presently permitted on Christmas day.

However, in deference to the views that hon. Members have expressed, I have tabled the amendments—I admit that I did not appreciate that it would take quite so many words to remove "Christmas day" from the legislation. I know that the amendments address the concerns of a number of hon. Members, and I hope that they will speed the Bill's passage through the Parliament.

The effect of the amendments is to ensure that people who are employed in licensed premises do not have to work on Christmas afternoon. They will be able to spend that time with their families and listen to Her Majesty's broadcast to the nation or whatever. I hope that that accords with the wishes of the House.

Mr. Beith: I warmly welcome the Minister's decision to move the amendments. He listened to the arguments that hon. Members put during the Committee. I discussed those points with him following the Committee proceedings, and I know that several other hon. Members also approached him about the subject.

When I moved an amendment along those lines in Committee, I called it the "Bet Lynch Christmas dinner amendment". There is no doubt that it is very important to many landlords and public house managers to be able to shut their doors on Christmas day, get the turkeys out of the oven and spend some time with their families in what are their homes.

Although the Minister is correct when he says that public houses are not obliged to open on Christmas day, it is at least possible—I think it is quite likely—that competitive pressure in some areas would lead the breweries to force managers in their employ to open on Christmas day. In some cases, licensees would feel obliged to open rather than allow their competitors to test the Christmas afternoon market.

That would mean the loss of a very special time for almost every family in the country. There are very few families to whom Christmas day is not important, and we try as much as we can to allow workers in all but the most essential industries to spend that time with their families.

There is no real evidence of a strong demand for Christmas day opening in the same way that there is a genuine call for the relaxation of hours on Sunday afternoons throughout the year. The issue was not addressed by the Prime Minister in his trailer for the legislation. In stressing the importance that he attached to Sunday deregulation, he made no mention of Christmas day. Therefore, I think it right that we should have second thoughts about it.

Following the Committee stage, I received letters of support from licensees and public house managers, who agreed that it was not necessary to include Christmas day in the terms of the Bill. People should be given a clear assurance that they will not be required to work on Christmas afternoon.

I am grateful to hon. Members from other parties, including the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson)—and other Government Members, whom I shall not name lest I should embarrass them, who also made their views known—who joined me in seeking to persuade the Minister about the matter. I am very glad that the Minister has listened to our views and has moved amendments in order to achieve the intended effect. There are some technical differences between my amendments and the Government's amendments, but they are of no consequence, and I shall not press my amendments.

Mr. Couchman: I was going to ask the right hon. Member whether he intended to press his amendments. They are somewhat different from the Government's, and I think that they may tighten the current position further.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member is correct in one respect: my amendments would effect a 2 o'clock closure on Christmas day. That was the position until a few years ago, and it is generally thought that the hours on Sunday changed to 3 o'clock because of a mistake on the part of the Home Office. There is a case for at least returning to that original intention, but we can set that aside. There is consensus in favour of accepting the Minister's amendments. I certainly accept them, and I am glad that the Minister has taken that decision.

Mr. Alison: I congratulate the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on the persistence and perspicacity with which he pursued this narrow but important and valuable point, and on the way in which he argued his case in Committee. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister most warmly on his typical receptiveness and sensitivity in accepting a proposal which I believe will cause general rejoicing in every part of the House and the country.

It is not merely a symbolic gesture, although the Christmas festival remains a special time in Britain; the measure is also a practical one. The Archbishop of Canterbury recently stated that a quarter of the British population attended Christmas day church services in 1994. That is an almost unimaginable number.

The amendment will allow more time for family life on Christmas day, and it is symbolic of our national tendency at present—we are militant in the Christian sense of the word, if not in the socialist sense. I congratulate the Minister most warmly on introducing those important amendments.

Mr. George Howarth: On behalf of the Opposition, I place on record the fact that we also warmly welcome the conversion on the part of the Minister. We accept that Christmas day has a number of meanings for different people. The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), the Church Commissioner, has given one side of the argument. The other side is that, even if Christmas day does not have the same Christian significance for everyone, it has a broader family significance for many. We welcome the Government amendments to the extent that they recognise that fact, and we certainly do not intend to impede them in any way.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 2

PERMITTED HOURS IN REGISTERED CLUBS

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 1, line 14, leave out from 'clubs)' to end of line 15 and insert '—

(a) for paragraph (a) there shall be substituted—

"(a) on days other than Christmas Day, the general licensing hours;"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), for the words "Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday," there shall be substituted the words "Christmas Day,".'.

No. 18, in page 1, line 15, at end insert—

'( ) In section 62(3) of that Act (notice of permitted hours) for the words "on Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday" there shall be substituted the words "on Christmas Day".'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 3

RESTRICTION ORDERS

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 1, line 20, leave out 'Christmas Day or'.

No. 20, in page 1, line 22, leave out ', Christmas Day'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 1

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 21, in page 3, leave out lines 5 to 38 and insert—

'. In section 51(2) (register of clubs), for the words "on Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday," there shall be substituted the words "on Christmas Day,".

. In section 60(5) (permitted hours in licensed premises), for the words "(a) and (b)" there shall be substituted the words "(a) to (c)".

. In section 68(1)(a) (extension of permitted hours in restaurants), for the words "Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday," there shall be substituted the words "Christmas Day,".

. In section 87A (power to vary permitted hours in on-licensed vineyard premises)—

(a) in subsection (4)—

(i) for the words ", Christmas Day or" there shall be substituted the words ", other than Christmas Day, or on"; and

(ii) in paragraph (b), for the word "five" there shall be substituted the word "nine"; and

(b) after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4A) In making an order under this section with respect to the permitted hours on Christmas Day, licensing justices may not so vary the hours as to make them—

(a) begin before twelve noon; or

(b) exceed in total more than five and a half hours.".'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 2

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 22, in page 4, leave out lines 4 to 24.

No. 23, in page 4, line 27, column 3, leave out '4 and 5' and insert 'and 4'.

No. 24, in page 4, leave out lines 28 and 29.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Title

Amendment made: No. 25, in title, line 3, leave out 'Christmas Day'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Bill reported, with amendments.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be read the Third Time, *put forthwith and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

EXTERNAL FRONTIERS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11287/93, relating to controls on persons at the external frontiers of the European Union; welcomes the objective of achieving effective controls on persons at the external frontiers of the Member States; endorses the Government's determination to take whatever steps are necessary to maintain immigration controls on non-European Economic Area nationals at United Kingdom internal frontiers; endorses the need to preserve the intergovernmental character of agreements concluded under Title VI of the Treaty on European Union; endorses the Government's commitment, in the event of agreement between all parties, that the final text of the draft External Frontiers Convention should be brought back to Parliament before signature and that the draft Convention should not be ratified before the necessary legislation has been enacted by Parliament; and endorses the Government's aim of ensuring that full account is taken of the United Kingdom's present practice in drawing up the common visa list.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Edgware General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

6.10 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful for this important Adjournment debate, which contrasts with the previous harmonious stages of a Bill on which hon. Members on both sides of the House seemed agreed, the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill. This is a painful moment, because it gives me no pleasure to take issue with the Government and with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and other colleagues responsible for the threatened closure of Edgware general hospital's accident and emergency department.

That outrageous decision is unacceptable to me, to many of my hon. Friends and to the local population. A campaign was launched to save the hospital and to maintain its existing range of services. I must express my considerable anger and resentment at the manner in which the matter has been handled, notwithstanding ample exchanges earlier in the House. The last thing you want, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is for me to be repetitive or to refer to other hospitals threatened with total or partial closure. For that reason, although I am tempted to refer to other threatened London hospitals, I shall confine my remarks to Edgware general.

I use the word "threatened" deliberately. The Government have said that they agree with the proposal to close Edgware general's A and E unit. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will not be surprised to hear me say with great force that a massive local campaign will be unleashed to save the hospital's facilities and to persuade the Government to change their mind.

Since the campaign for Edgware general was launched more than one year ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) and by me, it has grown in conviction. It is not, as some bureaucrats suggest, an emotional campaign but a carefully thought-out campaign, with medical evidence supporting our arguments.

I share the resentment of other hon. Members that the dreadful announcement of the proposed closure of Edgware general's A and E unit was made in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on Tuesday, because the hospital is precious to our constituents and an important part of the all-London health service care system. Today, the Secretary of State was obliged to come to the House, to respond to a private notice question from my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). I cannot recall an occasion in recent years, or even decades, when a former Secretary of State who was until recently a member of the Cabinet insisted, justifiably, on a proper statement to the House—if that is the right word for the Secretary of State's lamentable announcement. That statement about Edgware general and other hospitals was not acceptable to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Again and again, the Government gave a solemn undertaking that there would be no adverse effect on primary health care facilities in our part of north-west London. Manifestly, that undertaking will be betrayed and traduced cynically and ruthlessly by the decision to close Edgware general's accident and emergency facilities. Local Members of Parliament will be fighting hard to ensure that the Government change that decision.

I take no pleasure in saying that, if that does not happen, the Government will face defeat if there are any votes on those matters in the House. I take no pleasure, because I do not want to anticipate that position being reached. However, that is the stark situation that confronts us and the Government.

The whole panoply and the way in which the matter has been handled are encapsulated in the terms of the early-day motion that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North and I, and other hon. Friends tabled on 3 April—the day before the announcement about Edgware general's A and E unit was made. By then, there was an indication that the Department of Health had not listened to any of the local arguments for retaining that facility. It will take a long time before local Members of Parliament change their minds. I much resent the way in which Sir William Staveley and his colleagues on the regional health authority dealt with the many objections to the closure, and to the recent meeting at which that decision was taken. I was unable to attend it myself but received a full report from my local colleagues that the issue was not dealt with satisfactorily.

I shall refer to one or two important elements in our early-day motion, because that is the most convenient way to explain why we feel so strongly and why the A and E unit must be kept open beyond 1997. My constituency and Hendon, North would be most affected, because the hospital borders them on the Edgware road. A large number of my constituents use the hospital, including an above-average number of elderly patients who rely on the services of this outstanding and successful district general hospital.

Today, we received a deputation comprising mainly schoolchildren but also councillors and others. All the children had been born at Edgware general and their parents regularly make use of it—although, obviously, no one takes pleasure in a hospital being regularly used by people who are ill. Edgware general is regarded with great affection locally.

When the Royal National Orthopaedic—a famous teaching hospital—in my constituency was deprived of its accident and emergency facilities 10 years ago, Government spokesmen said that those facilities and immediate treatment would be maintained and enhanced at Edgware general and that there would be no deterioration in the service.

My difficulty, my constituency being on the Harrow side of the border of the Edgware road, has been that decisions have been recommended mainly by Barnet district health authority, whose remit is outside the area which I represent. Close contact and liaison have been maintained, however, between Members and the protest group over many months. There has been close liaison with the understandable exception of a good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman). As he is a Whip, he is not permitted to act on these matters. I fully acknowledge that he is in a different position from other colleagues in the area when it comes to the future of Edgware general hospital, because of the proposal for the extension of Barnet district hospital.

The early-day motion to which I referred reminds the House and the Government with great solemnity that the proposal to close the accident and emergency unit is

"contrary to the overwhelming opinion of those residing in the catchment area . . . these proposals are based on debatable clinical assumptions allied to conjectural statistics . . . there are strong social considerations in favour of retaining an Accident and Emergency Department at Edgware; notes that these consideration include transport and traffic problems".

Edgware general hospital is in an extremely congested area. I note the arrival of three distinguished colleagues. I am glad to see that they wish to take part in the debate. I refer to my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon, North and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). Given the recent Jopling procedural changes, it may be possible for us to speak on this Adjournment debate for a little longer than is usual. We might not wish to continue for as long as some pessimists imagine, despite the great importance of the issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I shall assist the House. The rules are clear: the Adjournment debate can continue until 10.30 pm. I remind hon. Members, however, that this is a specific debate that is confined to Edgware general hospital. The House spent an hour earlier on other health service matters. The Chair will be strict in ensuring that the debate is confined to Edgware general hospital.

Mr. Dykes: That is why I was trying, Mr. Deputy Speaker—obviously, I was not especially successful—to choose with great, exquisite and painful care a balance of words that would give the impression that we had the right to continue for longer than usual, but that it was understood that to do so might be rather taxing on the patience of other colleagues, including the occupant of the Chair, especially if the expansion of time were to be excessive in all the relativities. I would welcome such an expansion, however, if it were feasible and possible. As I have said, we are dealing with a crucial issue.

That being so, my colleagues present in the Chamber will understand that I shall not necessarily, unless they are minded strongly to intervene, be prepared to give way. They will have the opportunity to make their own contributions, which I shall welcome warmly. That is subject only to the fact that I have to see one of the Harrow deputations on this subject later this evening. Its members will be coming to the House. I would have to leave the Chamber, if the debate were lengthy, to see them. I also have a speaking engagement later today. In any event, we shall see how the debate goes.

I was expressing the anger that we all feel. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North and I, with the strong support and approval of other colleagues, have led the campaign because our constituents are the most affected physically and geographically. As I have said, the hospital is on the border of the Edgware road. I think that I am right in saying that the majority of patients and others using the hospital probably come, notwithstanding that the figures fluctuate and float, from my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North. I accept, of course, that many come from elsewhere, sometimes from quite far afield. They come to an excellent hospital. It is extremely popular and part of the local human and social community. That must be emphasised to our ministerial colleagues. I have in mind that which others and I said about Edgware general hospital in unhappy exchanges with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

I am worried about all aspects of the closure proposal. That is why others and I will be fighting hard and relentlessly to persuade the Government to change their mind. I am especially concerned about traffic congestion. It is an extremely congested area. If people are obliged to go to Barnet, Northwick Park or the Royal Free hospitals, their journeys will take a great deal of time. That would be unacceptable for emergency treatment, including other treatment that patients should receive in a hurry. We would be extremely irresponsible as Members if we put up with such bureaucratic nonsense from the Department. I say to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, as I said earlier to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that it is the job of politicians in the Department of Health to balance the ruthless arguments of accounting and financial officers, along with those of the bureaucrats, with the human and political considerations that relate to the needs of our constituents and patients generally.

We were given to understand quite a few years ago that there would be no reduction in the services at Edgware general hospital. The hospital is needed, as much as Barnet hospital needs to be expanded. I welcome that expansion, as long as it does not cause Edgware general to suffer. Northwick Park hospital is too far away. It is a major district general hospital with research facilities. St. Mark's hospital is happily going into it, as it were, as a new unit of excellence and special research. All these services are being provided, but a long way away. I estimate that if a journey were made in normal traffic conditions—not in the rush hour—from Edgware general to Northwick Park, it would take about 45 to 50 minutes. In an emergency, that is far too long a journey to an alternative installation.

That journey time shows how inhuman and ill thought out is the judgment with which we are faced. We are faced with a complex—indeed, Byzantine—set of arguments and statistics. I pay tribute to the *Evening Standard*, which campaigned mostly on behalf of inner-London hospitals, but also for London hospitals generally. There may be some arguments open to the bureaucrats and politicians in the Department of Health that enable them to say that there is some duplication of physical facilities and financial resources in some national central London teaching hospitals, some of which are centuries old. Their long standing is a factor in itself. I can understand the anger that is reflected in the campaign being mounted on their behalf.

At the same time, outer-London hospitals do not have enough facilities. The idea that they have too much is absurd. That is the position in north-west London. In the area that I represent, people are waiting far too long for treatment. It is dispiriting and frustrating for those who have to wait an extremely long time for non-emergency treatment.

The idea that we can close with equanimity, and with callous disregard for the needs of local people, accident and emergency facilities that are so precious to the community is unacceptable. It is not enough for us to protest today about the closure. We will not be doing that because we shall be fighting the proposal all the way through. We shall wage a massive campaign to persuade the Government to change their mind.

[Mr. Dykes]

It would not be a weakness on the part of Ministers to change their mind and to consider these matters again. They should look again at what has been wrongly decided by the regional health authority. I referred earlier, before the arrival of my hon. Friends, to the cavalier manner in which Sir William Staveley dealt with the proposals at the last consultation meeting. In fact, it was not a consultation meeting. We have been inundated with thousands of views and opinions, including those from medical practitioners and medical experts in our constituencies. I do not know of anyone—if any evidence can be furnished to me to the contrary, I shall happily correct myself at a later occasion—who has given support to the closure proposal. I am talking of people who know about the sharp end or coal face of medical treatment and what is needed for the interests of patients and their families.

It must be understood that a hospital should not be a cold, callous place, one part of what is the greatest health service in the world in many ways, despite the depredations that we have seen in recent years. A hospital is not, as I say, a cold, callous place where people are merely admitted for clinical treatment. It should not be thought of as a place where people receive a necessary bald measure of treatment, and that is it.

Edgware general hospital lives in the hearts and minds of local people. Many people have known it since it started to function and developed with its post-war services. They have known it since it expanded and became a commanding district general hospital in an area of great population growth. It has a particular attraction and affection in the hearts of elderly people locally because of the excellent treatment that they receive in all respects, including accident and emergency services.

About a year ago, on 19 April, I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State various questions about the hospital. I thank the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who answered, for attending the debate this evening. I hope that some of his answers will be designed to convince us that the proposal is sound. I have my doubts, but I shall give him the benefit of the doubt before his reply.

The campaign against the proposal has continued for a long time. Many hours have been devoted to it. It has been a massive and popular campaign. Detailed arguments have been calculated and considered. It is not merely an emotional campaign, although there is bound to be emotion, of course, when a hospital is threatened with closure. I do not apologise for that. If the bureaucrats in the Department said that it was an emotional campaign, I would agree. But the campaign is not only that: it is based on hard-nosed calculations by us as Members of Parliament and by all the people who are involved in the campaign of what is needed in that area, the population pressure, the lack of facilities if the hospital is closed down, and other related factors.

I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a year ago, on 19 April, what representations against the proposed closure of the A and E services at Edgware general had been sent to the Department since the beginning of 1994. We had started the campaign well before that; we became pessimistic and alarmed about the matter a long time ago. That is why we worked in a cohesive group, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North, who has led our campaign with great distinction. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West, gave the usual bland temporary service reply:

> "Any proposal for a major change in services would be subject to a period of public consultation. The matter comes to Ministers if there are objections. All factors are taken into account including public representations."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 1994; Vol. 241, c. *475*.]

Those representations have been brushed aside in this case, by the Department, by the direct agency responsible and, indeed, by Barnet. That is the unacceptable part of this whole business. The anger expressed in the House today about other hospitals is reflected, repeated and mirrored in this Adjournment debate when we express and redouble our expression of anger about the views of people and the medical experts being dismissed with flimsy statistical justification. I particularly resent that, as they know more about the subject than all of us.

The accountants have an obsession that, somehow, money will be saved. I doubt that very much. I think that it would cost more in the end if the services were transferred to the other two hospitals and to the Royal Free. The Royal Free—like most hospitals, sadly—is severely overloaded, and so it is one of the least practical suggestions.

After I received the reply from the Under-Secretary, I commented, saying:

> "I regard the last part of the answer as crucial"—

referring to the public representations and consultations.

> "The vast number of objections to closure will I trust be conclusive in the end, partly because they include most informed medical opinion in the area as well."

At that stage, a number of medical people were arguing on behalf of the Barnet proposal instead. That is true, but I think I am right in saying that that support has died away, and the longer the campaign has gone on, the more angry and resentful has become the medical and the wider social world. The people whom we respect in the local community: the opinion formers, the professional people—without being pompous to others—the people whose opinions are respected by members of the public, because they are leading representatives of the community in a non-political sense, are all against the proposal. It is not just a knee-jerk reaction that happens when facilities are reduced.

The old pledge that Conservatives gave—I regarded it as a most solemn pledge to my constituents, was happy to echo it and was delighted when it was said from Conservative party platforms and repeated by the noble Baroness Thatcher, and afterwards—that the national health service would be safe in our hands, was one of the most solemn pledges given by any political party in recent decades—

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Outrageous.

Mr. Dykes: I heard my hon. Friend the Whip say, "Outrageous". It was loud enough for me to hear. If it is outrageous for me to remind my Government colleagues, whom I normally support loyally and faithfully, that a pledge that the national health service would be safe in our hands is now being undermined by the closure of district general hospitals, I make no apology and would ask him to be a gentleman and apologise later on. Perhaps next time he will be wiser.

I am quite intrigued that my hon. Friend the Whip is laughing and smirking when I am protesting and doing what a Member of Parliament never has to apologise for, to any Department or Minister—defending the interests of his own constituents when a vital medical health installation is threatened with closure. If that is a matter for laughing and smirking, my hon. Friend is not fit to be a Government Whip, because most of my colleagues who are Government Whips would not behave like that. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend is continuing to laugh. I am glad that he has a well-developed sense of humour. Perhaps it will stand him in good stead later on when his constituents reflect on his performance as a Member of Parliament, because now that he has to take the Trappist vow of silence as a Government Whip, he will have to work that much harder locally to appeal to them with his local performance.

In contrast to my hon. Friend the Whip's behaviour—he is continuing to laugh—I am glad to pay tribute to our hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet, who cannot, of course, speak on this matter, and is bound to have a different view on the matter because of the position of Barnet hospital in his constituency. My colleagues in the Whips' office in general—perhaps with one exception—are decent people and behave properly on these occasions. Once again, I am sad to see that kind of reaction when I am doing what I perceive to be my duty. But I am and remain a loyal supporter of the Government.

I hope that that will reinforce the scope and extent of my protest, because I would not attack all the proposals that the Government are making: trying to make the NHS more efficiently managed and better run financially with a greater rational sense of the use of resources. That is right and it is the duty of any Government. All Governments, of whatever colour, would have to be extremely careful about the use of NHS resources—the unlimited demand for them—and I pay tribute to their efforts to do that. But that should not mean closure of district general hospitals or, indeed, the most important part of the services. When I say closure, I do not mean the whole hospital but the A and E unit, which is the major part of a hospital. Without an A and E facility in Edgware hospital, the hospital would die. We know that. It would be a very small rump hospital, without the essential services that are needed on these occasions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North has kindly allowed me to quote from a letter from one of his constituents. I shall not identify the constituent's name, as that would be wrong. It is from a constituent who has always been a strong supporter of our party. We have been inundated with thousands of letters on the subject, as would be expected. The letter reads:

> "I cannot see how the Labour party could destroy our health service any more than it is at the moment".

That is a rather over-strong statement, which I do not accept, but one can understand that reaction when people see what is happening to this precious local unit. The letter continues, in more acceptable language:

> "The closure of Edgware Hospital as a community hospital serving all the needs of the local people is appalling. Don't tell us that this is not directly the Governments responsibility, it could be if they wanted it to be. The people most affected by the changes at the hospital will be the young people with young children and the elderly, who do not have cars to take them to the other hospitals who are supposed to make room for the people of Edgware . . . It is also very difficult to get to particularly in the busy times when it can take 50 minutes by car."

That is a figure that I have timed in my own car to get to, say, Northwick Park hospital. Anyway, it is a different catchment area. That must be emphasised.

The letter continues:

> "An elderly friend of mine was admitted as an emergency at Edgware only to find herself in a bed at Chase Farm, Enfield. With no family and only other elderly friends to rely on, this lady was stranded. It would have taken three buses for her friends"—

one can imagine how long it would take, waiting at bus stops, the changes, and so on—

> "to reach her at this hospital. They were frightened of travelling so far and also coming home in the dark. Incidentally, the staff kept reminding her that she was not in their catchment area and they did not know what the procedures would be for after-hospital care . . . She also had to pay for a minicab to take her home."

That is just one example of the thousands of letters that we have received. Do I accept the suggestions of my hon. Friend the Whip and just ignore them? Should I dismiss them and say, "Don't you complain. You are just voters and constituents. You don't matter. We've had consultations. We have thrown all the papers away?" That is impossible. No Government can ask their supporters in the House to put up with such a proposition. That is why the campaign will continue.

It gives me no pleasure to talk in those terms. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will understand how strongly my hon. Friends and I feel. I look forward to his reply. It is not too late for the Government to reconsider these matters. This is only the first stage. As has been said, the circumstances of the announcement were extremely regrettable and clumsy, but that can be corrected. The Government can think again.

There may be some arguments at the margin about some of the central London facilities, although I hesitate to agree too wholeheartedly with that because I would like them all to continue if they can be afforded. Outer London hospitals in general and the Edgware general hospital in particular are in a different position from the point of view of catchment, transport links, congestion and the needs of the elderly, the young in particular, and all those who need accident and emergency facilities.

My hon. Friend is a conscientious Minister. We thank him for his attentions in the past. He has acquired something of a reputation for being more reasonable in many ways than others, whom I shall not name, in his responses to our efforts to obtain a just solution to this difficult problem. I hope that he will be able to reassure us today, even as a temporary measure, by saying that the matter will be looked at again.

That is a heartfelt plea. I say with great sincerity that it is important that our local people are reassured. They have had many economic and social hammer blows in recent years and this is the last straw in the local area. They cannot put up with it and we want the Minister to say that he will reconsider the matter, take further advice and see what can be done. I would be most grateful if he could reassure us on this occasion.

6.41 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I concur entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes): this is a major issue in our constituencies. I have visited Edgware general hospital on a number of occasions. I have timed the journey to it by car. I have talked to patients inside and to its staff. They are unanimous that the accident and emergency department should continue.

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

I know the roads in the area as well as any Member of Parliament who is here because they go through my constituency. From Edgware general hospital to Northwick Park hospital is a journey of six and a half miles on congested roads. On a Saturday afternoon, early in the morning or during the second rush hour the journey can take anything up to an hour and a quarter or an hour and a half. At those times I usually have to make a detour in order to complete my journey in a reasonable time.

We are asking for a reappraisal. There is no local support for the closure of the accident and emergency department. Closure will add to the difficulties in other hospitals as people have to be sent further and further afield.

I trust that this is a listening Government. All Members of Parliament from the area feel strongly that the accident and emergency department should remain at Edgware. Even at this late hour, the matter can be reconsidered. A sensible Government can do sensible things at any time, just as an non-sensible Government can do non-sensible things at any time. We ask for a full reappraisal so that those of us who feel strongly about the matter are not forced to take action in the Lobby that we do not wish to take.

6.43 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me. Perhaps preference should have been given to hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst), but I am sure that he too will catch your eye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman was fortunate to catch my eye as I took the Chair.

Mr. Marshall: I should not complain about my good fortune, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you for your kindness now and for your kindnesses earlier this morning.

Edgware general hospital serves two wards in my constituency—Hendon and West Hendon wards. I know the accident and emergency department quite well because I have twice had to take my youngest son there. On Sunday I decided that I would drive to Barnet hospital to try to work out how long it would take me to take him there compared with Edgware. The difference is some 50 per cent. On a Sunday afternoon when there is relatively little traffic, that does not make a great deal of difference. During the week it would take substantially longer to take a child or a patient from Hendon to Barnet than it would from Hendon to Edgware.

Some of the wards served by Edgware general hospital are among the most socially and economically deprived in the London borough of Barnet and in the north-west of London. The West Hendon ward and the West Hendon estate have much social deprivation and car ownership is much lower than elsewhere in the borough.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is suggesting that in-patient facilities should be transferred from Edgware, which is relatively convenient for visitors, to Barnet general hospital, which will be inconvenient for visitors living in the West Hendon ward. Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to think again.

Earlier this afternoon I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State how much money would be spent on additional primary care facilities in the London borough of Barnet. We are told that some £210 million will be spent across London. But it is no use constituents using the Edgware general hospital being told that facilities are not going into West Hendon or Burnt Oak but into Hackney or Islington. That is not providing the additional facilities that are necessary to relieve the pressure on hospital facilities in north-west London.

As part of the change, we are told that in-patient facilities will go from Edgware general hospital to Barnet, the Royal Free and Northwick Park. My agent has twice been into the Royal Free in recent weeks and she says that it is already bursting at the seams. The thought of additional patients going to the Royal Free is just not on.

I should like my hon. Friend to tell the House what the net change in in-patient facilities will be when the new Barnet general hospital is completed. Obviously, in addition to the beds required at Barnet general for patients who currently use that hospital, beds will be needed for those transferred from Edgware. We should be told how many that will be.

The proposed closure of facilities at Edgware also concerns the London ambulance service. I have been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister on that subject from time to time and I should like an updated statement on the efficiency of the London ambulance service.

We should also be given some concept of the change in timing as a result of yesterday's announcement. When the subject went out to public consultation it was suggested that the facilities would be removed in April 1997. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has put certain conditions upon the decision announced yesterday and I should like my hon. Friend the Minister, if he can, to say how long he envisages it will be before those conditions are confirmed.

Some three years ago there was a proposal to close Barnet hospital and we all agreed with our hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) that the roads between Barnet and Edgware were so poor and the journey time between them so long that they were two different communities and that it was wrong to say that they should have to use the same hospital. Just as it was wrong to propose the closure of Barnet general hospital—my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) was also at the forefront of that battle—I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look again at these proposals and answer some of the specific questions that I have asked him this evening.

6.49 pm

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): I shall not go over the same ground as my hon. Friends, all of whose comments are worthy of consideration by the Government. A year or so ago I secured an Adjournment debate on this subject; my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) was present then, and may wish to remind himself of what I said.

Let me try to bridge the gap between what my hon. Friends and I think should be happening, and the Government's view. The Government see the current hospital closures in the light of facts, statistics and other rational considerations, but I ask them to consider the wider issues before making the wrong decision.

Let me explain the difference between the job of a politician and that of a civil servant. Let us suppose that a building development on the property of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East is proposed, and that the proposal is cost-effective, rational, logical and immensely convenient to many other people. Let us also suppose, however, that my hon. Friend and his neighbours take exception to the proposal, along with people living in the village and, indeed, the district.

It is the job of a politician—a Minister, perhaps—to say, "Of course it all sounds reasonable, but this Dykes character will not wear it, and nor will anyone else living in the district. Go away and find another plan that will not involve his house."

When I spoke to the my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State late last week, I pointed out that when a calculator is asked to add two and two it can produce only one answer: four. I ask Ministers to go back to their civil servants and say, "We want you to make a different calculation." They can very easily come up with a different plan.

We, as politicians, must recognise that there is another element in the equation: human feelings—human fears and reactions. We are talking not just about someone's house but about people's lives. We are talking about a place where people are born, where they may go in a traumatised state if they are ill or have an accident and where—alas—some of them will die, and be visited in their final days. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to bear in mind that deeply emotional dimension, rather than merely producing statistics to prove the clinical importance and the rationality of the decision.

We have heard about the clinical, financial and social considerations. My hon. Friends have spoken eloquently about the social considerations, and I spoke of them a year ago. However, there are also political considerations. I am not talking about the number of votes that my constituency will attract or lose; I am talking about intangible issues relating to people's real concerns.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will re-examine the position. No one wants to resort to extreme measures in the Lobby, but I repeat my commitment to vote against the Government if they will not reconsider—and I can give no assurance that I will not withdraw my support in the Lobby for their plans for London's health service as a whole. They are not considering the important element that we were elected to deal with: the human element. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reflect carefully on what I have said.

6.55 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). The fates have conspired in his favour: not only is the debate particularly opportune, but he has a good deal of time on his hands, not normally granted to those who have the luck to secure Adjournment debates.

I freely admit that I am not as well briefed on issues relating to Edgware and Barnet as others who have spoken, but I believe that issues surrounding the decisions that have been made also apply to other parts of London, particularly the part that I represent. As the hon. Member for Harrow, East pointed out, the nature of consultation is important: how much weight is given to the views of those who are consulted?

Many people throughout London feel that decisions were made at the outset, and that little or no regard has been paid to the subsequent consultation exercise other than very selectively. They feel that the views that they have been asked to submit on issues affecting the areas in which they live have been jettisoned, or at least placed so far down the scale as to be rendered virtually meaningless. People will rightly feel aggrieved about some aspects of what is happening to Edgware general hospital: what they want cannot be given to them, for reasons that have not been adequately explained.

Earlier today, in a question to the Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) defined democracy, or its purpose, as giving people what they want. Obviously, we cannot always do that; there are constraints on resources. I served on an area health authority, and subsequently a district health authority, from 1976 to 1990, so I am well aware of the difficult decisions that must be made. However, I strongly share the instinct voiced by the hon. Member for Hendon, North—the feeling that, if we cannot give people what they want, there must be glaringly compelling, overpowering reasons for not doing so. The technical assessments of what may or may not be right simply do not measure up to the task of providing what people want.

It is generally possible to make budgetary decisions from one year to another that can be improved in better times, or avoided in the light of experience. In the case of the closure of hospitals that have served generations of people in certain localities, however, much of the action that is now being suggested will prove to be irreversible. I feel that people and their Members of Parliament are fully entitled to know that every possible step has been taken, and every implication considered, before such irreversible decisions are made.

6.59 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am one of the four Members representing Barnet and last year we waged a local battle to maintain facilities at Barnet general hospital, which has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). We won that battle. It would be churlish to begin what I believe is a unhappy chapter this week without at least giving credit to the Government for saving Barnet general hospital at considerable expense to the taxpayer. We believe that the Government meant what they said, and certainly we approved last year when the Government decided to rebuild, modernise and improve Barnet general hospital at a cost of some £90 million.

Yesterday afternoon we heard the decision that the accident and emergency department at Edgware general hospital is to close when the facilities at Barnet general hospital are considered adequate to cope with patients from west Barnet and, doubtless, the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

My hon. Friend the Minister is known for listening and I would put it to him that when we offer the Government guidance on the health service and try to get them to take the right decisions on such issues as the Edgware general hospital, we cannot go by the old socialist bureaucratic

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

rule book that everywhere has to be identical. That is flying in the face of reality. Every health district is different.

Barnet health district has one of the most extraordinary differences from other health districts which must be taken on board. We have between the west and the east of Barnet the huge block of the A1. I have spoken about it before, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South for mentioning it tonight.

The A1 cuts through what was a network of little villages around London. Those little villages were joined up in a way which is now causing the most terrible traffic jams. People have had appalling traffic experiences. It is physically impossible for me or my wife to deliver three children to different schools in the locality between the hours of 8 and 9 in one car journey in the morning. The roads are seized up regularly.

The Government must recognise that our local traffic problems are reaching the point at which lives will be at risk in emergencies when people drive their cars through the traffic jams to try to get past the A1 with its rows of juggernauts. They will not always make it and there will be deaths.

I was grateful to have been permitted an intervention in earlier proceedings and to have received a reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that the Department of Transport will be consulted. Inevitably, recommendations will made and they will cost money. Let us face the facts now that consulting experts will cost money.

I am concerned about whether the Government will be able to deliver their promises of better health for the people of our locality. Secondly, we are a Government known for good management of resources. If, as a result of all this, when we have delivered a good hospital in Barnet general, but we have closed another accident and emergency department, it is found that the net cost—including the traffic costs and all the other problems—will be greater than keeping the unit open, we will not be known for good management and we will be hide-bound by the bureaucratic rule that we had to get rid of one accident and emergency department because Whitehall said so.

I understand the feelings expressed in the House this afternoon that other localities in Britain suffer even more. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) said that some of his constituents have to travel 60 miles to a hospital. In time, not in distance, it can be worse in Barnet. It can take two hours to reach a hospital when one is travelling through a solid traffic jam.

We are told that any emergency cases will go by ambulance. Certainly the blue light of the ambulance will carve a path through seized traffic, but I am worried that if someone is bleeding to death or dying of some illness, their wife, mother or brother may attempt to drive them to Barnet general hospital and get stuck in traffic. It is a real problem. We all see it as local Members of Parliament and we hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise the problem.

We hope that my hon. Friend will listen, as he is noted for listening, address the matter in his research and come back and candidly tell us what is in the report from the Department of Transport so that we can consider it before the closure of the accident and emergency department at Edgware general hospital.

7.6 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): May I first join the congratulations to the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on his success in gaining this evening's Adjournment debate the day after the secretive announcement about hospital changes in London, which included announcements about Edgware general hospital, and the day on which the Secretary of State had to be brought to the House, to use the rather colourful expression of one of my hon. Friends, kicking and screaming to account for herself.

I represent the constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green in north London. It is in the borough of Haringey, which adjoins Barnet. It is fair to say that in north London, certainly in the boroughs of Barnet, Enfield and Haringey, what happens in one of those boroughs certainly has a knock-on effect on health provision in the other boroughs.

Today we are debating the proposed closure of the accident and emergency facilities at Edgware general hospital. In Haringey and Enfield we were much concerned about the possible amalgamation of the accident and emergency facilities between the North Middlesex and Chase Farm hospital. We were aware that there could have been a knock-on effect on Barnet. When we consider what is happening in one area of north London, we should be mindful that a much wider area might be affected, so it is extremely important that we are having this debate this evening.

Let me say something about accident and emergency facility in a hospital. The hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) put his finger on it when he said that in essence they are the life blood of a hospital. If the accident and emergency unit is closed it signals the death knell of a hospital. That has happened in many of our hospitals, of which Bart's is a good example.

Something that has distressed me, both today and on other occasions when London Members of Parliament, from both sides of the House, have come together to discuss health issues, is the apparent anti-London bias among some Conservative Members. There is a feeling that London is well provided for. That is not the case. Indeed, what we have heard tonight about the future of Edgware general hospital shows that it is not over-provided for.

In the context of the wider picture, I draw attention to the Whittington and North Middlesex hospitals and the consequences for them of the proposed closure of the accident and emergency unit at Edgware. I am extremely worried about the effects of that.

Hon. Members have referred to the traffic problems in London, about the problems of having to travel some distance to a hospital and about the problems of the London ambulance service. I do not need to remind hon. Members about the difficulties and problems of the London ambulance service, which all Members, of whatever political persuasion, recognise. The Department of Health has shown a gross lack of management of that service. It has not given proper support to the excellent men and women who work for that service—a service to which we, as Londoners, owe such a great debt.

I end by referring to our responsibilities as Members of Parliament. The hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) touched on that. We all owe a duty to our constituents, no matter which party we represent. Week in, week out, at our constituency surgeries and in our postbags, we receive representations from our constituents. We come to this place not just to have the pleasure of listening to our colleagues or to the sound of our own voices; we are here as the voice of our constituents.

In London, as elsewhere, local people have a great attachment to their local hospitals. They identify with them. The great difficulty with health provision, and this is not often recognised by the Government or the bureaucrats, is that part of getting well and of feeling well cared for is not just the excellent professional care that people receive in their local hospitals, it is how people feel about the hospital itself. It is how the family—husband, wife, son or daughter—feel about it. Most important, it is what the community feels about the hospital. That is absolutely vital.

It appears that in dealing with Edgware general hospital, the Government, once again, have not taken into consideration the feelings of local people and those who use our local facilities. I urge the Government to think about the consequences for the Whittington and North Middlesex hospitals and also to think again about all the central London hospitals that have been so badly affected by the Government's policies.

7.14 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): At lunchtime today, I had the great privilege of representing the parliamentary Labour party when meeting a delegation of very young constituents of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who had come to the entrance of the House to ask us to save their hospital. I understand that most of those young children had been born in that hospital. They had spent time preparing leaflets and making a banner and badges to set out the case for their local hospital. They had obviously been encouraged to do so by their teachers and parents, but their strength of feeling about the hospital was made clear to me and to their local Members of Parliament, who are all Conservative Members.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, East on having secured this important debate. I congratulate his colleagues the hon. Members for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst), for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), and for Finchley (Mr. Booth) and the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). It was not easy for them to make the important contributions that they have made today. It is not easy to speak in a manner that will not find favour with one's Front Bench. It requires courage to do that and I congratulate them on it. I recognise the case that they are making, which is not for a change, but for a review; a ministerial reflection. That case has been well made today.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) that the manner of the announcement yesterday left just about everything to be desired. It was sneaked out in a written answer. The range of changes announced to the hospital service in London was so significant that it merited a statement in the House. Indeed, the private notice question to which the Secretary of State had to respond today—she came here because she had to, not because she wanted to—the number of interventions that were made and the fact that some hon. Members were still rising at the end of a generous hour's questioning show how strong the feeling is on both sides of the House.

That strength of feeling transcends party politics. Every Member of Parliament, regardless of party affiliation, wants to do his best for the constituents who elected him to come to this place to represent them. I congratulate both Conservative Members and Labour Members on doing just that. The Secretary of State for Health has done herself no good—nor, indeed, the office that she holds—by perpetually sneaking out difficult announcements under the cover of some other statement. Yesterday, it was the statement on the report of the Privileges Committee; not long ago the announcement of the increase in prescription charges was sneaked out on the day of the Northern Ireland announcement. That is no way to serve democracy and I deplore it.

This debate is important because it enables the House again to express its view—a virtually united view—to the Under-Secretary of State for Health. He can be in no doubt about the strength of feeling or the sincerity of the local Members of Parliament. It was deplorable that they were laughed at by the Government Whip. This is not a laughing matter. The constituents of those Conservative Members take it very seriously indeed. Those hon. Members perfectly properly have done what they should do: represented their constituents' views. That should have the sympathy of the House; it certainly should not be treated as a laughing matter.

The Secretary of State has never provided a debate on any health issue in Government time. Any such debate has always had to have been dragged out of the Department by a Member or it has been provided through an Opposition Supply Day. The narrow issue, although there is a wider context, is the plan to close the accident and emergency unit at Edgware general hospital. The claim is that the geographically nearby Barnet hospital will be able to cope.

The piecemeal way in which decisions have been made in London is deeply flawed. London will rue the day that those decisions are implemented. Of course, the points made about traffic issues are well taken, especially in the context of the shortcomings of the London ambulance service. To say that those facilities will be replaced with primary health care eventually is just not good enough. Local people and their elected representatives rightly worry that they will lose the accident and emergency service, and that primary health care will, at best, come later. I notice that the Secretary of State has not been forthcoming about how much is to be spent. More important, she has not been forthcoming not only about how much revenue expenditure is to be committed, but about when it will be committed. That failure to make a definite statement is clearly fuelling the uncertainty, as well it might.

Further investment in primary health care is right for London, but it will not lead to a reduction in the demand for secondary care. An increase in primary care may stimulate demand for secondary care and for the sort of services that are provided at Edgware general hospital. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green made the good point that the loss of an accident and emergency unit was the thin end of the wedge, and that the general closure of the hospital would not be far behind.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) said, this exercise is driven by financial considerations. No one could have taken any comfort from the light statement that the Secretary of State made about the revenue issues involved in that exercise.

Hon. Members have made the point about consultation. If one is to consult local people, one should do it in a meaningful way. One should be willing to listen to what they have to say. However, in the whole debate on secondary health care in London, no evidence exists of the Department listening to anyone. Clinicians, managers, local people, their elected representatives and members of local authorities are screaming at the Government to think again.

When the parliamentary Opposition say to the Government, "Think again", they satirise our position as requiring a review of a review. I have said this before and I make no apologies for saying it again. If one is going in the wrong direction, there is no shame in pausing, thinking and saying, "Perhaps we ought to turn around". That is the position that the Government find themselves in today. I urge the Minister to listen to what just about everyone is saying to the Department. I urge it to come out of its ivory tower, and to mix with real people rather than a handful of professional advisers.

Sir John Gorst: As the hon. Gentleman is talking about listening, may I tell him that, when the regional health authority finally considered the matter, the admiral of the fleet who chairs that organisation said—I cannot vouch for this, but I have been informed that it is so—that it was a meeting in public, but not a public meeting.

Mr. Brown: That is a new concept to me. The Government are clearly doing to the national health service what they have done to the Royal Navy, and they are using the same people to do it. Representing Swan Hunter shipyard, I speak with some feeling.

The exercising of political judgment is the real issue. The Secretary of State and her team of Ministers do not seem able to do that. They rely on specialist advisers. They do not allow anyone else to put a point across to them, no matter how widely the public support that point. They make decisions and do not have the courage to announce them proudly in the House of Commons, or in any other forum where they can be criticised, and then they seem to be slightly resentful of the fact that they are eventually dragged here to explain what on earth they think they are doing.

That is a hopeless state of affairs. The only way out of it is an independent review, which should be conducted not by the Government's political opponents—although that may happen soon enough—but by an independent body that can take evidence. The people who serve on it should be respected across the professions as well as local communities. A post-Tomlinson reassessment is needed because much of the evidence on which Tomlinson was founded is deemed by many people to be so deeply flawed.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, East on securing the debate. I assure him that I support his request for a review.

7.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on bringing this debate before the House. I have no doubt as to the great sincerity with which he has done that, or about the feelings that the matter has engendered in his constituents and in those of my hon. Friends. I congratulate all those who have spoken and, in particular, with one exception, I commend them on the brevity of their speeches. I welcome the fact that the debate has attracted expert witness from as far away as Lewisham and Newcastle. I have no doubt about the importance of the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East.

I should like to make one important point first. Edgware hospital will not close. As has been said, it will continue as a major provider of health care in the region. I shall briefly run through the matters that will be out for consultation, but, at Edgware hospital, there is likely to be a great range of out-patient services, rehabilitation, mental health facilities and palliative care, not forgetting minor accident treatment, which is likely to be used by many people—a large proportion of those now using the accident and emergency department.

I have been asked about beds.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: I think that I shall continue. The hon. Gentleman has already intervened at some length in the debate.

Currently, there are 747 beds in the Wellhouse Trust, excluding psychiatry. Following the changes, the potential capacity is 635, a reduction of 112. The House might like to know that, since the publication of the consultation document, an additional 50 beds have been opened at Northwick Park hospital, with additional plans already in hand for a further 62. An extra ward of 24 beds has already been brought into use at the Royal Free hospital, and the provision of an extra 44 beds in existing wards has been made.

Sir John Gorst: Listening to my hon. Friend, I wonder whether he knows or recognises the difference between when someone is ill or has some slight infirmity that requires hospital treatment, and when someone is traumatised by a sudden accident or heart attack? What an accident and emergency unit does is at the heart of what reassures people. He is telling us that all the peripheral things will be there. He is missing the point of the whole debate.

Mr. Sackville: I was seeking to answer a specific question about in-patient beds. I shall talk later about A and E departments and 999 attendances.

I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has said. The A and E department will not close until new facilities are in place—that is to say, an expanded modern A and E department at Barnet general hospital. Part of the £29 million phase 1a extension at that hospital will include new theatres, wards and other facilities and, of course, bringing the minor accident treatment service at Edgware into operation.

If I were asked briefly to give the reasons that have led to those proposals and the decision, I should divide them into two parts. First, it is true that we want services to be provided more efficiently in the whole region. We are constantly faced with the need to provide health services efficiently. There is indeed a financial aspect to this. There is no doubt that there is a subsidy to the local area which, to a great extent, is a result of the fact that we are currently providing acute services at two hospitals. All hon. Members who have spoken tonight know that this has been presented as an on-going problem which will probably get worse unless some action is taken.

Secondly, as has been mentioned, there are clinical reasons for the decision. We do not want any duplication of specialty services; we want modern facilities of a certain size so that the correct number of patients pass through, thus enabling us to provide, where possible, not only a consultant-led service but a consultant-provided service. We have heard too many stories recently about things going wrong in the NHS in the absence of consultants. That is particularly true of accident and emergency services where, whether or not it is possible to achieve this in the short term, we aim to provide 24-hour consultant cover. One cannot always expect junior doctors to provide the same level of expertise as doctors with years of experience.

Accident and emergency departments in particular—although it is to a certain extent true of other specialities—need a certain flow of patients. It is no good providing a very specialised service—the accident and emergency service is now recognised as such—if the doctors and nurses involved do not see enough cases to develop the expertise to deal with, for example, head injuries. One needs a service that is large enough to develop expertise, or one runs the risk of having unsafe services because for too much of the time one would be running them with too low a grade of medical staff and with staff who do not have sufficient exposure to special problems to be able to offer the best that is available today.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that the accident and emergency department at Edgware hospital is very heavily utilised?

Mr. Sackville: Yes. I believe that it has a volume in excess of 40,000 attendances a year and that something in the order of 25 "999" ambulances use it. It does not have 24-hour consultant cover. We are not aiming for the American model of trauma centres, but we at least want to ensure that anyone who attends an accident and emergency department as an emergency is seen by a consultant. That must be our aim because it can make an enormous difference to the outcomes. Certainly, we have to count beds and consider questions of access and distance, but, at the end of the day, it is the outcomes that are enormously important. That is what the service is all about.

I am well aware of the concern felt by many hon. Members about transport. I can confirm that it will be kept under review. The district health authority and the trust will want to ensure that the necessary action is taken where transport facilities are inadequate.

The issue of "999" ambulances is of grave concern to the public and has already been mentioned once or twice this evening. The London ambulance service has had problems that are unique to the capital. Of the 35-plus services in England, only the London ambulance service has failed to get anywhere near its target time. The target time involves responding to 90 to 95 per cent. of calls within 14 or 19 minutes, depending on whether the service involved is a rural or urban one.

I am glad to be able to make it clear that there has been a very marked improvement in recent months in the London ambulance service's performance from what I admit was a very low base. Not long ago, we were talking about performance figures of only 50 per cent. or just over. Recently, the figure has been 76 per cent., and the latest figures reveal that targets were reached in 74 per cent. or 75 per cent. of cases, which is a favourable development. I suspect that there is now a very much better atmosphere between management and staff than that which bedeviled the service.

Mr. Marshall: In effect, my hon. Friend is saying that the target is not hit in one in four cases. Does he accept that, if that rate continued, the proposal would be unacceptable?

Mr. Sackville: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we would expect a further improvement in performance. I can report to the House that there are already plans for extra resources to go directly into the Barnet and Edgware area. In fact, the local health authority is putting an extra £320,000 into local ambulance cover and two extra standby points for "999" ambulances have been provided.

Detailed work has recently been carried out into the journey times of the London ambulance service and it has been calculated that, with the extra resources, the average call-to-hospital time for Brent and Harrow residents would decrease by between one and two minutes with an increase for Barnet residents of just under half a minute compared with current performance. That is the effect that the extra resources, quite apart from the overall increases in performance, would have on journey times. I think that that is encouraging.

Mr. Dykes: In view of the distance between Barnet hospital, Edgware hospital, the Royal Free and the Northwick Park hospital, that input of two additional ambulances will be wholly inadequate.

Mr. Sackville: The question of ambulance cover and where ambulances are stationed has to be worked out on the basis of the demand at different times of the day and the week. We have to leave it to the London ambulance service to make those dispositions, but we demand that the service not only provides additional resources to cover that area but that it makes an overall improvement in performance of the sort that has been achieved all over the country.

The London ambulance service is funded at the same level as, or even better than, any other urban ambulance service. There is no reason on earth why it should not achieve the very high standards of many of the county ambulance services, which are probably as high as any in Europe. We look to the service to do just that.

Primary care is fundamental to all our arrangements.

Mr. Booth: Before my hon. Friend moves on to another subject, may I draw him a little further on transport? He said that he would keep it under review, but does he accept that, unless he has expert advice or an independent inquiry, as suggested by the hon. Member for

[Mr. Booth]

Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), there will be nothing to review because his Department is not responsible for transport?

Mr. Sackville: Access to hospitals is fundamental to any monitoring of the performance of those hospitals and especially that of accident and emergency departments. I assure my hon. Friend that the matter will not be forgotten or ignored.

I deal now with primary care because, clearly, all those matters involving the configuration of acute services and hospital services in our major city need to be accompanied by improvements in primary care, in GP services and in community services. I well understand that those improvements are needed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said, somewhat hesitantly—I will say it more robustly—that there would be £15 million of new, special funding spent over five years for primary care in the Edgware area. Current projects, to give an example, include the extension of home nursing for people who are terminally ill. There have been improvements in GP surgeries and there is an outreach ophthalmology clinic. Further planned projects include improved community therapy services, increases in the number of community nursing staff and a new GP surgery in Burnt Oak.

Mrs. Roche: Can the Minister tell me what community therapy services and community nurses have to do with the closure of an accident and emergency facility?

Mr. Sackville: I was making a general point about improvements in community and primary services. These are specially funded services rather than just what is normally provided by the health authority and the FHSA.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend has said that there will be an extra £15 million over five years. How much of that is coming in the current financial year?

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend has defeated me there. I shall have to write to him on that point.

Sir John Gorst: This is precisely the point that many of us have been making. The announcement has been made and no plans exist. The Minister does not even know the position.

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Gentleman is being unfair. We have to assume that the statement about £15 million over five years suggests that there will be fairly level spending over that period. I am sure that he is right to try to—

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Is not the Minister really saying that once the savings have been realised from the closure of the accident and emergency unit, they will then be ploughed back into primary care?

Mr. Sackville: I am not saying that at all. Primary care is already being improved in London, as it is all over the country because new primary facilities are provided everywhere. I have opened many new GP surgeries and community centres in the past two and a half years. The money is extra money from a special fund aimed at improving community and primary services in the area.

A more general point, which has been made several times, concerns the way in which the changes were announced. I must correct the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State came kicking and screaming to the House. I was here and I saw her neither kick nor scream during any part of the day. She answered a number of questions extremely convincingly.

On the question of whether my right hon. Friend should have made a statement—much has been made of this—all that I can say, speaking as a north-western Member, not a London Member, is that I have been involved in many major changes in the health service involving the closure of hospital facilities. They are always accompanied, as in this case, by major redevelopments of modern facilities. On no occasion have we made a statement on the subject to the House. I agree that this is a major package of changes, but I believe that there is not, formally speaking, any precedent for making a statement for the agreement of proposals for the reconfiguration of hospital services. It has never been suggested during the two and a half years in which I have been involved in dozens of such proposals.

Sir John Gorst: May I offer a different point of view to my hon. Friend? If the Birmingham theatre closed, I would not expect the nation to have a statement from the Secretary of State for National Heritage. However, if Covent Garden opera house was to be closed, I would expect the Secretary of State to come to talk about it. What has happened here is that two of the monuments of our medical service—Bart's and Guy's—are to be closed in a most surreptitious fashion, with no statement. I honestly believe that it is wrong for the Minister to say that just because no statements are made about Birmingham, no statements should be made about the cathedrals of the medical world.

Mr. Sackville: That is the sort of elitism to which we in the north-west have to listen a great deal. I am not particularly convinced by that argument. These are matters that have been discussed widely in the House and elsewhere over recent weeks and months.

Mr. Dowd: That may have been the Minister's judgment before. He must, however, have noticed, because he sat loyally through the private notice question this afternoon, that it ran for one hour and four minutes, yet there were still at least half a dozen Conservative Members waiting to get in. Does that not now, post hoc, suggest to him that the decision not to present the proposals as a statement was a miscalculation? Will he bear that in mind if something like this happens in future? Let us hope that no such thing happens.

Mr. Sackville: I note that Madam Speaker granted a private notice question; that is a matter for the Chair. I also note that yesterday, she did not grant a private notice question on the subject. This is not a matter I want to go into further.

Although I welcome very much the fact that the subject has been so ably aired by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East, I ask him to read *Hansard* and to reconsider some of his remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), the Government Whip. He may find that he went a little far, especially as he was talking about an hon. Member who, by long convention of the House, was not able to answer the charges made against him.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Even at this stage, the Minister must be aware of the depth of feeling on the matter. It should and must be looked at again, and it should be thrashed out. At the moment, it is a question of saying that the proposals will take effect in two years' time; there is time. I presume that the two years apply because there will be two years of consultation. We have had none yet.

Mr. Sackville: Uncomfortable as many of these decisions are, a decision has to be reached in these cases. I do not like being here at the Dispatch Box having to defend this decision because, like many decisions over much-loved local hospitals, it is not popular. People do not like it and they fear the worst as a result of hearing that local health facilities will be closed. I absolutely accept that there are grave concerns. On the other hand, I have spelt out some of the reasons why we have had to arrive at this decision. I have spelt out some of the factors that should reassure people that there will be no closure of the A and E, for example, until new facilities are in place.

As I have already told the House, I have been involved in several such decisions. No one ever likes them. The local health managers and often—it is true in this case—some or all of the clinicians agree with the decision; very few other people do because it is natural that people do not want health services to change. From our point of view, as those responsible for trying to provide a consistent health service around the country, we have to make changes. We have to modernise and we have to concentrate services from two or three places, sometimes into one, simply to provide them not only efficiently, but well and safely. I would not pretend that this decision is popular.

I regret very much that, from the tone of the debate, I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have apparently failed to convince the local Members of Parliament. I can tell them that we have considered these matters carefully. We are quite certain, as are all the others who work in the health service who have contributed to this decision, that the proposals will provide over the area as a whole a better and more modern health service.

Sir John Gorst: It is possible that the House might take a different view—we hoped that my hon. Friend the Minister might have taken such a view, but he has not so far suggested that. If the proposals were to be vetoed by the House on a vote, what would be the position in relation to the London closures? We should know that because it is important when deciding how to treat any vote on the subject.

Mr. Sackville: That is a procedural matter and it involves health considerations that go much wider than the subject of the debate. While I understand my hon. Friend's question, I am sure that he will forgive me if I do not attempt to answer it. All that I can say is that I believe that we have made the right long-term decision for the overall good of health care in the area. We have to make many such decisions.

I resent the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East that this is an example of the health service being unsafe in our hands. If we took no such decisions, never made any major changes to hospital provision and went on exactly as we were, we would probably have very few new hospitals, and would be treating fewer patients rather than more, and at greater cost. That is not a recipe for the NHS to be safe in anyone's hands.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that he misunderstood—I specifically paid tribute to the need for the Government to have disciplined financial management over all matters and all installations in the national health service. I have always supported that policy in general, and think that everybody should do so. I thought that we had made our views crystal clear and I am sorry that my hon. Friend does not seem to be grasping the reality.

The perception is wrong; the public do not trust the process. I am sad and regret having to say that they do not feel that they can accept my hon. Friend's assurance that the consultations have been genuine. The Government have been going through pretend motions, then ignoring and dismissing the views and the thousands of opinions, including expert medical ones. The trouble is that the Government never reassure the public in respect of any such instances. That is why we continue to fight in this case to see whether the process has been genuine and other opinions against the closure of the accident and emergency unit have been heeded. Why should they not be heeded? Why should not the Government say that they disagree with the regional health authority and will keep the facilities open because the hospital is needed?

Mr. Sackville: The Government find themselves agreeing with the regional health authority that we have to make the changes in order to provide an efficient, safe and high-quality health service over the area.

If, over the past few years, we had not made any decisions about hospital provision—many of them unpopular—we would not be treating 120 patients for every 100 that we treated four or five years ago. We would not have better outcomes—

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: No, I shall not as I am just about to finish my speech.

It is sometimes necessary to take decisions which may not always be popular, but which we know to be in the best interests of providing a modern health service in the long term. The decision that we are discussing is no exception.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Eight o'clock, till Tuesday 18 April.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 March 1995

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the planned timetable for the extension of existing prisons with new house blocks; and what are his estimates of the cost of the programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the timetable and cost of the programme currently underway to build additional houseblocks at existing prisons.

Construction of most of the houseblocks in question has now begun (the last two are programmed to start in May this year). Although completion dates vary, it is planned that six of the new blocks will be ready for use by early 1996, and the remaining ten will become available for occupation during the course of the 1996–97 financial year. The overall cost of the programme is £115 million, including £31 million for ancillary facilities needed to support the increases in population at the establishments concerned. When complete, the programme will deliver 2,000 places.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the net operating cost per prisoner place for each of the prisons and remand centres excluding contracted-out prisons in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995. [14571]

Mr Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the net operating cost per prisoner place for 1994–95 for each of the prisons and remand centres in England and Wales, excluding contracted out prisons.

Figures for 1994–95 will be published later this year in the Prison Service Annual Report for 1994–95. Figures for 1993–94 have been published in Section A of Part Two of the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Private Sector Contracts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the names of those companies who have won contracts to run court or prison escort services; and what was the cost of those contracts in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about companies who have won contracts to run court or prison escort services and the cost of the contracts.

Four contracts have been awarded for prisoner escort and custody services. The names of the contractors and the estimated cost of the contracts over five years at time of award, are as follows:

Area 3—Securicor Custodial Services Ltd:

£96 million

Area 4—Group 4 Court Services Ltd:

£47 million

Area 6—Group 4 Court Services Ltd:

£69 million

Area 7—Group 4 Court Services Ltd:

£41 million

The cost of the contracts for Areas 3 and 7, which are already in operation is 25 per cent below the cost of previous arrangements. This represents a saving of £10 million a year. The cost of the contracts for Areas 4 and 6 is estimated to be 15 per cent below the cost of previous arrangements. This represents a saving of £13 million a year.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the companies which have won contracts to run contracted-out prison establishments; and what was the cost of those contracts in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the companies who have won contracts to run contracted out prisons and the cost of the contracts.

Four contracts have been awarded for contracted out prisons. The names of the contractors and the estimated cost of the contracts over five years at time of award, are as follows:

Wolds Prison—Group 4 Remand Services Ltd:

£21.5 million

Blakenhurst Prison—UK Detention Services Ltd:

£57 million

Doncaster Prison—Premier Prison Services Ltd:

£66 million

Buckley Hall Prison—Group 4 Prison Services Ltd:

£33 million

The cost of these prisons is 15—25 per cent below the cost of comparable public sector establishments. This represents a saving of £5 million a year from the four prisons already under private management.

Key Performance Indicators

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest figures for the key performance indicators for each prison from 1 April 1994 to the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the latest figures for performance against the Prison Service's key performance indicators from 1 April 1994 to the latest available date.

The available information is set out in the enclosed tables. I should explain the following points:

KPI 1 escapes:	the attached figures show the number of escapes from each prison, including escapes from escort outside the prison (but excluding prisoners who were immediately recaptured) from 1 April to 31 December 1994 inclusive.
KPI 2 assaults:	the attached figures show the number of offences of assault by prisoners on staff, prisoners and others which are proved in disciplinary proceedings and which result in a punishment being awarded, and the rate of assaults as a proportion of the average population (expressed at an annual rate), from 1 April to 31 December 1994 inclusive.
KPI 3 overcrowding:	no prisoners have been held three to a cell in units of accommodation certified for one person during the current financial year.
KPI 4 sanitation:	96 per cent. of prisoners had access to sanitation 24 hours a day at the end of January 1995. We are on course to provide all prisoners with access to sanitation at all times by the end of February 1996.
KPI 5 purposeful activity:	the attached figures show the average number of hours a week which prisoners spent in regime activities in the period 1 April to 31 December inclusive.
KPI 6 time unlocked:	the attached figures show the average number of hours which prisoners were unlocked on weekdays at the end of January 1995.
KPI 7 visits:	all establishments have provided prisoners with the opportunity to exceed minimum visiting entitlements throughout 1994–95.
KPI 8 cost per place:	information about the average cost per prisoner place for individual establishments is not available in a meaningful form until after the end of the financial year, because of variations in the phasing of expenditure in-year. Figures for 1993–94 are published in the Prison Service's Annual Report for that year, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Young offender institutions

		KPI 2: Assaults			
Closed	*KPI 1: Escapes*	*Number*	*Percentage of average population*	*KPI 5: Regime Hours*	*KPI 6: Time Unlocked (Weekdays)*
Aylesbury	0	71	43.5	26.5	9.3
Castington	0	51	24.6	24.3	9.3
Deerbolt	4	57	19.8	25.1	10.8
Dover	0	29	14.5	23.4	9.2
Glen Parva	2	127	22.2	22.5	9.0
Guy's Marsh	0	14	10.2	42.0	13.3
Hollesley Bay[1] (Warren Hill)	0	29	11.6	27.4	8.0
Huntercombe	0	29	17.4	26.4	10.4
Onley	2	126	35.8	24.0	12.0
Portland	0	28	10.1	29.6	10.7
Stoke Heath	1	44	22.2	28.9	12.5
Swinfen Hall	0	13	9.6	30.8	10.1
Werrington	9	62	77.3	42.3	13.5
Wetherby	7	26	24.4	37.8	12.0

[1] Includes Hollesley Bay (open prison) for assaults.

		KPI 2: Assaults			
	KPI 1: Escapes	*Number*	*Percentage of average population*	*KPI 5: Regime hours*	*KPI: 6 Time unlocked (weekdays)*
Open YOIs					
Hatfield	—	12	9.9	38.4	13.3
Prescoed[1]	—	—	—	43.2	—
Thorn Cross	—	20	15.9	46.4	12.5
Remand Centres					
Brinsford	3	94	27.5	23.7	9.9
Feltham	0	172	28.8	32.3	8.0
Hindley	1	59	27.9	22.6	8.5

		KPI 2: Assaults			
	KPI 1: Escapes	*Number*	*Percentage of average population*	*KPI 5: Regime hours*	*KPI: 6 Time unlocked (weekdays)*
Lancaster Farms	0	63	24.3	23.6	12.0
Low Newton	0	38	20.8	23.0	8.5
Moorland	0	114	33.0	25.2	10.5
Northallerton	0	31	25.4	23.8	10.3
Reading	0	36	27.3	27.0	10.5
Rochester	2	53	29.3	30.6	11.5

[1] Precoed appears under Usk for assaultss and time unlocked.

Female establishments

		KPI 2: Assaults			
	KPI 1: Escapes	*Number*	*Percentage of average population*	*KPI 5: Regime hours*	*KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)*
Local					
Holloway	5	127	34.3	20.2	9.5
Pucklechurch	0	32	67.7	17.8	12.0
Closed					
Bullwood Hall	1	16	17.6	31.1	12.5
Cookham Wood	0	20	18.0	30.0	10.5
New Hall	3	41	31.6	28.3	12.0
Styal	1	28	16.2	35.1	13.3
Open					
Askham Grange	—	1	1.3	48.9	24.0
Drake Hall	—	3	1.8	37.1	24.0
East Sutton Park	—	0	0	37.1	24.0

Local Prisons/Adult Remands

		KPI 2: Assaults			
	KPI 1: Escapes	*Number*	*Percentage of average population*	*KPI 5: Regime hours*	*KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)*
Bedford	1	24	10.5	22.9	10.0
Belmarsh	0	75	13.5	15.9	11.2
Birmingham	1	73	12.7	20.9	7.2
Blakenhurst	0	77	16.4	26.2	14.0
Bristol	0	21	6.3	23.3	11.8
Brixton	1	68	15.1	19.4	8.8
Bullingdon	0	77	16.6	24.1	10.5
Canterbury	0	8	4.2	24.9	12.0
Cardiff	0	46	14.9	24.5	11.9
Chelmsford	1	25	9.2	16.1	7.5
Doncaster[1]	1	132	36.2	—	12.0
Dorchester	0	4	2.7	21.4	10.3
Durham	2	31	6.8	19.3	10.5
Elmley	1	47	10.3	23.0	10.5
Exeter	1	31	10.5	22.4	9.0
Gloucester	0	30	16.1	22.0	9.5
Highdown	0	60	14.0	21.3	11.0
Holme House	2	31	6.8	16.3	9.0
Hull	1	68	23.1	21.0	12.0
Leeds	0	118	15.2	15.8	7.0
Leicester	1	36	14.3	23.0	10.0
Lewes	1	25	10.0	18.2	8.2
Lincoln	2	35	7.7	20.3	11.2
Liverpool	2	55	6.1	17.7	7.2
Manchester	1	56	9.0	19.9	13.1
Norwich	1	41	14.7	22.4	9.0
Pentonville	2	68	12.6	28.0	10.5
Preston	1	48	13.0	19.1	6.5

Local Prisons/Adult Remands

	KPI 1: Escapes	KPI 2: Assaults		KPI 5: Regime hours	KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)
		Number	Percentage of average population		
Shrewsbury	1	26	12.7	21.9	10.0
Swansea	4	27	17.2	22.1	12.0
Wandsworth	0	112	16.8	24.2	10.0
Winchester	0	29	9.9	22.1	7.5
Wolds	0	39	16.4	22.5	13.8
Woodhill	0	81	20.8	24.8	12.0
Wormwood Scrubs	0	38	6.3	22.9	11.2

[1] Doncaster opened June 1994. A comparable figure is not available for regime hours. Figure for time unlocked is agreed performance as specified in the establishment contract.

Performance against key targets

Dispersals

	KPI 1: Escapes	KPI 2: Assaults		KPI 5: Regime hours	KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)
		Number	Percentage of average population		
Frankland	0	40	12.7	20.3	10
Full Sutton	0	53	13.1	25.1	10.5
Long Lartin	0	29	10.9	22.4	11
Parkhurst	0	30	17.5	19.1	10.3
Wakefield	0	24	4.6	21.0	11.4
Whitemoor	6	90	25.5	21.3	10.3

Category B

	KPI 1: Escapes	KPI 2: Assaults		KPI 5: Regime hours	KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)
		Number	Percentage of avergae population		
Albany	0	15	4.8	26.0	11.3
Blundeston	0	25	8.7	23.6	12.0
Dartmoor	3	29	7.4	24.4	10.0
Garth	0	19	5.0	20.2	9.1
Gartree	0	8	3.9	28.9	12.3
Grendon	0	4	5.3	28.8	13.0
Kingston	0	2	1.9	26.5	12.5
Maidstone	0	23	6.7	22.0	11.4
Nottingham	1	8	5.2	26.0	12.0
Swaleside	1	41	10.9	23.4	10.0

Open Prisons (male)

	KPI 1: Escapes	KPI 2: Assaults		KPI 5: Regime hours	KPI 6: Time unlocked (weekdays)
		Number	Percentage of average population		
Ford	—	5	1.5	37.5	13.3
Hewell Grange	—	1	0.8	42.6	24.0
Hollesley Bay[1]	—	—	—	39.0	24.0
Kirkham	—	1	0.3	49.0	13.5
Leyhill	—	0	0	40.7	24.0
Morton Hall	—	2	1.7	47.3	24.0
North Sea Camp	—	0	0	62.8	16.5
Rudgate	—	1	0.5	47.7	14.0
Spring Hill	—	1	0.7	39.8	16.0
Standford Hill	—	2	0.7	42.3	14.5
Sudbury/Foston	—	1	0.3	45.7	14.5

[1] Hollesley Bay: assault figures appears under Warren Hill.

Prisoners

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of hours prisoners spent out of cell for each of the last 20 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average number of hours prisoners spend out of cell for each of the last 20 years.

At the end of March 1994, prisoners were spending an average of 10.6 hours out of cell on weekdays. In January 1995 (the latest available information), this figure had increased to 11.2 hours.

It is not possible to provide figures for each of the last 20 years, as information on the average number of hours prisoners spend out of cell was not collected before April 1993, when the Prison Service became an executive agency. Nor is it possible to provide average figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95. The information which is routinely collected and monitored relates to the number of prisoners unlocked for at least 12 hours on weekdays, which is one of the Service's key performance indicators, not the average time prisoners are unlocked.

Young Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of recorded incidents of self-harm among 15-year-old boys and girls by individual penal institution in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of recorded incidents of self harm among 15 year old boys and girls in each penal institution in each of the last 10 years.

I regret that the information you have requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Illegal Immigration

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures he proposes to take to control, at the channel ports of entry, illegal immigration from the rest of the European Union into the United Kingdom;

(2) what measures he proposes to take to control further illegal immigration.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Immigration officers apply a document check to all passengers arriving at Dover, and examine non-EEA nationals to assess their admissibility under the immigration rules. In addition, immigration officers conduct surveillance on car and freight traffic to combat clandestine immigration by concealment in vehicles and containers. The number of clandestine entrants detected in the Dover area increased from 256 in 1993 to 379 in 1994.

My right hon. and learned Friend recently announced measures, including additional resources for the immigration and nationality department and the immigration appellate authorities, aimed at speeding up the processing of asylum applications.

We have been examining further ways in which the system of immigration control can be made more effective and hope to bring forward new measures shortly.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he proposes to instigate within the Council of Ministers further to control illegal immigration into the European Union through all European Union ports of entry.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government strongly support measures to combat illegal immigration into the European Union and are participating actively in a number of measures currently under consideration in the third pillar. They do not at present have any separate initiatives of their own to propose.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received from the governor of Wandsworth prison in respect of the background details of the suicides that have taken place in Wandsworth prison in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 20 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what reports he has received from the governor of Wandsworth prison in respect of the background details of the suicides that have taken place in Wandsworth prison in each of the last three years.

Each death in custody is always the subject of an internal Prison Service investigation, the results of which are then reported to Prison Service headquarters. Each of the six suicides which have occurred at Wandsworth prison in the past three years was reported in this way. Ministers are not routinely briefed on the content of these investigation reports.

Mr. Abeey Dykes

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to deport Mr. Abeey Dykes following his conviction. [14430]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The question of deportation will be considered in the light of whatever sentence is imposed by the court.

Street Watch Schemes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a list of all the street watch schemes, by police force area, which have been registered with his Department. [14368]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is not a requirement to register street watch schemes with the Home Office.

I have today placed in the Library a list of all the street watch schemes, by police force area, which are known to us.

We are working closely with forces in England and Wales, and Crime Concern, for the development of street watch. Where they are established, street watch schemes have been very successful in reducing crime.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility, and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of *(A)* civil service job reductions due to privatisations, *(B)* civil service job reductions due to contracting out, *(C)* civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, *(D)* the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and *(E)* total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [14765]

Mr. Howard: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in annexe 3 of my Department's annual report (CM 2508). Annexe 4 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohue: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14514]

Mr. Howard: The polling and public survey organisations employed by the Home Department since 1 April 1993 are in the following list, together with the purpose of research undertaken by those organisations. The fee paid to successful contractors is not shown as this is regarded by the Central Statistical Office as a matter of commercial confidentiality. The total amount of money spent was £661,000.

	Organisation	*Purpose of Research*
1.	*Carrick James*	*Cycle helmets*
	Fieldwork:	April 1993
	Purpose:	Survey of young people between the ages of 10—16 years in Great Britain regarding cycle riding, cycle helmet wearing and advertising recall.
2.	*Cragg Ross Dawson*	*Specials Creative and Development Research*
	Fieldwork:	April 1993
	Purpose:	Reactions for new advertising campaign on the views of Specials.
3.	*Harris Research Centre*	*Eleven discussion groups plus an interview survey of 1,200 women and ethnic minorities in England, Scotland and Wales.*
	Fieldwork:	June—July 1993
	Purpose:	To explore reasons why potentially eligible women and members of ethnic minority groups might wish or not wish to apply for work as firefighters.
4.	*Sample Surveys*	*Car Crime Advertising*
	Fieldwork:	September 1993
	Purpose:	To examine recall of car crime campaign and changing attitudes to car crime.
5.	*GFK Marketing Services*	*Smoke Alarms Home Audit*
	Fieldwork:	September 1993
	Purpose:	To measure smoke alarm ownership and maintenance procedures.
6.	*OPCS*	*Omnibus Survey questions on public experiences of and attitudes towards the police. 2,000 adults in England and Wales.*
	Fieldwork:	October 1993
	Purpose:	To assess public response to the police service Quality of Service Programme.
7.	*BMBR*	*Special Constables Recruitment advertising research*
	Fieldwork:	November 1993
	Purpose:	To examine awareness of the attitudes towards Special Constabulary, including recent recruitment advertising.
8.	*Research Surveys of Great Britain*	*Witness intimidation: Strategies for prevention*
	Fieldwork:	November—December 1993
	Purpose:	One public survey was carried out by Research Surveys of Great Britain to obtain information on people's experience of intimidation. (Another survey was done by Home Office Staff).

	Organisation	Purpose of Research
9.	*BMRB*	*Smoke Alarms Post Advertising Research*
	Fieldwork:	January 1994
	Purpose:	Survey of adults in England and Wales regarding smoke alarm ownership and maintenance carried out on them.
10.	*Reflexions Market Research Ltd.*	*Special Creative Development*
	Fieldwork:	February 1994
	Purpose:	A survey of a number of adults in England asking the opinions of new advertising executions for the specials; including perceived target audience, communication, motivation potential (to joining the specials), style and tone of voice of advertising.
11.	*BMBR*	*Smoke Alarms*
	Fieldwork:	February 1994
	Purpose:	Post advertising campaign survey to measure fire precautions in general.
12.	*BMRB*	*Specials Advertising Evaluation*
	Fieldwork:	March 1994
	Purpose:	Awareness of advertising, knowledge, awareness of specials.
13.	*BMRB*	*International Commercial Crime Survey*
	Fieldwork:	March–April 1994
	Purpose:	Information gathered will help development of national and local government strategies for crime prevention. All Businesses could benefit; reduction in crime should also benefit customers.
14.	*SCPR*	*Survey of offenders on probation.*
	Fieldwork:	April 1994
	Purpose:	The survey aimed to give a picture of the types of offender on probation and to provide quantitative information on the workings of the probation service.
15.	*NOP*	*Assessing the expandable side-handled baton*
	Fieldwork:	May 1994
	Cost:	£3,888
	Purpose:	Part of a project to assess the merits of expandable side handled batons involved a face-to-face survey to assess the attitudes of the public towards the acceptability of the new baton.
16.	*Tim Grosvenor Associates*	*Fifteen discussion groups amongst residents of five areas currently served by 'Parish Special Constables.'*
	Fieldwork:	May—June 1994
	Purpose:	To assess public reactions to the Parish Special Constables initiative.
17.	*NOP*	*Partners against Crime Campaign*
	Fieldwork:	September—October 1994
	Purpose:	To assess level of support for local community crime prevention and Neighbourhood Watch
18.	*Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.*	*Immigration and Nationality User Survey*
	Fieldwork:	October 1994
	Purpose:	People in the Granada TV region were surveyed on the qualitative survey of applicants and representatives to establish the most important quality of service aspects from a users prospective. Concentrates on issues such as provision of information, speed of response, clarity of correspondence, etc. if not concerned with users' perception of the decision.
19.	*OPCS*	*Census of mothers in prison*
	Fieldwork:	November—December 1994
	Purpose:	A survey of imprisoned mothers to determine their numbers, and arrangements for the care of their children.
20.	*SCPR*	*Survey of 500 persons living in the London area and currently eligible to apply for United Kingdom citizenship. Applicants and non-applicants questioned about their reasons for applying/not applying.*
	Fieldwork:	February—April 1995
	Purpose:	To assist workload planning by B4 Division of Immigration and Nationality Department.
21.	*RSGB*	*Omnibus Survey questions on attitudes to gambling and casinos.*
	Fieldwork:	February 1995
	Cost:	£3,000
	Purpose:	To provide background information for a review of current policy on gambling.

Commission for Racial Equality

Sir Ivan Lawrence:: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the next quinquennial review of the Commission for Racial Equality is due to take place. [15446]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The quinquennial review of the Commission for Racial Equality is now beginning and it will continue into the summer.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure of *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14630]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Publicity campaigns and publications involving expenditure of more than £50.000 between 1 April 1993 and 1 March 1995 were as follows:

a) television advertising to encourage home owners to purchase, install and maintain smoke alarms;

b) press advertising to encourage applications to the accelerated promotion scheme for graduates in the police;

c) television and press advertising and the publication of brochures to recruit more special constables;

d) television advertising to encourage people to register to vote;

e) press advertising to encourage the public to renew passports in good time;

f) press advertising to encourage people to become members of boards of visitors;

g) press advertising to encourage applications to the Prison Service accelerated promotion scheme;

h) the production of leaflets to support the "Make a Difference" initiative to encourage more people to undertake voluntary work;

i) the production of a booklet advising on protecting people and property against bombs;

j) television, radio and press advertising and publications about car crime prevention;

k) publication of the Citizenship Foundation pack "You, Me, Us" designed to help primary school children develop their moral and social responsibility reasoning;

l) publication of the home security leaflet and poster "Beat the Burglar";

m) publication of the truck theft leaflet, poster and sticker "A load on Your Mind";

n) publication of "Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention" advising on security on a wide range of subjects;

o) television, radio and press advertising to encourage the general public to get involved in preventing crime in their community and publication of the booklet "Partners Against Crime"; and

p) publication of the leaflet "Domestic Violence—Don't Stand For It" directed at victims of domestic violence.

The other information requested could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Transport Accidents (Legal Process)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he or his Ministers have had with the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and the Transport Secretary on reforms to the legal process of inquiry and potential prosecution following transport accidents leading to injury or death.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Discussions between Ministers are confidential. However, a Home Office-led interdepartmental group of officials was established in November 1990 to consider the relationship between coroners' inquests and public inquiries into disasters. Its membership included officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Department of Transport.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service jop reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [14764]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals—from 1993 onwards—and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Services Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service paybill for my Department can be found in the tables on pages 97 and 98 of my Department's annual report (CM 2804). The table on page 99 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Konver II Programme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those projects that have been submitted to the European Union for inclusion in the Konver II programme. [14332]

Mr. Eggar: I have not sent any projects to the European Commission. The hon. Member has misunderstood the procedure.

On 1 July 1994, the Commission published a notice outlining the purposes of Konver grants, setting out criteria for geographical eligibility, and inviting national programmes, not projects, to be sent to it by 1 October. After revising its views on the determination of the eligible geographical areas, it subsequently amended the date for programmes to 1 March 1995, when the British programme was duly sent. On 21 December 1994, the Commission determined the financial allocation available to each member state and drew up a "provisional" list of eligible geographical areas.

The national programmes set out the purposes for which member states propose to use Konver grants in more detail, but consistently with the terms of the notice. They do not describe individual projects. They also include member states' final proposed lists of eligible areas.

When, later this year, the British programme has been agreed with the Commission, applications for grants to individual projects will be considered by the Government in accordance with the terms of the programme. Allocations and payments of grant will proceed thereafter.

I am aware that many prospective applicants have, on their own initiative, been preparing applications for some time. The Government offices in the English regions, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be glad to advise them, so far as is possible while the final terms of the British programme—like those for other member states—are not yet agreed with the Commission.

Deregulation Advisory Committee

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what results have been achieved following the establishment of the deregulation advisory committee; how many members it comprises; how many sub-committees it contains; how many members comprise those sub-committees; what is the total cost of public funds of the initiative in terms of *(a)* staff salaries, *(b)* office costs and *(c)* incidentals and if he will make a statement on the progress he hopes to make in the next three months. [14812]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The deregulation task force has 16 members, including the chairman, the right hon. Francis Maude. It has a flexible working structure. At present, it is focusing on 10 broad areas of work: small business/licensing, enforcement, tax, health and safety, food and drink, environment, financial services, employment, transport and longer-term issues. Fourteen additional business representatives currently assist the task force on particular issues.

Task force members are not paid for their work, but they receive travel and subsistence expenses. Administrative support for the task force is provided by the deregulation unit in my Department, which also has the overall task of stimulating and monitoring progress to minimise regulatory burdens. Details of the total running costs of the deregulation unit are available in the DTI annual report which was published on 2 March and is available for inspection in the Library of the House.

The deregulation task force will issue its first annual report soon.

Telecommunications

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he expects to present to Parliament the official text of part II of the European Green Paper on telecommunications liberalisation;

(2) when he expects to produce the explanatory memorandum from the Government on the implications of the European Commission Green Paper, part II, on telecommunications liberalisation.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I expect to submit to Parliament shortly the official text of part II of the European Commission's Green Paper on the liberalisation of telecommunications infrastructure and an explanatory memorandum on it.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Tam Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Sir Charles Powell about the western response to the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [15102]

The Prime Minister: None.

Terrorist Organisations (Disarming)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister when a Minister first intimated publicly that the Government's position on disarming terrorist organisations had changed to allow Ministers to discuss the possibility and modality of disarming. [14854]

The Prime Minister: The Government's line regarding dialogue with Sinn Fein and the decommissioning issue has been consistent throughout. It is important not to confuse the issues of ministerial participation in exploratory dialogue and Sinn Fein participation in inclusive talks.

We have always made it clear that, in judging the right time for ministerial involvement, we have to be clear that Sinn Fein is willing to address all necessary issues and that progress has been made in having serious and substantive exploration of them. Ministers need to be clear that, if and when they take part, constructive discussion, particularly in achieving substantial progress on the decommissioning of arms, would be facilitated and accelerated by their joining the dialogue.

But, as a matter of principle and political reality, Sinn Fein cannot be admitted into an inclusive political talks process until substantial progress has been made on the decommissioning of weapons. This is exactly the point my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made in Belfast on 14 December last year.

Public Holidays

Sir David Steel: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in respect of the entitlement of employees of the NHS to time off on the national holiday planned for 8 May; and if he will make it his policy that the status of the employers within the health service will have no bearing upon employee entitlement to public holidays. [14694]

The Prime Minister: It is the Government's policy that the national holiday on 8 May will be observed by all national health service employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, instead of the customary bank holiday on May 1. In recognition of the different traditions regarding bank holidays in Scotland, it will be for NHS employers in Scotland to decide whether or not to give staff a holiday on 8 May.

Entitlement to bank and public holidays for NHS staff employed on national terms and conditions is governed by an agreement of the General Whitley Council.

Royal Family (Publicity Services)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what was the expenditure for each year since 1984 in support of the royal family in respect of publicity services; and if he will provide a breakdown between different members of the royal family. [14611]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Expenditure by COI on publicity services for the royal household for each year since 1984–85 is as follows:

1984–85	£182,000
1985–86	£172,000
1986–87	£181,000
1987–88	£205,000
1988–89	£183,000
1989–90	£375,000
1990–91	£292,000
1991–92	£318,000
1992–93	£237,000
1993–94	£290,000

Further information is not available in the form requested.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report,* column *267,* if he is now able to publish research carried out by his Department on the lengths of periods of disqualification from unemployment benefit following a finding of voluntary unemployment. [14369]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 20 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked to reply to your question about research we commissioned into periods of disqualification from unemployment benefit.

When I wrote to you on 24 November, I undertook to forward the results of this research, which were expected by the end of 1994. May I reiterate my letter to you of 18 January which contained details of the findings.

Information about periods of disqualification from unemployment benefit, including those imposed following a finding voluntary unemployment, was gathered as part of research we commissioned into wider adjudication issues. I am enclosing an extract from the research data which provides a snap shot picture of average periods of disqualification imposed during October 1994. The results show that 29% of disqualifications overall are for the full six months and that the average period for the remainder is 89 days. For leaving voluntary cases the proportion of disqualifications for the full six months is 25%.

I hope this is helpful.

NB: I have arranged for a copy of the annexes to be placed in the Library.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14511]

Miss Widdecombe: The Department funds a comprehensive range of research and evaluation work to assist in achieving the aim of promoting a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market. The forward programme is advertised in the *Employment Gazette* and potential contractors, some of whom may conduct polling and public survey work, are invited to register an interest in projects within the programme. Contracts are awarded following competitive tendering in line with Government purchasing procedures. Details of all research and evaluation work commissioned within the Employment Department group are published in our annual reports on research and in regular research updates in the *Employment Gazette*.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15096]

Miss Widdecombe: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Department and the Employment Service agency, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by civil service statistics.

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for the Department can be found in annexe A, table (iv) of the Department's annual report, Cm 2805. Table (iii) gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library.

The remaining information sought can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Burns International

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what contact his officials have had with Burns International to discuss a variation to the tender to provide his Department with office services; and if he will make a statement; [14874]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that a full cost assessment is made of any changes proposed by Burns International in its tender for office services and that they are compared against the cost of the in-house bid. [14876]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 20 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions relating to various aspects of the recent successful tender by Burns International (Burns) for Regional Office Support Services within the Employment Service (ES).

My decision to award contracts to Burns in ES Northern Region, Office for Scotland and Office for Wales was reached following a market test carried out in accordance with Efficiency Unit guidance. It represents best value for money for the ES and therefore better value for money to the taxpayer. Since that decision in January, discussions have taken place between Burns and my people focusing on aspects of service delivery and final contract price. Such post tender negotiations, with our preferred tenderer, are part of our standard procurement process and are undertaken in order to finalise contractual detail prior to contract signature. I can assure you that any changes proposed by Burns in order to meet the requirements set out in the competition for this work will not involve amending the price that they will charge the ES.

Within ES market testing, it is our policy to ensure that any variations to the tender price which result from post tender negotiations are fully assessed in line with Efficiency Unit guidance. This assessment involves full financial comparisons with the tender proposals of other bidders, including the in house bid team, to ensure that the preferred tenderer continues to offer the ES best value for money.

I hope this is helpful.

Stockport and High Peak Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Stockport and High Peak training and enterprise council is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [15442]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that Stockport and High Peak training and enterprise council has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three year licences. Its licence will be effective from April 1995.

TREASURY

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals, and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15091]

Mr. Nelson: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central government departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of the running costs and civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in table 12.2 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2817. Table 12.3 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Barings Bank

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date requests to close the New York office of Barings by the Securities and Exchange Commission were first communicated *(a)* to the Bank of England or *(b)* departmental officials.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* On *(a)* as my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February, *Official Report*, columns 693–704, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints. On *(b)* Treasury officials were not approached.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date concerns expressed by Mr. James Bax as to Barings operations in Singapore in a memo of 1992 were first drawn to the attention of representatives of the Bank of England or departmental officials.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* There was no requirement to bring this to the attention of the Treasury, and no one did so. As for the Bank, my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February, columns 693-704, that he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what communications were received by Treasury officials as to developing problems at either Barings in the United Kingdom or in Singapore from overseas financial authorities in each of the last 24 months separately.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Barings ever discussed with the Bank of England or Treasury officials a dispensation enabling Barings to breach rules in respect of cap on investments rules in the period between 1 December 1994 and 26 February 1995.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Such dispensations are not matters for the Treasury and officials were not approached. As for the Bank, my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February that he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of this episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Bank of Japan was approached by Barings in January 1995 on matters relating to exposure in the Market first made known to Bank of England and or departmental officials.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* There would have been no need for any such information to be made known to Treasury officials and, as far as I can ascertain, it was not. As for the Bank, as my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date warnings by SIMEX in January and February as to Baring's exposure in the market were first communicated to the Bank of England and or departmental officials.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Treasury officials received no such information. As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 27 February columns 693-704, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the number of banks which have closed in the last 30 years; on what dates they closed; and what was the value of their assets.

Mr. Nelson: Full information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The following table lists United Kingdom authorised banks which have entered into administration, liquidation or provisional liquidation since 1980. It does not include banks which have ceased to be authorised by the Bank of England but which remained solvent. In most cases the value of assets has been taken either from statements of affairs or press releases and will be best estimates made at the time.

United Kingdom authorised banks which have closed since 1979

	Closure date	*Value of assets* £
Merbro Finance	1982	4 million
First Guarantee Trust	1982	3 million
Chancellor Finance	1983	1 million
Goodwin Squires Securities	1983	negligible
Trinity Trust and Savings	1983	4 million
Bremar Holdings	1984	22 million
Castle Court Trust	1984	7 million
Cross and Bevingtons Finance	1984	negligible
St. Martin le Grand Securities	1984	negligible
Eastcheap Investments	1984	1 million
Spring Gardens Securities	1986	1 million
Oriental Credit	1986	10 million
PL Investments	1987	1 million
Consumer Credit Investments	1987	1 million
British and Commonwealth Merchant Bank	1990	410 million
Authority Bank	1991	49 million
Chancery[1]	1991	164 million
Edington	1991	33 million
Wallace Smith Trust	1991	215 million
Bradford Investments	1991	1 million
BCCI (United Kingdom branches)	1991	$3.2 billion
Rafidain Bank (United Kingdom branch)[2][3]	1991	201 million
National Guardian Mortgage Corporation	1992	12 million
Mount Banking Corporation	1992	188 million
Deacon Hoare	1992	1 million
Equatorial Bank	1993	83 million
Roxburghe Bank	1993	34 million
Wimbledon and South West Finance[3]	1994	24 million
Baring Bros and Co. Ltd.[3]	1995	5.2 billion

[1] Came out of administration and is now subject to a company voluntary arrangement.

[2] In provisional liquidation.

[3] Still authorised under the Banking Act.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which local authorities or Government bodies had money deposited with Barings bank.

Mr. Nelson: It is for individual authorities and Government bodies to decide what details to disclose about their use of bank accounts. In any case, following ING's takeover of Barings, depositors' funds have now been unfrozen.

Monetary Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent to which the deflationary measures which he has taken since August 1994 will benefit the financiers of the real economy at the expense of manufacturing industry; and what steps he will take to prevent this.

Mr. Nelson: The role of monetary policy is to deliver low inflation. Monetary policy has been tightened since August 1994, so as to take no risk with inflation. A stable macro-economic environment with low inflation is the best way to ensure sustained real growth and will benefit all sectors of the economy.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1970 the United States and United Kingdom trade surplus/deficit in manufactures as a percentage of gross domestic product, the terms of trade for manufactures and the change in the relative unit value of exports of manufactures compared to each other and to the main manufacturing countries.

Mr. Nelson: The value, and united values for UK imports and exports of manufactures, and relative export unit value indices for the United Kingdom, United States and other main manufacturing countries can be found in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" published monthly by the Central Statistical Office. UK GDP can be found in "Economic Trends, Annual Supplement" also published by the Central Statistical Office. Alternatively, the data can be found on the Central Statistical Office's computer database.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the change in relative export unit values for manufactures since 1979, together with the change in import penetration and in the United Kingdom share of the export trade in manufactures.

Mr. Nelson: Estimates of import penetration and the UK share of world trade in manufactures can readily be derived from figures for import volumes, domestic demand, manufacturing export volumes and world trade in manufactures. These data and figures for relative export unit values for manufactures can be found on the central database of the Central Statistical Office, which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

Exchange Rates

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the £/DM exchange rate in 1965, 1975, 1985 and currently.

Mr. Nelson: At close on Wednesday 15 March, sterling stood at DM2.22. Information on sterling's exchange rate against the deutschmark can be found in table 7.1 of "Financial Statistics" published by the Central Statistical Office; a longer back-run of data is available in the annual supplement to "Economic Trends", also published by the CSO.

Export Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects United States relative export values for manufactures to fall to the 1978-80 average; and if he will publish a table showing United Kingdom export unit values for manufactures relative to those of the United States for each year since 1987 and for each quarter since the third quarter of 1992.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* It is not the Government's practice to publish forecasts of relative export values for the United States.

Unit value export prices of manufactures for the main manufacturing countries can be found in the "Monthly

Review of External Trade Statistics", published monthly by the Central Statistical Office, or on the Central Statistical Office's computer database.

Taxpayers

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers there were in the last financial year whose taxable earnings averaged £1,000 or more per day.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* A reliable estimate is not available.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the benefits of introducing a higher marginal income tax rate for those taxpayers earning more on average than £1,000 per day.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 14 March 1995]:* We believe that high income tax rates damage incentives and growth. Our policy is to have a tax system with low marginal rates—so that people keep more of every extra pound they earn—and a broad tax base.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Boxing

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total amount spent by his Department on boxing in schools for each of the last three years. [14691]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not given any direct funding for boxing in schools in the last three years. However, through Sportsmatch, it awarded a grant of £5,000 in October 1994 to the non-contact "Kid Gloves Scheme".

Digital Audio Broadcasting

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what action his Department is taking in response to the Radio Authority's second policy statement on digital audio broadcasting; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans his Department has to bring forward legislative proposals to encourage the development of digital audio broadcasting in the United Kingdom;

(3) when his Department plans to bring forward proposals for a regulatory and licensing regime for digital audio broadcasting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government hope to set out later this year a regulatory framework for digital broadcasting. We, therefore welcome this publication which is a useful sttement of the Radio Authority's current position.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department did not occupy its own HQ premises until May 1993. Only in one of our buildings, occupied since October 1993, do we pay water charges directly. The following is a breakdown of those charges along with those of my agencies.

	£
1994–95	
DNH (Grove House)	1,516
Royal Parks Agency	213,339
Historic Royal Palaces Agency:	
Her Majesty's Tower of London	16,426
Hampton Court Palace	41,886
Kensington Palace	1,853
Banqueting House	2,512
1993–94	
DNH (Grove House)	683
Royal Parks Agency	166,754
Historic Royal Palaces Agency:	
Her Majesty's Tower of London	15,476
Hampton Court Palace	17,954
Kensington Palace	1,735
Banqueting House	2,351
1992–93	
Royal Parks Agency	129,278
Historic Royal Palaces Agency:	
Her Majesty's Tower of London	14,271
Hampton Court Palace	14,911
Kensington Palace	1,598
Banqueting House	2,165
1991–92	
Royal Parks Agency	188,335
Historic Royal Palaces Agency:	
HM Tower of London	9,174
Hampton Court Palace	17,044
Kensington Palace	1,465
Banqueting House	1,964

Television Reception

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate he has of *(a)* the erection costs and *(b)* the annual rental, insurance and technical maintenance costs which fall on communities of below 200 inhabitants that are dependent upon the provision of a private booster mast for the reception of television broadcasts. [14573]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* The Department does not hold this information. The current "Self Help Television" guidance booklet, issued by the BBC and Independent Television Commission, includes some indicative figures but suggests that communities should seek a quote from a competent television engineer and obtain estimates from manufacturers and installers. The BBC or ITC will offer advice to groups about the possibilities of self-help schemes.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility, and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimate of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15089]

Mr. Horam: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in chapter 7 and tables 8.4 and 8.5 in chapter 8 in my Department's annual report, Cm 2820. Table 7.7 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Library of the House.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [14768]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department and its three agencies, HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office, including full-time equivalents and casuals from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies" published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill in cash terms for the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies can be found in chapter A, tables 4 and 5, chapter C, and Chapter D, tables 5 and 6, of the departmental report of the Lord Chancellor's and the Law Officer's Departments, Cm. 2809. Chapter A, table 5, and chapter C give details of overtime from 1989 onwards.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Injury

Ms Lynne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many claims under £2,500 for industrial injury have been made since 1990; and how many to the same amount were made in the previous four years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure by the Lord Chancellor's Department on water and sewerage was: *(a)* £556,394 in the current year to the end of January; and *(b)* £857,977 in 1993–94, £772,652 in 1992–93 and £840,024 in 1991–92.

Mr. Darius Guppy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the application for legal aid by Darius Guppy has been approved; and what assessment he has made of whether the proceeds of the crime of which Mr. Guppy was convicted have been accounted for.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Mr. Guppy has made a number of applications for legal aid in the past 12 months, in respect of various proceedings. Most recently, his application for criminal legal aid to Redbridge magistrates court was granted on 24 February 1995. The confidentiality provisions in section 38 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 prevent the disclosure of information on an applicant's financial means.

HEALTH

Health Records (Access)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she now intends to make regulations under section 8(3) of the Access to Health Records Act 1990 in order to provide a complaints procedure for patients who have been denied access to their health records under the Act, in line with the commitment given by the Under-Secretary of State for Health on 4 July 1990.

Mr. Sackville: Complaints about non-compliance with the Access to Health Records Act in relation to hospital records can already be made, using the hospital complaints procedure. We are considering the need for regulations under the Access to Health Records Act and will make an announcement in due course.

Depo-medrone

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what approach her Department has made to Upjohn, the manufacturer of depo-medrone, to request it to vary the provisions of the licence so as to include epidural use; and if she will publish the details of discussions and correspondence that have taken place between her Department and Upjohn.

Mr. Sackville: No such approach has been made to Upjohn. The present product licence for depo-medrone does not recommend the use of the product by the epidural route. The company holding the licence for the product would be required to provide the necessary supporting information to the Medicines Control Agency to support any changes to the licence. Correspondence between companies and the Medicines Control Agency regarding product licences are commercially confidential.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment she has made of the frequency with which *(a)* depo-medrone and *(b)* other drugs are used for purposes for which they are not licensed;

(2) what is her Department's policy regarding the use of *(a)* depo-medrone or *(b)* other drugs for purposes which are not licensed.

Mr. Sackville: Information regarding the use of medicines in an unlicensed manner is not available centrally since doctors are not obliged to report such usage. In accordance with the exemption in section 9 of the Medicines Act 1968, if a doctor believes that the use of an unlicensed medicine, or use of a licensed medicine in a manner which is not specified in the product licence is appropriate for a patient, he or she may administer it on their own responsibility. They may also seek advice from relevant professional bodies, but it is for doctors to use their training, knowledge and experience to weigh carefully the likely benefits of a medicine against the anticipated risks before choosing the most appropriate treatment for a particular patient. It is also for doctors to discuss the risks and alternatives of any proposed treatment and to obtain the patient's consent before administering it.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of discussions between departmental officials and relevant medical professional bodies concerning current clinical practice referred to in her answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), on 21 October 1993, *Official Report*, columns *315-16;* and what specific advice her Department has issued to doctors on this issue.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 2 March 1994, column *757.* We have decided that no further guidance on depo-medrone is needed at present.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the use of polyethylene glycol as one of the constituent parts of depo-medrone.

Mr. Sackville: Polyethylene glycols of various molecular weights and grades have been used extensively in the pharmaceutical industry, as solvents, vehicles and solubilising agents. Depo-medrone is a licensed medicinal product. A product licence is granted only after the careful consideration of evidence to demonstrate to the licensing authority that the product is safe, efficacious and of satisfactory quality for the indications and routes of administration intended. The assessment includes not just the active drug substance but an assessment of the whole formulation of the product, in the context of the terms of the licence. This includes the safety of any excipients such as polyethylene glycol.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care beds are currently operational in *(a)* London and *(b)* the rest of England and Wales: and what were the corresponding figures for the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Information is provided in the table on the average daily number of available designated intensive care beds in London and the rest of England. In addition to these services provided in units designated as intensive care units, intensive care can also be delivered in a variety of hospital departments, such as neo-natal intensive care, coronary care units, accident and emergency departments, renal units and high dependency units. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

	London	*England*[1]
1989–90	484	2,033
1990–91	459	2,024
1991–92	459	2,017
1992–93	480	2,045
1993–94	501	2,105

[1] Excluding London.

NHS Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State of Health what was the expenditure on the NHS in each year since 1965 showing any percentage increase or decrease from the pervious year taking account of *(a)* inflation, *(b)* NHS inflation, *(c)* the impact of demographic changes on activity and unit costs and *(d)* the impact of technological advance on activity and unit costs.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table. We have no means of adjusting these figures for the impact of demographic changes on the national health service as a whole or of technological change.

Information on estimated growth in demand for hospital and community health services from demographic changes is in the departmental report (Cm 2812).

Gross National Health Service expenditure[1]

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Adjusted by general inflation*[2] *(1993–94 prices)*	*Percentage change over previous year*	*Adjusted by NHS inflation (1990–91 prices)*[3]	*Percentage change over previous years*
1971–72	2,000	14,251	—	16,554	—
1972–73	2,281	15,029	5.5	17,433	5.3
1973–74	2,592	15,980	6.3	18,075	3.7
1974–75	3,426	17,653	10.5	17,976	–0.5
1975–76	4,511	18,530	5.0	18,377	2.2
1976–77	5,149	18,634	0.6	18,546	0.9
1977–78	5,689	18,123	–2.7	18,817	1.5
1978–79	6,525	18,697	3.2	19,531	3.8
1979–80	7,755	19,040	1.8	19,344	–1.0
1980–81	10,103	20,964	10.1	19,890	2.8
1981–82	11,329	21,434	2.2	20,557	3.4
1982–83	12,353	21,818	1.8	21,027	2.3
1983–84	13,114	22,135	1.5	21,279	1.2
1984–85	14,102	22,664	2.4	21,567	1.4
1985–86	14,923	22,737	0.3	21,695	0.6
1986–87	16,044	23,729	4.4	21,942	1.1
1987–88	17,653	24,789	4.5	22,354	1.9
1988–89	19,628	25,834	4.2	22,595	1.1
1989–90	21,148	26,017	0.7	22,946	1.5
1990–91	23,673	26,963	3.6	23,673	3.2
1991–92	26,813	28,734	6.6	—	—
1992–93	29,393	30,292	5.4	—	—
1993–94	30,419	30,419	0.4	—	—
1994–95[4]	31,946	31,320	3.0	—	—
1995–96[5]	33,441	31,753	1.4	—	—

[1] Information on National Health Service expenditure is not available on a comparable basis before 1971–72.

[2] Measured by the GDP deflator.

[3] Figures for NHS inflation not available after 1990–91.

[4] Forecast outturn.

[5] Plan.

St. Mary's Hospital

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about St. Mary's hospital and its energy-saving potential.

Mr. Sackville: St. Mary's hospital is the first of two demonstration hospitals in which a range of energy-saving technologies are being used. The aim is to achieve significant savings in fuel consumption and reduce environmental pollution.

First and second year appraisals have identified significant reductions in fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions, increasing from 35 per cent. fuel savings in year one to 44 per cent. in year two. This equates to annual savings of £51,000 in fuel bills and a reduction of 1,000 tonnes in carbon dioxide emissions.

Practice Nurses

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the annual change in pay received by practice nurses in each regional health authority in each of the last five years. [15370]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Female Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of female obstetricians and gynaecologists in each of the last five years. [13328]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Females obstetricians and gynaecologists—England (whole time equivalent) 1989–1993

As at 30 September *Percentage*

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Female	22	22	23	24	26

1. Grades covered are: consultant, staff grade, associate specialist, senior registrar, registrar, hospital practitioner and clinical assistants.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set in the last 10 years in relation to the increase in the number and percentage of female obstetricians and gynaecologist; and when they should be achieved. [13329]

Mr. Malone: None. In the 10 years between 1983 and 1993, the percentage of female consultants in obstetrics and gynaecology rose from 11 to 15 per cent.—an increase of 8.8 per cent. per annum between 1988 and 1993. The number of female consultants in the specialty rose from 80 to 130. Some 35 per cent. of senior registrars in the specialty are women.

National Continence Day

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support she has given and will be giving to National Continence Day; and if she will make a statement. [14231]

Mr. Bowis: The Department is providing £160,000 this year to support National Continence Day, which will be held on 21 March 1995, and for on-going work in this area.

Over 3 million adults and half a million children in the United Kingdom are estimated to suffer from incontinence. The majority of them—around 70 per cent.—could be successfully treated. Many others could have their quality of life improved by the provision of the right type of incontinence aids, but only one in six sufferers seeks help.

The Department of Health, working jointly with the Continence Foundation, has produced publicity items which refer people to their pharmacists for advice or give the numbers of the Continence Foundation and the Enuresis Resource and Information Centre helplines.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS trust hospitals published annual accounts for 1993–94; what was the total amount paid by those hospitals in salaries and expenses to their chief executive; and what was the total amount paid by those hospitals in salaries and expenses to their boards of directors; [14770]

(2) which NHS trust hospitals pay their chief executives more than £75,000 per annum; and if she will give the amount of the salaries; [14771]

(3) which NHS trust hospitals paid their board of directors more than £400,000 in 1993–94. [14772]

Mr. Malone: All 292 national health service trusts in operation in 1993–94 published annual accounts for that year. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 16 February, column *808* in respect of the available information on remuneration of members of NHS trust boards.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by her Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by her Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14500]

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lynfield Mount Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct Bradford Community Health trust to make public the report of the external review team into the secure unit at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford. [14813]

Mr. Bowis: The Bradford Community Health national health service trust has agreed to prepare copies of the report, suitably edited to preserve confidentiality of patients and staff. These will be made available to the hon. Member and other interested local bodies shortly.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* patients there are on general practitioners' list and *(b)* full-time equivalent general practitioners in each family health service authority area. [15081]

Mr. Malone: This information is contained in "General Medical Services Statistics", which are published twice yearly, copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Fundholding

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what comparative assessment she has made of the benefits and costs of joint commissioning and general practitioner fundholding. [15085]

Mr. Malone: General practitioner fundholders are able to achieve improved patient benefits because they purchase services directly on behalf of their patients and ensure services are more sensitive to individual patient needs. This is the crucial difference between fundholding and other models of purchasing. Fundholding GPs, like other GPs, should be involved in health authority purchasing.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average amount spent in the private sector by fundholders in each year since 1991–92. [15035]

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 9 December 1994, column *401*.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal restrictions there are on future uses of St. Bartholomew's hospital site. [15084]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the North Thames regional health authority. The right hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, the chairman, for details.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the agencies under her Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under her Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalent, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether she will also provide for each year her estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisation, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15094]

Mr. Sackville: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Department and its agencies, including full time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for the Department can be found in table 12 of the Department's annual report (Cm 2512). Table 13 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

GP Remuneration

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the published and non-published research done by her Department or commissioned by it on variation of general practitioner NHS income in each of the last five years. [15082]

Mr. Malone: Each year, the Department of Health and the General Medical Services Committee jointly commission an inquiry into the gross earnings and expenses, from all sources, of a sample of general practitioners. Surveys are conducted by the Inland Revenue and the results are reported, in confidence, to the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration.

GP Staff

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent staff are employed by GPs in each family health service area; and if she will break down the figures by staff category; [15005]

(2) how many *(a)* practice nurses and *(b)* practice managers there are in each family health service area. [15005]

Mr. Malone: The information is contained in "GMS Statistics 1 April 1994 England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Fundholders

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average amount spent by fundholders out of savings in extending premises and the average amount of improvement grants given to non-GP fundholders in the latest available year. [15003]

Mr. Malone: Information on the amount of savings spent by general practitioner fundholders on premises improvements is not available centrally. However, the National Audit Office report on GP fundholding estimates, from regional health authorities, that about one-third of savings have been used to improve practice premises for the benefit of patients, for example, to provide a wider range of services.

In 1993–94, about £26 million was spent on improvement grants for all GPs in 1993–94. A breakdown of this figure between fundholders and non-fundholders is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average savings by fundholders in each year since 1991–92. [15007]

Mr. Malone: Average savings made by fundholders in the first three years of the scheme were £50,000 per fund in 1991–92, £50,000 per fund in 1992–93 and £55,000 per fund in 1993–94. These savings are being reinvested in improving patient care. Following independent audit by the Audit Commission, fundholders savings are held by family health services authorities on behalf of the patients of fundholders.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has about the total savings by individual GP fundholders; and what information she has on how these savings are being spent by individual GP fundholders. [14990]

Mr. Malone: Regional health authorities are responsible for managing the fundholding scheme in their area. Information about an individual fundholder's savings is not routinely held centrally.

Consultant Clinics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average annual number of consultant clinics held in *(a)* fundholding practices and *(b)* non-fundholding practices. [15036]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Hospices

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of hospices and Macmillan services in each region; and what information she has on the number of hospices in each European country. [15083]

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the tables.

Table 1: In-patient palliative care units and Macmillan services by region, England (January 1995)

Region	*In-patient units*	*Macmillan Services*
Anglia and Oxford	20	61
Northern and Yorkshire	26	83
North Thames	19	79
South Thames	25	54
North West	27	86
South and West	27	61
West Midlands	11	52
Trent	10	57
Total	165	533

Sources:

St. Christopher's Hospice Information Service and Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund (for Macmillan services).

Table 2: Palliative Care Services (Including Day and Home Care) by European Country (October 1994) (NB. These figures are approximate)

Country	*Palliative Care Services*
Austria	4
Belgium	20
Bulgaria	1
Croatia	1
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	7
Denmark	1
Finland	4
France	32
Germany	35
Gibraltar	1
Greece	2

Table 2: Palliative Care Services (Including Day and Home Care) by European Country (October 1994)
(NB. These figures are approximate)

Country	*Palliative Care Services*
Hungary	2
Iceland	1
Italy	169
Lithuania	1
Luxembourg	1
Malta	1
Netherlands	5
Norway	4
Poland	30
Portugal	2
Romania	3
Russia	12
Spain	60
Sweden	10
Switzerland	7
Total	417

Source:
St. Christopher's Hospice Information Service.

Performance-related Pay (Nurses)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates she has made of the costs of introducing performance-related pay for nurses. [14991]

Mr. Malone: The Government are proposing local pay for nurses which does not mean individual performance-related pay. Local pay provides the opportunity to reward the contributions which staff make to the provision of high-quality, cost-effective patient services. Arrangements for calculating local pay are a matter for individual trusts or other employers.

Efficiency Savings

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what total NHS efficiency savings, in real terms, are expected in each of the next five years. [14992]

Mr. Sackville: Hospital and community health services are expected to improve their efficiency by at least 3 per cent. in 1995–96, equivalent to an extra £600 million for patient care. No decision has been taken on the efficiency target for 1996–97 or any subsequent years.

Cardiac Bypass Operations

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cardiac bypass operations were done in each of the last five years; what projections she has on the likely numbers of these operations in each of the next five years. [14993]

Mr. Sackville: The number of cardiac bypass operations is as follows:

1988–89: 10,203
1989–90: 11,402
1990–91: 13,195
1991–92: 14,850
1992–93: 17,119

It is for each district to make an assessment of future demand.

Casualty Departments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient episodes there were in casualty departments in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [15001]

Mr. Sackville: This information is available in Department of Health statistical bulletin 12/94, copies of which are available in the Library.

London Chest Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has in relation to the London Chest hospital. [15002]

Mr. Malone: Ministers await the outcome of public consultation conducted by East London and The City health authority.

Ministerial Visits

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fundholding and non-fundholding practices she and her Ministers have visited in the last year. [15004]

Mr. Sackville: A total of 40.

Contracting Costs

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has done on the comparative administrative costs of contracting on a cost per case basis and for block contracts; and what are the findings. [15008]

Mr. Malone: None. Health authorities and fundholding general practitioners are responsible for selecting the most appropriate type of contract to suit their patients' needs, taking account of value for money and the characteristics of the service being purchased.

Dental Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists who have not given notice to leave the dental list have given written notice to each family health service authority to de-register some or all of their continuing care arrangements for adult patients in each month since July 1992; and how many patients have been de-registered by family health service authority and in total.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Information about the numbers of patients de-registered will be placed in the Library.

At the latest date for which figures are available, there were 20,712,569 adult patients registered with national health service dentists, an increase of 0.6 per cent. on July 1992.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health service authorities have referred patients who have been unable to obtain treatment from a general dental practitioner to *(a)* the community dental service, *(b)* the hospital dental service and *(c)* a salaried dentist in each month since July 1992.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* The available information is shown in the tables.

Table 1: General Dental Service: number of Family Health Services Authorities who referred patients to the Community Dental Service, Hospital Dental Service or a Salaried Dentist in each month from July 1992 to July 1994

England

Month	*Number of FHSAs*
1992	
July	42
August	35
September	30
October	33
November	34
1993	
December/January	36
February	33
March	30
April	31
May	32
June	30
July	34
August	30
September	31
October	33
November	30
1994	
December/January	38
February	34
March	37
April	33
May	35
June	33
July	38

1. The Christmas period totals cover the months of December and January.

Table 2: General Dental Service: number of Family Health Services Authorities who referred patients to the Community Dental Service, Hospital Dental Service or a Salaried Dentist in each month from August 1994 to February 1995

England

	Number of FHSAs referring patients to		
Month	*Salaried dentists*	*CDS*	*HDS*
1994			
August	15	14	4
September	12	20	7
October	12	16	4
November	12	15	4
1995			
December/January	12	20	6
February	12	25	5

1. The Christmas period totals cover the months of December and January.

2. Information is only available from August 1994.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's role in facilitating progress in the middle east peace process.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan demonstrated our strong support for the peace process and the strength of our bilateral relations. The Prime Minister announced an additional £7 million of aid for the Palestinians, bringing our total package to £82 million over three years.

Wartime Intelligence Material

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will declassify the wartime decrypts designated *(a)* ZGA, German naval attachés in Tokyo, *(b)* ISOS, Alwehr traffic, and *(c)* ISK, Alwehr machine cipher traffic, and release them to the Public Record Office.

Mr. Hurd: Following the release of the Dir/C archive in 1993 and 1994, GCHQ is continuing to review wartime intelligence material issued by the Government code and cypher school. This includes the material referred to by my hon. Friend which will be reviewed in turn for possible release. One of these reports, on communications between Berlin and the naval attaché in Tokyo, is already in the Public Record Office as Z/P/ZG/248 in ADM223/4.

China (HIV-AIDS)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had from organisations and individuals concerned with HIV and AIDS about the Chinese Government's refusal to allow people with HIV and AIDS entry into China, with particular reference to the fourth world conference of women in Beijing.

Mr. Baldry: We have had some queries from non-governmental organisations who are concerned with AIDS asking whether people with HIV or AIDS will be able to enter China to attend the UN fourth world conference on women in September. We have raised this with the Chinese who have stated that their existing HIV-related entry restrictions will continue to apply. We are considering with our EU partners what further action to take.

Visa Applications

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current waiting time for interview for applications for settlement visas in *(a)* Bombay and *(b)* Islamabad.

Mr. Baldry: Waiting times to first interview for applicants in settlement queues in Bombay and Islamabad as at 31 December 1994.

	Months	
	Bombay	*Islamabad*
Queue 1:		
Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years old, special, compassionate cases.	—	3

	Months	
	Bombay	*Islamabad*
Queue 2: Spouses and children under 18 years.	3	3
Queue 3: Fiance (e) s and others applying for the first time for settlement.	3	6
Queue 4: Re-applicants.	5	9

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British passport holders remain in Sierra Leone; and what advice they have been given about their continued presence.

Mr. Baldry: Some 800 British passport holders remain in Sierra Leone. Of these, approximately, 350 have the right of abode in the United Kingdom.

Since 26 January the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been advising dependants and those with no pressing reason to stay in Sierra Leone to leave.

Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries whose existence Her Majesty's Government officially recognise.

Mr. Baldry: The countries whose existence we officially recognise are as follows:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Comoros
Congo
Costa Rica
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Estonia
Ethiopia
Fiji
Finland
France
Gabon
Gambia, The
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
Holy See
Honduras
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Irish Republic
Israel
Italy
Ivory Coast
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Kiribati
Kyrgyzstan
Korea
Korea (North)
Kuwait
Laos
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Liechtenstein
Lithuania

Luxembourg
former Yugoslav
Republic of Macedonia
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Malta
Marshall Islands
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Micronesia
Moldavia
Monaco
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nauru
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Palau
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
St Kitts and Nevis
St Lucia
St Vincent
San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Suriname
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Thailand
Togo
Tongo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkmenistan
Tuvalu
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
United States
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Vietnam
Western Samoa
Yemen
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries with which Her Majesty's Government does not have diplomatic relations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The countries with which we do not have diplomatic relations are as follows:

Bhutan
Iraq
Korea (North)
Libya

Korea

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what decision was reached concerning diplomatic relations following discussions held in Geneva between representatives of Her Majesty's Government and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Goodlad: We have discussions with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the UN framework, but it would be premature to establish diplomatic relations.

Tiger Conservation Schemes

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make additional resources available for tiger conservation schemes. [13019]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Minister of State, Foreign Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) *Official Report*, column *763*, on 27 October 1994, and the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, on 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *24–42*.

Social Development Summit

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will evaluate the progress made at the world summit for social development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Negotiations on the declaration and programme of action for the United Nations world summit on social development were successfully completed in Copenhagen during the summit, 6 to 12

March 1995. The final official text of the summit declaration has not yet been published.

Newspaper Announcements

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, by type and number, the announcements placed by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration in (i) *The Times,* (ii) the *Daily Telegraph,* (iii) *The Independent* and (iv) other publications in the last 12 months for which information is available. [14337]

Mr. Baldry: The only announcements we issue concern official functions and diplomatic appointments. We do not keep a record of this information.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration have spent listing official engagements in newspapers in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [14336]

Mr. Baldry: Nothing.

Service Attaches

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent on service attachés; defence advisers and support staff in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [14334]

Mr. Goodlad: The costs of service attachés, defence advisers and support staff met by the FCO are included with all other diplomatic service staff costs. Since the expenditure is not accounted for separately, it would be possible to identify it only by incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which costs incurred by service attaches; defence advisers and support staff are met by his Department; and if he will give a breakdown of these costs for each overseas post. [14335]

Mr. Goodlad: The FCO meets the cost of residential and office accommodation for service attachés, defence advisers and their support staff. In addition, some local administration costs are met such as utilities and some communications. The expenditure is included with that for all other diplomatic service staff. Since it is not accounted for separately, it would be possible to identify it only by incurring disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility, and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimate for *(a)* civil service job reductions due to privatisations, *(b)* civil service job reductions due to contracting out, *(c)* civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, *(d)* the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and *(e)* total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [14767]

Mr. Goodlad: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals—from 1993 onwards—and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in table 36 of my Department's annual report—Cm 2802. Table 37 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many GCHQ staff are located at Menwith Hill station in north Yorkshire; what are their main duties; to whom they report; if they are required to obtain warrants from him or Ministers in other Departments to intercept communications; how many warrants have been issued in each year from 1992 to date to GCHQ staff at Menwith Hill station; and if he will make a statement. [14811]

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces on 9 March 1995, *Official Report,* column *346.* All interception of communications on public telecommunications systems in the UK is subject to the provisions of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. It is not our policy to comment on the detailed operations of the intelligence and security agencies.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14499]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), on 27 October 1994, *Official Report,* column *761.* The FCO has not conducted any public opinion surveys since January 1994.

The purpose of the research undertaken by public survey organisations is to provide information useful to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as background for Government policy.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Belgian Government concerning the public statements given by Ruber Orian concerning extradition and aspects of the Lockerbie case. [15103]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Royal Assent for the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [15250]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 15 May to Friday 19 May 1995.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Adult Learners Week to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [15122]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 8 May to Friday 12 May 1995.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will conduct a survey of the energy efficiency of *(a)* the heating and *(b)* the lighting in all the buildings for which the House of Commons Commission is responsible.

Mr. Ray Powell: A survey of energy efficiency has already been undertaken and was considered by the Committee last summer. The Director of Parliamentary Works was asked to report progress on the matter on an annual basis. The next such report is expected by July.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission whether the House of Commons Commission employs, on a consultancy basis *(a)* an architect and *(b)* a designer.

Mr. Beith: Yes.

Heating and Lighting

Mr. Fisher: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission how much was spent by the House of Commons Commission, in each of the last five years on *(a)* heating, *(b)* lighting, *(c)* repairs and maintenance and *(d)* office furniture.

Mr. Beith: Prior to 1991–92 the Department of the Environment was responsible for these matters and expenditure records are not available. Figures for office furniture are not recorded separately from general furniture and furnishings. The figures given are for total House of Commons expenditure on new furnishings and maintenance of existing furnishings.

£

	Heating	*Lighting*	*Repairs and maintenance*	*Furnishings*
1991–92	200,000	130,000	9,706,000	—
1992–93	202,000	140,000	8,311,000	—
1993–94	219,000	141,000	8,506,000	890,000
1994–95	216,000	157,000	7,580,000	1,008,000

SCOTLAND

Brucella Melitensis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of brucella melitensis were reported in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of brucella melitensis have been recorded in Scotland since 1985.

National Continence Day

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what financial support he has given and will be giving to National Continence Day; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has had regarding the forthcoming National Continence Day; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of £10,500 has been allocated to fund National Continence Day in Scotland. The resources are being directed towards the servicing of a telephone helpline facility at the Continence Resource Centre, Southern General Hospital NHS trust, Glasgow and also the printing and distribution of information leaflets and advertisements in some Scottish newspapers. No representations have been received. The Scottish Office is happy to support the campaign to raise awareness of this condition and to encourage sufferers to seek advice and treatment.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Lang: The charges for water and sewerage for the buildings occupied by the Scottish Office for the relevant years were:

Date	*£*
1991–92	473,079
1992–93	343,771
1993–94	320,574
1994–95	413,726

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* The proportion of women as a total of those selected for fast-stream entry to the Scottish Office in 1991 and 1992 can be found in the Civil Service Commissioner's report for the relevant years, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

The figures for 1993 and 1994 are 36 per cent. and 50 per cent. respectively.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* At 1 March 1995, the number of casual staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, employed in the Scottish Office core was 146.5. A further 111.5 casual staff were employed in its executive agencies, excluding the Scottish Prison Service. The following table shows the grade equivalents at which these staff were employed:

Casual staff employed by the Scottish Office and its executive agencies (other than SPS) at 1 March 1995 (full-time equivalent)

	Grade equivalent	*SO Core*	*Executive agencies (excluding SPS)*
Administration	EO	—	1.0
	AO	6.0	—
	AA	121.0	48.5
Professional	Gr 6	0.5	—
	Gr 7	0.5	—
	SEO	2.5	1.0
	HEO	—	5.5
	EO	9.5	1.5
	AO	1.0	9.5
	AA	1.0	20.5
Industrial	Industrial	4.5	24.0

At 1 January 1995, the Scottish Prison Service employed 45.0 casual staff.

The length of contract tends not to be set at a fixed length in advance, but is subject to on-going review.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* At present the Scottish Office and its executive agencies, excluding the Scottish Prison Service, generally recruit staff, excluding casual appointments, on fixed-term appointments for initial periods of two or three years with the possibility of extension or making permanent.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* I am placing in the Library the terms of employment for casual staff in my Department and executive agencies. Casual staff are not normally employed on a continuous basis for a period exceeding 12 months.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constituted.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information requested is shown in the following table. The official staffing returns from which this information has been extracted do not include details on length of contract.

Number of casual and permanent staff in post (full-time equivalents) the Scottish Office and its executive agencies

	SO Core				*Agencies Exclude SPS*				*SPS*			
Quarter	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*
1989												
1 April	6,273.0	257.5	6,530.5	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,803.5	10.0	3,813.5	0.3
1 July	6,239.0	364.5	6,603.5	5.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,884.5	9.0	3,893.5	0.2
1 October	5,683.0	219.5	5,902.5	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,858.5	8.0	3,866.5	0.2

Number of casual and permanent staff in post (full-time equivalents) the Scottish Office and its executive agencies

	SO Core				*Agencies Exclude SPS*				*SPS*			
Quarter	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Percentage Casual*
1990												
1 January	5,703.5	162.5	5,866.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,822.0	7.0	3,829.0	0.2
1 April	5,703.0	218.0	5,921.0	3.7	572.0	26.0	598.0	4.3	3,999.5	7.0	4,006.5	0.2
1 July	5,649.5	199.0	5,848.5	3.4	579.5	104.5	684.0	15.3	3,977.5	3.0	3,980.5	0.1
1 October	5,642.0	155.0	5,797.0	2.7	584.0	101.5	685.5	14.8	3,944.5	4.0	3,948.5	0.1
1991												
1 January	5,632.0	166.0	5,798.0	2.9	591.5	26.5	618.0	4.3	3,906.5	4.0	3,910.5	0.1
1 April	5,475.0	103.0	5,578.0	1.8	807.0	145.5	952.5	15.3	4,004.0	4.0	4,008.0	0.1
1 July	5,427.5	178.0	5,605.5	3.2	812.0	146.5	958.5	15.3	4,086.0	4.0	4,090.0	0.1
1 October	5,360.5	134.0	5,494.5	2.4	835.5	107.5	943.0	11.4	4,109.0	5.0	4,114.0	0.1
1992												
1 January	5,343.5	152.5	5,496.0	2.8	840.0	55.0	895.0	6.1	4,202.0	6.0	4,208.0	0.1
1 April	5,147.5	78.0	5,225.5	1.5	984.5	74.5	1,059.0	7.0	4,228.5	8.0	4,236.5	0.2
1 July	5,140.5	133.0	5,273.5	2.5	993.5	161.0	1,154.5	13.9	4,257.0	8.0	4,265.0	0.2
1 October	5,180.0	160.0	5,340.0	3.0	990.5	77.0	1,067.5	7.2	4,479.5	11.0	4,490.5	0.2
1993												
1 January	5,218.5	170.0	5,388.5	3.2	1,003.5	58.0	1,061.5	5.5	4,523.5	10.0	4,533.5	0.2
1 April	4,923.0	149.0	5,072.0	2.9	1,175.0	104.0	1,279.0	8.1	4,625.0	19.0	4,644.0	0.4
1 July	5,073.0	204.5	5,277.5	3.9	1,205.5	170.5	1,376.0	12.4	4,653.0	18.0	4,671.0	0.4
1 October	5,058.0	168.5	5,226.5	3.2	1,191.0	89.0	1,280.0	7.0	4,607.0	17.0	4,624.0	0.4
1994												
1 January	4,924.5	151.5	5,076.0	3.0	1,185.0	58.5	1,243.5	4.7	4,600.0	16.0	4,616.0	0.3
1 April	4,835.0	142.5	4,977.5	2.9	1,199.5	57.5	1,257.0	4.6	4,498.5	14.0	4,494.5	0.3
1 July	4,557.5	136.0	4,693.5	2.9	1,358.0	174.5	1,532.5	11.4	4,472.5	22.0	4,440.5	0.5
1 October	4,498.0	125.5	4,623.5	2.7	1,308.0	106.0	1,414.0	7.5	4,408.5	32.0	4,453.5	0.7
1995												
1 January	4,428.0	140.0	4,568.0	3.1	1,299.5	91.5	1,391.0	6.6	4,271.0	45.0	4,316.0	1.0

Notes:

1. Historic Scotland became an Executive Agency on 1.4.90.
2. Scottish Fisheries protection Agency became an Executive Agency on 1.4.91.
3. Scottish Agricultural Science Agency became an Executive Agency on 1.4.92.
4. Scottish Office Pensions Agency became an Executive Agency on 1.4.93.
5. Student Awards Agency for Scotland became an Executive Agency on 5.4.94.
6. Traditionally, staff in the Scottish Prison Service have been shown separately from Scottish Office staff. Prior to the Scottish Prison Service becoming an Executive Agency on 1.4.93, staff in Prisons HQ (179 at 1.4.93) were included in Scottish Office Core. Since that date they have been included in SPS figures.

Council Tax

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the band D council tax for 1995–96 for each local authority in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* The information requested is given in the following table:

Local authority	*Band D council tax £*
Borders	413
Central	444
Dumfries and Galloway	406
Fife	491
Grampian	409
Highland	424.12
Lothian	490
Strathclyde	451
Tayside	475
Orkney	467
Shetland	428.22
Western Isles	524
Berwickshire	58.5
Ettrick and Lauderdale	108
Roxburgh	107
Tweeddale	90
Clackmannan	186
Falkirk	104
Stirling	133
Annandale and Eskdale	124
Nithsdale	129
Stewartry	89
Wigtown	123
Dunfermline	124
Kirkcaldy	163
North East Fife	158
Aberdeen City	190
Banff and Buchan	99
Gordon	90
Kincardine and Deeside	64
Moray	99
Badenoch and Strathspey	99
Caithness	86
Inverness	118
Lochaber	142
Nairn	114
Ross and Cromarty	149
Skye and Lochalsh	115
Sutherland	102
East Lothian	130
Edinburgh City	245.36
Midlothian	150
West Lothian	91
Argyll and Bute	188
Bearsden and Milngavie	130
Clydebank	167
Clydesdale	190
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	186
Cumnock and Doon Valley	190
Cunninghame	165
Dumbarton	199
East Kilbride	169
Eastwood	99
Glasgow City	225
Hamilton	194

Local authority	*Band D council tax £*
Inverclyde	167
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	151
Kyle and Carrick	220
Monklands	233
Motherwell	179
Renfrew	189
Strathkelvin	240
Angus	99
Dundee City	233
Perth and Kinross	110

Source:

Press details checked, where available against statistical returns to the Department.

ENVIRONMENT

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the yearly cost of bed-and-breakfast or temporary accommodation in the London borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1980.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The net costs of housing homeless households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, as reported by Wandsworth on its revenue outturn returns, for the years 1990–91—the earliest period for which revenue outturn data are available—to 1993–94 were as follows:

	£000
1990–91	1,069
1991–92	1,132
1992–93	1,314
1993–94	898

Data on local authorities' expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation are also published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in its annual "Homelessness Statistics Actuals" publication. Copies of these publications, which are available for all years since 1979–80, are in the Library.

County Councils (Cash Reserves)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of cash reserves held by each county council.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 March, *Official Report*, column *421*.

Local Government

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have established an office in Brussels; what is the cost of these offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department does not collect this information.

New Homes

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new homes were completed privately by housing associations and by local authorities in 1994 *(a)* in England and Wales, *(b)* in Southwark and *(c)* in Lambeth.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It is estimated that housebuilding completions in England and Wales during 1994 amounted to 125,800 private enterprise dwellings, 33,700 housing association dwellings and 1,400 local authority dwellings; a total of 160,900 dwellings.

During the 12 months up to the end of September 1994, housebuilding completions in the London borough of Lambeth were reported at 96 private enterprise and 195 housing association dwellings; a total of 291 dwellings. Figures for the last three months of 1994 have not yet been sent to the Department.

Figures for Southwark are not available as this local authority has not sent the Department any statistical returns about housebuilding in its area since March 1986.

Business Rates

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will amend regulations so that all security measures taken by small businesses are excluded from being taken into account when business rates are set.

Mr. Robert. B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on Tuesday 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *139–42*.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the method being adopted to evaluate the submissions made in response to the consultation paper circulated as part of the review of radioactive waste management policy.

Mr. Atkins: We have received a large number of responses to the review of radioactive waste management policy. Each of these is being given careful consideration. A statement of conclusions will be made in due course.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received concerning breaches of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 by the disposal to sea from nuclear facilities of radioactive acid.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has received no such reports.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent incidences of significant environmental contamination by radioactive tritium have been reported to his Department by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and what steps have been taken to discover the cause of such contamination.

Mr. Atkins: There have been no recent instances of significant environmental contamination by radioactive tritium reported by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. Disposal of radioactive waste, including tritiated material, is regulated by HMIP under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. As part of this regulatory function the inspectorate carries out a monitoring programme to confirm that the environmental impact of such disposals is minimal. The results are published in HMIP's annual monitoring programme report on radioactive substances, a copy of which is in the Library. The most recent report for the calender year 1993, shows an increase in the levels of tritium in the leachate arising from some landfill sites. An investigation and an enhanced monitoring programme have been instigated to examine this issue. The quantities of radioactive tritium are, however, such that the radiological impact of these discharges is negligible.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the items of expenditure by the Rural Development Commission in north Yorkshire during the last financial year.

Mr. Atkins: The Rural Development Commission provided financial support for numerous schemes and individuals in north Yorkshire in 1993–94. Expenditure by programme was as follows:

Programme	*1993–94 £000*
Redundant Building Grants	340
Loans and ACCORD	864
Marketing Grants	34
Partnership Workspace	413
Wholly Funded Workspace	1,015
Rural Development Programme	215
Rural Counselling Grant	12
Training and Enterprise	5
Village Hall Legislation Scheme	15
New Entrants Training Scheme and Productivity Centre	21
Total	2,940

In addition, the commission provided a grant of £125,000 for Yorkshire rural community council in support of the council's work across the whole of Yorkshire.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current financial support provided by the Government for the Rural Development Commission in north Yorkshire.

Mr. Atkins: The Rural Development Commission is funded in part by grant-in-aid from the Government and in part by receipts from its operations and services. The commission also administers the rural transport development fund on behalf of the Department of Transport.

Government funding for the commission is not allocated to specific geographical areas. It is for the commission to decide where its money will be spent in accordance with its corporate plan.

Sewerage (Rotherham)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion he has had with Yorkshire and Trent water companies to maintain improvements in sewage and sewerage in Rotherham.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Housing in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of responses received by his Department to the consultation on licensing houses in multiple occupation; and what percentage of these responses was favourable to a licensing scheme.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the consultation paper "Houses in Multiple Occupation—The Case For Licensing"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The period for responses to my Department's consultation paper on the case for licensing houses in multiple occupation closed on 18 February: we have received 379 responses. Approximately two thirds were from local housing authorities and fire authorities. About three quarters of the responses were in favour of introducing some form of licensing system, although there was a wide variety of opinion on the details. We are now considering what action to take in the light of these, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Local Government (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received to date concerning his decision to refer back to the Local Government Commission its recommendations on Lancashire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have not decided to refer Lancashire back to the Local Government Commission.

Development Corporations

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the method used by each development corporation to estimate the changes in employment in its respective area; and if he will make a statement. [14331]

Sir Paul Beresford: The urban development corporations undertake surveys of the businesses in their respective areas to obtain details of employment levels. They supplement that information with information on employment taken from planning and grant applications.

Ofwat

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 9 March, *Official Report,* column *263,* regarding charges by Ofwat, if he will give details of the normal Treasury accounting guidance of charging practices for Government Departments. [14515]

Mr. Atkins: Treasury accounting guidance for Government Departments is contained in the publication "Government Accounting", a copy of which is in the Library.

Vanadium and Nickel

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is proposing to take to reduce levels of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel in the atmosphere to below the guidelines set by the World Health Organisation. [14681]

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my pursuant reply of Friday 17 March 1995, *Official Report,* column *732.*

Levels of vanadium and nickel measured in urban and rural areas in the United Kingdom on behalf of the

Department of the Environment have not approached or exceeded guidelines set by the World Health Organisation.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the ambient level of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel in (i) rural and (ii) urban areas in England expressed in nanograms per cubic metre at ground level. [14700]

Mr. Aitkins: Annual average concentrations of vanadium and nickel expressed in nanograms per cubic metre—ng/m3—measured by the Department of the Environment monitoring stations in England and Wales are presented in the table.

Site	*Date*	*Level (ng/m^3) vanadium*	*Level (ng/m^3) nickel*
Urban Sites[1]	Annual average		
Central London	1991–1992	15	5
Brent	1991–1992	—	12
Leeds	1991–1992	—	15
Motherwell	1991–1992	—	9
Glasgow	1991–1992	—	9
Rural sites[2]	10-year average	—	—
Chilton, Oxon	1982–1991	6.1	3.3
Styrrup, Notts	1982–1991	8.1	5.6
Wraymires, Cumbria	1982–1991	3.3	2.6

Source:

[1] Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics. HMSO No. 16, 1994.

[2] Cawse P.A., Baker S. and Law, D.V. (1994) A Survey of atmospheric trace elements in Great Britain, 1972–1991. AEA/CS/18358008/REMA–039. AEA Technology, Culham, Oxon.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current EU health guidelines for the level of *(a)* vanadium *(b)* nickel, *(c)* particles, *(d)* sulphur dioxide and *(e)* nitrogen dioxide expressed in nanograms per cubic metre, per day and annual average atmospheric concentrations. [14701]

Mr. Atkins: Air quality limit and guide values for concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and particulates, and a limit value for concentrations of lead, are specified, in terms of microgrammes per cubic metre, in European Council directives 85/203/EEC, 80/779/EEC and 82/884/EEC respectively. The table shows the values in microgrammes per cubic metre. These can be converted into nanograms per cubic metre by multiplying by 1000. The limit value for sulphur dioxide is dependant on the level of suspended particulates measured over the same period:

	ug/m³
Nitrogen dioxide	
limit value 98 per cent. of hourly means	200
guide value 98 per cent. of hourly means	135
guide value 50 per cent. of hourly means	50
Lead	
limit value—annual average	2

Reference Period	*Limit value for SO_2*	*Associated value for suspended particulates*[1]
Sulphur dioxide—limit values		
Year.	80	>40
Median of daily values.	120	≤40
Winter (1 October to 31 March).	130	>60
Median of daily values.	180	≤60
Year (made up of units measuring periods of 24 hours).	250	>150
98 per cent. of daily values.	350	≤150

[1] Measured by the gravimetric method.

Reference period	*Guide value for SO_2*
Sulphur dioxide–guide values	
Year. Mean of daily values.	40 to 60
24 hours. Daily mean value.	100 to 150

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the ambient level of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel in (i) rural and (ii) urban areas of Wales. [14698]

Mr. Atkins: No measurements are currently made of vanadium and nickel in air by the Department of the Environment in urban or rural areas in Wales, but the annual average levels of vanadium and nickel at a rural site in Wales in 1979 are presented in the table.

Site	*Date*	*Level (ng/m^3) vanadium*	*Level (ng/m^3) nickel*
Rural site[1]			
Trebanos, West Glamorgan	Average 1979	7.3	46

Source:

[1] Cawse P A (1981) A survey of atmospheric trace elements in the UK. AERE-R 9886. Environmental and Medical Sciences Division, AERE Harwell, Oxon.

Suffolk County Council

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to monitor the spending of Suffolk county council year on year and to improve the evaluation of what the authority bids for each year from his Department. [14617]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities do not make bids in respect of their general revenue spending. The Secretary of State announces his proposals for the local government finance settlement annually and he takes account of their representations before reaching his final decisions. Authorities are required to provide information about their budget requirements and their spending annually to my Department.

Particulates

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those district and metropolitan councils that are monitoring particulate levels at ground level; and what results have been collected by his Department. [14699]

Mr. Atkins: Results of particulate monitoring undertaken by local authorities in collaboration with the Department of the Environment are available in "UK Smoke and Sulphur Dioxide Monitoring Networks Summary Tables for April 1992 to March 1993". Data on automatic fine particulate monitoring—PM_{10}—are available in "Air Pollution in the UK: 1992–93". LR1000(AP).

Both reports are available from the National Environmental Technology Centre, Culham, Oxfordshire.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15088]

Sir Paul Beresford: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in table 7 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2807. Table 8 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Air Pollution Control

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the 1995–96 charging scheme for local authority air pollution control under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [15395]

Sir Paul Beresford: Charges to cover the costs of local enforcing authorities in regulating processes which are subject to part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were introduced in April 1991. With the approval of the Treasury, and following consultation with local authority associations and industry, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have made a revised scheme specifying the scale of fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 1995. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is revising the identical, parallel scheme for Scotland on the same basis.

The standard application fee is increased by £25 to £990, the application fee for a former Alkali Act works is increased by £15 to £595, the substantial change fee is increased by £15 to £635, and the annual subsistence charge is increased by £20 to £605. No change has been made to the remaining fees and charges.

To help businesses with the budgetary planning, for the first time this year, the scheme will allow operators to pay their annual subsistence charge in quarterly instalments.

The scheme will be laid before both Houses and a copy placed in the Library.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates of appointment for each of the current members of the Countryside Commission and the total remuneration each has received to date. [14468]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Dates of first appointment and total remuneration received up to 31 March 1995 are listed in the table. However, it should be noted that commissioners other than the chairman received no remuneration before 1 April 1992. The figures do not include expenses, which were dealt with in my hon. Friend's reply of 13 March, column *409*.

	Date appointed	*Remuneration £*
Sir John Johnson KCMG	1.4.91	138,830
Rachel Thomas	1.10.87	15,280
David Fletcher MBE	1.7.88	15,280
Sarah Ward	1.8.91	15,280
Sir Richard Carew Pole	26.9.91	15,280
Professor Allan Patmore CBE	28.9.92	12,866
Lord Denham	1.8.93	8,687
Rodney Swarbrick CBE	1.8.93	8,687

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

2. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures the Government are taking to help disabled people. [12989]

Mr. Hague: The Government's plans for ending discrimination against disabled people were set out fully in the White Paper published on 12 January. These include new initiatives in education and transport, in addition to the measures in the Disability Discrimination Bill for new rights in employment and access to goods and services and the establishment of a National Disability Council. These proposals, which are clear, flexible and fair, have received widespread support.

Housing Benefit

7. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about his proposals to restrict housing benefit expenditure. [12994]

Mr. Roger Evans: From October, we propose that housing benefit in the deregulated private sector will be limited for rents which are above the general level of rents for similar properties in the same area. Local authorities will have discretion to pay more housing benefit in individual cases of exceptional need.

13. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations 1995 on the proposed changes to housing benefit eligibility of sentenced prisoners will come into force. [13000]

Mr. Roger Evans: The relevant regulations were laid on 10 March and are due to come into effect from 1 April 1995.

25. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the total savings in housing benefit that will arise from his proposed changes in that benefit in the first year of operation. [13013]

Mr. Roger Evans: The savings to housing benefit from the restrictions on rents above the general level in the locality, the increase in non-dependent deductions, and the restriction on housing benefit claimants temporarily absent from home are estimated to amount to around £75 million in 1995–96.

Unemployment

15. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reforms of the benefit system he is planning to help unemployed people back to work. [13003]

Mr. Lilley: I have set in hand eight major initiatives to help unemployed people move back into work more easily and increase the opportunities and rewards of work.

These initiatives include:

a reformed system of benefits for unemployed people, focused on jobseeking;

a £10 weekly premium in family credit for 345,000 families in full time work;

the removal of barriers impeding the initial move into work;

specific help with child care costs;

a back to work bonus of up to £1,000 to encourage part-time work on benefit

reducing costs on business to encourage employers to take on the long-term unemployed and to boost jobs

and a pilot study of a new in-work benefit for people without children.

Incapacity Benefit

16. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he estimates will be the increase in administrative costs for the Benefits Agency and his Department arising out of the introduction of incapacity benefit. [13004]

Mr. Hague: The increase is estimated to be about £55 million for 1995–96; £47 million for 1996–97; and about £2 million per annum thereafter.

Child Support

17. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent parents he estimates will see a reduction in their maintenance assessment as a result of the introduction of the travel costs allowance in the child support formula. [13005]

Mr. Burt: It is estimated that, in the long run, 55,000 absent parents will benefit from this allowance each year.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received pressing for repeal of the legislation in response to his recent White Paper, "Improving Child Support".

Mr. Burt: None. Those responses received continue to support the principles of the Child Support Act 1991.

Income Support, Leicester

18. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants there are in receipt of income support in Leicester, South. [13006]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Family Credit

19. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total value of spending on family credit since its introduction. [13007]

Mr. Burt: Total spending on family credit from its introduction in 1988 to March 1994 was £4,076 million. Estimated expenditure for 1994–95 is £1,480 million.

Benefit Payment Card

20. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a benefit payment card. [13008]

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Somerset and Frome (Mr. Robinson) on 20 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *71*.

Pensioner Households

21. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner households had *(a)* a fridge, *(b)* a car, *(c)* a freezer, *(d)* a telephone and *(e)* a television in 1979; and how many have them today. [13009]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

Percentage of all pensioner households with access to consumer durables

	Pensioner couples		*Single pensioners*		*All pensioners*	
	1979	*1991–92*	*1979*	*1991–92*	*1979*	*1991–92*
(a) Fridge or fridge freezer	94	99	82	98	88	99
(b) Car/van	48	66	21	29	34	49
(c) Freezer or fridge freezer	42	85	21	62	32	75
(d) Telephone	64	95	51	88	57	92
(e) Television	99	99	92	98	96	99

Source:
Households Below Average Income Series.

Funeral Expenses

22. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had from funeral directors about his proposals to cap payment of funeral expenses under the social fund. [13010]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received approximately 55 letters from individual funeral directors and two requests for meetings from funeral directors' national associations.

24. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to receive the views of the Social Security Advisory Committee on his proposal to cap payments towards funeral expenses under the social fund. [13012]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Social Security Advisory Committee's report was received on 15 March in the Department. I am now in the process of considering the recommendations.

Social Fund

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the jobseeker's allowance will be used in the same way as income support to decide the district allocation for social fund purposes. [14154]

Mr. Roger Evans: The income-related element of jobseeker's allowance will be used in a like way as income support for unemployed people when deciding on budget allocations to the discretionary social fund.

Habitual Residence Test

23. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the length of time taken to process appeals against the habitual residence test; and if he will make a statement. [13011]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have received a number of inquiries about the habitual residence test. I am unaware of any representations about the time taken to process appeals. The responsibility for administering and hearing social security appeals rests with the president of the independent tribunal service, who I understand has also not received any representations regarding this matter.

Mortgage Interest Payment

27. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to next meet the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Building Societies Association to discuss payment of mortgage interest by his Department. [13015]

Mr. Roger Evans: Officials are engaged in on-going discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and Building Societies Association on the proposals for income support mortgage interest.

Young People (Income Support)

28. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who have been refused income support since the entitlement was restricted. [13016]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Rowntree Report on Inequality

29. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to meet Sir Peter Barclay to discuss the findings of the Rowntree report on inequality in income and wealth. [13017]

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has no such plans. The Rowntree report was commented on by my right hon. Friend during the debate on Tuesday 14 February, *Official Report*, columns 812-826.

Disabled People

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new measures he is taking to assist disabled people: and if he will make a statement. [13204]

Mr. Hague: The Government's plans for ending discrimination against disabled people were set out fully in the White Paper published on 12 January. These include new initiatives in education and transport, in addition to the measures in the Disability Discrimination Bill for new rights in employment and access to goods and services and the establishment of a national disability council. These proposals, which are clear, flexible and fair, have received widespread support.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations.

Mr. Roger Evans: Most of the Department's research contracts are let following a process of competitive tender. The Department announces its research programme annually and potential contractors are invited to register an interest in relevant projects.

A list of contracts let by the Department to polling or public survey organisations in the current financial year is set out below:

	Organisation Amount £
British Market Research Bureau (BMRB)	
Contributions Agency Customer Survey 1994	152,691
Resettlement Agency Customer Survey 1994	36,310
Industrial Facts and Forecasting Research Ltd. (IFF)	
Forecasting demand for Social Security Advice Line for Employers	42,594
Staff Attitude Survey 1994	86,362
Market and Opinion Research International (MORI)	
Child Support Agency Customer Survey 1994	265,531
Child Support Agency Survey on the Phasing Option	10,100
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS)	
Family Resources Survey (FRS) (joint project with Social and Community Planning Research)	2,960,000
Disability survey development work	9,420
Public Perceptions of Occupational and Personal Pensions	40,000
Retirement Survey follow-up	395,166
Study to compare the contents and methods of FRS and Family Expenditure Survey	3,500
Omnibus Survey on Contributions Statement	8,800
Public Attitude Surveys Ltd. (PAS)	
War Pensions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994	92,837
Educational Compliance Visits	35,516
Council Tax Benefit (Second Adult Rebate) Research	7,656
Housing Benefit: LA Anti-Fraud Incentives scheme	25,397
Income Support Review	17,531
Benefits Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994	208,738
Research on the service provided by the War Pensions Welfare Service	31,020
Research Services Ltd. (RSL)	
Evaluation of One Stop Initiative	63,620
Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR)	
Industrial Injuries: Income and Resources of recent claimants	12,244
Women, Pensions and Divorce	397,870
Pension Scheme Dispute Resolution	112,625
Employers' Pension Provision	177,300
Direct Payments of Mortgage Interest	33,577
Satisfaction with Benefits Agency Local Office Services	38,230
Customer Satisfaction: Methodological Issues	18,115
Secondary Analysis of Benefit Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey	15,875
Management of money in later life	40,400

The Department also commissions research from independent research institutes, universities and other non-survey research organisations. Full details of all projects commissioned as part of the research programme are contained in the social research yearbook published annually.

In addition, the Department has contracted a number of market research agencies to develop and monitor public information campaigns and projects through the Central Office of Information.

Research contributes to the development and implementation of new policies and the monitoring and evaluation of existing policies. It also plays an important role in providing customer feedback on the Department's services. The Department's external research budget for 1994–95 is £4,000,000.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on how many occasions in each year since 1987 payments have been triggered under the cold weather payments scheme in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland; [14497]

(2) if he will list all the weather stations which are used by his Department within Scotland to assess whether payments are necessary under the cold weather payments scheme and the parliamentary constituencies associated with each of these. [14483]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since 1991, the weather stations which are used for the cold weather payment scheme have been linked to post code areas to enable automatic payment. All weather stations and the areas they cover are listed in the schedules to the cold weather payment regulations, a copy of which is in the Library.

Information is not available in respect of the number of occasions since 1987 payments have been triggered in each parliamentary constituency. The information that is available is in the statistical holdings section of the Library.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15090]

Mr. Hague: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. Some of the staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by this Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies" published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for this Department can be found in figure 32 of this Department's annual report 1995–96 to 1997–98. Figure 35 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* As at 1 January 1995, there were no staff employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks. The available information for those employed on contracts of fewer than 51 weeks is in the table. More precise details of the positions held could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Clerical, secretarial and support grades	*Executive and professional grades*
Department of Social Security	5,068	137
Executive Agencies	5,008	108

Notes:

1. Part-time staff are counted as half-units and totals are rounded to whole units.

2. Numbers of staff employed in the executive agencies are included in the departmental figures.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date;

(2) how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* fewer than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information requested for the period prior to April 1993 and concerning staff who have been re-employed is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There were no staff employed on temporary contracts of 51 weeks as at 1 April 1993, 1 April 1994 or 1 January 1995. The available information is in the table.

Staff employed on temporary contracts of fewer than 51 weeks

	1 April 1993		*1 April 1994*		*1 January 1995*	
	Number	*Percentage of total workforce*	*Number*	*Percentage of total workforce*	*Number*	*Percentage of total workforce*
Department of Social Security	2,729	3.0	3,176	3.4	5,205	5.5
Executive Agencies	2,637	3.0	3,123	3.5	5,116	5.6

Notes:

1. Part-time staff are counted as half units and totals are rounded to whole units.

2. Numbers of staff employed in the executive agencies are included in the departmental figures.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lenient Sentences

32. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Attorney-General what opportunities he foresees for further expansion of the system for prosecution appeals against over-lenient sentences. [12980]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General's power to review a sentence was recently extended to cover cases of serious fraud. All the most serious offences tried in the Crown court, which are those that give rise to greatest public concern, are now covered.

Combat 18

36. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the head of the Crown Prosecution Service relating to prosecution policy concerning Combat 18. [12984]

The Attorney-General: I frequently meet the Director of Public Prosecutions. Cases with a racial element are discussed as and when they arise.

38. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has now received a report from the Metropolitan police concerning Combat 18. [12986]

The Attorney-General: No. A report will be submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service by the Metropolitan police once they have concluded their inquiries.

Barings Bank

37. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent meetings he has held with the Serious Fraud Office to discuss Barings bank. [12985]

The Attorney-General: I frequently meet the director of the Serious Fraud Office to discuss matters of departmental interest, including particular cases.

Asil Nadir

29. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the case of Asil Nadir. [12987]

The Solicitor-General: A warrant has been issued for the arrest of Asil Nadir. The Crown is ready to proceed as soon as he returns or is returned to the jurisdiction.

Public Interest Immunity

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Attorney-General what changes he has made in his policy for advising on public interest immunity certificates since the prosecution of directors of Matrix Churchill. [12982]

The Attorney-General: Any advice in relation to public interest immunity is based on the law as it stands at the time that advice is given.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Forces

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reduce the present numbers of security forces in Northern Ireland while IRA weapons are still outstanding; and if the release of prisoners will be negotiable.

Sir John Wheeler: Adjustments in the level of military support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary are based solely on the operational judgment of the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding. On the basis of their advice my right hon. and learned Friend was able to announce on 14 March the relocation to Great Britain of one of the two additional units deployed to Northern Ireland in 1992. The unit and its intended successor will be ready to deploy fully trained at short notice should the need arise.

The decommissioning of arms is required in its own right and cannot be linked to prisons or other unrelated issues. We have made it absolutely clear that there is no question of an amnesty. There are no political prisoners in the United Kingdom and those who have committed crimes must serve their sentences according to law.

Telecommunications

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans exist to cut off British Telecom (Northern Ireland) from the rest of the United Kingdom network and allow it to stand alone as a separate business entity.

Mr. Ancram: I am not aware of any such plans, which would be a matter for the board of British Telecom.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for British Telecom (Northern Ireland) to be one of the first private sector companies to be established as a cross-border utility with joint Government-Executive influence.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Brucella Melitensis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of brucella melitensis were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: Brucella melitensis has never been recorded in Northern Ireland.

National Continence Day

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has had regarding the forthcoming National Continence Day; and if he will make a statement; [14230]

(2) what financial support he has given and will be giving to National Continence Day; and if he will make a statement. [14232]

Mr. Moss: No representations have been received about National Continence Day. The Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland is funding a freephone helpline and arranging publicity for National Continence Day. Health and social services boards in Northern Ireland will be distributing information leaflets, and continence advisers will be manning stands at shopping and health centres throughout Northern Ireland to support the campaign, raise awareness of this condition and encourage sufferers to seek advice and treatment.

DEFENCE

War Widows

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of living post-1973 war widows who have at any time been in receipt of an attributable forces family pension.

Mr. Soames: This information is not available. An attributable forces family pension ceases on death or remarriage and we have no record of whether those whose pensions ceased on remarriage are still living.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many post-1973 war widows in receipt of an attributable forces family pension have subsequently remarried, in each year for which figures are available.

Mr. Soames: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of living post-1973 war widows currently in receipt of an attributable forces family pension.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *719*.

Royal Flight

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in 1993–94 the royal flight was used by *(a)* members of the royal family, *(b)* Ministers, and *(c)* others.

Mr. Soames: During financial year 1993–94, the Queen's flight was used by the royal family on 968 occasions; by Her Majesty's Government Ministers on 89 occasions; and on 21 occasions by other VIPs, such as visiting foreign dignitaries.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of his Department's expenditure on water and sewerage in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the three previous years.

Mr. Freeman: The statistics sought are not held centrally and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

RAF Recruitment

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of potential pilots recruited into the RAF in each of the last five years had university air squadron experience;

(2) how many potential pilots were recruited into the RAF in each of the last five years.

Mr Soames: The information requested is contained in the table below:

Financial Year	*Total Number of recruits who entered pilot training*	*Total former UAS*	*Percentage former UAS*
1994–95	70	57	81
1993–94	74	52	70
1992–93	116	65	56
1991–92	170	68	40
1990–91	254	95	37

University Air Squadrons

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of the university air squadrons in each of the last five years showing *(a)* the cost of staff, *(b)* the cost of aircraft, *(c)* the cost of airfields and *(d)* other costs.

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying students joined university air squadrons in each of the last five years; and how many completed initial flying training with such squadrons.

Mr. Soames: Information on the number of undergraduates who joined the university air squadrons as flying members is only available for the last three years, and is as follows:

Financial year 1992–93: 348
Financial year 1993–94: 346
Financial year 1994–95: 404

Information for earlier years could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The total UAS student pilot establishment is 725.

Records are not maintained centrally on the number of UAS students who successfully complete the entire UAS flying syllabus. However, of those ex-UAS pilots who enter initial officer training each year, it is assessed that historically around two thirds will have successfully completed the UAS flying syllabus.

In the future, the UASs are committed to train all potential pilots up to a common standard for entry into basic flying training in the Royal Air Force.

Railway Wagons

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military purpose his Department requires to purchase 27 45-tonnes pallet vans and 40 modified container flat wagons, as set out in contract number PDS1A/29; what consideration has been given to leasing or hiring such equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The railway wagons will be used at Army base ammunition and ordnance depots for movement of stores both within the depots and to deliver to other customers via the main line railway system. They are needed as part of the modernisation of the Army's wagon fleet and to meet the increasingly exacting health and safety at work regulations.

In producing these wagons, full consideration was given to the options of leasing or hiring but the best value for money for the taxpayer will be achieved in this case by permanent ownership.

Lobbying Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when representatives of his Department last had a meeting with representatives from *(a)* PPAI International, *(b)* Lowe Bell Communications, *(c)* GJW Government Relations, *(d)* the Conservative Research Department, *(e)* Shandwick Consultants, *(f)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(g)* the Market Access Group, *(h)* Westminster Strategy and (i) Barrington Jay and Company; and if he will give the subject of each meeting. [14339]

Mr. Freeman: There is no central record of any meetings between my officials and representatives of the companies listed.

Newspaper Announcements

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list, by type and number, the announcements placed by his Department in *(a) The Times*, *(b)* the Daily Telegraph, (c) The Independent and (d) other publications in the last 12 months for which information is available. [14341]

Mr. Soames: Announcements concerning events, functions and the like may be sent to newspapers, both from my Department's headquarters and from establishments and commands. It is then a matter for individual newspapers whether they publish the information provided.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent listing official engagements in newspapers in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [14340]

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's practice to pay for listing official engagements in newspapers. Press releases and announcements are sent to newspapers, which will decide for themselves what they choose to publish.

Overseas Posts

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *87–88*, how much his Department spent on *(a)* pay, *(b)* allowances and *(c)* equipment and support costs for (i) services attachés, (ii) defence advisers and (iii) support staff in each overseas post for the last year in which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [14345]

Mr. Soames: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *87–88*, if he will give the official annual entertainment allowance currently at the disposal of service attachés and defence advisers in each overseas post; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The current official entertainment allowance at the disposal of defence staff in each overseas post is given below.

Annual Accountable Entertainment Allowance (AEA)

Capital	*Country*	*AEA for year 1994–95 (Sterling)*
Abu Dhabi	UAE	10,998
Accra	Ghana	7,239
Algiers	Algeria	4,198
Amman	Jordan	12,976
Ankara	Turkey	6,152
Athens	Greece	18,016
Bangkok	Thailand	4,902
Beirut	Lebanon	3,560
Belgrade	Yugoslavia	10,343
Berne	Switzerland	8,190
Bogata	Colombia	9,675
Bonn	Germany	27,319
Brasilia	Brazil	9,885
Bratislava	Slovakia	5,000
Bridgetown	Barbados	6,099
Brussels	Belgium	13,348
Bucharest	Romania	3,500
Budapest	Hungaria	5,899
Buenos Aires	Argentina	22,755
Cairo	Egypt	16,188
Canberra	Australia	15,115
Caracas	Venezuela	8,604
Copenhagen	Denmark	8,307
Damascus	Syria	5,004
Dhaka	Bangladesh	5,011
Dublin	Irish Republic	6,296
Guatemala City	Guatemala	4,660
The Hague	Netherlands	24,677
Harare	Zimbabwe	6,888
Helsinki	Finland	11,790
Islamabad	Pakistan	8,254
Jakarta	Indonesia	5,824
Kampala	Uganda	5,746
Kathmandu	Nepal	3,160
Kiev	Ukraine	4,811
Kingston	Jamaica	4,474
Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia	8,328
Kuwait City	Kuwait	4,476
Lagos	Nigeria	10,836
Lisbon	Portugal	7,082
Madrid	Spain	16,641
Mexico City	Mexico	6,883
Moscow	Russia	21,958
Muscat	Oman	13,762
Nairobi	Kenya	5,160
New Dehli	India	9,725
Nicosia	Cyprus	7,698
Oslo	Norway	11,608
Ottowa	Canada	15,594
Paris	France	56,985
Peking	China	7,778
Prague	Czech	8,198
Pretoria	South Africa	6,150
Rabat	Morocco	7,914
Riga	Latvia	2,000
Riyadh	Saudi Arabia	21,281
Rome	Italy	27,816
Santiago	Chile	8,455
Seoul	South Korea	14,338
Singapore	Singapore	12,928
Sofia	Bulgaria	4,566
Stockholm	Sweden	26,408
Tel Aviv	Israel	14,746
Tokyo	Japan	33,064
Vienna	Austria	8,377
Warsaw	Poland	6,126
Washington	USA	224,400
Wellington	New Zealand	8,076
Zagreb	Croatia	4,000

Public Relations

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *666–67*, if he will list the publications produced by his Department's public relations section in *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992–93 and *(c)* 1993–94; and what was the cost of each, the number of copies produced, the number distributed, whether any charge was made and the level of each charge. [14338]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *666–67*, if he will list by title the films made by his Department's public relations section in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93 and *(c)* 1993–94; and if he will give the cost of each. [14344]

Mr. Soames: Films and videos produced by the Department's headquarters public relations staff are as follows:

1991–92
Britain in NATO
Insurance for Peace
RN in the Gulf
Keeping the Coasts Clear
Freedom of the Seas
RN Presentation Team Film
RAF Presentation Team Film
1992–93
Green Forces
Low Flying
Changing Horizons and Ship Class Videos
Sound of Silence
1993–94
Protecting through Science
Field Gunners

The individual cost of each film or video is a commercially sensitive matter but overall the cost was just over £700,000.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings have taken place in the last two years between representatives of his Department and Conservative hon. Members to discuss procurement decisions; and if he will give *(a)* the date, *(b)* the subject and *(c)* the names of the Ministers and hon. Members attending. [14343]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Manadon

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete the sale of the Royal Navy's engineering school at Manadon, Plymouth. [14342]

Mr. Soames: The marketing campaign for Manadon is proceeding satisfactorily and prospective purchasers have been asked to submit details of their proposals and a financial offer by 26 April. It is too soon to say when assessment of the bids will be completed, but we aim to achieve a sale which will allow a smooth transition from naval to civilian use.

Porton Down Experiments

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks have volunteered since 1965 to participate in experiments at Porton Down. [14330]

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 20 March 1995:

Question 12, Order Paper 14 March 1995

1 Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many (a) officers and (b) other ranks have volunteered since 1965 to participate in experiments at Porton Down, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures.

(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Our records indicate that the number of officers and other ranks who have volunteered since 1965 to take part in studies at Porton Down is as follows:

Year	*Officers*	*Other ranks*	*Total*
1965	17	129	146
1966	35	114	149
1967	44	200	244
1968	35	228	263
1969	47	134	181
1970	59	268	327
1971	57	168	225
1972	59	299	358
1973	63	201	264
1974	100	204	304
1975	41	96	137
1976	65	189	254
1977	37	80	117
1978	25	79	104
1979	37	116	153
1980	106	234	340
1981	61	242	303
1982	38	123	161
1983	36	141	177
1984	42	89	131
1985	52	129	181
1986	31	65	96
1987	29	64	93
1988	46	90	136
1989	31	79	110
1990	18	65	83
1991	9	41	50
1992	54	58	112
1993	23	41	64
1994	38	66	104

Goddard Study

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *87–88*, who carried out the independent review of attachés known as the Goddard study; and what was the total cost of the review. [14333]

Mr. Soames: The Goddard study was conducted by an air commodore, a lieutenant colonel and a higher executive officer, Development, supported by a personal assistant. The cost of staff time and travel and subsistence involved in this review was £65,000.

Civil Service

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of *(A)* civil service job reductions due to privatisations, *(B)* civil service job reductions due to contracting out, *(C)* civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, *(D)* the total of all other staff undertaking work for his Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and *(E)* total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [14763]

Mr. Freeman: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of operating costs and the civil service pay bill for my Department for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 5 of my Department's annual report (Cm 2801), and table 4 gives details of overtime.

"United Kingdom Defence Statistics" which is published annually contains more detailed information regarding recruitment and job reductions due to contractorisation and privatisation.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Library of the House.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14508]

Mr. Freeman: The following organisations have undertaken opinion surveys on behalf of the MOD since 1 April 1993:

RSGB
Reflexions
MORI
One World Research
BMRB
Research Services
Diagnostics
Andrew Irving Associates

The cost of the individual studies is commercially confidential information, but the total cost of all surveys was:

1993–94:	£129,000
1994–95:	£243,500

The objectives of the research are to monitor the effectiveness of advertising in recruiting personnel to the armed forces and the attitudes of the public towards a career in the armed forces.

Official Service Residences

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 February *Official Report* column *86–87* if he will give the annual entertainment allowance for each other official service residence for the latest year for which information is available.

Mr Soames *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* The current annual entertainment allowance at the disposal of the officers resident in my Department's official service residences is given in the table below:

Residence	*Annual entertainment allowance 1994–95*	*Comments*
1 (1)	3,263	
2 (2)	3,263	
3 (3)	3,741	
4 (4)	Vacant	
5 (5)	7,470	
6 (6)	[1]Not in receipt of EA	
7 (7)	4,870	
8 (9)	7,470	
9 (10)	1,390	
10 (11)	4,870	
11 (12)	4,870	
12 (12)	4,870	
13 (15)	3,263	
14 (16)	3,263	Vacant from 1 May for disposal
15 (17)	4,870	
16 (18)	4,870	
17 (19)	7,470	
18 (20)	4,870	
19 (22)	2,080	
20 (23)	4,870	
21 (24)	7,470	
22 (25)	2,255	
23 (26)	4,870	
24 (27)	4,870	
25 (28)	7,470	
26	4,870	New residence
27 (29)	3,263	
28 (30)	3,263	
29 (31)	3,263	
30 (33)	[1]Not in receipt of EA	
31 (34)	7,470	
32 (35)	1,390	
33 (36)	4,870	
34 (37)	3,263	
35 (38)	4,526	
36 (39)	6,314	
37 (40)	8,212	
38 (41)	3,263	
39 (42)	2,080	
40 (43)	3,263	
41 (44)	1,390	
42 (45)	2,080	
43 (46)	4,870	
44 (47)	4,870	
45 (48)	3,263	
46 (49)	3,263	
47 (50)	2,080	

Residence	Annual entertainment allowance 1994–95	Comments
48 (51)	3,263	
49 (52)	7,470	
50 (53)	3,263	
51 (54)	7,470	
52 (55)	3,263	
53 (56)	11,147	
54 (57)	11,888	
55 (58)	7,470	
56 (59)	3,263	
57 (60)	4,870	
58 (61)	3,263	
59 (62)	7,470	
60 (63)	1,390	
61 (64)	2,080	
62 (65)	3,263	
63 (66)	2,139	
64 (67)	3,263	
65 (68)	4,870	
66 (69)	3,263	
67 (70)	3,263	
68 (71)	3,263	
69 (72)	4,870	
70 (73)	3,263	
71 (74)	3,263	
72 (75)	9,056	
73 (76)	6,241	
74 (77)	3,263	
75	7,470	*Omitted from previous list*

Note:

[1] The posts held by the occupants of residences 6 and 30 do not qualify for payment of Entertainment Allowance.

Representational entertainment by these officers is funded through individual grants in aid.

Properties no longer classed as OSRs	
(8) Vacant—declared for disposal	Not in receipt of EA
(14) OSR status removed	
(21) Vacant from September 1994—previous occupant EA = £4870	
(32) Vacant 31 January 1995	Not in receipt of EA

The numerical list given in my answer to the hon. Member on 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *560*, has since been updated and the previous serial number is shown in parentheses.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council, what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1992, divided in (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices.

Mr. Newton: The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Privy Council Office, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service. I am not responsible for any agencies.

Details of the running costs and the staff pay bill for my department can be found in the relevant annual report—Cm 2820, page 102.

Copies of these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Correspondence

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the letter dated 26 February sent by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston has not been answered.

Mrs. Browning: The letter was replied to today.

New Forest Buckhounds

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the keeper's reports on the carcases of deer killed by the New Forest buckhounds on 6 March and 10 March. [14370]

Mr. Jack: Copies of the reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

Livestock Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the type, value and number of livestock exported through *(a)* Dover, *(b)* Plymouth, *(c)* Brightlingsea, *(d)* Shoreham, *(e)* Coventry airport, *(f)* Swansea airport, *(g)* Humberside airport, *(h)* Grimsby, and (i) other (i) in the five months before October 1994 and (ii) since October 1994. [14155]

Mrs. Browning: Overseas trade data are not available in the form required.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents; (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other—and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures in 1994 prices. [15091]

Mr. Jack: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Department and its agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and civil service pay bill for the Department can be found in annexe 5 of the Department's annual report, cm 2803. Annexe 6 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Members' Library. The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid and Trade Provision

43. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to change the nature of the trade for aid provision. [13023]

Mr. Baldry: The results of a full review of the aid and trade provision were announced to the House on 17 June 1993 in a reply from my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). These reforms are being carried through.

Eastern Europe

44. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the level of aid to the east European countries from the know-how fund is expected to be in 1995–96. [13024]

Mr. Baldry: The 1995–96 planning figure for central and eastern Europe and former Soviet Union is £80 million.

Rwanda

45. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current level of aid going to Rwanda. [13025]

Mr. Baldry: Since January 1995 we have pledged 11,000 tonnes of bilateral food aid worth more than £3 million and £6 million in other assistance to Rwanda. This brings our total assistance to the Rwandan crisis since April 1994 to nearly £80 million.

Saharwi Refugees

46. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been made available to Saharwi people in refugee camps. [13026]

Mr. Baldry: The UNHCR earmarked £4 million for the Saharwi refugees in 1994 and a further £4 million this year.

The United Kingdom provides no direct bilateral aid, but helps indirectly through its contributions to UNHCR. ODA has provided over £20 million in 1994–95 for UNHCR's general programmes budget.

Sri Lanka

47. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid projects were discussed during his recent visit to Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [13027]

Mr. Baldry: I visited Sri Lanka on 14 to 16 November 1994. I was able to discuss with Ministers there the content of the aid programme in Sri Lanka which aims to reduce poverty; tackle environmental problems; strengthen human resource development; and promote good government. I was also able to see some of the relief and rehabilitation projects for families affected by the disturbances in the north and east which are financed by aid.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he received, before February, prior to scholarship awards being granted to officers of the Indonesian police force that none of those officers had previously served in East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: None.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *726*, what assurances he obtained, before February, prior to scholarship awards being granted to officers of the Indonesian police force that none of those officers would subsequently serve in East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: The Indonesian national police force gave a commitment that officers who received scholarship awards under the police project would remain with the project for a minimum of five years.

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates, titles and reference number of evaluation studies relating to Indonesia published by his Department since April 1990, indicating in each case which of the documents relate to support given through the aid and trade provision.

Mr. Baldry: Since April 1990 ODA's evaluation department has published two evaluation reports relating to Indonesia. The "Evaluation of the Ombilin Coal Mine, Indonesia (1982–84)"—EV491 January 1992—was financed under the aid and trade provision. This project is also referred to in the "ATP Synthesis Evaluation Study"—EV490 November 1991. Both reports are available in the Libraries of the House,

Mrs.Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any Indonesian police officers who have received scholarship awards involving training paid for by his Department had previously served in East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: Major Adjie Rustarn Ramdja served there in 1985 and Major Medhy Chumaedi served there before 1983.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *726*, what sources other than the Indonesian national police force have provided information that Indonesian police officers who have received scholarship awards paid for by his Department, have not subsequently served in East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom managers of the Indonesia national police project have also provided this information.

Third-world Countries

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account is taken of poverty levels in third-world countries when they are considered for overseas aid; and if he will make a statement. [13205]

Mr. Baldry: The objective of the whole aid programme is poverty reduction through sustainable development. In allocating resources, the Government target in particular poverty reduction in the poorest developing countries. Nine of the 10 largest aid recipients in 1993–94 were low-income countries in Africa and Asia and, in the same year, over two thirds of our bilateral aid allocable by income group went to the poorest developing countries.

European Democracy Programmes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications have been submitted by voluntary organisations located in the United Kingdom for funds under *(a)* the European Union's PHARE programme and *(b)* the European Union's TACIS democracy programme; if he will list those organisations which have been awarded such moneys; what is the range of these awards; and if he will make a statement. [14810]

Mr. Baldry: As of the end of 1994, the jointly administered PHARE and TACIS democracy programmes had considered a total of 88 applications from British based non-governmental organisations which met the eligibility criteria. Of these 22 were successful and the following awards have been made:

Name of organisation	*Amount (ecu)*
Penal Reform International	69,650
English Speaking Union	69,864
European Young Bar Association	150,000
Association mondiale des radiodiffuseurs communautaires—AMARC[1]	116,210
Article XIX, International Centre Against Censorship	116,865
PMA Foundation	118,177
AIRE Centre: Advice on Individual Rights in Europe	85,887
Historical Association	150,000
Penal Reform International	52,605
BBC World Service	102,995
Centre for Defence Studies	81,700
BEARR Trust—British Emergency Action in Russia and the Republics	37,083
AIRE Centre: Advice on Individual Rights in Europe	80,608
BBC Marshall Plan of the Mind Trust	150,000
British-Albanian Legal Association	53,980
Centre for Defence Studies	50,000
Bilston Community College	94,398
International Media Centre, University of Salford	88,253
Graphical, Print and Media Union	134,219
INTRAC—International NGO Training and Research Centre	124,588
Aga Khan Foundation	193,970
Verification Technology Information Centre—VERTIC	190,000

[1] Application made from UK office.

Yemen

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he proposes to resume the bilateral aid programme to the republic of Yemen. [15251]

Mr. Baldry: We have recently informed the Government of the republic of Yemen that United Kingdom bilateral aid activity will resume at the start of the 1995–96 UK financial year.

TRANSPORT

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14510]

Mr. Watts: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Financial year 1993–94

Name of polling or public survey organisation	*Purpose of research*
Hampshire County Council	After study of traffic calming measures
Lincolnshire County Council	After study of traffic calming measures
Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.	Customer satisfaction survey
Research International	Tracking research on road safety campaigns to test overall effectiveness and report on changes in attitude/behaviour

Financial year 1993–94

Name of polling or public survey organisation	*Purpose of research*
Research International *(Cont.)*	Survey to determine the public view on the acceptance of photocard driving licences Survey to determine the attitude of Vehicle Excise Duty evaders, and the effectiveness of advertising campaigns
Ross Silcock Partnership	Public Attitude Surveys to environmental and traffic schemes in Bypass Demonstration Project towns
SDG Research	Driver information survey
Social and Community Planning Research	Qualitative research into attitudes to cycle helmets
Taylor Nelson Business Services	Initial survey to determine the views and needs of the Surveyor Generals Organisation's customers prior to becoming the Marine Safety Agency
Transport Studies Unit, Oxford	Public perceptions of Red Routes
Transport and Travel Research	Bus Passenger Information Study
Total expenditure	£399,430

Note:
The values of individual contracts are not listed as these are regarded as commercially confidential.

Financial Year 1994–95

Name of polling or public survey organisation	*Purpose of research*
Accent Marketing and Research	Highways Agency image and awareness study
Andrew Irving Associates	Market research relating to the flotation of Railtrack
Atkins, Wootton Jeffries	Research study amongst goods and bus operators to determine views on the administration of the HGV and PSV operator licencing system
Babtie Traffic Ltd.	Roadside interviews on A1/M1
PAS Research Ltd.	Parking surveys Surveys of acceptable noise levels Interview surveys
Pinpoint	High Risk Offenders Project (to obtain Socio Economic Group by postcode)
Public Attitude Surveys Ltd.	Customer satisfaction survey
Research International	Tracking research on road safety campaigns to test overall effectiveness and report on changes in attitude/behaviour Customer survey to determine the effectiveness of earlier procedural changes introduced to improve the service to DVLA customers Research to determine the level of accuracy of Driver and Vehicle records
Ross Silcock Partnership	Public Attitude Surveys to environmental and traffic schemes in Bypass Demonstration Project towns
SDG Research	Motorway and Trunk Road User Survey
Social Surveyors (Gallup Poll) Ltd.	Behavioural Psychology programme—Interviewing drivers about their behaviours and attitudes
Smith and Williamson	Establishment of a Customer Research plan within the Vehicle Testing Division of the Vehicle Inspectorate
Taylor Nelson Business Services	Customer Survey to re-examine the perception of MSA and its services following transition to Agency status
Total expenditure	£522,954

Note:
The values of individual contracts are not listed as these are regarded as commercially confidential.

Date	*Researcher*	*Purpose*	*Costs (excluding VAT)*
June 1994	Advertising Principles Devonshire Hall Devonshire Avenue Street Lane Leeds, LS8 1AW	To establish attitudes of dealers in new motor vehicles to the Agency's Select Registrations Accredited Dealer scheme which allows new vehicle buyers the opportunity to buy from the Agency's Sale of Attractive Vehicle Registration Numbers via the motor dealer	Contract price: £1,800 Actual spend: £1,800
January 1995	Enterprise Planning and Research Ltd. Victoria House 28–38 Desborough Street High Wycombe HP11 2NP	To establish why certain enquiries of the Agency's Sale of Attractive Vehicle Registration Numbers telesales hotline are not being converted into sales	Contract price: £12,750 Actual spend: £12,750

Road Maintenance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if delays to motorists arising from structural maintenance of the road network are included in the assessment of the track costs of heavy lorries.

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February, *Official Report*, column *469*.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the full text of the criteria and guidelines used to implement the unpublished hardship scheme for the channel tunnel rail link referred to in paragraph 38 of the report to Parliament by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the "Channel Tunnel Rail Link and Blight".

Mr. Watts: This scheme was operated by Union Railways following the Government's announcement on 22 March 1993 of a defined route for the channel tunnel rail link for consultation purposes, and applied to that part of the route that was not covered by existing safeguarding directions until February 1994 when further safeguarding directions were issued. No specific new guidelines were produced because, as the commissioner's report indicates, the scheme was similar to the British Rail 1988 scheme described in paragraphs 31 and 32 of his report, except that properties generally had to be within 67 m of the centre line of the consultation route, which served only as a "coarse sift" as to possible eligibility.

British Rail

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of restrictions on through ticket purchase on British Rail trains on individuals with a visual disability.

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the rail regulator, who is currently considering responses received to his consultation exercise on ticket retailing. He has a statutory duty to exercise his functions in a manner that protects the interests of disabled passengers and I would expect him to take this into account in reaching his decision on the requirements to be imposed on operators.

Railtrack

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the name, location and acreage of each site or other property owned by Railtrack which is currently for sale; and if he will estimate the total value of those sites and properties.

Mr Watts: I am advised by Railtrack that the list of sites currently for sale is as listed. This includes several compulsory purchase orders, including the M11 extension transaction at Leyton. The list also includes sales where contracts have been entered into, but not yet completed. Estimates of proceeds are a matter for Railtrack.

Sites	*Description*	*Area (Acres)*
Aberdeen	Ferry Hill	2.0
Borough Green	Land at Station Road	0.3
Bradford	Land adjacent Station	16.0
Bromley South	Land adjacent Station	1.1
Enfield	Land adjacent Station	1.1
Cambridge	Former Coal Yard	2.4
Camden Chalk Farm	Stanley Sidings	2.0
Charing Cross	Carrara House	0.3
Charing Cross	Ship and Shovel	0.1
Chichester	Land adjacent Station[1]	2.6
Eastbourne	Former Goods Yard	0.5
Hemel Hempstead	Land adjacent Station	0.1
Kentish Town	Land at Spring Place	0.4
Kentish Town West	Land at Artic Street	0.5
Leatherhead	Land adjacent Station[1]	2.5
Leyton	Part of Former Engineers Depot	4.6
Marylebone	Land at Harewood Avenue[1]	1.7
Merthyr Tydfil	Goods Yard[1]	4.7
Oxford	Former Goods yard[1]	5.9
Radyr	Former Goods Yard	1.0
Reigate	Land at Station[1]	0.6
Silvertown	Goods Yard	5.4
St. Leonards	West Marine	0.5
Stevenage	Coal Yard	5.9
Urmston	Former Goods Yard[1]	2.0
Weymouth	Land adjacent Station	3.8

[1] These transactions are tied in with new or improved station facilities.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are currently employed *(a)* in York and *(b)* in other locations by Railtrack's east coast and north east zones; and how many people will be employed (i) in York and (ii) in other locations after the two zones have been merged.

Mr. Watts: I am advised by Railtrack that the combined establishment of the company's north-east and east coast main line zones is 2,129, of which 521 posts are in York. I am also advised that the small number of staff likely to be displaced as a consequence of the merger of the zones will be offered alternative employment within the company.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the name, location, acreage and date of sale of each site or other property sold by Railtrack since its creation; and what is the total amount of money received from those sales.

Mr. Watts: I am advised by Railtrack that to date Railtrack has received £8 million in sales receipts from 134 individual transactions. This figure includes compensation from compulsory purchase orders, notably the Jubilee line extension scheme. Details of the individual transactions are commercially confidential.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date Railtrack's east coast zone and its north-east zone will merge; and where the headquarters of the new merged zone will be situated.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's north-east and east coast main-line zones are scheduled to merge on 26 June 1995. The headquarters of the combined zone will be situated in York.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the safety directorate of Railtrack should not be privatised. [14429]

Mr. Watts: No. The legislative framework for railway safety developed by the Health and Safety Commission ahead of privatisation will remain robust following the privatisation of Railtrack as a single entity.

Kingskerwell Bypass

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what date has been set to start work on the Kingskerswell bypass.

Mr. Watts: It is too early to say when this scheme may enter construction. Future progress will depend on the satisfactory completion of the statutory planning procedures and the availability of funds.

Red Routes (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the present plans for implementing the red route proposals in the London borough of Wandsworth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Traffic Director for London is considering a revised timetable under which Wandsworth's red routes would begin to come into operation later this year.

Kent Coast Lines

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many carriages used currently by BR Network SouthEast's South Eastern train operating unit are due to be withdrawn from service on its Kent coast lines over the next 18 months; and if he will indicate the class numbers of these carriages and the dates they are expected to be withdrawn from service.

Mr. Watts: South Eastern has confirmed to me that over the next 18 months it is planning to withdraw progressively 116 class 411 coaches from service on Kent coast lines. The precise dates of the withdrawals have yet to be determined.

Railways (Road Bridges)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory duties with regard to the maintenance and strengthening of road bridges over railway lines have been transferred from British Rail to Railtrack; and what will be their responsibility with regard to this strengthening necessary to take 40 tonne road vehicles. [14579]

Mr. Watts: Any statutory duties relating to the maintenance and strengthening of former British Rail road bridges now owned by Railtrack have been transferred to Railtrack so far as permitted under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. Railtrack maintains its bridges to the standards set by the Railway Bridges (Load-Bearing Standards) (England and Wales) Order 1972; any strengthening beyond this level will be the responsibility of the relevant highway authority.

Royal Train

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the individuals other than Her Majesty the Queen, who used the royal train in 1993–94. [14728]

Mr. Watts: I understand from British Rail that, between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994, the royal train was used by the following members of the royal family, other than Her Majesty the Queen:

The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Prince Edward
The Duke of Kent
The Duchess of Kent

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many and what occasions was the royal train used in 1993–94. [14729]

Mr. Watts: Between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994, the royal train was used on 47 separate occasions, involving use of the royal train coaches on 95 days, to enable members of the royal family to carry out official engagements.

Compensation

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which court judgments delivered in the last two years have resulted in the Department needing to review its rules of compensation to take account of a reduction in property values resulting from its schemes. [14726]

Mr. Watts: I am aware of no judgments which have resulted in a need for change in the compensation payable under the provisions of the statutory compensation code. The Court of Appeal judgment in the case of the Secretary of State for Transport and Lt. Col. David Owen requires the Department to take into account loss in value of property when assessing whether its enjoyment is seriously affected and therefore whether it falls to be considered for discretionary purchase.

Eurostar

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely traffic demand on the proposed channel tunnel rail link following the inauguration of the Eurostar service. [14978]

Mr. Watts: I have not made any such assessment; it is for the operators and the channel tunnel rail link bidders to do so.

WALES

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency in relation to his Department's agreement to the agency's three-year business plan with reference *(a)* to its projections of projected capital expenditure and *(b)* its conditionality on receipt of increased levels of grant from the European regional development fund.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* I met the chairman and board of the agency on 1 November 1994 to discuss its draft corporate plan. The agency quite properly plans its activities with reference to a number of factors, including the sale of capital assets and anticipated funding. In the event that the agency is more or less successful with its project bids for ERDF, the agency would need to adjust its levels of gross expenditure accordingly. Those ERDF projects are additional to the programme financed by grant-in-aid and asset receipts.

Mr Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the future headquarters location of the agency; and if he will make a statement. [15076]

Mr. Redwood: None.

Company Liquidations

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to collect information pertaining to the number of Welsh businesses going into liquidation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No. Information is collected by the Insolvency Service, an executive agency within the Department of Trade and Industry, on liquidations in England and Wales. I do not consider that attempting a separate count for Wales could be justified in terms of the cost to public funds.

National Continence Day

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support he is giving to National Continence Day.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office has funded the cost of producing bilingual leaflets and Welsh language stickers, amounting to £3,273, which will support local NHS initiatives.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what literature accompanying National Continence Day is to be published in the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Welsh language stickers and bilingual bookmark style leaflets have been distributed widely.

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had regarding the forthcoming National Continence Day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office has not received any representations regarding the forthcoming National Continence Day, but a set of publicity material has been produced and widely distributed.

Housing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *446*, if he will publish his estimate of the extent of unmet housing need in terms of housing condition, population growth and housing location. [14575]

Mr. Redwood: Local housing authorities are responsible for assessing housing need. The 1991 census showed that there were more household spaces than households in Wales. I expect to publish the 1992-based household projections for the counties of Wales on 5 April 1995. These will inform local estimates of housing need. Local housing authorities also have available the results of the 1993 Welsh house condition survey, which I published last September.

Building Signs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *445*, on the recognition of Welsh Office funding, if he will define significant funding; to which current schemes the provisions would apply; and if the provision covers European Community programmes where local authorities spend money in unison with Community money. [14616]

Mr. Redwood: These matters will be addressed in the proposals being drawn up by my officials.

Civil Service

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1992, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15091]

Mr. Redwood: "Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the Civil Service pay bill for my Department can be found in table 10.01 of my Department's annual report (Command 2815). The table also gives details of overtime from 1991–92 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the expected date for the publication of the firm proposals for the acquisition of land in south Gwent for bird habitat migration measures in relation to the Cardiff bay barrage; what consultation he has had with the two local authorities concerned; if the acquisition of the land required will be by voluntary or compulsory purchase; and if he will make a statement. [15080]

Mr. Redwood: I hope to make an announcement about the most appropriate site within the next two or three months.

The consultation and land acquisition procedures are matters the development corporation are pursuing with the Land Authority for Wales.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *531*, if he will give the dates of the answers in each category and state the underlying principle behind the increase in the numbers since 1 January of answers requesting a chairman or chief executive of a non-departmental public body to write in answer to a parliamentary question. [15078]

Mr. Redwood: The dates are as follows:

PQ number	*Date answered*
(a)	
168N	30 January 1995
114N	7 February 1995
41N	10 February 1995
38N	10 February 1995
146N	15 February 1995
153N	15 February 1995
104N	23 February 1995
(b)	
77N	15 December 1994

There is no underlying principle behind the increase in numbers of answers stating that a chairman or chief executive of a non-departmental body will write to the hon. Member.

I or my Ministers answer on policy matters; the chairman or chief executive answer on day-to-day running and management of their organisation.

Southern Damselfly

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to prevent further loss of breeding populations of coinagroin mercuriale—the southern damselfly. [14877]

Mr. Redwood: The southern damselfly has been fully taken into account in the selection of conservation sites in Wales including both sites of special scientific interest and proposed special areas of conservation under the EC habitats directive.

Killarney Fern

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measure he is taking to maintain six sites in Wales that contain trichomanes speciosum, Killarney fern, and to restore the population of Killarney fern to the site in Meirionnydd where it has been depleted by collecting. [14878]

Mr. Redwood: The Killarney fern is fully taken into account in the conservation strategies of the Countryside Council for Wales. Sites containing the largest populations are designated as sites of special scientific interest and great caution is shown on releasing information relating to the location of the fern. Proposals to reintroduce the fern in Meirionnydd are under consideration.

Secondary School Reorganisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his decision on the proposed reorganisation of secondary education in Ely will be based on the principle of commencement in September 1995. [15075]

Mr. Redwood: Yes

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in full the members of the single programming document monitoring committee for Wales of the European regional development fund and the offices and bodies they represent; if he will list the dates of each meeting that has been held and of the next meeting. [15079]

Mr. Redwood: The rural Wales committee and the industrial south Wales single programming document monitoring committee met on 16 and 21 February 1995 respectively. It is anticipated that the next meetings of the monitoring committees will take place late Summer 1995. The membership of those committees is set out in the following list.

Rural Wales

Mr. M. J. A. Cochlin (Chair), Welsh Office
Miss E. N. M. Davies, Welsh Office
Dr. M. C. Dunn, Welsh Office
Mr. J. Burns, Department of Employment
Mr. R. Liddell, DGVI European Commission
Ms C. Wendt, DGXVI European Commission
Mr. N. Scott, DGV European Commission
[1]Mr. H. V. Thomas, Gwynedd County Council
[1]Ms J. Jones, Powys County Council
[1]Mr. D Bown, Dyfed County Council
Mr. M. Royles, Dwyfor District Officer
Mr. A. Carr, Aberconwy, Borough Council
Mr. G. Davey, Montgomeryshire District Council
Mr. H. James, South Pembrokeshire District Council
Mr. D. L. Evans, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Mr. S. White, West Wales TEC
Mr. W. R. Jones, Barclays Bank plc
Mr. T. Jones, Farmer
Prof. J. Hughes, Development Board for Rural Wales
Mr. Pride, Wales Tourist Board
Mrs. E. Allinson, Welsh Funding Councils

[1] Two Monitoring Committee places are available to the County Councils and two of the three County Councils nominees attend meetings.

Industrial South Wales

Mr. M. J. A. Cochlin (Chair), Welsh Office
Miss E. N. M. Davies, Welsh Office
Dr. M. C. Dunn, Welsh Office
Mr. J. Burns, Department of Employment
Mr. R. Royce, DGV European Commission
Ms C. Wendt, DGXVI European Commission
Mr. A. G. Corless, West Glamorgan County Council
Mr. M. J. Perry, Gwent County Council
Mr. R. Leadbeter, Blaenau Gwent Borough Council
Mr. M. Boaden, Merthyr Tidfil Borough Council
Mr. I. K. Lewis, Port Talbot Borough Council
Mr. G. Byrne, Cardiff City Council
Ms. S. Stephens, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Mr. G. Vaughan, Mid Glamorgan TEC
Mr. R. Thomas, Eversheds Phillips and Buck
Mr. A. Clegg, Railtrack
Mr. G. Moore, Welsh Development Agency
Mr. J. Pride, Wales Tourist Board
Mrs. F. Pickard, Further and Higher Education Funding Councils

EDUCATION

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many local education authorities were affected by boundary changes in 1994–95; if she will list for each such local education authority *(a)* the number of schools transferred to a new local education authority, *(b)* the name of the new local education authority, *(c)* the education component of the standard spending assessment and *(d)* the adjusted figure for the standard spending assessment after account has been taken of the boundary changes.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the following table. Most local education authorities affected by boundary changes are not affected by school transfers. All the adjustments for boundary changes are included within the "other services" component of local education authorities' standard spending assessments.

	Schools transferred	*Receiving LEA*	*Education component £ million*	*Adjusted SSA £ million*
City of London	0		0.783	65.873
Camden	0		78.775	218.486
Greenwich	0		114.265	227.891
Hackney	0		92.843	247.328
Hammersmith and Fulham	0		57.213	164.606
Islington	0		80,442	214.504
Kensington and Chelsea	0		37.272	140.302
Lambeth	0		102.068	284.848
Lewisham	0		107.987	245.200
Southwark	0		109.934	273.412
Tower Hamlets	0		120.163	259.597
Wandsworth	0		88.718	240.671
Westminster	0		59.934	241.849
Barking and Dagenham	0		65.688	131.085
Barnet	0		113.666	227.343
Bexley	0		84.537	155.449
Brent	1	Ealing	106.318	235.514
Bromley	0		99.593	194.122
Croydon	0		114.342	239.973
Ealing	0		108.869	241.671
Enfield	0		112.192	217.111
Haringey	0		89.054	213.600
Harrow	0		70.409	147.952
Havering	0		84.067	155.216
Hillingdon	0		88.939	177.762
Hounslow	0		90.156	178.744
Kingston upon Thames	0		45.852	95.320
Merton	0		56.276	124.808
Newham	0		123.810	259.435
Redbridge	2	Barking	94.245	176.706
Richmond upon Thames	0		44.331	102.168
Sutton	0		64.450	124.886
Waltham Forest	0		94.112	200.246
Birmingham	0		427.157	880.278
Coventry	0		115.727	227.863
Dudley	0		98.869	198.376
Sandwell	0		113.826	232.447
Solihull	0		69.171	129.509
Walsall	0		103.691	206.172
Wolverhampton	0		96.144	196.072
Knowsley	0		69.643	139.138
Liverpool	2	Knowsley	202.743	422.859
St Helens	0		63.280	129.743
Sefton	0		102.312	205.107
Bolton	0		95.727	193.671
Bury	0		57.847	116.426
Manchester	0		182.485	420.956
Rochdale	0		79.656	159.566
Salford	0		78.671	180.186
Stockport	0		86.091	175.407
Tameside	0		76.328	155.265
Wigan	1	Salford	104.851	206.143
Barnsley	0		73.067	149.575
Doncaster	0		113.687	216.492
Rotherham	0		96.279	184.544
Sheffield	0		162.779	377.290
Bradford	0		201.941	396.947
Calderdale	0		72.840	140.552
Kirklees	0		136.679	267.648
Leeds	0		240.355	512.221
Gateshead	0		68.177	153.191
Newcastle upon Tyne	0		97.287	224.010
North Tyneside	0		65.412	140.100
South Tyneside	0		56.343	120.377
Sunderland	0		110.851	227.641

	Schools transferred	*Receiving LEA*	*Education component £ million*	*Adjusted SSA £ million*
Berkshire	0		273.303	453.592
Buckinghamshire	1	Berkshire	244.491	393.493
Cambridgeshire	0		226.137	380.909
Cheshire	0		332,027	552.612
Derbyshire	0		302.839	522.391
Durham	0		206.861	357.911
East Sussex	0		212.497	413.417
Essex	0		540.456	923.590
Hereford and Worcester	5	Birmingham	219.794	364.554
Hertfordshire	0		371.417	610.165
Humberside	0		310.831	533.528
Kent	0		559.063	953.111
Lancashire	0		483.978	845.369
Northumberland	0		107.600	190.055
Nottinghamshire	0		346.671	589.856
Staffordshire	0		348.788	581.770
Suffolk	0		205.854	357.958
Surrey	1	Berkshire	299.400	542.654
Warwickshire	0		156.224	260.819

Colleges and Universities (Safety)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to require improved security and personal safety at colleges and universities.

Mr. Boswell: None. Colleges and universities are independent, autonomous bodies, responsible for their own affairs. Any arrangements that they make for security and personal safety on campus are for the governing body of each institution to determine. Ministers have no powers to intervene.

Grants

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of students in full-time education received grants.

Mr. Boswell: Information is not available in the form requested.

In 1992–93, 1,192,000 full-time students below postgraduate level normally resident in England and Wales were studying at publicly funded further and higher education institutions, including universities. In the same year, 864,000 students below postgraduate level held mandatory or discretionary awards from local education authorities in England and Wales. Some of these awards will have been to part-time students, some will have been for study at private institutions, and some will have been for fees only, not maintenance grants. Because the figures for students and award holders are not directly comparable, it is not possible to calculate the percentage of full-time students who received a grant.

University Salaries

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the average change in real terms of university salaries since 1979. [14463]

Mr. Boswell: Between April 1979 and April 1994, university academics' pay rose by 27 per cent. in real terms as measured by the new earnings survey. Definitional changes may have slightly reduced this figure.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the average change in real terms of teachers' salaries in further education since 1979. [14461]

Mr. Boswell: It is not possible to provide a figure solely for teachers in further education. Between April 1979 and April 1994, the pay of staff in former local authority further and higher education rose by 31 per cent. in real terms, as measured by the new earnings survey.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what has been the change in real terms of secondary school teachers' salaries since 1979; [14460]

(2) what has been the average change in real terms of primary school teachers' salaries since 1979. [14458]

Mr. Robin Squire: The average salary of a primary and secondary school teacher in Great Britain has increased by 60 per cent. in real terms between April 1979 and April 1994, as measured by the new earning survey. This compares with an increase of 37 per cent. in real terms in the average pay for all employees over the same period.

Physical Education Curriculum

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what education and training is available in schools on coastal hazards and life-saving techniques. [14719]

Mr. Forth: The revised national curriculum for physical education requires that, by the age of 11, all pupils should be taught to swim unaided, competently and safely, for at least 25 m. They should also be taught the principles and skills of water safety and survival. Detailed advice on safe practice in teaching swimming and outdoor and adventurous activities is included in the handbook "Safe Practice in Physical Education" which was first published in 1985 by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. A revised edition of the handbook was published in 1990 with the approval and recommendation of the then Department of Education and Science. The handbook includes advice about recommended teacher-tutor qualifications, supervision and pupil behaviour. The handbook is currently subject to further revision and will be republished later this year.

Surplus Places

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many surplus places there are in Bolton's local authority *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools; and what is the cost of such empty places. [14238]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, there were 2,187 surplus primary places and 2,000 surplus secondary places in Bolton LEA maintained schools, representing 9 per cent. and 10 per cent. of capacity respectively. We estimate that the cost of maintaining these places is in the region of £1 million. Not all these places are in practice removable. Increasing pupil numbers will fill many of them.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the pupil-teacher ratio in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in Nottinghamshire. [14675]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, the latest date for which information is available, the pupil-teacher ratios within maintained primary and secondary schools in Nottinghamshire local education authority area were 22.9 and 15.8 respectively.

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the pupil-teacher ratio in Cornwall and the national average for *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last 20 years. [15010]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pupil:Teacher Ratios within maintained primary and secondary schools in Cornwall local education authority and England 1975–94—Position in January each year

	Primary		*Secondary*[1]	
Year	*England*	*Cornwall*	*England*	*Cornwall*
1975	24.3	26.0	17.3	17.6
1976	23.9	25.4	17.1	17.5
1977	23.8	25.1	17.1	17.5
1978	23.6	24.6	17.0	17.3
1979	23.1	24.2	16.8	16.9
1980	22.7	24.0	16.7	16.8
1981	22.6	23.9	16.7	17.0
1982	22.5	23.8	16.7	17.1
1983	22.3	23.6	16.6	17.2
1984	22.1	23.7	16.4	17.2
1985	22.2	23.5	16.3	17.2
1986	22.1	23.5	16.1	16.9
1987	21.9	23.2	15.8	16.8
1988	22.0	23.4	15.5	16.6
1989	22.0	23.1	15.4	16.4
1990	22.0	23.2	15.4	16.1
1991	22.2	23.3	15.7	16.4
1992	22.2	23.3	15.9	16.4
1993	22.4	23.4	16.2	16.9
1994	22.7	23.3	16.4	17.3

[1] Excludes Sixth Form Colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1993.

Teachers

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the teacher numbers in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education in 1979 and what are they now. [14679]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on qualified teachers employed within maintained primary and secondary schools in England in 1979 and 1994, the latest date for which information is available, is shown in the table.

Full-time equivalent (FTE)[1] *qualified teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in England*

Position in January each year

	Primary	*Secondary*
1979	192,500	[2]226,800
1994	180,600	178,800

[1] Includes the FTE of part-time qualified teachers.[2] Excludes sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1994.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost of employing a teacher for a year in *(a)* infant schools, *(b)* junior schools and *(c)* secondary schools. [14702]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's estimate of the average annual cost of employing a teacher in an infant school or in a junior school in Great Britain as at 1 April 1994 is around £23,600. The estimated average annual cost of employing a teacher in a secondary is around £25,700.

Public and Polling Opinion Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the employment of polling or public opinion survey organisations by her Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by her Department, on the values of the individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14509]

Mr. Boswell: The Department carries out regular market research to measure public awareness of key policy initiatives, to evaluate the effectiveness of its information campaigns and to inform the planning of future publicity activity.

All departmental research is commissioned via the Central Office of Information, which contracts commercial research companies on behalf of the Department.

The overall cost of completed market research carried out by the Department during the current and previous financial year is some £262,000. To give the cost of individual research surveys would compromise confidential tendering procedures.

Sports Equipment

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recommendations her Department makes to schools and education authorities on improving safety in the use of sports equipment, with particular reference to portable goal posts, and on the purchase of all sports equipment. [14618]

Mr. Forth: Detailed advice on safe practice in the use of sports equipment in physical education is included in the handbook "Safe Practice in Physical Education" which was first published in 1985 by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. A revised edition of the handbook was published in 1990 with the approval and recommendation of the then Department of Education and Science. The handbook includes advice about the safe use and maintenance of premises and equipment, recommended teacher or tutor qualifications, supervision and pupil behaviour. The handbook is currently subject to further revision and will be published later this year.

School Budgets

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the budget, per head, in respect of children in school in each member of the European Union. [14673]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on budgets is not collected centrally. Information on expenditure per pupil or student is shown in table P6 of the OECD publication "Education at a Glance", published in December 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

Business Funding

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress has been made in acquiring business funding for schools. [14672]

Mr. Robin Squire: There is already significant non-commercial private sector investment in schools. For example, business sponsors have committed over £37 million to city technology colleges and £7 million to technology colleges to date.

In the context of the Government's private finance initiative, we are actively promoting and facilitating school and private sector partnerships to increase commercial investment in schools.

School Places (Costs)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost of providing a place in a school per child for *(a)* infant schools, *(b)* junior schools and *(c)* secondary schools. [14703]

Mr. Robin Squire: Net institutional expenditure per pupil in LEA-maintained nursery and primary schools in England is estimated at £1,638, and in secondary schools £2,250, in 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available.

Equivalent information for grant-maintained schools is the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I will ask the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Information for independent schools is not available.

School Reserves

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy in respect of the putting of school reserves into special project accounts not counted in total reserves; and if she will make a statement. [14619]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is not a matter on which my right hon. Friend has had occasion to give specific guidance to local education authorities.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children are in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education now and how many in 1979. [14678]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils is maintained primary and secondary schools in England in 1979 and 1994, the latest date for which information is available, is shown in the table.

Full-time equivalent (FTE)[1] pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools in England

Position in January each year

	[1] *Primary*	*Secondary*
1979	4,444,500	[2]3,820,300
1994	4,093,500	2,933,600

[1]Each part-time pupil is treated as 0.5 full-time equivalents.

[2]Excludes sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 april 1993.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Stephen Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated cost of the Coopers and Lybrand investigation into financial irregularities at the Student Loans Company. [14988]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 20 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *720*.

Cornwall Local Education Authority

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent per pupil in Cornwall in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last 20 years at constant prices. [15009]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table below shows expenditure by Cornwall local education authority on *(a)* pre-primary and primary pupils combined, and on *(b)* secondary pupils from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available.

Cornwall County Council

	Spending per pupil (1994–95 prices)	
Year	*Nursery/Primary*	*Secondary*
1974–75	1,006	1,832
1975–76	1,009	1,836
1976–77	1,034	1,807
1977–78	1,004	1,744
1978–79	1,035	1,779
1979–80	1,026	1,747
1980–81	1,038	1,597
1981–82	1,079	1,651
1982–83	1,101	1,669
1983–84	1,126	1,699
1984–85	1,124	1,681
1985–86	1,130	1,723
1986–87	1,222	1,886
1987–88	1,317	2,033
1988–89	1,379	2,164
1989–90	1,373	2,123
1990–91	1,381	2,192

Cornwall County Council

	Spending per pupil (1994–95 prices)	
Year	*Nursery/Primary*	*Secondary*
1991–92	1,534	2,139
1992–93	1,584	2,241
1993–94[1]	1,566	2,203

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent in total on education in Cornwall at constant prices in each of the past 20 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows total expenditure by Cornwall local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Cornwall County Council gross expenditure (1994–95 prices)

Year	*£ millions*
1974–75	145.5
1975–76	150.0
1976–77	154.8
1977–78	155.0
1978–79	161.0
1979–80	158.0
1980–81	161.2
1981–82	164.2
1982–83	163.9
1983–84	162.6
1984–85	163.4
1985–86	166.2
1986–87	177.4
1987–88	186.8
1988–89	195.0
1989–90	196.0
1990–91	207.5
1991–92	209.3
1992–93	226.8
1993–94[1]	197.0

[1] Provisional.

Civil Service

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the agencies under her Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under her Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether she will also provide for each year her estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisation, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditure, in 1994 prices. [15011]

Mr. Boswell: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Department and its agency, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and the civil service pay bill for the Department can be found in table 22 of the Department's annual report Cm 2810.

Copies of all of these publications are available in Library. The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Class Sizes

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many primary school children in Nottinghamshire are taught in classes of more than 30 children; [14677]

(2) how many secondary school children in Nottinghamshire are taught in classes of more than 30 children. [14676]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, the latest date for which information is available, 19,900 pupils were being taught in single teacher classes of size greater than 30 in maintained primary schools in Nottinghamshire local education authority area. The equivalent figure for maintained secondary schools was 2,100 pupils.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many secondary school children are taught in class sizes of over 30. [14680]

Mr. Robin Square: In January 1994, the latest date for which information is available, 208,700 pupils were being taught in single teacher classes of size greater than 30 in maintained secondary schools in England.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average class size in each member country of the European Union for *(a)* infant schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools. [14674]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not available centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 March 1995

TREASURY

Somerset House (Security)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the bid by the private company awarded the contract for security at Somerset house was more expensive than the rival in-house bid; and what assessment he has made of the value for money achieved by the awarding of the contract.

Sir George Young: The tendering process in this, as with any market test, sought best value for money and so considered not only price but also quality and ability to deliver. The decision was not made on cost alone. The contract commences on 1 March 1995, so it is too soon to evaluate delivery of the service.

Civil Servants' Pay

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average increase in real terms of civil servants' salaries since 1979.

Mr. Aitken: Between April 1979 and April 1994 civil servants' average earnings increased by 26 per cent. in real terms, based on data from the New Earnings Survey and deflated by the all items retail prices index.

Home Care Services (VAT)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual VAT income from VAT levied on private home care services provided by VAT-registered companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is not possible to provide a separate figure for VAT levied on private home care services.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14503]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* In 1993–94, International Survey Research Limited was employed to carry out a staff attitude survey. Market and Opinion Research International Limited is currently carrying out a survey of members of the Government Accountancy Service.

Disclosing details of the cost of individual contracts would breach commercial confidentiality. The total cost of the above contracts is expected to be some £60,000.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the projected earnings in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 from the tax on medical insurance premiums 1994–95. [15000]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* Annex A to chapter 4 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report shows that receipts for IPT on all types of insurance is forecast to be £0.2 billion in 1994–95 and £0.7 billion in 1995–96. Data from the Family Expenditure Survey suggests that around 8 per cent. of this is due to medical insurance.

VAT Threshold

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to increase the VAT threshold for small businesses to £100,000. [13717]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The Government are obliged, under the EC sixth VAT directive, to restrict increases in the threshold to those which maintain its value in real terms.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list all the visits by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities; [15027]

(2) if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15014]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and I always do our best to give prior warning to hon. Members when we visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Commissioner for the Holding Centres

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he hopes to publish Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's second annual report as Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres. [15600]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have today arranged for copies of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's annual report for 1994 to be placed in the Library.

I welcome the report, which provides a valuable examination of custody procedures in the police offices. I shall be studying it carefully.

I am most grateful for the work carried out by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper. The role of the commissioner remains important even in the changed circumstances since the PIRA and loyalist paramilitaries' cessation of violence. The Government remain committed to the principle that the emergency legislation will remain in force no longer than is necessary. However, for as long as the paramilitaries retain the capability to resume violence, and for as long as the police require to interview persons suspected of involvement in terrorism, there is a need to maintain special provisions for detaining suspects in police custody. While this is the case, all the present safeguards designed to ensure the rights of those held in custody will remain in place, including the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres. As Sir Louis Blom-Cooper states in his report, an immediate impact of the ceasefires was a dramatic drop in the numbers detained in the police offices.

I am glad to note that, after a total of 26 visits of his own and 88 by his deputy, Sir Louis has been able to report that he can again find no cause for concern about the care and treatment of detainees held in the custody of uniformed officers of the RUC. I share Sir Louis' satisfaction that his terms of reference have been changed to permit him to be present, if he wishes, throughout interviews with terrorist suspects. This will further increase the level of independent supervision of procedures in the police offices.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to those hon. members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities [15023]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is standard practice, when I intend to visit any hon. Member's constituency, to inform the hon. Member concerned. I am aware of no occasion when I have departed from this practice.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14504]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* My Department has employed the following polling and public survey organisations during the current and previous financial years:

The Historic Royal Palaces Agency used CC and C Research Limited during 1994–95 to carry out summer visitor surveys at Hampton Court palace, the tower of London and Kensington palace, at a cost of £10,325. In the same year it employed Vital Statistics to carry out an attitude survey cross all of the historic royal palaces, at a cost of £9,150.

The Royal Parks Agency employed the Centre for Leisure and Tourism Studies at the university of North London to collect information on the use of, and visitor attitudes towards, the Royal Parks. The cost in 1994–95 was £70,125.

All prices are exclusive of VAT.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1992, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisation, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15099]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The civil service covers the permanent staff of central government departments and "next steps" agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full-time and equivalent staff and casuals (from 1993 onwards) and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by "civil service statistics".

Details of running costs and civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in figure 9.4 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2811.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Television Reception

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of the land area of the United Kingdom was unable to receive terrestrial television in each year since 1985. [14920]

Mr. Dorrell: Television coverage estimates are made in terms of population rather than land area. The broadcasters estimate that their terrestrial television coverage had reached all but 0.6 per cent. of the UK population by 1985. they have continued to build about 25 new transmitters a year but this programme has not measurably reduced the estimate of the percentage of unserved population.

Concessionary Television Licences

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will consider granting concessionary TV licences to *(a)* residents of Bradely village, Stoke on Trent, over pension age and *(b)* residents under pension age; and if he will make a statement. [15131]

Mr. Dorrell: Under section 180 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, administration of the television licensing system, including determining eligibility for concessionary licences, passed to the BBC with effect from 1 April 1991. I have no power to intervene in respect of entitlement to the concession in individual cases.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report*, column *727*, if any officer of the Indonesian national police force who has received any form of training paid for by his Department has subsequently gone on to serve in East Timor. [15432]

Mr. Baldry: No.

PRIME MINISTER

Consultants

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will name the consultancy to which he referred in his oral answer to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), *Official Report*, column *140*, on 7 March as having achieved savings of tens of millions of pounds; and what were the savings and consultancy fees involved. [13241]

The Prime Minister: The example related to a Welsh Office roads project. On one particular five year project the final certificate for the main contract was substantially greater than the original tender price because of the effects of inflation and unforseen conditions encountered during construction. A consultant quantity surveying firm was employed in assisting departmental staff to consider the appropriate price for the overall contract. This work cost around £50,000, but the advice helped to inform the negotiations with the contractor, which led to a settlement £80 million less than the contractor's claim.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13541]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 March. [13542]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will hold discussions with the United States Government about the action of the CIA in arresting Juval Aviv, former agent of the Israeli intelligence service, and on Mr. Aviv's report of September 1989 for Pan Am. [15397]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Teachers and Administrators

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to oral answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *1021*, concerning the ratio of teachers to administrators or other staff within the ambit of local education authorities, what are the statistical bases and arithmetical calculations on which his statement was based. [15342]

The Prime Minister: Figures collected by the Local Government Management Board show that in June 1994 local education authorities in England employed 376,665 full-time equivalent teachers and lecturers and 316,244 full-time equivalent other manual and non-manual staff involved in education, making a ration of around 2.5 non-teaching staff to every three teachers.

Ministerial Committees

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Prime Minister what new Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet have been established since the updated list of membership and terms of reference of Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees was published on 22 November 1994. [15648]

The Prime Minister: I have established a new Ministerial Committee to consider the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy. A copy of the terms of reference and membership is in the Library of the House. The details are as follows:

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON THE COORDINATION AND PRESENTATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY (EDCP)

Composition

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Chairman)

Lord President of the Council

Lord Privy Seal

Minister without Portfolio

Other Ministers will be invited to attend when necessary.

Terms of reference

"To consider the coordination and presentation of Government policy".

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (i) full-time equivalents, (ii) overtime, (iii) casuals and (iv) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of *(A)* civil service job reductions due to privatisations, *(B)* civil service jobs due to contracting out, *(C)* civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, *(D)* the total of all other staff undertaking work for his department of its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and *(E)* total manpower expenditure in 1994 prices. [14769]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science on 20 March.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Child Abduction Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the cost of the child abduction unit; and how many staff are involved in the unit, fall and part-time.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of the child abduction unit for the year ending 31 March 1995 will be £130,000.

There are four staff involved in the unit: two full time and two whose employment on unit work forms only part of their duties.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Computer Networks

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international agencies exist to maintain and promote standards concerning the content of international communications via computer networks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such international agencies exist.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international agreements exist to set and maintain standards concerning the content of international communications on computer networks.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such international agreements exist.

Fishing Disputes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support of any kind was given to the United Kingdom by *(a)* Spain, *(b)* the EEC and *(c)* other individual EEC Governments between 1972 and 1976 in the United Kingdom's fishing dispute with Iceland.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The EEC made the tariff reductions on certain Icelandic fish imports provided for under protocol No. 6 of Iceland's 1972 free trade agreement with the Community dependent on a satisfactory resolution of the fisheries dispute with member states. The Council of the EEC implemented the protocol only after the UK settlement with Iceland on 1 June 1976, the last to be concluded by an EEC member. There was close consultations with the German federal Government, whose dispute with Iceland ended in 1975. This consultation included the handling of the British and German cases on the issue before the International Court of Justice. A German proposal for tripartite negotiations in 1972 was rejected by the Government of Iceland. Spain was not a member of the EEC at that time and I am unaware of any bilateral support.

Philippines

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with the Philippines Government.

Mr. Goodlad: President Fidel V. Ramos has just completed a successful visit to the United Kingdom, the first by a Philippine President.

The visit served to strengthen further our already excellent bilateral relations. It confirmed Britain's role as a leading trade partner for the Philippines in Europe—many important commercial agreements were signed during the visit—and reinforced the position of the Philippines as an important partner for the UK in Asia.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions the situation in Sierra Leone has been raised at a forum of the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information is not collated. However, Sierra Leone was raised on 25 January 1995, during informal consultations of the Security Council and on 10 February 1995 when UN Secretary-General addressed a donors' meeting.

Social Development Summit

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the world summit for social development; and if he will list the changes in *(a)* policies and *(b)* expenditure to the United Kingdom Government as a result of the summit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The declaration and programme of action of the world summit for social development were adopted on 12 March in Copenhagen.

The summit outcomes do not require changes in policy or expenditure unless the Government decide that this is necessary. The Government will consider the outcomes of the summit carefully in the light of national circumstances and priorities.

Import Quotas (China)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if at its meeting on Monday 6 March the General Affairs Council of the European Commission took account of the use of Laogai labour in approving an increase in quotas on imports of Chinese goods, with particular reference to shoes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The increases agreed by the Council of Ministers on 6 March were primarily to take account of Community enlargement: there was no discussion of the nature of the quota regime as a whole.

Visa Application Fees

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the recent changes in the application fees for a visitors' visas and settlement visas; and what are the reasons for these changes. [14881]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *863*.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15017]

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs always does his best to give prior warning to hon. Members when he visits their constituencies in an official capacity.

Hong Kong

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual report on Hong Kong will be laid before Parliament. [15581]

Mr. Goodlad: The report is being published and laid before Parliament today. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Army Vehicle Storage

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to rationalise Army vehicle storage facilities; and if he will make a statement. [15645]

Mr. Soames: Following the "Front Line First" announcement on 14 July 1994, proposals to rationalise Army vehicle storage facilities were outlined in a consultative document issued on 19 August 1994. Some 50 responses were received from trade unions, local authorities and other interested parties, all of which have been considered with care and sympathy. Understandable local concerns were expressed about the effects on employment and the local community but no significant new defence-related arguments emerged, nor have any new suggestions been made which have caused us to alter our original proposals for the rationalisation of vehicle storage.

Having carefully considered all the points raised, I can therefore confirm that we shall now begin work on rationalising vehicle storage, concentrating on a single site at Ashchurch; the vehicle depot at Ludgershall will be closed for operation by 31 March 1997. I am confident that this change can be achieved without detriment to operational capability.

We will continue to consult with staff and the trade unions about the detailed implementation of this rationalisation.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of military service houses and flats that were empty on 1 March.

Mr. Soames: As at 31 December last year, which is the latest date for which figures are available, my Department owned 9,992 vacant service married quarters. A further 2,160 former married quarters were vacant and in the process of being sold.

Discussions are being held with the Housing Corporation on an enhanced programme of short term leasing to housing associations for married quarters which are temporarily surplus to our requirements. The majority of the vacant married quarters are not surplus, however, but are undergoing or awaiting major maintenance, held for future deployments or form part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available for entitled service families.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what co-operation he is offering to Dr. Roger Sutcliffe of the department of human genetics at the university of Glasgow for his proposal of a pilot study into miscarriages, still births, respiratory problems or low resistance to infection among babies born of Gulf war veterans.

Mr. Soames: My Department wrote on 7 March to the department of medical genetics at the university of Glasgow seeking clarification of Dr. Sutcliffe's views and further details of his proposal for a study. We also set out figures of service birth rates and information which indicates that the incidence of miscarriages, still births, birth defects and infant morbidity among families of Gulf veterans is no greater than the national average and has not changed since the Gulf conflict. My Department continues, however, to assess all available information and will give full consideration to Dr. Sutcliffe's views.

University Students

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the number of applicants for bursaries awarded to university students, by gender, under his Department's arrangements for officer entry, in each year since 1990–91. [15108]

Mr. Soames: A breakdown by gender of the number of applicants for bursaries awarded to university students in each financial year since 1990–91 is as follows:

	Royal Navy		*Army*		*Royal Air Force*		*Civilian*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1990–91	146	43	406	27	1,019	186	—	—
1991–92	152	35	389	25	987	158	—	—
1992–93	80	15	362	23	659	126	—	—
1993–94	148	40	303	27	974	178	—	—
1994–95	134	33	291	43	740	166	570	90

Notes:

Figures for the Royal Air Force are for applications for bursaries and cadetships. It is not possible to provide separate figures.

Information for civilians is available only for the present financial year.

Ministerial visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15028]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the guidance contained in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" it is the practice of MOD Ministers to inform hon. Members in advance of any visits to their constituencies.

There has been one case in the current parliamentary Session, however, where due to an administrative oversight not all hon. Members whose constituencies were affected by a particular ministerial visit were informed in advance. Immediate action was taken to rectify this, however, when the error became apparent.

Cargo Vehicles

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unscheduled stops there have been involving truck cargo heavy duty mark 2 vehicles since January 1994; and if he will provide a breakdown of the circumstances which resulted in these incidents.

Mr. Soames: Between January 1994 and 13 March 1995 there were four occasions on which truck cargo heavy duty mark 2 vehicles were obliged to make unscheduled stops to deal with technical problems. The circumstances are set out in the table.

TCHD Mark 2 Operational Convoy unscheduled stops (29 January 1994 to 13 March 1995)

Serial number	Date	Location	Fault	Cause Quality	Cause Design	Rectification	Delay time
1	6 June 1994	M1, Tibshelf near Mansfield	Knocking sound from tractor unit	—	—	Precautionary stop, no fault found	33 minutes
2	7 June 1994	A696, South of Otterburn	Air pressure warning buzzer sounded	—	—	Air pressure found satisfactory	34 minutes
3	2 August 1994	A68, SE of Edinburgh	"Clonking" sound when turning	—	—	Precautionary stop, no fault found	26 minutes
4	21 September 1994	A696, near Ponteland	Discharge from sump oil connecting pipe	X	—	Tractor unit changed	[1] 1 hour 10 minutes

Note:

[1] The fault developed shortly after departure. After replacement of the spare tractor unit the convoy returned to await arrival of a substitute spare unit. Movement therefore suspended for 24 hours.

ENVIRONMENT

Construction Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on expected levels of activity in the construction industry; and what action his Department intends to take.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Construction output increased by 3 per cent. last year and modest yet sustained growth looks set to continue. My Department continues to work with the industry to monitor activity levels in the different sectors, and to promote competitiveness and success in export markets.

Emissions

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the standards for hazardous waste incinerators and for cement kilns of emissions of *(a)* particulates, *(b)* oxides of nitrogen and *(c)* sulphur dioxide.

Mr. Atkins: Under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, existing hazardous waste incinerators and cement kilns are required to meet the following limits for emissions to the atmosphere:

Plant	*Sulphur dioxide mg/m*^{3}	*Oxides of nitrogen mg/m*^{3}	*Particulates mg/m*^{3}
Hazardous waste incinerators	50(1)	350(1)	20(1)
Cement kilns	750(2)	Wet kilns = 1800(2) Dry kilns = 1200	50(3)

(1) To be met by 1 December 1996. (2) To be met by 1 April 1997.

(3) To be met by 1 April 1998.

These limits are set out in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution guidance notes.

So far as cement kilns are concerned, the figures in the table relate to operations where conventional coal/petroleum coke is being used as fuel. If cement kiln operations using substitute liquid fuel to replace a portion of coal/petroleum coke are authorised under the Act, then that part of the emissions that originates from the substitute fuel will be controlled to the above incinerator limits, while that part of the emissions which originates from coal/petroleum coke will be controlled to the above cement kiln limits. Taking sulphur dioxide as an example, if all of the conventional fuel is replaced with substitute fuel, then a limit of 50 mg/m^3 will apply. If however, the replacement is only 30 per cent., then 30 per cent. of the emissions, those generated from the substitute fuel, will be required to meet 50 mg/m^3, while the rest will be required to meet 750 mg/m^3.

Housing Construction, London

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each London borough *(a)* the numbers of applicants currently on the council housing waiting lists, *(b)* the total central Government funding for new rented housing association homes for 1995–96, excluding TIS, DIYSO and major repairs or sale programmes, *(c)* the sum which would have been available if original funding intentions as set out in the 1992 Autumn Statement had been maintained, *(d)* the estimated number of homes that will be built with the money now available and *(e)* the estimated number of homes that could have been built if funding had been provided at the original proposed funding level as set out in *(c)*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 16 March 1995]*: Allocations made to London boroughs from the Housing Corporations's 1995–96 approved development programme for the provision of new rented housing are listed below together with the Housing Corporation's estimate of what the allocations may have been if funding plans in the 1992 Autumn Statement had been maintained.

Local authority	*Allocation £'000s*	*Related units*	*1992 Autumn statement estimated allocation £'000s*	*Related units*
Barking and Dagenham	1,415	46	3,561	116
Barnet	3,610	81	9,084	204
Bexley	1,159	68	2,916	171
Brent	5,827	117	14,663	294
Bromley	1,997	92	5,025	232
Camden	7,722	146	19,432	367
Croydon	4,457	138	11,215	347
Ealing	8,020	166	20,180	418
Enfield	3,682	114	9,265	287
Greenwich	4,712	126	11,856	317
Hackney	12,054	296	30,332	745
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,945	137	17,475	345
Haringey	9,788	179	24,629	450
Harrow	2,123	50	5,343	126
Havering	1,235	49	3,107	123
Hillingdon	8,137	241	20,475	606
Hounslow	4,386	103	11,036	259
Islington	7,028	136	17,685	342
Kensington and Chelsea	5,701	151	14,345	380
Kingston upon Thames	1,941	91	4,884	229
Lambeth	8,382	158	21,091	398
Lewisham	4,870	109	12,255	274
Merton	2,125	303	5,347	762
Newham	8,149	241	20,506	606
Redbridge	2,648	82	6,664	206
Richmond upon Thames	2,057	61	5,175	153
Southwark	4,784	137	12,038	345
Sutton	1,347	32	3,390	81
Tower Hamlets	3,976	91	10,005	229
Waltham Forest	4,288	121	10,790	304
Wandsworth	5,826	80	14,661	201
Westminster	11,242	252	28,288	634

Further social lettings will also be made available through vacancies in local authority and housing association properties; through the Housing Corporation's home ownership initiatives; through housing association developments funded by local authority housing association grant; and through the cash incentive scheme.

The number of households on local authority housing waiting lists in London on 1 April 1994 is given in section B of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Right to Buy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of the total value of tenancies sold under the right to buy.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Prior to 1993 figures for receipts resulting from council tenants exercising their right to buy from local authorities were not separately collected by the Department. However, between the introduction of the right to buy in 1980 and the end of September 1994, the total value of council dwelling sales to sitting tenants, net of discounts is estimated to be £19.0 billion.

The number of sales to local authority sitting tenants during this period was almost 1,300,000, and 92 per cent. of such sales resulted from tenants exercising their right to buy.

Information on the value of right-to-buy sales to sitting tenants of new towns and housing associations is not available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority owned houses and flats have been sold, to date, since the introduction of the right to buy in each local authority area in England.

[14714]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables showing the available information on total right-to-buy sales for each English local authority for every financial year since 1980 and a cumulative total to March 1994 are in the Library.

In addition, the tables also give data on total sales and on the number of flats sold.

Council Tax

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 London boroughs with the lowest record on collecting council tax, the cash and percentage owed and the political control of each authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is as follows:

	1993–94 council taxes received as a percentage of annual net collectable debit[1]	*Uncollected council taxes as at 31 March 1994*[2] *£000*	*Political control as at February 1995*
Lambeth	48.4	25,597	Noc
Hackney	67.5	12,824	Lab
Islington	69.3	[3]10,300	Lab
Southwark	73.1	7,693	Lab
Newham	73.4	7,703	Lab
Haringey	74.0	10,917	Lab
Camden	81.4	8,742	Lab
Waltham Forest	82.2	7,043	Noc
Lewisham	82.5	5,617	Lab
Tower Hamlets	84.3	[3]2,600	Lab

[1] Based on information supplied to the Department in May 1994.

[2] Based on information published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in its Revenue Collection Statistics 1993–94 publication.

[3] No information was published by CIPFA for these two authorities: the figure shown is the Department's estimate based on information supplied in May 1994.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much is owed to the London borough of Lambeth in *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge and *(c)* council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on uncollected domestic rates, community charge and council tax for each local authority is not available centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publish estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1994 are available in their Revenue Collection Statistics 1993–94 publication, and are as follows:

	Arrears outstanding at 31 March 1994 for Lambeth (£000)
Domestic rates	12,917
Community charge	84,895
Council tax	29,597

Council Tenancies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority housing tenancies were available in *(a)* England, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside in 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities housing investment programme—HIP1—returns for 1994 show that on 1 April a total of 3,615,504 local authority dwellings were occupied or available for letting in England. Of these, 451,112 were within the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take to implement the recommendations of the panel on sustainable development.

Mr. Atkins: We will shortly issue a response to the recommendations made in the first report of the Government's panel on sustainable development.

Neighbour Noise

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further progress has been made regarding the working party looking into noise from neighbours; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The working party has completed its review of the effectiveness of current neighbour noise controls. We hope to consult in the near future on its conclusions and recommendations.

Detergents (Phosphate Content)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to reduce the phosphate content of domestic detergent products. [13715]

Mr. Atkins: There has been a reduction of the order of 40 per cent. in the use of phosphates in detergents since the early 1990s, due to the presence in the market place of phosphate-free detergents. The imminent inclusion of detergents in the EC ecolabelling scheme will give an incentive to manufacturers to reduce the content of phosphates in detergents still further. There are some unresolved questions about replacement of phosphates in detergents and the Government have no plans to require substitution.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15018]

Mr. Gummer: My practice is to ensure that hon. Members have prior warning of all departmental visits that I make to their constituencies; so far as I am aware, this has been achieved for all the visits that I have made in the current parliamentary Session.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce decisions on the future structure of the remaining shire counties for which he had final reports from the Local Government Commission. [15646]

Mr. Gummer: I can now announce my decisions on the remaining 12 shire counties as follows. In all cases I have considered the commission's reports and the representations I have received. In the process I have taken into account the transitional and ongoing costs and the viability of the structures—both of unitary authorities and remaining two-tier arrangements—which will result from my decisions. In each case I am satisfied that on balance my decision will best reflect the identities and interests of local communities and will best secure effective and convenient local government.

Derbyshire

I have decided to accept the Local Government Commission's final recommendations for Derbyshire that Derby city be given unitary authority status and that the existing two-tier structure be retained in the rest of the county.

The case for a unitary Derby city is compelling. Derby is a former county borough and was responsible for the broad range of local government services prior to 1974. It has a population of 227,000 and is larger than many metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs. The commission found that about two thirds of local people identified strongly with the city area.

Staffordshire

On Staffordshire, I have accepted the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for Stoke-on-Trent, with the addition of a small area of Barlaston from the Stafford borough area, and that elsewhere in the county the status quo should be retained.

The case for a unitary Stoke is strong. It is a former county borough with a large and concentrated population in excess of 250,000, and the commission has identified a strong sense of community identity within the city council area. I agree with the commission that the remainder of the county outside Stoke, with a county council and eight districts, will continue to be fully viable.

Wiltshire

In the case of Wiltshire, I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for the present borough area of Thamesdown (Swindon) and that there should be no change to the existing two-tier arrangements in the rest of the county of Wiltshire.

The case for a unitary Thamesdown is strong. It is a significant urban area, with a population in excess of 170,000, where the commission identified a strong and distinct sense of community identity and an independent economy. I agree with the commission's conclusion that a unitary authority for Thamesdown would offer the opportunity to improve the co-ordination, effectiveness and delivery of services and facilitate the co-ordination of these services with other public bodies, the business community and the voluntary sector.

East Sussex

For East Sussex I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that a unitary authority should be created by merging the present borough areas of Brighton and Hove, and that there should be no change to the existing two-tier arrangements in the rest of the county.

While I recognise the feeling in Brighton and Hove of separate identifies, in practical terms they form a continuous conurbation. I agree with the commission's conclusion that the balance of advantage lies with the establishment of a single unitary authority, which would have physical coherence, be of sufficient size and compactness to be self sufficient and accessible, and have a good infrastructure. I am satisfied that such an authority would be well placed to deliver the full range of local services.

Devon

On Devon, I accept the commission's recommendation of unitary authorities for Plymouth and Torbay, with the continuation of the two-tier structure elsewhere in Devon, subject to any review of Exeter which I might ask the commission to conduct.

Both Plymouth and Torbay are former county boroughs which have previously been responsible for the broad range of local government services. Plymouth, with a population of over 250,000, is the fourth most populous non-metropolitan district. It is a significant and well defined urban area which is distinct from the neighbouring rural areas.

For Torbay, while its population is smaller—around 120,000—it is one of the largest resorts in Great Britain. Like Plymouth, it has a distinctive identity from the surrounding rural areas, reflecting its relatively self-sufficient economy and low level of interdependence with the rest of Devon. The commission found strong local support for a unitary authority for Torbay, including from business and other local bodies. I consider that the remainder of the county will retain its viability.

Nottinghamshire

I have decided to accept the commission's proposal that Nottingham city should gain unitary status.

The city has a substantial population of 285,000; it is the third largest non-metropolitan district in England and is larger than most existing metropolitan and London boroughs. It was formerly a county borough. The city is distinct from most of the rest of the county and has specific needs which I believe could be more effectively addressed by a unitary city authority. The commission found that the majority of local people in Nottingham identify strongly with the city.

As I announced on 2 March, some of the arguments the commission put forward in favour of a unitary authority for Nottingham could equally be applied to the neighbouring districts of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe. I am considering whether to refer these three districts to the commission for a further review so that the case for unitary authorities in the greater Nottingham area can be thoroughly explored. Subject to this consideration, I accept the case for retaining the existing two-tier structure in the rest of the county.

Essex

For Essex, I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that Southend-on-Sea should become a unitary authority, with the rest of the county remaining two-tier. The commission also recommended that Southend's boundaries should be extended to include Southend airport. I think this needs further exploration and I may ask the commission in due course to look at the matter again.

There is a strong case for a unitary Southend, given its population size and density, the high level of community identity with the borough council area which the commission found, and its former status as a county borough. I accept the commission's view that a unitary Southend could provide the broad range of local government services within its area in a way which is effective, convenient, accessible and responsive to local needs.

The commission also recommended significant boundary changes between Basildon, Brentwood and Rochford. In my statement to the House on 2 March, I said that I had in mind to include the districts of Thurrock and Basildon among those where I shall be asking the commission to carry out fresh reviews. I have accordingly decided it would not be appropriate to reach a decision on the proposed boundary changes affecting Basildon until the outcome of those reviews is known.

Hereford and Worcester

In the case of Hereford and Worcester, I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for the area of the "traditional" Herefordshire, and that the existing two-tier structure should be retained in the "traditional" area of Worcestershire. The "traditional" area of Herefordshire comprises the areas of Hereford city, South Herefordshire, the western part of Malvern hills and Leominster except for the Tenbury area. The "traditional" area of Worcestershire comprises the districts of Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester city and Wychavon, with a new district to be established covering the eastern part of the Malvern hills and the area of Tenbury.

Prior to the reorganisation of local government in 1974, Herefordshire and Worcestershire were two separate counties for both administrative and ceremonial purposes. The merger in 1974 has proved to be very unpopular and the evidence presented to the commission suggests that the merger have not earned the loyalty of the local people.

I consider that the Worcestershire element of the present county, with approximately 77 per cent. of the existing county's population, would be viable. I also agree with the commission about the viability of a unitary Herefordshire. A number of services such as education and social services are currently run on the basis of the "Herefordshire" boundary and the commission is satisfied that the full range of services can be provided by a unitary Herefordshire.

I also accept the commission's recommendation for new electoral arrangements for the new unitary Herefordshire and the remaining county and districts in Worcestershire.

Leicestershire

I am minded to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for the city of Leicester. It has a long history of unitary government and there seems to be strong support for a return to that status. Leicester is the second largest of the non-metropolitan districts and I believe that it will be able to fulfil the functions of a unitary authority effectively and conveniently. I also believe that the reduced county council will be viable.

Having weighed all the arguments, I am minded to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority in Rutland. The strength of local identity is very clear and there is definite support for a unitary authority.

There are, however, understandable concerns about whether Rutland could provide effective local government, given its small size, and about the financial implications of reorganisation. Before an order implementing change for Rutland is introduced, I shall want to be satisfied that the authority has been able to make good practical arrangements for local services; that the authority have fully assessed the overall financial implications; that the costs can be paid for within the same financial arrangements and constraints that apply to other reorganised authorities. I expect that at least for some services, some form of joint working may be needed.

Hampshire

Having weighed all the arguments, I have accepted part of the commission's structural recommendations—namely unitary authorities for Portsmouth and Southampton—but rejected the recommendation for the New Forest so that it, and the rest of the county of Hampshire, will remain two-tier.

There is a strong case for unitary authorities for the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton. Both are former county boroughs with a history of unitary local government and are amongst the largest, and most densely populated, non-metropolitan district councils. Portsmouth and Southampton, with populations of around 180,000 and 200,000 respectively are comparable in this respect with the urban unitary authorities in London and the metropolitan counties. There is support for unitary status locally, and the city councils are confident about their ability to deliver services, establishing where necessary joint arrangements with each other and with the county council.

However, the position in New Forest is much less clear. Whilst it is one of the larger non-metropolitan districts in terms of population (around 160,000), it is a largely rural area. It has no tradition of unitary local government and popular opinion is finely balanced. Doubts have been expressed about the fragmentation of services in a strongly rural district which has no large town to give it focus and identity. I have decided, therefore, not to accept the commission's recommendation for a unitary authority for the New Forest.

Dorset

Having weighed all the arguments, I have accepted part of the commission's structural recommendations—namely unitary authorities for Bournemouth and Poole—but rejected its proposal that there should be two unitary authorities in the rest of the county. Outside the two boroughs, the county will remain two—tier.

There is a strong case for unitary authorities in Bournemouth and Poole, which is now also accepted by the county council. The two boroughs are distinct within the largely rural county and each has a strong sense of community identity. The population of each is already large and I have little doubt that they would each be able to provide all local authority services, especially with further growth expected in Poole.

The position outside Bournemouth and Poole is much less clear. Community identity in the area tends to have a very local emphasis and popular opinion is finely balanced. Doubts have also been expressed about the viability of the two largely rural authorities.

Berkshire

On Berkshire, having weighed all the arguments, I have largely accepted the commission's final recommendations for the county's future structure, but with a modification. I accept the recommendation that Reading, Newbury, Slough, and Wokingham should become unitary authorities on the boundaries of the present district areas. However, I propose to modify the recommendation that a unitary authority be created based on a merger of the district areas of Bracknell Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead, and instead create two unitary authorities based on the existing district areas. The present two-tier structure in Berkshire will therefore be replaced by six unitary authorities based on existing district areas.

The commission found a strong and well supported case for an all unitary structure in Berkshire from the outset of the review. The case for unitary status for Reading, Newbury and Slough is particularly strong; Reading is a former county borough with a predominantly urban and district character; Slough is a densely populated urban area which is a significant industrial and retail centre with an infrastructure to reflect this; Newbury is a predominantly rural area quite distinct from the rest of the county, relating more to areas in neighbouring counties. While there was less unanimity about the best structure for the rest of the county area, on balance I consider that unitary status for each of the remaining districts—Wokingham, Bracknell Forest and Windsor and Maidenhead—will on balance best serve the needs of community identity and effective local government, and that unitary authorities based on the existing districts are capable of delivering the full range of services. The county's geography, coupled with the marked diversity across its area, give it a particularly strong case for an all unitary structure.

The county area for Berkshire will be retained, but it will no longer have a county council.

I have now considered my decisions on all the commission's structural recommendations. I am still considering a number of outstanding recommendations on other matters, and will announce my decisions on these in due course.

HEALTH

GP Fundholding

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of patients currently covered by GP budget fundholders in *(a)* the Dartford constituency, *(b)* the Dartford and Gravesham Health Trust area, *(c)* the county of Kent, *(d)* the South Thames regional health authority, *(e)* England and *(f)* the United Kingdom. [14566]

Mr. Malone: Information available from the enhanced general practitioner census of 1 April 1994 is shown in the table. Information is not collected below family health services authority level.

Area	*Population coverage Per cent.*
Kent FHSA	53
South Thames RHA	37
England	34

Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Secondary Fuels

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence she has collected from other countries of ill health caused by the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns or incinerators; [14425]

(2) what evidence her Department has of ill health caused by the burning of secondary liquid fuels in *(a)* the kilns of cement industries and *(b)* waste incinerators; and if she will make a statement. [14428]

Mr. Sackville: The Department is not aware of any evidence that the burning of secondary fuels has caused ill health.

In England and Wales, cement kilns and waste incinerators are authorised under the integrated pollution control regime of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. Under this Act, the operator of the plant is required to use best available techniques not entailing excessive costs to prevent, minimise or, where that is not practicable by such means, for rendering harmless any releases.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing for each local health area in England *(a)* the number of general dental practitioners and *(b)* the number of general dental practitioners per 1,000 population, for each year since 1986. [14723]

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library.

Industrial Discharges

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all industries the processes of which discharge dioxin or heavy metals into the atmosphere together with details of illnesses directly or indirectly attributed thereto; and if she will make a statement. [14427]

Mr. Sackville: The main industrial processes which discharge dioxin and/or heavy metals are incineration plants, power stations and other combustion plants, metal industry processes and chemical plants.

The health effects of emissions from the burning of any fuel cannot be determined unless the specific components of the fuel and the method and temperature of its combustion are known. Discharges of dioxins and heavy metals must be kept within levels whereby no harm to health should occur. No illnesses are known to be directly or indirectly caused by such discharges in the United Kingdom.

NHS Complaints Procedures

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will make an announcement on the Government's response to the report of the review committee on NHS complaints procedures, "Being Heard". [15644]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall publish tomorrow a booklet entitled "Acting on Complaints". This will set out our plans for a speedier, simpler and more effective national health service complaints procedure in England. Copies will be placed in the Library. Similar systems are being introduced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I will also be responding tomorrow to the recommendations in the First and Sixth Reports of the 1993–94 Session of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, which relate to NHS complaints procedures in Great Britain.

Family Health Services Appeal Authority

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Eastbourne of 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *88*, what arrangements she has made to create a special health authority to undertake the functions of the family health services appeal unit. [15647]

Mr. Malone: Statutory Instruments were laid before this House on 8 March 1995 to come into effect on 1 April 1995 creating the Family Health Services Appeal Authority. The authority is to be located in Harrogate. The chairman of the authority will be Mr. Alan Crute and Mrs. Hilda Harvey, Mr. John Goss and Mrs. Josephine Larbie have been invited to be non-executive members.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in London that took *(a)* 14 minutes and *(b)* for each subsequent minute up to 70 minutes in February 1995. [14773]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 25 January at columns *251–52*.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the visits she has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with her departmental responsibilities. [15016]

Mr. Sackville: Ministers always do their best to give prior warning to hon. Members when they visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Ethnic Origin

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people of *(a)* Turkish origin, *(b)* Turkish Cypriot origin and *(c)* other Turkish origin, including Kurdish origin, were resident in (i) each of the London boroughs and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole at the latest available date. [15104]

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available as these categories were not listed in the 1991 census ethnic group question. However, there was a space for people to enter their ethnic group if they felt that none of the printed, pre-coded, categories, was appropriate. Counts for the London boroughs of these "write-in" answers for the category of "Turkish", without any sub-division, are included in the 1991 Census Report for Ethnic Group and Country of Birth (table a), copies of which are available in the Library. The ethnic origin question was not asked in Northern Ireland and this table relates to Great Britain.

Sarah Varley

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to publish the report submitted by the city of Bradford metropolitan council concerning the circumstances leading to the death of Sarah Varley, together with the response of her Department's social services inspectorate; and if she will make a statement. [15441]

Mr. Bowis: It is for the Bradford area child protection committee to consider publication of the report. The review, completed in 1993, made a number of recommendations to the area child protection committee. The social services inspectorate has asked the Bradford director of social services to report on action taken to implement the recommendations.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if patients given definite dates for treatment and operations are then removed from the waiting list. [15185]

Mr. Malone: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Remploy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the work of Remploy as clothing suppliers has met his quality control standards.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R.M. Phillips to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 21 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your question about whether the work of Remploy as clothing suppliers has met his quality control standards.

Although Remploy receives substantial financial support from Government (£92.1 million for 1994/95), and operates within an Annual Performance Agreement setting targets in relation to the employment of disabled people, in every other respect it operates as a normal commercial company. As such, any quality control standards are a matter for Remploy and its customers.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts have been awarded to Remploy since the special contracts arrangements were introduced.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 21 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many contracts have been awarded to Remploy since the special contracts arrangements were introduced.

To date Remploy has received orders in excess of £20 million since the introduction of the Special Contracts Arrangements on 29 November, 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of whether the special contracts arrangements are working effectively.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 15 March, *Official Report*, column *624*.

Industrial Workers' Salaries

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the average change in real terms of industrial workers' salaries since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: The average real weekly earnings of an industrial worker rose 32 per cent. between 1979 and 1994.

Disabled People

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *143*, if he will identify the six employer associations which, in the consultation process, expressed a view in favour of exempting small firms from the requirement not to discriminate against disabled employees and the three employer associations which were against this.

Miss Widdecombe: No. As I made clear in my answer of 7 March 1995, it is not our policy to publish particular responses to the consultation and this includes identifying the views that particular organisations expressed in those responses.

Forth Railway Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Executive will make a complete independent assessment of the Forth railway bridge. [15101]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand the director general of the Health and Safety Executive, Mr. Rimington, has asked Her Majesty's railway inspectorate to undertake an assessment of the Forth bridge.

A time scale for the completion of this work has not yet been confirmed.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15024]

Mr. Portillo: I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Unemployed People (Study Courses)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to reinstate a scheme along the lines of learning for work for unemployed people who would benefit from full-time study. [15336]

Mr. Paice: Learning for work will not be replaced by another scheme. The Department, through training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service, provides a range of programmes and services to help unemployed people prepare for work. Training for work, career development loans, job clubs and restart courses all play an important part of this package of help.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if part-time study by unemployed people will be a positive outcome of restart interviews. [15339]

Miss Widdecombe: It is appreciated that undertaking part-time education can enhance some clients' prospects of finding work in the longer term, so advisers will give advice and guidance on part-time education opportunities available and the implications for benefits. However, a client who starts part-time education following a restart interview is not counted towards the positive outcome targets unless he also leaves the unemployment register.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if a course of study being undertaken by an unemployed person by the Employment Service is not exceeding 16 hours of guided learning will be disregarded in any further tests of availability for work. [15335]

Miss Widdecombe: People claiming jobseeker's allowance will be able to take part-time courses provided that they remain available for, and actively seeking, employment.

Courses of part-time study will not be disregarded by the Employment Service in availability for work tests.

After three months unemployment, the course will not of itself be grounds for finding someone unavailable for work, but it will continue to be the case that a jobseeker may not turn down or refuse to apply for a vacancy notified to him merely because it conflicts with his course of study.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the new rule on hours of study will apply during the first three months of unemployment. [15337]

Miss Widdecombe: People claiming jobseeker's allowance will be able to take part-time courses provided that they remain fully available for, and actively seeking, employment. After three months unemployment, attending a part-time course will not of itself be grounds for finding someone unavailable for work, but it will continue to be the case that a jobseeker may not turn down or refuse to apply for a vacancy notified to him merely because it conflicts with his course of study.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if people who were studying part-time while employed may be required under the rules for jobseeker's allowance to give up their courses on becoming unemployed. [15343]

Miss Widdecombe: People who become unemployed will be able to continue to study part-time within the rules of jobseekers allowance and receive benefit, so long as they remain available for, and actively seeking, employment.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if study for a skill or qualification will be taken into account by the Employment Service under the rules for jobseeker's allowance, in judging the suitability of a job which an unemployed person may be directed to take. [15334]

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Service does not set out to offer claimants unsuitable jobs, and employment officers may take into account a range of factors before notifying claimants of vacancies. However, jobseeker's allowance, like current unemployment benefits, will be for people whose first priority is to find a job. Study must not conflict with claimants' availability for work and active jobsearch and they will be liable to sanction if, without good cause, they refuse or fail to apply for a job that has been notified to them by an employment officer as vacant or about to become vacant. This does not mean that they must necessarily leave their course: it may be possible, because of the increasing flexibility of modern courses, to combine work and study. But it will continue to be the case that claimants may not turn down or refuse to apply for a vacancy notified to them merely because it conflicts with their course of study.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if courses for the long-term unemployed funded from the European social fund and provided at present by training and enterprise councils, further education colleges, local authorities and voluntary organisations will be made exempt from the 16-hour limitation and the actively seeking work requirement brought within the training for work programme or in some other way. [15338]

Miss Widdecombe: Courses part-funded by the European social fund and run under training for work will be subject to the rules of that programme. People undertaking part-time courses part-funded by ESF while claiming jobseeker's allowance will be subject to the rules of JSA, which will include an upper limit of 16 guided learning hours per week in Further Education Funding Council funded courses and a requirement to be available for, and actively seeking, employment.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was paid in grants from any section of the European Union budget to the South Thames TEC for each year since 1992. [14730]

Mr. Paice: Payments to South Thames training and enterprise council under objective 3 of the European social fund for 1993 and 1994 are shown in the following table. The TEC had no applications approved for support in 1992.

Year	ESF grants paid £
1993	308,770
1994	166,100

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15013]

Mr. Howard: On 16 February 1995 when, at short notice, I visited Wormwood Scrubs prison, and my office tried but was unable to contact the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley).

Television Licences

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted for not having a television licence in the latest year for which figures are available; what sentences they received; and how many people eventually served a period of imprisonment.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Information held centrally by my Department on the number of court proceedings under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts 1949 to 1967 cannot separately identify the offence of TV licence evasion. I understand from the national television licence records office that the number of prosecutions in the last two years was as is shown in the table. Over 97 per cent. of people found guilty were fined. A total of 845 people in 1993 and 754 in 1994 were imprisoned for default on fines imposed for using a TV without a licence.

Offenders prosecuted and found guilty of television licence evasion England and Wales

Year	Prosecuted	Found guilty
1993	243,025	212,952
1994	223,985	199,970

Source:
National television licence records office.

Parole

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *375*, what is the length of the delay beyond their parole eligibility dates in the cases of each of the 569 prisoners mentioned in his answer. [15194]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bookmakers

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the request from the British Betting Office Association for a seat on the bookmakers' committee to the levy board and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 March 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has decided to review the composition of the bookmakers' committee in the light of representations from the British Betting Office Association.

We have written today to the BBOA, the Secretary to the bookmakers' committee and to the levy board to inform them of this decision. Officials will be writing to the BBOA and the associations represented on the committee in order to undertake the necessary consultation.

A decision on whether the BBOA will be granted representation on the committee and the size of any such representation will be taken following the consultation.

Armed Response Units

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities have permanently staffed armed response units; and how many second officers from other duties for short periods. [14841]

Mr. Maclean: On 31 December 1993, 34 police forces in England and Wales had armed response vehicles. A complete breakdown of this figure between forces which maintain a 24-hour armed response vehicle service, and those which do not, is not centrally available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Victim Support

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the level of financial support provided to Victim Support and the total number of victims so supported since 1989. [14396]

Mr. Maclean: Details of Home Office funding of Victim Support since such funding began in 1979 were given in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 22 February at column *236*.

Victim Support does not record how many victims have actually been helped, but its records show that in the period 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1994 it made more than 3.9 million offers of support to victims of crime.

Crime Prevention

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those local authorities which have established designated units with a specific responsibility to reduce the fear of crime and improve crime prevention measures, reporting direct to the chief executive, by party of control. [14397]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally.

Police

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of uniformed officers with a commitment to a specific geographical area by police authority, in each year since 1989; and what these figures are as a percentage of uniformed officers in each area. [14299]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department issues to police authorities about the account taken of community liaison work when considering the career progression of individual officers. [14400]

Mr. Maclean: Guidance on best practice in operating career development and staff appraisal system does not specify how particular aspects of police work should be treated. It is for chief constables to take decisions on the career progression of their officers, taking into account the skills and abilities of the officers concerned, the long-term and short-term needs of the individual, and the needs of the force and the police service as a whole.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of medium and high-level community liaison posts by police authority, in place for each year since 1989. [14401]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not held centrally. Each police force in England and Wales has a community liaison department, generally headed by an officer at superintendent or chief inspector rank. Officers at various levels in forces will have community liaison responsibilities, exercised locally as circumstances require.

Retailers (Prosecutions)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions of retailers for the sale of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco and *(c)* 18-classified video products to people who are under age were undertaken in the last year for which figures are available; and what advice his Department issues to the police regarding such offences. [14713]

Mr. Maclean: Information held centrally shows that in England and Wales in 1993, 156 defendants were prosecuted for the illegal sale of alcohol on licensed premises to persons under 18. In 1993, 143 defendants were prosecuted for offences related to the illegal sale of tobacco to children under 16.

The Video Recordings Act 1984 does not differentiate the supply of a video recording of classified work for hire from other forms of commercial supply, such as the supply of a classified video for sale. In 1989, there was one prosecution under section 11 of the Act relating to supply of a video recording in breach of the classification awarded. Information collected centrally from 1990 to 1994 does not identify individual offences committed under this specific Act from other summary offences. However, from 1995 onwards the information is being recorded separately. Home Office guidance to the police and local authorities in 1992 on the law relating to the sale of tobacco to children indicated that enforcement action was primarily a matter for the latter.

Metropolitan Police Committee

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations underlay his rejection of nominations for the Metropolitan police committee made by local authority associations. [14442]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 February to a question from the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), *Official Report*, column *757-58*.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many meetings he has scheduled with the Metropolitan police committee; and how frequent those meetings will be; [14446]

(2) what sanctions the Metropolitan police committee has if he ignores its advice on policing the capital; [14447]

(3) how many times he has so far met the Metropolitan police committee, how many letters he has received from it; and to what extent he has acted on any advice received from it. [14449]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to a question from the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 11 January at column *139-40*. The Metropolitan police committee is not yet formally in operation. From 1 April 1995 it is expected to advise the Secretary of State on a range of matters concerning the policing of the Metropolitan police district but it will be for Ministers to decide whether or to what extent they should accept the advice put forward. The question of sanctions does not arise.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he took to establish that members of the Metropolitan police committee demonstrated knowledge of the workings of the Metropolitan police; [14805]

(2) how many people were interviewed for membership of the Metropolitan police committee. [14441]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *19*.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many full-time and part-time staff will be allocated to the Metropolitan police committee; and what will be the cost of those staff; [14444]

(2) what will be the annual cost of the Metropolitan police committee. [14445]

Mr. Maclean: The estimated cost of the Metropolitan police committee for 1995–96 is £399,000. This includes the cost of eight full-time and two part-time staff who comprise its Secretariat, accommodation costs and other expenses.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of the Metropolitan police committee are members of a political party; and if he will list those parties; [14443]

(2) how many of the members of the Metropolitan police committee *(a)* are and *(b)* have been, councillors; and which party they represented. [14451]

Mr. Maclean: Information about past or present political affiliations, if any, of members of the

Metropolitan police committee is not collected by my Department. However, I understand that of the two serving councillors appointed to the committee, one is a member of the Conservative party and the other is a member of the Labour party.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many overseas domestic workers are currently working in London; [14450]

(2) how many overseas domestic workers there are currently in Britain. [14448]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available.

Entry Clearance

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage of *(a)* husbands and *(b)* wives seeking to join their spouses initially refused by entry clearance officers in India in 1994; what were the reasons for the differences; and if he will make a statement. [14831]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: In India in 1994, 45 per cent. of husbands and 20 per cent. of wives were initially refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom. Some of these applications may be subsequently granted on appeal. Immigration rules for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom apply equally to husbands and wives. Differences in the percentage initially refused reflect differences in individual applications.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage of *(a)* husbands and *(b)* wives seeking to join their spouses initially refused by entry clearance officers in Pakistan in 1994; what were the reasons for the differences; and if he will make a statement. [14739]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: In Pakistan in 1994, 60 per cent. of husbands and 25 per cent. of wives were initially refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom. Some of these applications may be subsequently granted on appeal. Immigration rules for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom apply equally to husbands and wives. Differences in the percentage of applications initially refused reflect differences in individual applications.

Metropolitan Police

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the need for a police authority for London; [14440]

(2) if he will establish mechanisms whereby London council tax-payers can influence expenditure on the Metropolitan police. [14454]

Mr. Maclean: It is the Government's view that the Secretary of State should remain the police authority for the Metropolitan police district. Like other police authorities, the Secretary of State has overall responsibilities for the efficiency and effectiveness of the force. He answers to Parliament for those responsibilities.

Prison and Escort Contracts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the full names of those private companies which have tendered for, or have been invited to tender for, each individual contract to *(a)* design, construct, manage or finance any of Her Majesty's prison establishments or *(b)* manage court or prison escort services, together with the contract involved; [14452]

(2) if he will list the full names of those private companies which have been awarded individual contracts to *(a)* design, construct, manage or finance any of Her Majesty's prison establishments or *(b)* manage court or prison escort services, together with the contract involved and its costs. [14453]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters have been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. George Howarth, dated 21 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the private companies that have tendered for, been invited to tender for or awarded contracts to design, construct, manage and finance prisons or to manage court escorting and custody services. You also asked for details of the companies awarded each contract and the cost of these contracts.

Invitations to tender have been issued to five companies or consortia for two prisons (at Bridgend and Fazakerley) to be designed, constructed, managed and financed by the private sector. They are, Securicor Seifert Atkins Consortium, UK Detention Services Ltd, Premier Prison Services Ltd, Securer Care Services Ltd and Group 4 Tarmac Ltd. The closing date for receipt of tenders is 20 March 1995. No contracts of this kind have been let in the past.

To date, tenders have been invited for court escort and custody services in five areas in England and Wales. The first of these tenders was for the East Midlands and Humberside area (Area 7). Six companies bid: Securicor Custodial Services, Securiguard Services Ltd, Burns International Security Services (UK) Ltd, Group 4 Court Services Ltd, Wackenhut (UK) Ltd and Reliance Security Ltd. Group 4 Court Services Ltd were appointed, the estimated cost of the contract is £41 million over five years.

Four companies bid for the contract for the Metropolitan Police District (Area 3); Group 4 Court Services Ltd, Reliance Custodial Services, Securicor Custodial Services Ltd and Pinkerton Court Escort Services Ltd. Securicor Custodial Services Ltd were appointed, the estimated cost of the contract is £96 million over five years.

Five companies bid for the contracts for East Anglia (Area 4); Group 4 Court Services Ltd, Premier Prison Services Ltd, Reliance, Securicor Custodial Services Ltd, United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. Group 4 Court Services Ltd were appointed, the estimated cost of the contract is £47 million over five years.

Four companies bid for the contract for the North West (Area 6); these were Group 4 Court Services Ltd, Premier Prison Services Ltd, Reliance and Securicor Custodial Services Ltd. Group 4 Court Services Ltd were appointed, the estimated cost of the contract is £69 million over five years.

Five companies bid for the contract for the North (Area 8); these were Group 4 Court Services Ltd, Premier Prison Services Ltd, Reliance, Securicor Custodial Services Ltd and United Kingdom Detention Services Ltd. A contract was not awarded. It is still our intention to award a contract as soon as possible. We will be considering how best to re-organise the size and scope of the contract so as to ensure it is both operationally effective and good value for money for the taxpayer.

Prison Contracts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the net operating cost per prisoner place for each contracted-out prison in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995. [14572]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. George Howarth, dated 21 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the net operating cost per prisoner place for each contracted out prison in England and Wales.

The net operating cost per prisoner place for each contracted out prison in England and Wales from 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995 will be contained in the Prison Service Annual Report, which for that period will be laid before Parliament later this year.

Fear of Crime

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken to conduct evaluative research into the fear of crime following the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention's report of the working group on the fear of crime, dated 11 December 1989. [14402]

Mr. Maclean: The research and planning unit, crime prevention unit and police research group of the Home Department conduct and sponsor a wide range of research into the problem of criminal behaviour, the effects of which will influence people's fear of crime. More specifically, the Department has conducted a number of pieces of evaluative work on fear of crime, which bear on the recommendations of the fear of crime working group report.

Details are as follows:

(i) "Special constables: Issues for the management and organisation of volunteer police"—research and planning unit paper 88;

(ii) "Lagerland Lost?" An experiment in keeping drinkers off the street in central Coventry and elsewhere—crime prevention unit paper 22;

(iii) "The Influence of Street Lighting on Crime and Fear of Crime"—crime prevention unit paper 28;

(iv) "Closed Circuit Television in Public Places"—crime prevention unit paper 35;

(v) "Fear of Crime Findings" from the 1992 "British Crime Survey"—research findings No. 9;

(vi) "Participation in Neighbourhood Watch": Findings from the 1992 "British Crime Survey"—research finding No. 11.

Further research on special constables, community policing and the safer cities programme is forthcoming.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to combat the fear of crime following the recommendations of the standing conference on crime prevention contained in the report of the working group on the fear of crime, dated 11 December 1989. [14403]

Mr. Maclean: Home Office Ministers welcomed the report of the working group which provided a stimulating contribution to the debate on fear of crime. The Home Office attaches a high priority to tackling crime and the fear of crime, which we recognise can be just as disabling as crime itself.

The Home Office tackles this problem through a number of initiatives, most recently through the partnership campaign "Partners Against Crime" which was launched by my right hon. and learned Friend in September 1994. The campaign encourages individual members of the public to join the police as partners in the fight against crime. Through neighbourhood watch schemes, the special constabulary, neighbourhood constables, street watch, youth action groups and crime prevention panels, individuals can make a difference and gain a sense of empowerment, which in turn helps to reduce the fear of crime.

We also welcome the use of technology such as closed circuit television in the fight against fear of crime. Last October, my right hon. and learned Friend announced a competition to set up more schemes across the country and the winners will be announced shortly.

Partnership is the basis of Home Office crime prevention policy, and we continue to work closely with other organisations—such as the Department of the Environment on the single regeneration budget and the safer cities programme; and the Department of Transport who have commissioned a national review of transport-related crime and perceptions of safety.

The Home Office produces practical advice on the measures which people can take to help keep themselves, their families and their property safe. The advice is always carefully worded to ensure that it is not fear-inducing.

Following a specific recommendation made by the working group, crime statistics are now published half yearly, rather than quarterly.

Most recently, to help forces identify those areas which suffer most from fear of crime, we have circulated to every police force a handbook and computer software package which provides a guide to the process of conducting a fear of crime survey.

Under-age Drinking

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding extending existing voluntary identity schemes administered by licensed victuallers associations in respect of the 18-year-old public alcohol drinking limit; and what measures he is preparing to increase the take-up of these schemes. [14711]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We have received no such representations. While we welcome these schemes, it would be for the sponsors of such schemes to consider any proposals for their extension.

My right hon. and learned Friend has announced, however, our intention to publish later in the spring a Green Paper on identity cards. This will set out and canvass views on the options for a national identity card scheme, including the possible benefits of identity cards in helping to combat under-age drinking.

Criminal Cases (Information)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he is considering for legislation to revise requirements for the disclosure of information by the prosecution and the defence in criminal cases.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend is currently considering the requirements for disclosure by the prosecution and the defence and hope to be able to announce proposals quite soon.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the existing guidelines in Wandsworth prison in respect of an inmate regarded as a possible suicide risk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 21 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to our recent Question about the existing guidelines in Wandsworth prison for coping with a prisoner identified as being at risk of self harm.

The Prison Service has introduced an updated strategy called 'Caring For The Suicidal In Custody' this year. Wandsworth prison was one of the establishments which piloted this scheme. It moves away from treating suicide as a medical responsibility to involve all staff working towards suicide prevention. Personal officer schemes give prisoners a direct link with a member of staff whom they can turn to in times of distress. All prison officers receive suicide awareness training as part of their induction programme.

Every prisoner who arrives at Wandsworth, as in other prisons, is screened on the initial reception and are interviewed by a medical officer. They are also shown the 'Misadvantages Video' which, using a realistic storyline, deals with the issue of custodial suicide.

When a prisoner is identified as being at risk of self harm, a standard form known as a F2052 SH is raised. He is then seen by the Residential Unit Manager and a Health Care Officer who make an initial assessment. If appropriate, the prisoner may be transferred to a shared cell where increased contact is used as a preventative measure, or he may be transferred to the Health Care Centre where he will be seen by a doctor. When necessary the prisoner is placed under observation. The desirability of continuous observation must be weighed against any possible psychological damage this may inflict.

When the standard form is raised a case review is held and a support plan devised. Further case reviews are held as needed. There are regular discussions with the prisoner as part of his daily supervision and to enable him to feel more in control of his situation. The standard form is only closed when the prisoner appears to be coping.

Wandsworth has established a 'Suicide Awareness Group' which co-ordinates the dissemination of information about best practice, reviews the incidents of self harm and death in custody, and inputs this information into the training programme for staff. This is a multi-disciplinary group which includes a representative of the Board of Visitors. Samaritans visit the prison weekly and have trained prisoners to be listeners. There are also strong contact with the visiting consultant psychiatrists.

Firearms Licensing

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *840*, for what reasons he has made only the executive summary of the Association of Chief Police Officers report on firearms licensing available in the Library; and if he has had access to the full report as prepared by Superintendent Campbell Beattie, including the costings.

Mr. Maclean: Superintendent Campbell Beattie prepared his report for the Association of Chief Police Officers and the release of that report is a matter for it. The Home Office has had a copy of it.

Crime Statistics (Assault)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if all offences of common assault are always recorded as crimes for the purposes of compiling crime statistics; [14472]

(2) how many crimes of actual bodily harm and how many crimes of common assault were recorded in *(a)* the six months since 1 September 1994 and *(b)* the six months preceding 1 September 1994; [14473]

(3) what proportion of total crimes committed consist of common assault and what proportion actual bodily harm *(a)* in the last year for which recorded crime figures are available and *(b)* in the previous two years. [14480]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Common assault is a summary offence and is therefore not included in the recorded crime statistics.

The available information relates to recorded offences of "other wounding" of which offences of assault occasioning actual bodily harm form part. However, such offences cannot be separately identified and it is not possible to identify what proportion offences of assault occasioning actual bodily harm form of the total number of recorded offences.

The latest available information shows that there were 99,482 recorded offences of "other wounding" in the six months to June 1994. Information after this date is not yet available.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to monitor the recording of crime by separate police forces and to asssess whether guidelines issued on this matter by the Home Department are followed. [14474]

Mr Maclean *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Statistics of recorded crime are based on rules for classification and counting which are standard for all police forces in England and Wales. A comprehensive set of counting rules is used by police forces in order to maintain the consistency of recording multiple, continuous and repeated offences. Whilst these detailed rules are issued centrally, many decisions still have to be taken locally about the recording and counting of criminal incidents.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary regularly looks into recording practices during force inspections. the Home Office also has a police statistics liaison officer who regularly visits statistics officers in the forces to discuss current issues and to monitor current procedures.

TRANSPORT

London Heliport

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the report of the London heliport study will be published. [15755]

Mr. Norris: I am placing a copy of the London heliport study report in the Library of the House today. The report sets out appraisal methodology and applies this to a number of sites, but makes no site recommendation. It is available for purchase by the public from the Department of Transport.

Transport Council

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the result of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 13 and 14 March. [15758]

Dr. Mawhinney: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 13 and 14 March. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council took votes on two proposals. The first was on a mandate for the Commission to negotiate on an air transport agreement with Switzerland. The mandate proposed was more restrictive than the Government would have wished, and accordingly I voted against it, as did my Italian colleague. Other member states voted in favour, constituting a qualified majority. The Council approved a mandate for land transport without a vote. Negotiations under these mandates will begin shortly.

The Council also voted on a draft directive requiring undertakings involved in the transport of dangerous goods by road, rail or inland waterway to appoint a dangerous goods adviser. The United Kingdom alone voted against the measure, on the grounds that it would not add significantly to existing safety legislation and that no proper cost/benefit analysis had been carried out. Other member states supported the measure. The Council was thus deemed to have reached a common position, by qualified majority.

The Council reached a common position on a proposed directive aimed at harmonising the certification of inland waterway boatmasters.

The Council adopted resolutions on the promotion of rail and combined transport within the Community; on working hours and training of goods vehicle drives, calling on the Commission to report as soon as possible on its study of these issues; and on the use of non-EC aircraft and crew within the Community, on which the Commission is also carrying out a study. Council conclusions on relations in air transport between member states and the US were agreed.

The Council discussed European Community shipping policy, but came to no agreed conclusions. I set out the UK's policy objectives of ensuring open and competitive markets worldwide for shipowners and traders.

Encouraging progress was made on a proposed regulation to apply the international safety management code for roll-on/roll-off passenger ships to all such ships using Community ports. The measure was referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further discussion.

Other issues considered at the Council included trans-European networks, interoperability of the high speed rail network, transport research, airport ground handling facilities, the collection of maritime statistics, and relations with central and eastern European countries in regard to road and air transport.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the timetable for the consideration of bids for the contract to build the channel tunnel rail link; when he hopes to announce the name of the winning consortium; and if he will make a statement. [14880]

Mr. Watts: The four bidding consortiums submitted their tenders on 14 March. The Department and its advisers have begun the process of evaluating the bids. It is our intention to announce a winner in the latter half of this year.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the explanatory documents, other than those that are commercially confidential, submitted by the four consortiums bidding for the channel tunnel rail link; if he will endorse requests for exhibitions in the Upper Waiting Hall to permit those consortiums to display their plans; and if he will seek to ensure that hon. Members with constituency interests in the project may receive briefings from each of the companies that have bid for the contract. [14888]

Mr. Watts: When we have announced the winner of the channel tunnel rail link competition, I am sure that the successful promoter will wish to give briefings and presentations, and I shall be happy to support that. In the meantime, however, the four bidders are competing for a Government contract in which very large amounts of public funds are at stake. In those circumstances, it would be improper for Ministers, Members of Parliament, officials or others to be subject to lobbying by any of the bidders. I appreciate that many hon. Members and their constituents have interests and concerns about the rail link; the proper forum in which to advance those is in the proceedings of this House on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. We shall, of course, ensure that all undertakings given by the Government as the Bill progresses are binding upon the successful promoter.

Channel Tunnel Inspections

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the required inspection levels of channel tunnel vehicles referred to at paragraph 10.2.4 of his Transport report 1995. [14882]

Mr. Watts: All vehicles using the channel tunnel are liable to be searched. It would not be appropriate to detail the measures applied on security grounds.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when pulsed fast neutron analysis will be operational in respect of screening freight vehicles using the channel tunnel to the required inspection levels. [14886]

Mr. Watts: Pulsed fast neutron analysis technology is currently undergoing further developing work and it is not therefore possible to give a firm operational date at this stage. However, at the satisfactory conclusion of this work, Eurotunnel will be required to put PFNA in place at both UK and French terminals.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how Transec monitors and inspects the channel tunnel system; and if he will make a statement. [14887]

Mr. Watts: Under the terms of the Channel Tunnel (Security) Order 1994, the channel tunnel security inspectors give instructions, offer advice and make both announced and unannounced inspections to ensure that the required security standards are, and continue to be, met. It would not be appropriate to detail their operational methods or their findings on security grounds.

Pulsed Fast Neutron Analysis

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how pulsed fast neutron analysis, referred to in his Transport report 1995 facilitates screening of freight vehicles. [14883]

Mr. Watts: Pulsed fast neutron analysis can provide precise information about the composition and location of materials within freight containers. The technique can detect the presence of explosives, for example, by measuring characteristics specific to their composition.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the amount of the contribution from the United Kingdom towards the cost of pulsed fast neutron analysis [14885]

Mr. Watts: The British and French Governments have agreed to contribute to the cost of further development work by Science Applications International Corporation on PFNA technology. The total UK contribution is £4.2 million.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15029]

Dr. Mawhinney: I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Twyford Down Protests

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the total costs incurred to date by his Department in the legal action against Twyford Down protesters. [15118]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Denham, dated 21 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what are the total costs to date by his Department in the legal action against Twyford Down protestors.

The total cost of legal fees to date in connection with action against trespassers on the M3 construction site is approximately £276,000 inclusive of VAT.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlie the necessity for road schemes which have been given detailed approval by his Department to be subjected to the same detailed appraisal and approval following their inclusion in the Merseyside objective 1 bid; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

Applications for European regional development fund grant under the Merseyside objective 1 programme, including road schemes, are appraised against project selection criteria agreed by the programme monitoring committee. The purpose of these criteria, which include value for money, job creation and economic benefit, is to ensure that only those projects best able to meet the aims and objectives of the Merseyside objective 1 programme receive approval. This assessment for ERDF purposes is necessarily a separate assessment from that carried out by the Department of Transport when evaluating local authority road schemes.

In any event most of the road schemes seeking funding under the Merseyside objective 1 programme are access roads to proposed development sites which do not fall within the Department of Transport assessment.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total number of civil servants employed *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agencies secretarial staff and substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15098]

Mr. Norris: The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of civil servants employed by my Department and its agencies, including full time equivalent staff and casuals, from 1993 onwards, and of staff leaving the civil service.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains the staffing information for those bodies not covered by "Civil Service Statistics".

Details of running costs and civil service pay bill for my Department can be found in table 6 of my Department's annual report (CM 2806). Table 7 gives details of overtime from 1989–90 onwards.

Copies of all of these publications are available in the Members's Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure plans tables

Table 6 Running Costs 1989–90 to 1997–98

£ million

	1989–90 outturn	*1990–91 outturn*	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94[6] outturn*	*1994–95 estimated outturn*	*1995–96 plans*	*1996–97 plans*	*1997–98 plans*
Department of Transport									
Gross running costs[1]									
Civil Service Pay bill	185	206	201	215	201	211	—	—	—
Other	156	174	183	222	239	228	—	—	—
Total	341	381	384	437	440	439	429	377	377
Related receipts	–68	–70	–44	–53	–70	–39	–40	–23	–23
Net expenditure	247	311	340	384	370	399	389	354	354
Running Costs by control area:									
Gross control area:									
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	126	143	152	177	172	174	171	170	170
Highways Agency	37	50	54	71	81	85	88	72	72
Central Transport Group	117	125	141	150	154	160	155	131	131
Total gross controlled areas	281	317	347	399	407	419	414	374	374
Net control area:									
Vehicle Certification Agency									
Gross expenditure	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3
Net expenditure	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DVOIT[3]									
Gross expenditure	13	14	15	16	12	—	—	—	—
Net expenditure	13	14	15	1	-2	—	—	—	—
Transport Research Laboratory[4]									
Gross expenditure	17	18	19	19	19	17	13	—	—
Net expenditure	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Vehicle Inspectorate[5]									
Gross expenditure	29	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Net expenditure	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising									
Gross running costs	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civil Service Pay bill	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Other	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Total	—	—	—	—	1	4	5	4	4
Related receipts	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Net expenditure	1	4	5	4	4	—	—	—	—
Office of the Rail Regulator									
Gross running costs	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civil Service Pay bill	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	1	6	8	7	7	—	—	—	—
Related receipts	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Net expenditure	1	6	8	7	7	—	—	—	—

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[1] The gross figures are net of any VAT refunds on contracted out services.

[2] This covers the pay costs, including employers earnings related national insurance contributions, of civil servants in running costs, as given in Table 7 on Department staffing.

[3] DVOIT was privatised on 17 December 1993.

[4] It is planned to privatise TRL during 1995–96.

[5] The Vehicle Inspectorate became a training fund on 1 April 1991. It previously operated under net running costs control.

[6] Outturn figures for 1993–94 have been amended since the publication of the Statistical Supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96, Cm2821.

Table 7: staff numbers

	1989–90 outturn	1990–91 outturn	1991–92 outturn	1992–93 outturn	1993–94 outturn	1994–95 estimated outturn	1995–96 plans	1996–97 plans	1997–98 plans
Department of Transport (Gross Control Area)									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	11,447	11,906	11,253	9,896	9,795	9,389	8,859	8,737	8,766
Overtime	177	171	183	162	103	148	130	142	125
Casuals	206	183	208	319	323	331	267	267	267
Total	11,830	12,260	11,644	10,377	10,221	9,874	9,256	9,146	9,158
Vehicle Certification Agency (Net Control Area)									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	72	82	78	72	73	75	74	71	71
Overtime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Casuals	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total	72	82	78	73	73	76	74	71	71
Transport Research Laboratory (Net Control Area)									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	659	590	417	—	—	—
Overtime	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	0	12	6	—	[5]—	—
Casuals	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	7	5	0	—	—	—
Total	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	666	607	423	—	—	—
DVOIT									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	468	227	—	—	—	—
Overtime	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	10	0	—	—	—	—
Casuals	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	0	3	—	—	—	—
Total	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	478	230	—	—	—	—
Driving Standards Agency[2]									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	2,037	2,105	2,192	1,898	1,805	1,793	1,813	1,786	1,754
Vehicle Inspectorate[3]									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	1,620	1,691	1,817	1,781	1,634	1,589	1,510	1,420	1,420
Total department of transport	15,559	16,138	15,731	15,273	14,570	13,755	12,653	12,423	12,403
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising[6]									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	0	0	0	0	26	53	54	55	55
Overtime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Casuals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	26	53	54	55	55
Office of the Rail Regulator[6]									
Civil Service full time Equivalents	0	0	0	0	30	45	72	85	85
Overtime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Casuals	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	0	0	0	0	3	45	72	85	85

[1] DVOIT was privatised on 17 December 1993.

[2] The Driving Standards Agency is non-statutory on-Vote trading body whose current expenses are not classified as public expenditure.

[3] The Vehicle Inspectorate became a trading on 1 April 1991.

[4] Figures for the Transport Research Laboratory and DVOIT are included within the Department of Transport (Gross Control Area) for the years 1989–90 to 1991–92.

[5] The Transport Research Laboratory is expected to be privatised early in 1995–96.

[6] OPRAF and ORR were set up after Royal Assent to the Railway Act 1993 on 5 November 1993.

Fares, London

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the fares a resident of Hornsey and Wood Green would pay for *(a)* a one-mile single bus journey, *(b)* a three-mile single bus journey, *(c)* a three-mile single London Underground fare, *(d)* a six-mile single London Underground fare and *(e)* a five-mile British Rail fare giving the percentage increase or decrease for each change compared with the change in the retail price index and index of average earnings on 1 March and 1 September for each year since 1965. [14439]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 15 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *559–63*.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of gross domestic product was spent on *(a)* buses, *(b)* trains and *(c)* all public transport in (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994. [14816]

Mr. Norris: Gross domestic product is a measure of output and for public transport only contains expenditure on personal, non-business travel. However, a separate exercise has estimated users expenditure on various transport modes. For 1993–94, these are as follows:

Mode of transport	*Users' expenditure £ billion*	*Percentage of GDP*
Buses and coaches	3.2	0.6
Railways[1]	2.9	0.5
All public transport [2]	7.6	1.4
All GDP	554.8	100

[1] Excludes Tyne and Wear Metro.

[2] Buses, coaches, railways and taxis. The estimate for taxis excludes business use.

Lobbying Companies (British Rail)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance his Department has issued to the British Rail Board relating to employment by the shadow rail franchise companies of lobbying firms in the run-up to rail privatisation. [14534]

Mr. Watts: None. The employment of lobbying firms is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what lobbying companies are currently employed by the British Railways Board and the six shadow rail franchise companies; and what is the value and duration of these contracts. [14535]

Mr. Watts: British Rail currently retains Westminster Communications Group Limited as consultants for strategic advice on political and parliamentary issues but not for the general purpose of lobbying Parliament. Union Railways, currently a BR subsidiary, employs the Public Policy Unit in a similar capacity.

Contract duration and costs are a matter for the British Railways Board.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Salmon Stocks

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what access his Department has had to the findings of the Bushmills salmon research station on the impact of cormorant predation on salmon stocks. [13716]

Mrs. Browning: Ministry scientists are fully aware of the Bushmills Salmon research station studies on the impact of cormorant predation on salmon stocks. Results of these studies have been published in the international press and discussed at meetings of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas north Atlantic salmon working group.

Fishery Contamination

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the areas around the United Kingdom where the Government have advised restrictions or prohibitions of the catch of fish or shellfish, including issuing advice against consumption.

Mr. Jack: For the protection of public health, shellfish growing areas are classified under EU legislation according to levels of microbiological contamination. There are 12 areas under the coast of England and Wales from which harvesting is currently prohibited; the Truro river is one of them.

A full classification list for England and Wales is in the Library of the House. One area in Scotland, the Eden estuary near St. Andrews, cannot be harvested. There are no prohibited areas in Northern Ireland.

Advice against consumption, where necessary, would be a matter for the Government's chief medical officer. Local Food authorities have powers under the Food Safety Act 1990 to take immediate action should any local problem be identified.

Veal Crates

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which year he expects veal crates to be banned throughout the EC.

Mrs. Browning: An EC ban on veal crates would necessitate amendment of EC directive 91/629 laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves. It would be unrealistic to expect those member states where veal crates are currently used to agree to any change overnight, but we will be pressing for any transitional period to be kept to a minimum.

Illegal Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Spanish vessels which were British or Spanish registered have been prosecuted in each of the last two years for illegal fishing in British waters.

Mr. Jack: The numbers of Spanish registered fishing vessels and the UK-registered fishing vessels landing in Spain that were successfully prosecuted in the UK in 1993 and 1994 for fishing offences were:

	1993	*1994*
UK registered vessels	11	10
Spanish registered vessels	4	5

Animal Exports

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) who is responsible for enforcing the 15-hour maximum journey time for animals in transit; [14583]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of enforcement of the 15-hour maximum journey time for animals in transit. [14584]

Mrs. Browning: The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994 which, among other things, sets the maximum interval between the provision of food and water, is enforced by local authorities at county council level, assisted by the state veterinary service. Powers also exist in the order for the Ministry to enforce its requirements in certain cases. The welfare of animals during transport in another member state is enforced by the authorities in the country concerned, and procedures for co-operation between the Governments of member states have been established by the Community. We maintain regular contact on enforcement matters with the enforcement authorities in Britain, and with certain other members states of the EU in relation to exports.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are available for the building, conversion or refitting of fishing vessels in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EC countries. [14797]

Mr. Jack: In the United Kingdom, aid for the modernisation of the fleet is currently available only under the safety grant scheme operated by my Department for certain works necessary to obtain a safety certificate under the Fishing Vessel Safety Rules 1975. I have made it clear before that there is no sense in the Government financing grants to increase fishing capacity and efficiency when we are paying large sums of money to decommission fishing vessels.

The position in other member states is that they are free to operate aids for fishing vessels provided they comply with the conditions of article 92 of the treaty of Rome and the guidelines on the examination of state aids in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Under article 93 of the treaty, the European Commission has responsibility for keeping all such aids under constant review. They compile a full list annually but it is not published because it contains information supplied by member states on a confidential basis. The UK has pressed for this restriction to be lifted. Some summary information is available in the Commission's periodic surveys of state aids in the European Community. The latest of these covers 1986 to 1990 and is available in the Library of the House. Details of individual measures are, however, published from time to time in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities following Commission approval, as are details of unauthorised aids which the Commission is examining under the procedure set out in article 93(2).

Bovine Offal

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the proposals concerning the collection and disposal of specified bovine offals are being considered. [14415]

Mrs. Browning: The Government are currently considering proposals concerning the collection and disposal of specified bovine offal.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his Department commenced its consideration of the need to introduce a requirement for a specific dye to be used to identify specified bovine offal. [14416]

Mrs. Browning: Staining SBO has been required since regulations were introduced in 1989. Until now, the same dye has been used to stain all material unfit for human consumption, whether SBO or not. The Government began considering the need to introduce a requirement for a different dye to be used to distinguish specified bovine offal from other unfit material in the spring of 1994.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he received prior to establishing an inquiry into the need to introduce *(a)* a requirement for a specific dye to be used to identify specified bovine offal and *(b)* changes concerning the collection and disposal of specified bovine offal. [14417]

Mrs. Browning: The Government received representations from a variety of industry organisations and individuals regarding the collection and disposal of specified bovine offal prior to their considering the need *(a)* to require SBO to be stained with a specified dye and *(b)* for changes concerning their collection and disposal.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14505]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The Ministry employs, under contract, a number of survey organisations to undertake research into a variety of areas in pursuance of Ministry business. Before any survey organisation is used, the Department takes full account of the need for economy, efficiency and whether the organisation represents value for money.

In 1993–94, 27 organisations were employed at a total cost of £4.4 million. In 1994 1,995, 22 organisations were employed at a total cost of £3.9 million. It is not possible, for commercial reasons, to give the cost of each individual survey.

Details of the research proposals agreed by the survey control unit are published quarterly in statistical news.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15021]

Mr. Waldegrave: I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to reply to the letter of 18 February from the hon. Member for South Hams about John Sanders, a fisherman, of 91 Drew street, Brixham, south Devon; and what assessment he has made of the situation facing Mr. Sanders. [15416]

Mr. Jack: I replied to my hon. Friend's letter on 20 March.

Fertiliser Imports

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken to prevent the breaking of fertiliser import quotas. [14925]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Following an anti-dumping investigation by the European Commission, the Russian and Lithuanian authorities gave undertakings to restrict exports of ammonium nitrate fertiliser to the UK. It is the responsibility of the Commission to ensure compliance with these undertakings. We have asked it to take immediate action to remedy an alleged breach of the Russian undertaking.

EDUCATION

Schools (Expenditure)

14. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines her Department issues to head teachers regarding school expenditure on capital projects and the maintenance of capital reserves. [13255]

Mr. Forth: It is for local education authorities to decide on the progress of capital projects at county schools. As far as expenditure within the schools' own discretion is concerned, the Department's circular on local management of schools, circular 2/94, makes it clear that they may use their budget shares for capital projects. The circular also makes it clear that such schools may carry forward savings in order to create balances which may be used for capital projects in subsequent years.

Teachers' Pay Awards

20. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment concerning the funding of teachers' pay awards. [13261]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend is now completing consultations on her proposal to accept the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendations on teachers' pay for 1995–96. She has held discussions with many people, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she proposes to fund future teachers' pay awards.

Mr. Robin Squire: It will be for local education authorities and schools to fund future teachers' pay awards within available future funding levels.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received in respect of low morale among teachers arising from Government funding of the pay award.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about aspects of the funding of the teachers' pay award during the course of the consultation period following her acceptance of the recommendations of the School Teachers' Review Body.

School Budgets

21. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the proportion of an annual school budget that is a reasonable minimum to be kept in reserve. [13262]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has made no such assessment.

Exam Results

15. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will initiate inquiries into the reasons for the variation in the levels of success in GCSE and A-level exams between *(a)* Southend-on-Sea, *(b)* the rest of the county of Essex and *(c)* England as a whole; and if she will make a statement. [13256]

Mr. Boswell: The Government's policies are raising achievement at national level. At school level it is for the headteacher, staff and governors to take appropriate action.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of passes at each grade of GCSE, including ungraded, were achieved by pupils of 15 years for all GCSE subjects in 1993–94 and what was the total number of entries. [15105]

Mr. Forth: The percentages of passes at each grade of GCSE, including ungraded, achieved by 15-year-old pupils for all GCSE subject entries in England in 1993–94 were as follows:-

	Percentage
Grade A*	3
Grade A	10
Grade B	18
Grade C	20
Grade D	18
Grade E	14
Grade F	9
Grade G	4
Ungraded	4

Total entries 4,266,900.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the GCSE average point score of pupils aged 15 years and over, as defined in the DFE performance tables, who *(a)* achieved and *(b)* failed to achieve at least five GCSEs at each grade of GCSE from grades (i) A to G and (ii) A to F, giving the numbers of each group and its percentage of the whole for all secondary schools in 1993 and 1994. [15107]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

Average GCSE point score

	1992–93		*1993–94*	
	Specified result		*Specified result*	
	Achieved	*Failed*	*Achieved*	*Failed*
At least 5 grade A	63.1	30.4	63.5	31.6
At least 5 grade B	57.7	26.2	58.1	26.7
At least 5 grade C	51.6	20.2	52.5	20.6
At least 5 grade D	47.0	14.6	47.8	14.6
At least 5 grade E	43.0	9.3	44.0	9.0
At least 5 grade F	40.2	5.3	41.1	4.6
At least 5 grade G	38.6	3.4	39.8	2.8

Numbers and percentage of 15-year-old pupils

	1992–93		*1993–94*	
	Achieved result		*Achieved result*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
At least 5 grade A	43,884	8.4	47,690	9.0
At least 5 grade B	113,820	21.8	131,358	24.7
At least 5 grade C	215,068	41.2	230,636	43.3
At least 5 grade D	298,536	57.1	318,827	59.9
At least 5 grade E	368,929	70.6	387,155	72.7
At least 5 grade F	416,574	79.7	434,987	81.7
At least 5 grade G	440,416	84.3	455,704	85.6
Total 15-year-old pupils	522,447		532,273	

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the GCSE average point score of pupils aged 15 years and over, as defined in the DFE performance tables, who *(a)* achieved and *(b)* failed to achieve at least one GCSE at each grade of GCSE from grades (i) A to G and (ii) A to F, giving the numbers of each group and its percentage of the whole for all secondary schools in 1993 and 1994. [15106]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

Average GCSE point score

	1992–93		*1993–94*	
	Specified result		*Specified result*	
	Achieved	*Failed*	*Achieved*	*Failed*
At least 1 grade A	53.7	24.9	54.7	25.8
At least 1 grade B	48.3	18.8	49.2	18.9
At least 1 grade C	43.0	11.5	44.4	11.8
At least 1 grade D	39.4	5.7	40.9	5.6
At least 1 grade E	37.1	1.8	38.8	1.8
At least 1 grade F	36.0	0.2	37.7	0.2
At least 1 grade G	35.6	0.0	37.4	0.0

Numbers and percentage of pupils aged 15 in each group

	1992–93		*1993–94*	
	Achieved result		*Achieved result*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
At least 1 grade A	149,112	28.5	159,729	30.0
At least 1 grade B	252,959	48.4	272,981	51.3
At least 1 grade C	357,812	68.5	370,475	69.6
At least 1 grade D	424,729	81.3	435,554	81.8
At least 1 grade E	463,191	88.7	469,727	88.2
At least 1 grade F	480,170	91.9	485,895	91.3
At least 1 grade G	485,618	93.0	490,893	92.3
Total 15-year-olds	522,447		532,273	

Higher Education

16. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of young people are now entering higher education; and what was the figure 10 years ago. [13257]

Mr. Boswell: The Government's policies have led to record participation in higher education. Some 30 per cent. of young people now enter full-time higher education compared with around 14 per cent. 10 years ago.

Grant-maintained Schools

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools in Kent have been given grant-maintained status. [13258]

Mr. Robin Squire: There are currently 87 grant-maintained schools in Kent, the second highest total for any LEA area in England. A further five schools have applications approved or in the pipeline.

23. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much she expects to be paid to grant-maintained schools in special purposes—VAT—grant in this financial year. [13265]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is primarily a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. However, I understand that the agency's latest projected outturn expenditure on special purposes—VAT—grant this financial year is £16.4 million.

29. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children are currently educated in grant-maintained schools in Kent; and if she will make a statement. [13271]

Mr. Robin Squire: We estimate that over 60,000 pupils in Kent are currently being educated in grant-maintained schools—the second highest total for any LEA area in England. That is clear evidence of the extent to which Kent parents have appreciated the benefits of grant-maintained status for their children's schools.

Nursery Education

18. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what further assessment she has made of the demand for nursery education. [13259]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has set a target to provide, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish them to take it up. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the official task force have been consulting widely with a view to drawing up detailed proposals on the expansion.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is her policy in respect of the use of a voucher system for under-five nursery provision; [15189]

(2) what plans she has for the funding of nursery education for four-year-olds; and what consideration she is giving to a model based on a split between purchasers and providers. [15190]

Mr. Forth: In drawing up proposals to implement my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's commitment to provide, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is examining all the options for funding, including voucher systems and a purchaser-provider split.

Truancy

19. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations she has received about truancy. [13260]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend receives representations about truancy from a variety of quarters. To provide practical help to schools, the Department is currently supporting locally-devised projects to a value of some £14 million in over 80 English local education authorities under the truancy and disaffected pupils programme of the grants for education support and training scheme 1994–95. In December we announced further support for some 90 projects in 1995–96, to a value of £15.6 million.

Literacy and Numeracy

22. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on progress in promoting the acquisition by school children of basic literacy and numeracy skills. [13264]

Mr. Forth: The Government's reforms—notably the national curriculum and testing—are already helping to raise overall educational standards, as recently confirmed by the chief inspector of schools. But the results of the national tests for seven and 14-year-olds in English and mathematics underline the need to continue to raise standards, which is why we have put more emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy in the revised national curriculum.

Ministerial Visits

24. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she next expects to pay an official visit to Bedfordshire to discuss funding of local education authority schools. [13266]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to visit Bedfordshire.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list all the visits she has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with her departmental responsibilities. [15015]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official manner.

Education Funding, Sheffield

25. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions are taking between herself and the Sheffield education authority regarding education funding. [13267]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend and I routinely have discussions about a range of matters with a large number of local education authorities and with the bodies which represent them.

Schools and Local Industry Links

26. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to develop closer links between schools and local industry. [13268]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is promoting a wide range of initiatives, both departmentally and with outside organisations, aimed at developing closer links between schools and local industry.

Government of Schools

27. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the future government of schools. [13269]

Mr. Robin Squire: We have no plans to change the government of schools.

Education Funding, Northumberland

28. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about education funding in Northumberland following the visit to schools in Northumberland by the Minister of State on 9 March. [13270]

Mr. Robin Squire: The education standard spending assessment for Northumberland is based on its spending needs and costs relative to those of other local education authorities.

Capital Projects

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidelines her Department has issued regarding local education authority expenditure on capital projects. [13176]

Mr. Robin Squire: None. It is up to local education authorities to determine local capital expenditure priorities, and to make the best use of the resources available to them in the light of local needs. But LEAs will be aware of the national priority criteria, agreed with them 10 years ago, which the Department uses to calculate credit approvals.

Engineering

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her response to the representations that have been made to her by engineering bodies and others about the shortcomings of some mathematics teaching in primary and secondary schools, in relation to the education and training of engineers in Britain. [13379]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *438*, which stressed the Government's commitment to higher standards in mathematics. The national curriculum will improve standards by establishing demanding expectations for both teachers and pupils. The full beneficial effects will only be seen in the medium term, however, as pupils progress through the curriculum: the first pupils to embark on the mathematics national curriculum as five year-olds in 1989 will not complete the curriculum as 16-year-olds until the year 2000, before moving on to further and higher education.

Meanwhile, the findings of the Engineering Council's review of the changing mathematical background of undergraduate engineers, which was published at the beginning of March, will helpfully inform current discussion about the teaching of mathematics.

School Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will make a statement on the future responsibilities of local authorities in respect of the funding of schools which have not opted out; [15186]

(2) if she is considering removing the responsibility for funding all schools from local education authorities. [15191]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no plans to change the present responsibilities of local education authorities for funding the compulsory years of education in the schools which they maintain. The official task force which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State established to draw up proposals to implement my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's commitment on the provision of pre-school places for four-year-olds in considering funding mechanisms as part of its work. The 1994 competitiveness White Paper announced that the Government would be looking at the practical implications of learning credits for all 16 to 19-year-olds. The Government have commissioned consultants to consider the costs and benefits of various options, and will be considering the next steps in due course.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy in respect of transferring the responsibility for funding all state schools to the Funding Agency for Schools. [15187]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice or guidelines she has issued to schools unable to meet the Government funding limits.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for governing bodies to deploy schools' budgets in the light of their own priorities and within the resources available to them.

Education Funding (Vouchers)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy in respect of the use of vouchers in the funding arrangements for the education of five to 16-year-olds. [15188]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce vouchers for the funding of education for five to 16-year-olds.

College Staff Pay

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) whether the Further Education Funding Council, England, collects data on the remuneration of principals and chief executives of colleges for which it has funding responsibility; [15271]

(2) what is the average salary increase of principals and chief executives of institutions funded by the Further Education Funding Council, England, in the years for which figures are available. [15272]

Mr. Boswell: FEFC guidelines on accounting policies recommend that colleges should disclose the emoluments of senior postholders in their accounts, which are publicly available. Information on average salaries for senior postholders is not collected by the Department. However, the FEFC has some data which might be helpful and has undertaken to write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plan the Student Loans Company has to provide compensation to students who have suffered extensive delays in the processing of their loan applications. [15273]

Mr. Boswell: It is for the independent assessor to decide, in line with his terms of reference, whether compensation is appropriate in any case which may be referred to him for consideration. A copy of the assessor's terms of reference was placed in the Library on 19 July 1990.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the number of schools unable to find extra funds by redeeming surplus places. [15047]

Mr. Robin Squire: None. We encourage local education authorities to remove surplus places, where that is practicable, thereby redeploying funds to be spent for the benefit of pupils rather than wasted on unnecessary capacity.

University and Industry Partnerships

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the total spend of her Department on encouraging research partnerships between industry and universities in each of the last 20 years. [14838]

Mr. Boswell: Public funds for English universities are distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in the form of block grant for each university to spend at its discretion. Since its establishment in April 1993, the funding council has allocated some £20 million a year to reward institutions for income earned from work with external sponsors of research, including industry. Comparable figures for earlier years are not readily available.

University Contracts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many university academic and research staff are now on permanent contracts and how many on short-term contracts; and what were the figures in 1990 and 1985. [14839]

Mr. Boswell: This information is not held centrally.

Responsibility for employment conditions of academic and research staff, however funded, rests with the universities as employers.

The Higher Education Statistical Agency, which has now assumed responsibility for collection of statistics on staff, students and finance in all United Kingdom higher education institutions, will identify, in its 1994–95 academic staff record, data on staff numbers in institutions on permanent or other form of contract.

The Universities Statistical Record has collected staff data on behalf of former UFC-funded universities, but does not distinguish by type of staff contract.

Small Schools

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to review the legislation preventing educational centres from being classed as independent schools if they have fewer than five children.

Mr. Robin Squire: The provisions of the Education Act 1944 governing the registration and monitoring of independent schools apply only to those educating five or more full-time pupils of compulsory school age. We have no present plans for legislation to extend those provisions to other independent institutions which are generally subject to separate monitoring arrangements.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in what circumstances Her Majesty's inspectorate is able to inspect schools with fewer than five children.

Mr. Forth: All maintained schools, whatever the number of pupils, are required to be regularly inspected under the Ofsted inspection arrangements.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools also has the power to inspect independent schools. Independent schools are defined as institutions which provide full-time education for five or more pupils of compulsory school age. Independent institutions caring for children under compulsory school age are generally subject to separate monitoring arrangements.

Major Discretionary Awards

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total expenditure, in each local authority, for major discretionary awards in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested for the academic year 1992–93, the latest for which data are available, is shown in the table. Financial year information is not available.

Expenditure on Major [1]Discretionary Awards—England and Wales 1992–93

LEA name	*£000s*
Corporation of London	25
Camden[2]	81
Greenwich	385
Hackney	659
Hammersmith and Fulham	308
Islington	444
Kensington and Chelsea	622
Lambeth	479
Lewisham	813
Southwark	315
Tower Hamlets	274
Wandsworth	667
Westminster	1,306
London Residuary Body	389
Barking and Dagenham	128
Barnet	19
Bexley	675
Brent	399
Bromley[2]	717
Croydon	310
Ealing	431
Enfield	253
Haringey	0
Harrow	24
Havering	150
Hillingdon	223
Hounslow	94

Expenditure on Major [1]Discretionary Awards—England and Wales 1992–93

LEA name	*£000s*
Kingston upon Thames	780
Merton	166
Newham	126
Redbridge	446
Richmond upon Thames	703
Sutton	278
Waltham Forest	569
Birmingham	1,418
Coventry	178
Dudley	206
Sandwell	165
Solihull	259
Walsall	314
Wolverhampton	43
Knowsley	1,160
Liverpool	2,384
St. Helens	175
Sefton	645
Wirral	1,836
Bolton	282
Bury	60
Manchester	254
Oldham	268
Rochdale	206
Salford	17
Stockport	186
Tameside	117
Trafford	421
Wigan	158
Barnsley	791
Doncaster	286
Rotherham	404
Sheffield	68
Bradford	1,941
Calderdale	349
Kirklees	1,686
Leeds[2]	2,813
Wakefield	789
Gateshead	268
Newcastle upon Tyne	120
North Tyneside	398
South Tyneside	430
Sunderland	837
Isles of Scilly	0
Avon	4,603
Bedfordshire	487
Berkshire	1,185
Buckinghamshire	880
Cambridgeshire	1,265
Cheshire	7,184
Cleveland	2,935
Cornwall	1,435
Cumbria	4,387
Derbyshire	528
Devon	7,753
Dorset	4,598
Durham	3,801
East Sussex	963
Essex	5,917
Gloucestershire	2,201
Hampshire	6,147
Hereford and Worcester	1,791
Hertfordshire	1,938
Humberside	3,655
Isle of Wight	265
Kent	5,699
Lancashire	5,019
Leicestershire	6,939
Lincolnshire	2,026
Norfolk	2,287
North Yorkshire	5,631
Northamptonshire[2]	1,060
Northumberland	293
Nottinghamshire	5,018
Oxfordshire	1,097
Shropshire	1,676
Somerset	1,513
Staffordshire	1,148
Suffolk	3,001
Surrey	1,741
Warwickshire	56
West Sussex	1,183
Wiltshire	1,439
Clwyd[2]	919
Dyfed	0
Gwent	1,131
Gwynedd	688
Mid-Glamorgan	1,065
Powys	766
South Glamorgan	670
West Glamorgan	983
England and Wales[3]	153,426

Source:

F503G.

Notes:

[1] Awards made at 50 per cent. or more of the mandatory rate.

[2] Incomplete returns received from Camden, Bromley, Leeds, Northamptonshire and Clwyd.

[3] England and Wales total is grossed to compensate for incomplete returns in 1992–93.

SCOTLAND

Lanark Blue Cheese

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is known to his Department about the actual health impact of Lanark blue cheese.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is not aware of any reported cases of human illness which have been shown by laboratory investigation to be associated with the consumption of Lanark blue cheese, although not all cases of food poisoning are reported.

Pharmacies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on non-contract pharmacies in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* Any registered pharmacy in Scotland can provide pharmaceutical services outwith the national health service. Only pharmacies contracting with a health board and included in that health board's pharmaceutical list can provide NHS pharmaceutical services.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement indicating what guidance the Scottish Office has issued to Scottish health boards in relation to the operation of mixed-sex wards in Scottish hospitals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The Scottish hospital planning notes draw together the best current knowledge of appropriate space, performance and cost criteria for health care needs. This guidance also provides advice on the grouping of beds in wards. It emphasises that careful consideration is needed when planning for accommodation within a range of single and multi-bed rooms. The position is being further reviewed.

The patients charter, published in September 1991, makes clear that patients have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and, in particular, with respect for their privacy.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional funding has been made available by the Scottish Office to Scottish health boards to phase out the operation of mixed-sex wards.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The allocation of resources to accommodation within hospitals falls within the financial freedoms available to NHS trusts.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mixed-sex wards have operated in each health board in Scotland for each of the last five financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Scottish health boards relating to the suitability of mixed-sex wards.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* None.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rights exist under the patients charter for patients to object to being placed in a mixed-sex ward.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* While there are no specific rights at present under the patients charter in Scotland in respect of mixed-sex wards, the charter does state that patients have a right to expect that they will be treated with dignity and respect and, in particular, with respect for their privacy.

Health Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much each health board has spent on capital investment on GP practices in each health board area in Scotland for each of the last five years; and how much of this expenditure went on GP fundholding practices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions the Scottish Office has had with Ayrshire and Arran health board relating to the concluding of its proposed contract with Irvine Care Ltd;

(2) what delays have occurred in concluding the contract between Ayrshire and Arran health board and Irvine Care Ltd; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* Contract negotiations between Ayrshire and Arran health board and its providers are a matter for the health board. The board has kept the Scottish Office informed of progress in this matter.

Delays arose as the board entered detailed discussions with the provider and the Community Health Care Trust on a range of issues including the application of the transfer of undertaking and protection of employment regulations.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when Ayrshire and Arran health board expects to conclude the contract for the replacement of Ravenspark hospital with Irvine Care Ltd;

(2) when Ayrshire and Arran health board now plans Ravenspark hospital to close; and when it plans the replacement facility for its patients to be opened.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The contract between Ayrshire and Arran health board and the provider is currently with Irvine Care Ltd for signature.

Ravenspark hospital will remain open until such time as replacement provision is available for present residents. Any formal proposal for the closure of Ravenspark hospital must be subject to a public consultation exercise and the final approval of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what staffing requirement has been agreed by Ayrshire and Arran health board and Irvine Care Ltd for the replacement facility for Ravenspark hospital; and if he will indicate how this compares with current arrangements.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* This is a matter for Ayrshire and Arran health board. Staff levels and skill mix form an integral part of the contract between the health board and Irvine Care Limited. The levels agreed are broadly comparable with existing provision.

Patients Charter

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on preparing, publishing and circulating the patients charter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* Expenditure to date on the patients charter, including printing and distribution costs, is £41,729.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1992, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15092]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

Appendix 4 of the Scottish Office departmental report for 1995, CM 2814, gives details of the number of civil servants employed by the Scottish Office, its associated departments and agencies, including full-time equivalent staff and casuals—from 1993 onwards—while appendix 3 of the report gives details of civil service paybill. Equivalent information in respect of the Forestry Commission, for which I am also responsible, is given in table 13.3. of the report.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by civil service statistics.

The annual publication "Civil Service Statistics" gives details of the number of staff leaving the civil service. Copies of all of these publications are available in the Members' Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Maternity Hospitals

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many maternity hospitals in Scotland are located on sites where acute hospital services are also located. [15100]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on Wednesday 15 March, *Official Report,* column *633.*

Police Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilians are currently employed in each of the police forces; and what were the comparable figures for 1979. [13206]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Force	*31 December 1979*		*31 December 1994*	
	Police	*Civilians*[2]	*Police*[1]	[2]*Civilians*
Central	509	104	654	155
Dumfries and Galloway	311	60	390	124
Fife	671	111	789	219
Grampian	932	191	1,191	385
Lothian and Borders	2,342	640	2,556	902
Northern	603	135	643	243
Strathclyde	6,905	1,334	7,003	1,553
Tayside	941	208	1,087	320
Total	13,214	2,783	14,313	3,901

[1] Includes officers on secondment to Central Services and Scottish Crime Squad.

[2] Includes Traffic Wardens, Clerical and Technical Staff, but not Cleaning or Domestic Staff, or Cadets.

Sheriffs

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions the activities of sheriff officers have been investigated under section 79 of the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 in *(a)* the Sheriffdom of North Strathclyde and *(b)* other sheriffdoms in each of the past five years; if any of these investigations led to individuals losing the status of sheriff officer; and if he will make a statement. [13543]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for the number of investigations carried out under section 79 of the Debtors (Scotland) from 1990 to 1994 are set out by Sheriffdom in the table. No sheriff officer has been deprived of his commission as a result of such an investigation.

Sheriffdom	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
North Strathclyde	0	0	0	0	0
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	0	1	0	0	0
Lothian and Borders	0	0	0	0	1
South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway	0	0	0	1	1
Tayside, Central and Fife	0	0	0	0	0
Grampian, Highland and Islands	0	0	0	0	0

Speech Therapists

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department has taken to encourage the recruitment of more speech therapists by Scottish health boards. [14537]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My Department has asked those higher education institutes where speech therapists train to increase their intake of students.

It is worthy of note that the number of whole-time equivalent speech therapists employed in the NHS in Scotland grew from 255.1 to 550.6 between 1979 and 1994, an increase of 116 per cent.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Scottish education authorities in relation to the numbers of speech therapists employed within the NHS. [14539]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many speech therapists have been employed by each health board in Scotland in each of the last five financial years. [14536]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for 1994 is shown in the table. Date for 1990–93 are published in "Scottish Health Statistics", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

Qualified speech therapists by health board: as at 30 September 1994 (provisional)

Scotland	*Number* 659	*Whole time equivalent* 550.6
Argyll and Clyde	50	39.7
Ayrshire and Arran	34	31.2
Borders	18	13.9
Dumfries and Galloway	24	21.8
Fife	50	44.8
Forth Valley	28	22.6
Grampian	71	59.2
Greater Glasgow	119	99.3
Highland	29	24.7
Lanarkshire	69	58.6
Lothian	99	79.6
Orkney	5	2.7
Shetland	2	2.0
Tayside	55	45.0
Western Isles	6	5.7

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines have been issued to the staff of Scottish Homes to prevent conflicts of interest in the establishment of housing associations by employees of Scottish Homes; and what safeguards have been established in order to protect the public interest when transfers of housing stock take place to housing associations involving the staff of Scottish Homes. [14576]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend issued guidance to Scottish Homes on the sale of assets and the letting of contracts, including those circumstances where groups of former staff are involved, which covered issues of propriety, value for money and quality of service. Scottish Homes took this guidance into account in determining its procedures for the disposal of its houses which includes a code of conduct for staff.

Transfer of Scottish Homes stock is subject to my right hon. Friend's approval and he will be concerned to ensure that such transfers will not take place unless he is satisfied that tenants are in favour and that their interests have been fully considered.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidance Scottish Homes has given to its staff in order to promote their involvement in the establishment of housing associations; [14546]

(2) what measures Scottish Homes have implemented to support their employees in establishing housing associations; [14547]

(3) how much revenue Scottish Homes has raised from the transfer of its housing stock to other landlords; [14550]

(4) how much revenue has been received by Scottish Homes for each transfer of housing stock by Scottish Homes; [14551]

(5) which housing associations have been established by staff employed by Scottish Homes. [14552]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

NHS Descriptions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS prescriptions have been issued *(a)* paid for by patients and *(b)* in respect of which the patients were exempt from payment in each health board area in Scotland in each year since 1968. [14540]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information requested, which is only available from the financial year 1979–80, is rather lengthy, I have arranged for copies of the tables to be placed in the Library of the House. The number of prescriptions for which no charge was made at the point of dispensing includes items dispensed on presentation of pre-payment certificates.

Scanner

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department had with Ayrshire and Arran health board and the South Ayrshire hospitals trust prior to its reaching an agreement with Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. for the provision of a scanner; and whether the Scottish Office acceded to this agreement. [14542]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is aware of the proposal for the provision of a fixed magnetic resonance imager at Ayr hospital by Ayrshire Medical Support Limited. This is a matter for the South Ayrshire NHS trust and the company. However, officials are in contact with Ayrshire and Arran health board and the trust with a view to continuing to be fully informed about the project.

Dental Services

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been deregistered by their dentist since 1992 in each health board area in Scotland. [14819]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information supplied by health boards about patient de-registrations since financial year 1991–92 is contained in the table.

Patients de-registered by dentists in Scotland

Health board	*April 1991–March 1992 Number of patients de- registered*[1]	*April 1992–March 1993 Number of patients de-registered*	*April 1993–March 1994 Number of patients de-registered*	*April 1994–January 1995 Number of patients de-registered*
Argyll and Clyde	25	2,241	42	—
Ayrshire and Arran	14	1,309	400	72
Borders	11	1,432	683	41
Dumfries and Galloway	11	4,518	1,388	825
Fife	—	295	417	492
Forth Valley	42	201	63	196
Grampian	9	257	179	205

Patients de-registered by dentists in Scotland

Health board	*April 1991–March 1992 Number of patients de- registered*[1]	*April 1992–March 1993 Number of patients de-registered*	*April 1993–March 1994 Number of patients de-registered*	*April 1994–January 1995 Number of patients de-registered*
Greater Glasgow	41	579	339	946
Highland	19	210	73	68
Lanarkshire	70	252	145	56
Lothian	101	483	1,625	1,009
Orkney	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Tayside	n/a	[2]106	57	437
Western Isles	—	37	16	—

n/a—Not available.

[1] Patients de-registered by their dentist without their consent. Figures may not include NHS registrations ended either to enter private contract by agreement between patient and dentists, or where a dentist leaves the practice.

[2] From July 1992.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of staff within the NHS in Scotland is currently covered by performance-related pay. [14548]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of employees within the NHS in Scotland he estimates will be covered by performance-related pay at the end of *(a)* the current and *(b)* the next financial year. [14549]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The taking forward of local pay arrangements whereby pay is related to performance, whether individual or team-based or otherwise, is a matter for the individual employing authorities.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance the Scottish Office has issued to Scottish health boards relating to the closure of staffed beds for the treatment of mental health and psycho-geriatric patients. [14526]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has issued no such guidance. Guidance has been issued on the role and responsibilities of the NHS in continuing care and on the arrangements to apply for the transfer of resources to local authorities where patients have transferred from the NHS to more appropriate forms of care. The organisation and provision of all mental health services is determined by clinical assessment and local need. It is for the individual health boards to assess the needs for their population and to purchase mental health services accordingly. In so doing they are expected to have due regard for the Government's community care objectives and what is best for individuals.

Ballochmyle Hospital

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Ayrshire and Arran health board and the South Ayrshire hospitals trust spent on upgrading Ballochmyle hospital during the last five years. [14527]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of £2.1 million.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many wards are currently lying empty within Ballochmyle hospital; and if he will give a reason for these closures. [14528]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Five wards are currently vacant. The organisation of health provision is a matter for the health board and NHS trust to agree in accordance with their shared assessment health needs for the area.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much it cost the Scottish Office to prepare, publish and distribute its recent information leaflet on the impact of local government reform. [14529]

Mr. Kynoch: The total cost for the printing and distribution of the explanatory leaflet "Local Government in Scotland: The New Councils" was £138,660. This works out at less than 7p per household.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce and develop a code of conduct for civil servants.

Mr. David Hunt: In "The Civil Service—Taking Forward Continuity and Change", CM 2748, published on 26 January, the Government accepted the recommendation of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee for a new civil service code, to set out with greater clarity and brevity than existing documents the constitutional framework within which all civil servants work and the values which they are expected to uphold. The Government have published a draft code based on the Select Committee's proposal and aims to settle the text of the code after consultation with the Select Committee, civil servants, the civil service unions, and others.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many vacancies in the civil service or its agencies have occurred since the publication of the civil service White Paper in July 1994; and how many of these vacancies have been *(a)* filled by internal candidates, *(b)* not been filled and *(c)* filled by external candidates. [14690]

Mr. Horam: Since the publication of the civil service White Paper in July 1994 there have been 36 vacancies in the civil service and its agencies at grade 3 level and above:

(a) 22 were filled by internal candidates

(b) 4 have not yet been filled (competitions are in train)

(c) 7 were filled by external candidates

(d) 3 were filled by candidates holding fixed term appointments to which they were recruited from outside the Service.

Information is not held centrally about all appointments to vacancies in Departments and agencies below grade 3 level.

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14597]

Mr. Horam: Total expenditure information on publicity, publications and pamphlets and details of individual publicity campaigns is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15019]

Mr. David Hunt: I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much each Government Department has spent on the employment of polling or public survey organisations during the current and previous financial years in connection with the citizens charter. [15192]

Mr. Horam: The table shows a breakdown of the charter unit's expenditure on the employment of polling or public survey organisations since its creation in 1991. Information on similar expenditure by other Government departments is not held centrally.

Table 1: Citizens charter unit—expenditure incurred on employment of polling or public survey organisations

Project	*Organisation and reason for payment*	*Financial year*	*Cost £*
Charterline	Research International (RI): quantitative stage development, set up and pilot	1992–93	9,953.00
	RI: questionnaire design and testing for Citizen's Charter survey	1992–93	2,126.00
	RI: fieldwork stage	1992–93	35,796.00
	RI: processing and computing.	1992–93	5,000.00
	RI: delivery of data tables.	1992–93	5,000.00
	COI (on behalf of RSGB) Pilot Tracking Research	1993–94	43,200.00
	COI (on behalf of Cragg Ross and Dawson) qualitative review	1993–94	12,980.00
	COI (on behalf of Cragg Ross and Dawson) Charterline Groups 93–94; assistance with planning of campaign and part of assessment of campaign	1993–94	17,800.00
Complaints Task Force	MORI: public's views on how public services handle complaints	1994–95	60,720.00
Customer Survey	ICM: evaluation of public reactions to Charter	1993–94	75,000.00
Miscellaneous research	MORI: survey of surveys	1994–95	1,350.00
Charter Mark	COI (on behalf of Duckworth Finn Grubb Waters/MORI)—research on success of Customer Nomination Scheme.1994–956,943.00		
	MORI: review of 1993 Charter Mark scheme	1993–94	29,595.00
	COI: tracking effects of Charter Mark advertising campaign	1994–95	9,600.00
	MORI: review of 1994 Charter Mark scheme	1994–95	35,485.00
		Total expenditure	350,548.00

Note:

All figures exclude VAT.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the level of social fund expenditure; and how much will be spent administering the social fund in the 1994–95 financial year. [14685]

Mr. Roger Evans: Details on the estimated outturn on the social fund for the current financial year are in figure 25 of the departmental report: "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995/96 to 1997/98 (Cm 2813)", a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on the administration costs of the social fund for 1994–95 is not yet available.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he intends to make to the discretionary social fund; and if he will make a statement. [15580]

Mr. Roger Evans: As in previous years, we have identified from our routine monitoring of the social fund scope for some minor improvements to the Secretary of State's directions and guidance. Details of the amendments and a revised copy of the Secretary of State's directions and guidance to take effect from April 1995 will be placed in the Library. A revised print of the social fund guide will be available from 27 March.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the application for severe disability premium by Miss J. Ellis of Willenhall will be decided by the social security commissioner local ref. ASB/9209: and if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay involved in this case. [14412]

Mr. Roger Evans: Miss Ellis's application is not yet with the social security commissioners. The adjudication officer has sought leave to appeal to the social security commissioners against the decision of the Wolverhampton tribunal dated 13 December 1994. The application is being considered by the tribunal chairman. I understand that if the application is refused the adjudication officer will seek leave directly from the commissioners.

The delays in hearing appeals in this case, and others like it, have been caused by various court decisions on the interpretation of the regulations.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of unemployment benefit are excluded from national insurance credits. [14921]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. National insurance credits are generally available to all recipients of unemployment benefit except for those people who work in excess of eight hours in a week. The Government announced in the White Paper on the jobseeker's allowance their intention to extend national insurance credits to those people who are unemployed but work for more than eight but fewer than 16 hours a week.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15020]

Mr. Lilley: I make every effort to inform hon. Members when I visit their constituencies on departmental business. Unfortunately, this courtesy was overlooked on the occasions of my recent visits to the Benefits Agency offices in Tottenham and Woolwich.

Family Credit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted the child care allowance; of those granted the allowance, how many were already in work and receiving family credit before they applied for or received the allowance how many (ii) applied for and received family and child care allowance on moving from unemployment into a job; and when he expects take-up of the child care allowance to reach 150,000 families. [14884]

Mr. Roger Evans: In the five-month period to 28 February 1995, the latest date for which information is available, there were 24,600 claims for help with child care charges. Of these, 12,900 families are now receiving higher family credit awards as a result of the new help. Of those families receiving the extra help, 8,800 families were previously receiving family credit and 4,100 are new recipients of the benefit. It will take some time before the new help takes full effect as existing family credit recipients can claim the child care help only when their current 26-week award expires, while many potential beneficiaries need to find work of 16 hours or more and to make appropriate child care arrangements. We therefore expect that it will be several years before the help reaches its full potential.

Source: Five per cent. sample of Family Credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 28 February 1995. These figures do not include claims made by 28 February but decided after that date.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14603]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* This Department was established in 1988. The information for years prior to April 1993 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 15 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *692-96* and on 1 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *694*, which lists the budget and costs of each of these campaigns in excess of £10,000 conducted by this Department.

The following figures refer to publicity for external audiences.

Anticipated total expenditures for 1994–95

	£
Department of Social Security Headquarters	5,050,000
Benefits Agency	8,544,000
Child Support Agency	418,000
Contributions Agency	4,135,000
War Pensions Agency	19,000

There was no significant expenditure on privatisation over this period.

Anticipated publicity budgets at 1994 prices for 1995–96

	£
Department of Social Security Headquarters	7,532,530
Benefits Agency	6,924,340
Child Support Agency	3,710,843
Contributions Agency	3,848,675
War Pensions Agency	24,096

All publications over £50,000 related to a mixed media campaign. Campaigns listed here included advertising, direct mailing, exhibitions, publications of literature, tapes, braille, and video.

April 1994–95 purpose and nature of each campaign

HQ/Agency	*Campaign*	*Purpose*	*Nature*
DSS/HQ	Disability	To increase awareness of discrimination against disabled people	Mixed media
	Working with Benefits	To provide information about in-work benefits	Mixed media
	Child Support	To inform public of changes to child support maintenance	Mixed media
	Pensions	Reminding people of pensions choices	Mixed media
	Family Credit	To maintain awareness among advisers and public	Mixed media
	Incapacity Benefit	Inform advisers and public prior to implementation of new policy	Mixed media
	Disability Working Allowance	To raise awareness and take-up of DWA	Mixed media
Benefits Agency	Disability	To support the Year of Disabled People	Mixed media
	Year of the Family	Supporting the International Year of the Family	Mixed media
	Incapacity Benefit	To advise customers and interested parties of the new Incapacity Benefit	Mixed media
	Adviser newsletter	To advise intermediaries of current developments and publicity initiatives	Publication
	BBC Select	To advise staff and interested groups of current developments and initiatives	TV programme BA Today
Contributions Agency	Direct Debit	Encourage cost efficient direct debit practices among self-employed	Mixed media
	Contributions compliance	Information to employers to facilitate their compliance	Mixed media
Child Support Agency	Lone Parents	Guide to Employment	Publications in a variety of formats

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement indicating for each financial year since the introduction of the cold weather payments scheme *(a)* the total number of payments which have been authorised under the scheme, *(b)* the number of payments which have been authorised within each parliamentary constituency in Scotland under the scheme, *(c)* the total value of payments made under the scheme for each parliamentary constituency in Scotland and *(d)* the value of payments made under the scheme for each parliamentary constituency in Scotland. [14498]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the cold weather payments scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 20 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Cold Weather Payments.

The new Cold Weather Payments Scheme was introduced in December 1986. Prior to that, payments for cold weather were made at local discretion under Regulation 26 of the Single Payments Regulations and records pertaining to payments made on that basis are not available.

Statistics are currently collated on the basis of Cold Weather Payments made in the areas covered by each Benefits Agency District Office. Information is not held for Cold Weather payments made in Parliamentary constituencies.

Details of the total number of Cold Weather Payments made on a national basis since 1986–87, together with the total number of payments made in Scotland during the period 1 November 1993 to 31 March 1994 are held by the Statistical Holdings Section in the Library.

The Library also holds information on Cold Weather Payments made on the basis of Regional Areas in the years 1988/89, 1989/90, and by Benefit/District Office for the years 1986/87 and 1990/91 to 1993/94.

The totals for the current year will not be available until after 31 March 1995.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library copies of his correspondence with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) concerning the Al Fayeds. [14424]

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave on 9 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *286*.

Arms Sales

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *152*, regarding public subsidy to the sale of armaments, in what form information on the breakdown of support is collected. [14906]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Information on the support provided is maintained on a basis which enables the annual totals to be broken down by the currency of finance and, since the terms of support are periodically revised, by reference to the amount paid or received under each of the several extant support schemes.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Darling: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of insider dealing cases for each year since 1980 that have been *(a)* reported, and *(b)* prosecuted; and how many resulted in convictions. [14879]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on cases referred to my Department by the London stock exchange and prosecutions for insider dealing are included in the Companies Annual Reports—Companies in 1993–94—and those for previous years. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members, without prior warning to those hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15012]

Mr. Heseltine: I always try to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

Guidance to Insurers

Sir John Stanley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *395*, if he will place in the Library the guidance issued to all United Kingdom insurers in December 1994. [15415]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of this guidance note together with others which my Department issued in 1994 to insurers on unrelated topics.

Small Firms, Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small businesses have received assistance in Northern Ireland under his Department's small firms loan guarantee scheme in each of the last 12 months [14835]

Mr. Ian Taylor: No figures are yet available for February 1995 but the number of loans guaranteed in Northern Ireland under the Department's loan guarantee scheme in the previous 12 months are:

Month	*Number of loans guaranteed*
February 1994	5
March 1994	2
April 1994	4
May 1994	9
June 1994	3
July 1994	5
August 1994	3
September 1994	2
October 1994	2
November 1994	3
December 1994	2
January 1995	2

WALES

Planning and the Environment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what powers for environmental planning he has transferred from local authorities to non-departmental public bodies since May 1979; and if he will make a statement on the ways in which this has benefited the environment in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No alterations to the arrangements for responsibilities have been made. It is the policy of my right hon. Friend that environmental planning and other planning matters should normally be dealt with locally and that other action would be taken only on the most exceptional basis.

Learning and Behavioural Difficulties

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how it is planned that emergency and respite care, previously provided at long-stay hospitals for those with learning difficulties and seriously challenging behavioural problems, is to be made available in each county in Wales following the closure of such hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Local and health authorities are responsible for planning and delivering these services.

Welsh Office circular 7/95, "Mental Handicap Strategy: Planning Alternative Care and Support for Individuals Living Unnecessarily and Inappropriately in Long Stay Mental Handicap Hospitals", stresses the need for authorities to consider how services currently provided on hospital sites will be provided in future years as resources are withdrawn from hospitals. We have made it clear that no long stay hospitals will close until appropriate arrangements for alternative care and support are in place.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will make it his policy that each individual with learning or behavioural difficulties, who has been a long-term resident at a long stay hospital in Wales, will have an individual assessment made of his or her personal, social and economic needs, by an appropriate multi-disciplinary team prior to being re-integrated into the community and that the individual, or an advocate on behalf of that individual, will have an opportunity to comment upon and agree to that plan before it is implemented.

Mr. Richards: It has always been the policy, under the Welsh mental handicap strategy, that individuals' needs should be assessed by a multi-disciplinary team. This is reinforced by the requirement to carry out assessments under section 47 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Full involvement of the individual concerned has always been a key element of these assessments. This is reinforced in Welsh Office circular 7/95 "Mental Handicap Strategy: Planning Alternative Care and Support for Individuals Living Unnecessarily and Inappropriately in Long Stay Mental Handicap Hospitals", which also urges authorities to consider how to resolve disagreements about plans for alternative care where these differ significantly from the wishes and preferences of individuals and their families.

Crematoria

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department will provide assistance in establishment a crematorium at Newtown to serve Mid Wales; and if he will make a statement. [15109]

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office funds local authorities through the annual local government revenue and capital settlements and, generally speaking, it is for individual authorities to decide how to apportion those resources between and within services in accordance with their statutory obligations and their own priorities. However, my Department's strategic development scheme could be considered as a potential funding source for a project of this kind provided it fulfilled criteria I have set for the scheme. Indeed my Department contributed £200,000 in 1993–94 to the development of a crematorium near Aberystwyth.

Regional Industrial Assistance

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the reason for the reduction of £29 million for regional industrial assistance in Wales between the 1994–95 planned allocation of £76.9 million and the 1995–96 plans totalling £47.9 million, as set out at figure 3.01 on page 18 of Cm 2815.

Mr. Redwood: As explained in paragraphs 3.06, 3.09 and 3.10 of the Welsh Office Departmental Report, Cm 2815, provision for 1995–96 is based on estimates of demand. Paragraph 3.06 also makes it clear that if the requirement exceeds forecasts than extra money will be made available.

Child Care

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to support the newly-organised kids' clubs network body in Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru, from April; [14516]

(2) what funding the kids' clubs network in Wales received over the past five years from the children and families section of the Welsh Office. [14519]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* Under the Department's support for child and family services scheme, grants were awarded to kids' clubs network to promote out-of-school care provision in Wales as follows:

	£
1991–92	24,022
1992–93	40,873
1993–94	18,240

An announcement will be made shortly on their application for grant in 1995–96.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in each county council area are receiving financial support from Government funding, at local or Welsh Office level, in obtaining national vocational qualifications to improve the quality of provision in child minding in Wales. [14520]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 march 1995]:* This information is not currently held.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered child minders there are in each county council area in Wales; and what changes there have been in the numbers over the last 10 years. [14524]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The latest information on the numbers of registered child minders relates to 31 March 1993. Information for 1984 to 1993 is given in the following table:

Number of registered child minders

Local authority	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Clwyd	241	241	355	396	448	588	516	670	543	540
Dyfed	143	179	195	212	196	384	292	450	433	277
Gwent	224	257	332	314	342	466	515	631	682	520
Gwynedd	120	150	138	173	148	321	319	471	206	251
Mid Glamorgan	527	387	442	485	484	547	743	765	874	660
Powys	73	89	102	129	137	170	187	218	221	171
South Glamorgan	312	393	393	459	597	715	787	741	594	702
West Glamorgan	105	152	157	193	227	257	282	247	298	242
Wales	1,745	1,848	2,114	2,361	2,579	3,448	3,641	4,193	3,851	3,363

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further plans he has to support new out of school clubs which have been developed in the past two years by the training and enterprise councils in Wales out of their funding for school child care initiatives. [14518]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* This pump-priming initiative supports the setting-up and early operation of schemes which are expected to become self-sufficient within 12 months of commencement. Development workers will be in place until the end of the Initiative in 1996 and will continue to offer general guidance. A child care scheme, like any other business, can also seek TEC help with business skills training. All schemes have been aware from the outset that they would need to become self-sufficient.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what support he has given towards the funding of the National Childminding Association in Wales; [14522]

(2) what plans he has to provide further support for county child minding services managers in the light of the impending changes in local government. [14521]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The National Childminding Association has received grant towards the costs of its work in Wales and is shown in the following table:

	Core costs £	*County child minding service managers* £
1986–87	15,000	—
1987–88	15,560	—
1988–89	16,041	—
1989–90	20,000	—
1990–91	26,776	—
1991–92	29,952	21,618
1992–93	33,826	75,120
1993–94	34,670	113,080
1994–95	35,190	114,776

An announcement will be made shortly on their applicants for further funding in 1995–96 for both these purposes.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much money has been made available for TECs in Wales to provide out of school clubs under the schools' child care initiative in the last two years; and how much has been spent on each project supported under this programme; and [14515]

(2) if he will list all of the out of schools clubs being funded by TECs from the schools' child care initiative budget and the number of children benefiting in each scheme. [14517]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* A total of £153,000 was made available in 1993–94 and £800,000 in 1994–95. A list of the schemes, amounts allocated and child care places available will be placed in the Library of the House. The numbers of children using the schemes vary from day to day.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in each county council area are currently cared for by child minders; and what changes there have been over the last 10 years. [14523]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* Information on the total numbers of children cared for by child minders is not held centrally. The latest information on the number of places for children with registered child minders relates to 31 March 1993. Information for 1984 to 1993 is given in the following table.

Number of places for children available with registered child minders

Local authority	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Clwyd	634	634	894	849	1,002	1,315	1,318	1,782	1,945	2,560
Dyfed	269	456	487	522	465	761	684	963	940	754
Gwent	357	415	468	494	572	777	931	1,101	1,218	1,180
Gwynedd	248	307	268	330	292	672	688	968	353	503
Mid Glamorgan	1,724	1,071	1,255	1,367	1,349	1,619	2,239	2,377	2,579	2,934
Powys	114	135	157	193	231	293	327	403	459	596
South Glamorgan	869	1,012	1,013	1,230	1,636	1,992	2,361	2,223	1,782	2,106
West Glamorgan	314	476	565	586	645	770	852	757	907	1,014
Wales	4,529	4,506	5,107	5,571	6,192	8,199	9,400	10,574	10,183	11,647

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many outline proposals for the purchase of the Estatecare division of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority he has received to date. [15077]

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* None. A feasibility study of the scope for privatisation of the Estatecare Group is still in progress.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has agreed with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency for Agency receipts from the European regional development fund in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the sections of the agency corporate three-year plan containing the table showing these estimates. [15078]

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* I discussed the plan with the chairman and the board, but it is not for me to agree the ERDF estimates contained in that plan.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in full the membership of the monitoring committee of the single programme document area of the European regional development fund in Wales. [15417]

Mr. Redwood: The membership of the rural Wales and industrial south Wales single programming document monitoring committees is set out in the following list:

Rural Wales

Mr. M. J. A. Cochlin (Chair), Welsh Office
Miss E. N. M. Davies, Welsh Office
Dr. M. C. Dunn, Welsh Office
Mr. J. Burns, Department of Employment
Mr. R. Liddell, DGVI European Commission
Ms C. Wendt, DGXVI European Commission
Mr. N. Scott, DGV European Commission
[1]Mr. H. V. Thomas, Gwynedd County Council
[1]Ms J. Jones, Powys County Council
[1]Mr. D. Bown, Dyfed County Council
Mr. M. Royles, Dwyfor District Council
Mr. A. Carr, Aberconwy Borough Council
Mr. G. Davey, Montgomeryshire District Council
Mr. H. James, South Pembrokeshire District Council
Mr. D. Ll Evans, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Mr. S. White, West Wales TEC
Mr. W. R. Jones, Barclays Bank plc
Mr. T. Jones, Farmer
Prof J. Hughes, Development Board for Rural Wales
Mr. J. Pride, Wales Tourist Board
Mrs. E. Allinson, Welsh Funding Councils

[1]Two Monitoring Committee places are available to the County Councils and two of the three County Councils nominees attend meetings.

Industrial South Wales

Mr. M. J. A. Cochlin (Chair), Welsh Office
Miss E. N. M. Davies, Welsh Office
Dr. M. C. Dunn, Welsh Office
Mr. J. Burns, Department of Employment
Mr. R. Royce, DGV European Commission
Ms. C. Wendt, DGXVI European Commission
Mr. A. G. Corless, West Glamorgan County Council
Mr. M. J. Perry, Gwent County Council
Mr. R. Leadbeter, Blaenau Gwent Borough Council
Mr. M. Boaden, Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council
Mr. I. K. Lewis, Port Talbot Borough Council
Mr. G. Byrne, Cardiff City Council
Ms S. Stephens, Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Mr. G. Vaughan, Mid Glamorgan TEC
Mr. R. Thomas, Eversheds Phillips and Buck
Mr. A. Clegg, Railtrack
Mr. G. Moore, Welsh Development Agency
Mr. J. Pride, Wales Tourist Board
Mrs. F. Pickard, Further and Higher Education Funding Councils

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations the Welsh Office has received on the subject of the funding of voluntary organisations in Wales under the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In addition to the hon. Gentleman's letter of 7 March on behalf of the Aberconwy area work group, the Welsh Office has received the following representations on the subject of the funding of voluntary organisations in Wales since the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 received Royal Assent:

Correspondent	*Date*
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	11 July 1994
Clwyd Voluntary Services Council	27 October 1994
Cardiganshire Transition Committee	9 November 1994
Wales Youth Agency	November 1994
Wales MIND	5 December 1994 and 24 February 1995
Clwyd Mental Health Alliance	18 January and 23 February 1995
West Glamorgan Mental Health Forum	22 February 1995
Swansea MIND	23 February 1995
Ogwr MIND	24 February 1995
NSPCC	8 March 1995

Local Government Debt

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list for each county council, district council and for Wales as a whole the amount of long-term debt in March 1994 prices as at *(a)* 31 March 1993 and *(b)* 31 March 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table:

Outstanding loan debt at constant 1993–94 prices[1]

£ million

	At 31 March 1993	At 31 March 1994
Alyn and Deeside	33.1	34.2
Colwyn	24.4	25.8
Delyn	27.8	30.0
Glyndwr	15.6	16.2
Rhuddlan	23.6	25.7
Wrexham Maelor	65.6	70.8
Carmarthen	35.2	35.4
Ceredigion	20.4	19.4
Dinefwr	28.4	25.6
Llanelli	39.5	42.4
Preseli Pembrokeshire	38.8	40.7
South Pembrokeshire	9.8	10.7
Blaenau Gwent	105.4	102.6
Islwyn	58.8	59.6
Monmouth	44.2	43.9
Newport	127.1	123.1
Torfaen	81.9	80.8
Aberconwy	15.9	18.8
Arfon	23.6	25.8
Dwyfor	12.0	14.7
Meirionnydd	7.6	9.2
Ynys Mon	50.5	51.3
Cynon Valley	47.6	49.4
Merthyr Tydfil	59.2	60.7
Ogwr	96.4	83.2
Rhondda	92.6	92.1
Rhymney Valley	70.3	69.4
Taff Ely	36.6	31.9
Brecknock	24.6	27.0
Montgomeryshire	20.2	21.3
Radnorshire	12.6	12.7
Cardiff	189.0	180.7
Vale of Glamorgan	54.7	55.7
Lliw Valley	37.9	38.2
Neath	37.5	38.2
Port Talbot	35.8	37.4
Swansea	126.9	128.5
Clwyd	136.5	133.5
Dyfed	119.4	116.6
Gwent	149.7	158.2
Gwynedd	73.3	77.7

Outstanding loan debt at constant 1993–94 prices[1]

£ million

	At 31 March 1993	At 31 March 1994
Mid Glamorgan	97.4	124.9
Powys	56.3	53.9
South Glamorgan	154.3	158.0
West Glamorgan	158.6	161.2
Wales	2,776.3	2,816.8

[1]Outstanding loan debt is defined here as debt incurred for capital purposes ie. external debt plus moneys used temporarily to support the credit ceiling. The outstanding loan debt for the joint police authorities has been apportioned to their constituent counties, on the basis of population estimates used in the revenue support grant settlement.

Youth Training in Wales

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many trainees have been on youth training scheme courses in *(a)* Wales, and *(b)* Swansea, in each of the last two years; and how many subsequently found employment.

Mr. Richards: Information on youth training in Swansea is not available, but the following table shows the relevant figures for Wales and for the West Wales TEC area, which includes Swansea:

Youth training in Wales and west Wales

	1992–93	*1993–94*
Number starting youth training/youth credits		
Wales	15,403	13,577
West Wales TEC	4,520	4,035
Percentage of youth training/youth credits leavers who obtained employment		
Wales	45	48
West Wales TEC	41	44

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many general dental practitioners have resigned from the NHS in Gwynedd over the past two years.

Mr. Richards: According to information supplied by the Gwynedd family health services authority, 12 dentists have resigned from the dental list since 1 January 1993. During this period nine dentists have commenced provided general dental services under NHS arrangements.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many NHS dental patients have been deregistered by general dental practitioners in Gwynedd since September 1993.

Mr. Richards: From information supplied by the Gwynedd Family Health Services Authority, 6,864 adult patients have been deregistered since the beginning of September 1993; during that period no children have been deregistered.

This is a cumulative total and does not indicate how many of those patients subsequently registered with another dentist.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the numbers of dental patients de-registered from the NHS by their dentist during each of 1992, 1993 and 1994 for each family health service authority area in Wales. [15435]

Mr. Redwood: From the information supplied by family health services authorities, the numbers of patients de-registered by their dentists is as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Clwyd	2,335	568	6,859
Dyfed	225	1,015	2,635
Gwent	490	1,073	2,977
Gwynedd	4,960	3,031	5,213
Mid Glamorgan	31	86	581
Powys	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	151	3,914	1,432
West Glamorgan	0	0	44

This information

a) was supplied for management purpose only;
b) has been collected only since 1 August 1992;
c) is not statistically validated;
d) does not indicate how many of these patients subsequently registered with another dentist.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to those hon. Members, for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15025]

Mr. Redwood: None that I am aware of.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report,* column *610,* if he will now publish the letter he has received from the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the funding of that body. [15396]

Mr. Redwood: I do not consider that it would be appropriate to publish routine correspondence with chairmen of non-departmental public bodies.

Mine Water

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the follow-up report on the study of ferruginous mine water impacts in Wales is to be published.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have today placed copies of this report in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 March 1995

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Summary Financial Statements

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to seek views on the proposed changes to the regulations governing summary financial statements. [16083]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has today published a consultative document seeking views on a number of recommendations for changes to the regulations governing summary financial statements. The document recommends changes to the procedures for consulting shareholders, the content of the SFS and the drafting of the regulations. The proposals have been developed with the help of business and the accountancy profession. They aim to make the SFS regime simpler and a more attractive option for companies and encourage their more widespread use.

The Department believes that greater use of SFS would benefit both business and shareholders. For business, they offer opportunities for cost savings and improved shareholder communications. Shareholders—in particular, private investors—benefit by receiving company information in a form which is easier to understand and more relevant to their needs, while still retaining the right to receive full reports if they choose.

The Department is also seeking views on changes to the content of SFS issued by insurance companies, which are necessary to align with new EU rules.

Copies of the consultative document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Comments should reach my Department by 19 May 1995.

Regional Development Organisations

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has yet considered the business plans of the English regional development organisations; and what level of financial support he proposes to offer for 1995–96. [16084]

Mr. Eggar: I am pleased to announce a 53 per cent. increase in funding next year to attract inward investment to the English regions.

Grants for the eight regional development organisations will be £8.551 million in 1995–96, compared with £5.605 million for the previous year. The increase reflects the real importance that the Government attach to maintaining and developing Britain's place as the preferred location for investment in the EU. It is apparent from their performance that they continue to play an important and successful role in attracting inward investment to Britain.

I am also pleased to welcome the setting up of a new regional development organisation for the west of England which is planned to begin operation in the autumn.

RDOs have been working closely with my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau. The increase in funding will allow them to continue and step up their activity to attract further investment over the next year, in the face of European and global competition. I have allocated the grant aid as follows:

RDO	*1995–96 grant £000*	*Percentage share of total grant*
Northern Development Company (NDC)	1,650	19.3
INWARD Ltd. (in the North West)	1,378	16
Yorkshire and Humberside Development Association (YHDA)	1,400	16.4
West Midlands Development Agency (WMDA)	1,118.2	13.1
Devon and Cornwall Development International (DCDI)	895	10.5
East Midlands	800	9.4
London First Centre	1,000	11.7
West of England Development Agency	310	3.6

Regional Supply Network

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about progress on the establishment of a regional supply network. [16085]

Mr. Heseltine: I am pleased to report that the regional supply network, which forms part of my Department's Business Links services, will become operational in April 1995. The network has, with funding from my Department, been established in fulfilment of a commitment in last year's competitiveness White Paper, Cm 2563. It will consist of 10 regional supply offices covering England and will complement similar existing operations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The network will:

help purchasers to find the most competitive sources of supply;

provide new business opportunities for competitive suppliers;

encourage the spread of best practice, supplier development and local chains;

highlight current deficiencies in local supplier capabilities, signpost firms to Business Links and other relevant business support organisations which will help to rectify such deficiencies.

Further information is contained in a leaflet on the regional supply network. I am placing copies in Library of the House.

Philippines

Mr. Amess: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the value to British companies of contracts signed following the visit of the Philippines President. [14419]

Mr. Ian Taylor: During President Ramos's visit, agreements to the value of approximately £700 million were signed with United Kingdom companies, including

British Gas, Balfour Beatty, GKN, Stramit and GEC Alsthom. UK companies are pursuing a number of other projects in the Philippines and I am confident that following the President's successful visit, UK commercial interests in the Philippines will develop further.

Privatisation

Ms Armstrong: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list in respect of each privatisation since 1979, including industries previously located at the Department of Energy, *(a)* the net equity proceeds to Government as a result of privatisation, *(b)* the market value at the end of the first day of trading and *(c)* the current market value. [15349]

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) on 31 October 1994, *Official Report,* columns *989–90.* Information on market values at the end of the first day of trading is not held centrally by my Department. In a number of cases, information on market capitalisation at flotation and movement in share values at the end of the first day's trading is contained in the National Audit Office report on the relevant sale, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from the budget of his Department in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The detailed information cannot be provided except at disproportionate costs. However, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 10 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *429.*

Regional Selective Assistance

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report,* column *567,* if he will set out the targets for the different size bands of projects applying for assisted area grants. [14937]

Mr. Eggar: Target times for processing applications for regional selective assistance are as follows:

Application size band	*Per cent.*
Up to £25,000	80 within 35 working days
£25,000 to £100,000	75 within 45 working days
£100,000 to £1 million	75 within 60 working days
£1 million or more	65 within 100 working days

These targets are currently under review.

Channel 5 Television

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress made to date in obtaining international clearances for the revised Channel 5 frequency plan; which frequencies have now achieved clearances from which foreign jurisdictions; which are outstanding; and if he expects any impediments to final clearances being achieved by October. [15394]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am pleased to report that most of the revised Channel 5 transmitter plan has been cleared. The coverage of the service is now around 67 per cent. of the population compared with the base figure of around 50 per cent. which had been cleared as part of the original Channel 5 plan.

The Radiocommunications Agency has cleared internationally 20 out of 26 proposals put forward by the Independent Television Commission, including major transmitters such as Winter Hill, which will ensure that a major part of the north-west of England, including Manchester and Liverpool, will be able to receive the service. Achievement of the outstanding clearances will increase coverage of Channel 5 to around 70 per cent. of the population.

The following transmitters which have been fully cleared by all foreign Administrations:

Location	
Winter Hill	Channel 48/Horizontal Polarisation
Croydon	Channel 37/Horizontal Polarisation
Sutton Coldfield	Channel 37/Horizontal Polarisation
Black Hill	Channel 37/Horizontal Polarisation
Burnhope	Channel 68/Horizontal Polarisation
Belmont	Channel 56/Horizontal Polarisation
Fawley	Channel 34/Horizontal Polarisation
Fenham	Channel 56/Vertical Polarisation
Tacolneston	Channel 52/Horizontal Polarisation
Durris	Channel 67/Horizontal Polarisation
Chelmsford	Channel 63/Horizontal Polarisation
Perth	Channel 55/Vertical Polarisation
Tay Bridge	Channel 34/Vertical Polarisation
Plympton	Channel 30/Vertical Polarisation
Huntshaw Cross	Channel 67/Horizontal Polarisation
Craigkelly	Channel 48/Horizonal Polarisation
Mounteagle	Channel 67/Horizontal Polarisation
Selkirk	Channel 52/Horizontal Polarisation
Cambret Hill	Channel 37/Horizontal Polarisation
Oxford	Channel 49/Horizontal Polarisation

The following are still under discussion between the Radiocommunications Agency and neighbouring administrations: the transmitters at Black mountain, Londonderry, Presely and Blaen Plwyf are under consideration by the Irish Administration; the Radiocommunications Agency is currently examining a response from the French Administration concerning the proposals for the Mendip and Redruth transmitters.

It is not possible to predict the outcomes or timing of the outstanding negotiations, although the discussions are taking place in a positive and constructive way.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the period of time by the European Union institutions to pay bills to British companies, with particular reference to small and medium enterprises. [15144]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The United Kingdom Government have not undertaken any assessment of payments by European Commission institutions to British businesses. However, I understand that the European Commission has established a maximum payment period of 60 days and has taken steps to improve compliance with this.

In addition, the Commission has said that it undertakes regular checks on the payment periods applied by its own departments.

Electricity Prices

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has that Northern Electricity plc misled the Director-General of Electricity Supply as to its true financial position during discussions last year about the appropriate level of electricity pricing; and what consideration is being given to appropriate action by his Department or other authorities to investigate the matters. [15164]

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the amount of money spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14620]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in the tables on pages 94 and 97 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2804, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what activities or discussion were forbidden under UN sanctions to the Iraqi-British Interests Group on its recent visit to Iraq.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Any prohibitions under UN sanctions apply to anyone from the United Kingdom visiting Iraq for trade purposes.

PRIME MINISTER

Objectives

Mr. Forman: To ask the Prime Minister how many of their objectives of April 1992 the Government have now achieved; and how many remain. [15354]

The Prime Minister: Since April 1992, the Government's policies have laid the foundations for sustained economic growth. Underlying inflation is down to its lowest for a generation, interest rates are among the lowest in the EC, unemployment is down by over 600,000 since its peak, exports are at record levels, and we are attracting more investment from Japan and America than Germany and France combined.

We have also pressed ahead with our reforms to raise standards in our schools, fight crime, improve the quality of care in the national health service and, with the citizens charter, make the public services more accountable to the taxpayers they serve. Our commitment to continuing improvement in standards in education has been achieved by the national curriculum, extension of objective testing of pupils, inspection of primary as well as secondary schools, continuation of publication of school results, and launch of the Teacher Training Agency. Parental choice has been enhanced by the further expansion of the grant-maintained schools and specialist colleges. The national health service is now treating 1 million more patients a year than since before our reforms began; our determination to ensure it is properly funded is borne out by the fact that, for every £1 spent on the service in 1979, over £5 will be spent in 1995–96. Against the backdrop of the largest fall in recorded crime for 40 years, we have introduced a range of measures designed to tilt the balance back in favour of the victims of crime, and ensure that crime does not pay, but criminals do.

The Government have made significant progress towards achieving a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. The ceasefire has now lasted for almost seven months, giving a new basis on which we can take the peace process forward. There has also been considerable success in winning the argument in Europe—especially in our attempts to make the community more open, outward-looking and decentralised.

The Government's objectives for the future remain as stated in the Gracious Speech on 16 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns 4-6.

Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minster what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science on 21 March.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total annual expenditure by the Prime Minister's Office on press and public relations for each year since 1987–88, including the estimated expenditure for 1994–95 and the budgeted expenditure for 1995–96. [14588]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Expenditure on the No. 10 press office for each year since 1987 is as follows. There is no separate expenditure on public relations.

£000

Year	*Total excluding superannuation*	[2]*Superannuation*	*Total including superannuation*
1987–88	378	n/a	n/a
1988–89	419	n/a	n/a
1989–90	428	n/a	n/a
1990–91	514	39	553
1991–92	571	36	607

£000

Year	*Total excluding superannuation*	[2]*Superannuation*	*Total including superannuation*
1992–93	622	46	668
1993–94	604	39	643
1994–95	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1995–96	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Outturn figure not yet available.[2] Notional superannuation costs were charged from 1990–91.

n/a = Not applicable.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Administration and Policy Formation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14250]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details of the Home Office's running costs and central services spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–298 are contained, respectively, in the tables in annexe 3 and annexe 1 of the Home Office Annual Report, Cm 2808, copies of which are available in the Library.

Nottingham Probation Service

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Sherwood may expect a reply to his letter dated 22 December 1994 about the Nottingham probation service. [14705]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A reply was sent on 17 March.

Football Hooliganism

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the main conclusions of the joint inquiry by the football associations of England and Ireland into the violence at the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin on 15 February; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [15436]

Mr. Maclean: I understand that a report has been prepared by the Football Association and that the Football Association of Ireland will be producing a separate report. It is for the FA to decide whether to make its findings public.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that a national database is maintained in regard to those who commit sexual offences against children and young people.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the introduction of a permanent register of convicted paedophiles and sex offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* A comprehensive database, known as Phoenix, which will cover all reportable offences including paedophile and other sex offences, is currently being developed by the Government on behalf of the police service. It will come into service for new offences in the late spring of this year, and the transfer of existing records to the new database will be complete by mid–1996. Phoenix is a development of exceptional importance to the police service, and I believe that it will meet many of the concerns which have led to suggestions for a separate register of certain convicted sex offenders.

Access to Police Records

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to grant Government Departments and agencies direct access to criminal records held on the police national computer for security vetting purposes. [16058]

Mr. Maclean: I have agreed with the Association of Chief Police Officers that limited direct access to the criminal record information held on the police national computer will be allowed to six Departments and agencies. The checks performed under this arrangement will be carried out strictly in accordance with the existing statement of security vetting policy announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *764-66*. The Departments and agencies, which will be taking up the new service at differing times, are the Ministry of Defence, the Secret Intelligence Service, the Security Service, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority—acting also on behalf of BNFL plc, URENCO, URENCO (Capenhurst) Ltd. and the UK NIREX—the Home Office, and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The new arrangements will allow these bodies to improve the efficiency of their procedures through direct preliminary checks which would establish whether or not a subject has a criminal record, but would not give them access to the record itself. In the minority of cases where the preliminary search indicates that the subject has a criminal record, the Departments or agencies would continue to ask the national identification service—formerly the national identification bureau—to supply the record itself.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clive Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in relation to Ethiopians seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom. [15331]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: All asylum applications from Ethiopian nationals are considered individually in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, to the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), *Official Report*, columns *755-56*, how many of those port asylum applicants, refused both asylum and exceptional leave to remain in each year since 1992 but who have not yet departed voluntarily or been removed *(a)* are currently detained pending the outcome of an appeal or awaiting removal, *(b)* have been placed on restriction orders or granted temporary admission and *(c)* are known to have absconded. [14799]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information available is given in the table:

Number of applicants

	Position at 16 March 1995		
Year of refusal	*Detained pending outcome of an appeal or awaiting removal*	*Granted temporary admission*	*Absconded*
1992	0	65	10
1993	13	815	290
1994	78	3,950	280
Total	91	4,830	580

M11 Link Road Protests

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of arrests made to date in connection with protests against the M11 link road; how many were made under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; what were the reasons for the arrests; and what have been the outcomes of these cases. [15336]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Wildlife Sales Offences

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces monitor relevant trade journals to identify potential wildlife sales offences. [15048]

Mr. Maclean: This is an operational matter for individual chief officers of police and is not recorded centrally.

Road Death Inquests

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many inquests into road deaths have been held in the presence of a jury, in each year from 1978 to 1994; [14856]

(2) what statistical records his office holds for the length of time elapsing between death on the road and an inquest taking place for each year from 1984 to 1994; [14858]

(3) how many inquests into road deaths have been held after summary charges, in each year, by county, from 1978 to 1994; [14857]

(4) how many inquests have been reconvened after a guilty plea in respect of road deaths in the Crown court for each year from 1984 to 1994. [14859]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information collected on deaths reported to coroners is published in an annual Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The latest bulletin, "Statistics of Death reported by Coroners: England and Wales, 1993", issue 7/94, was published on 21 April 1994 and is available in the Library. Specific information on road deaths is not collected separately.

Fear of Crime

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent representations he has received from women's organisations on the subject of crime and the fear of crime; [14860]

(2) if he will give details of meetings he has had with representatives of women's organisations to discuss crime and the fear of crime. [14863]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is as follows.

On 11 March 1994, the Women's National Commission, an advisory committee to the Government, forwarded a copy of its 1991 recommendations on women in prison, the operation of the criminal justice system and the management of prisons as they affect women in particular, to find out how far current practice reflected what was recommended.

On 15 March 1994, the Conservative Women's National Committee forwarded recommendations on law and order issues. Matters raised included juvenile crime, media portrayal of crime, drug abuse, police-community partnerships and sentencing and prisons.

On 14 November 1994, Mothers against Teenage Criminal Hooligans—MATCH—forwarded for comments a survey of the views of some 500 people about youth crime.

A number of representations have also been received from individuals and organisations working, or experiencing, the problems associated with domestic violence.

On 15 November 1994 the Minister of State met Mothers Against Murder and Aggression—MAMAA—which was formed in the wake of the Jamie Bulger murder to address issues of abuse and violence against and by children and young people.

On 7 December 1994 the Home Secretary addressed a plenary meeting of the Women's National Commission. His speech covered juvenile crime, domestic violence and victims and witnesses of crime.

Police Service Employees

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will give details of the number of *(a)* women and *(b)* men employed at each grade within the police service, for each police authority for every year since 1989 with details of their responsibilities. [14862]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the duties to which officers are assigned could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Tables giving the information requested on police ranks have been placed in the Library.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of Asian and Afro-Caribbean officers, both male and female in each police authority, in each year since 1989; and what are the figures as a percentage of officers employed in each area. [14398]

Mr. Maclean: The information for 1992 and 1993 is provided in the table. Figures for earlier years are not held centrally.

1992

Force	*1* *Total number of police officers*		*2* *Number of black officers*		*3* *Black officers percentage*		*4* *Number of Asian officers*		*5* *Asian officers percentage*	
	M	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*
Avon and Somerset	2,745.00	316.00	10.00	5.00	0.33	0.16	2.00	0.00	0.07	0.00
Bedfordshire	955.00	166.00	13.00	8.00	1.16	0.71	9.00	3.00	0.80	0.27
Cambridgeshire	1,087.00	150.00	11.00	5.00	0.89	0.40	6.00	0.00	0.49	0.00
Cheshire	1,670.00	231.00	1.00	1.00	0.05	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
City of London	685.00	93.00	6.00	2.00	0.77	0.26	1.00	0.00	0.13	0.00
Cleveland	1,317.00	184.00	2.00	0.00	0.13	0.00	9.00	2.00	0.60	0.13
Cumbria	1,048.00	148.00	1.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.08	0.00
Derbyshire	1,604.00	206.00	8.00	2.00	0.44	0.11	16.00	3.00	0.88	0.17
Devon and Cornwall	2,578.00	337.00	3.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dorset	1,154.00	164.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.15	0.00
Durham	1,245.00	131.00	3.00	1.00	0.22	0.07	1.00	0.00	0.07	0.00
Dyfed-Powys	848.00	109.00	1.00	1.00	0.10	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Essex	2,552.00	365.00	9.00	1.00	0.31	0.03	9.00	0.00	0.31	0.00
Gloucestershire	1,021.00	127.00	5.00	1.00	0.44	0.09	3.00	0.00	0.26	0.00
Greater Manchester	6,122.00	933.00	106.00	21.00	1.50	0.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gwent	894.00	106.00	2.00	0.00	0.20	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.20	0.00
Hampshire	2,883.00	402.00	6.00	2.00	0.18	0.06	7.00	1.00	0.21	0.03
Hertfordshire	1,430.00	258.00	6.00	1.00	0.36	0.06	3.00	2.00	0.18	0.12
Humberside	1,839.00	194.00	2.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	3.00	0.00	0.15	0.00
Kent	2,666.00	440.00	2.00	0.00	0.06	0.00	7.00	2.00	0.23	0.06
Lancashire	2,813.00	392.00	3.00	3.00	0.09	0.09	14.00	2.00	0.44	0.06
Leicestershire	1,601.00	229.00	18.00	2.00	0.98	0.11	19.00	2.00	1.04	0.11
Lincolnshire	1,064.00	127.00	1.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.17	0.08
Merseyshire	4,039.00	614.00	25.00	6.00	0.54	0.13	18.00	1.00	0.39	0.02
Norfolk	1,290.00	136.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
North Wales	1,203.00	153.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
North Yorkshire	1,258.00	150.00	1.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	4.00	0.00	0.28	0.00
Northamptonshire	1,067.,00	136.00	10.00	2.00	'0.83	0.17	6.00	0.00	0.50	0.00
Northumbria	3,196.00	387.00	3.00	1.00	0.08	0.03	7.00	2.00	0.20	0.06
Nottinghamshire	2,075.00	246.00	22.00	7.00	0.95	0.30	16.00	2.00	0.69	0.09
South Wales	2,873.00	288.00	18.00	1.00	0.57	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
South Yorkshire	2,651.00	349.00	18.00	2.00	0.60	0.07	10.00	1.00	0.33	0.03
Staffordshire	1,867.00	302.00	18.00	6.00	0.,83	0.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Suffolk	1,091.00	145.00	3.00	2.00	0.24	0.16	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.16
Surrey	1,435.00	222.00	10.00	1.00	0.60	0.06	4.00	1.00	0.24	0.06
Sussex	2,653.00	326.00	7.00	3.00	0.23	0.10	2.00	1.00	0.07	0.034
Thames Valley	3,222.00	541.00	21.00	8.00	0.56	0.21	24.00	4.00	0.64	0.11
Warwickshire	857.00	123.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.10	7.00	2.00	0.71	0.20
West Mercia	1,804.00	256.00	8.00	2.00	0.39	0.10	3.00	1.00	0.15	0.05
West Midlands	5,908.00	1,052.00	154.00	49.00	2.21	0.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
West Yorkshire	4,438.00	629.00	24.00	10.00	0.147	0.20	43.00	5.00	0.85	0.10
Wiltshire	1,010.00	157.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.17	7.00	0.00	0.60	0.00
Provincial total	85,758.00	12,020.00	561.00	159.00	0.57	0.16	267.00	40.00	0.27	0.04
Metropolitan Police	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
England and Wales total[2]	85,758.00	12,020.00	561.00	159.00	0.44	0.13	267.00	40 00	0.21	0.03

[1] Figures not available centrally.

[2] Excluding the Metropolitan Police.

1993

Force	*1* *Total number of police officers*		*2* *Number of black officers*		*3* *Black officers percentage*		*4* *Number of Asian officers*		*5* *Asian officers percentage*	
	M	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*
Avon and Somerset	2,688.00	336.00	13.00	5.00	0.43	0.17	3.00	0.00	0.10	0.00
Bedfordshire	994.00	173.00	11.00	6.00	0.94	0.51	7.00	4.00	0.60	0.34
Cambridgeshire	1,073.00	152.00	8.00	6.00	0.65	0.49	6.00	1.00	0.49	0.08
Cheshire	1,647.00	226.00	1.00	1.00	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
City of London	677.00	115.00	7.00	2.00	0.88	0.25	1.00	0.00	0.13	0.00
Cleveland	1,248.00	166.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.00	2.00	0.85	0.14
Cumbria	1,030.00	154.00	1.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.08	0.08
Derbyshire	1,581.00	209.00	6.00	1.00	0.34	0.06	15.00	3.00	0.84	0.17
Devon and Cornwall	2,552.00	353.00	4.00	0.00	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dorset	1,132.00	160.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.15	0.00
Durham	1,233.00	154.00	3.00	1.00	0.22	0.07	3.00	0.00	0.22	0.00
Dyfed-Powys	815.00	151.00	1.00	1.00	0.10	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Essex	2,548.00	399.00	11.00	2.00	0.37	0.07	10.00	0.00	0.34	0.00

1993

Force	*1* *Total number of police officers* *M*	 *F*	*2* *Number of black officers* *M*	 *F*	*3* *Black officers percentage* *M*	 *F*	*4* *Number of Asian officers* *M*	 *F*	*5* *Asian officers percentage* *M*	 *F*
Gloucestershire	1,004.00	136.00	5.00	2.00	0.44	0.18	3.00	1.00	0.26	0.09
Greater Manchester	6,058.00	987.00	107.00	22.00	1.52	0.31	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gwent	877.00	112.00	4.00	0.00	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hampshire	2,844.00	426.00	7.00	2.00	0.21	0.06	9.00	1.00	0.28	0.03
Hertfordshire	1,418.00	261.00	4.00	3.00	0.24	0.18	5.00	2.00	0.30	0.12
Humberside	1,817.00	216.00	3.00	0.00	0.15	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.10	0.00
Kent	2,691.00	462.00	3.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	8.00	1.00	0.25	0.03
Lancashire	2,735.00	402.00	4.00	3.00	0.13	0.10	14.00	2.00	0.45	0.06
Leicestershire	1,589.00	248.00	19.00	2.00	1.03	0.11	25.00	2.00	1.36	0.11
Lincolnshire	1,064.00	140.00	2.00	0.00	0.17	0.00	2.00	2.00	0.17	0.17
Merseyside	4,006.00	656.00	27.00	8.00	0.58	0.17	20.00	1.00	0.43	0.02
Norfolk	1,283.00	151.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
North Wales	1,184.00	157.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
North Yorkshire	1,182.00	152.00	1.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	4.00	1.00	0.30	0.07
Northamptonshire	1,044.00	137.00	9.00	2.00	0.76	0.17	7.00	0.00	0.59	0.00
Northumbria	3,179.00	412.00	1.00	1.00	0.03	0.03	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.03
Nottinghamshire	2,058.00	280.50	21.00	6.00	0.90	0.26	14.00	2.00	0.60	0.09
South Wales	2,854.00	288.00	22.00	1.00	0.70	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
South Yorkshire	2,630.00	385.00	24.00	7.00	0.80	0.23	9.00	0.00	0.30	0.00
Staffordshire	1,871.00	328.00	13.00	4.00	0.59	0.18	7.00	3.00	0.32	0.14
Suffolk	1,061.00	154.00	4.00	3.00	0.33	0.25	1.00	1.00	0.08	0.08
Surrey	1,422.00	228.00	11.00	1.00	0.67	0.06	6.00	1.00	0.36	0.06
Sussex	2,628.00	349.00	2.00	5.00	0.07	0.17	3.00	1.00	0.10	0.03
Thames Valley	3,256.00	567.00	24.00	6.00	0.63	0.16	20.00	5.00	0.52	0.13
Warwickshire	862.00	141.00	1.00	1.00	0.10	0.10	9.00	3.00	0.90	0.30
West Mercia	1,790.00	266.00	15.00	4.00	0.73	0.19	1.00	0.00	0.05	0.00
West Midlands	5,833.00	1,110.95	81.00	32.00	1.17	0.46	70.00	18.00	1.01	0.26
West Yorkshire	4,344.00	642.00	23.00	10.00	0.46	0.20	42.00	6.00	0.84	0.12
Wiltshire	1,018.00	158.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.17	7.00	0.00	0.60	0.00
Provincial total	84,820.15	12,700.75	503.00	152.00	0.52	0.16	348.00	65.00	0.36	0.07
Metropolitan Police	23,445.30	3,697.15	215.00	79.00	0.79	0.29	142.00	36.00	0.52	0.13
England and Wales total	108,265.5	16,397.90	718.00	231.00	0.58	0.19	490.00	101.00	0.39	0.08

Visas

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries from which visitors to the United Kingdom do not require a visa. [14911]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Those other than the following countries or territorial entities:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Angola
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bangladesh
Belarus
Benin
Bhutan
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Burkina
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
China
Comoros
Congo
Cuba
Djibouti
Egypt
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Gabon
Georgia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Haiti
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kirgizstan
Korea (North)
Laos
Lebanon
Liberia
Libya
Macedonia
Madagascar
Mali
Mauritania
Moldova
Mongolia
Morocco

Mozambique
Nepal
Nigeria
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Sao Tome e Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syria
Taiwan
Tajikistan
Thailand
Togo
Tunisia
Turkey
Turkmenistan
Uganda
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Yemen
Zaire

The territories formerly comprising the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, excluding Croatia and Slovenia

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14239]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 4 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2809, copies of which are available in the Members' Library.

HEALTH

Birth Defects

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what studies her Department has made of the side-effects of chorion villus sampling for Down's syndrome; and if she will take steps to ensure that all prospective parents are provided with information on the possibility of abnormalities resulting from the tests; [14455]

(2) how many CVS tests were provided under the NHS in each of the past five years and at what cost; and if she will list the manufacturers of these tests. [14457]

Mr. Sackville: The results of a major Government-funded Medical Research Council clinical trial conducted in a number of international centres and examining the use of chorion villus sampling were published in 1991 and the findings published in *The Lancet*[1], copies of which are available in the Library. This also highlighted the possibility of a risk of limb reduction deformities associated with the procedure. Health professionals involved in conducting CVS would be aware of these findings and therefore in a position to advise parents of the potential risks involved, including that of miscarriage.

Information is not available centrally about the number or cost of the tests. The procedure involves tests undertaken usually in national health service laboratories, on placental tissue taken from the woman by CVS. There are therefore no manufacturers of these tests.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children with Down's syndrome were born in each of the past 10 years. [14456]

Mr. Sackville: This information is shown in the table.

Notification of babies born with Downs Syndrome in England and Wales, 1984–1993

Year	*Numbers*
1984	505
1985	442
1986	445
1987	459
1988	428
1989	487
1990	415
1991	440
1992	394
1993	311

Data were obtained from the national congenital malformation notification scheme. For the years given, the data were collected for live and stillbirths where the malformation was identified at or within 10 days of birth.

Independent Living

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will continue to identify an element for support of independent living within the revenue support grant for local authorities from 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [15053]

Mr. Bowis: Currently, an element of the special transitional grant for community care is identified as relating to the former independent living fund. It is not separately ring-fenced and local authorities are free to use it for any community care service. Whether former independent living fund resources will continue to be separately identified after the special transitional grant ends has not yet been determined.

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will encourage and fund research into the therapeutic use of cannabis with double blind trials designed to established the efficacy or otherwise of this form of treatment. [15069]

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[1] Medical Research Council European Trial of Chorion Villus Sampling, *The Lancet*, vol 337: 1491–1499, 22 June 1991.

Mr. Bowis: The main agency through which the Government support medical and related biological research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. It is always willing to consider scientifically sound proposals. As for any other unlicensed product, a sponsor seeking a product licence for cannabis would need to present supporting data to the Medicines Control Agency, which would evaluate any application made to it in the normal way.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the adequacy of the provision of nursing homes for poor elderly people; and what information she has on the equivalent provision in each of the other European Union states. [14914]

Mr. Bowis: Matters of quality and quantity of local nursing homes, irrespective of the income levels of residents, are for local commissioning authorities. We do not hold information on nursing homes in other European countries centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for granting prescription charge exemptions to people with splenectomies who require prophylactic doses of penicillin. [15372]

Mr. Malone: None.

General Practitioner Trainees

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applicants there were per GP trainee post *(a)* nationally, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* broken down by each FHSA in the current year and for each of the last 10 years. [15364]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Smoking

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to reduce levels of cigarette smoking among people on low incomes. [15380]

Mr. Sackville: The White Paper "The Health of the Nation" sets a target of 20 per cent. for adults smoking by the year 2000. In view of their higher smoking rates, it is clearly essential to reach people on low incomes if this is to be achieved.

This will be done through the comprehensive programme set out in the White Paper and the action plan "Smoke Free for Health" including health education, action on price, advice from general practitioners and other health professionals and proper controls on advertising and promotion.

Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Consultation on Changes to Health Services

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to reduce the requirement on health boards for formal consultation when major changes to health services are planned. [15362]

Mr. Malone: None.

Sight Tests

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects consultations with representatives of the Association of Optometrists on the GOS sight test fee for 1995–96 to begin. [15873]

Mr. Malone: Consultations on the 1995–96 national health service sight test fee will begin shortly with the Optometric Fees Review Committee, which represents the optometric profession.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

Mr. John Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she intends to make to the representations to her from the London borough of Lambeth in relation to the reform of the system for registering births, marriages and deaths. [15137]

Mr. Sackville: The London borough of Lambeth has been advised that the Government intend to introduce legislation to implement the proposals in the White Paper entitled "Registration: proposals for change", Cm 939, when parliamentary time allows.

Emergency Services, Carshalton and Wallington

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the provision of accident and emergency services at hospitals serving the constituency of Carshalton and Wallington. [15268]

Mr. Sackville: Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority is responsible for purchasing accident and emergency services for Carshalton and Wallington residents. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Harry Cowd, chairman of the health authority, for details.

Complaints Procedures

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish her response of the Wilson report on patients' complaints. [15829]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health published today the Department of Health's response to the report of the review committee on the national health service complaints procedures, chaired by Professor Wilson, vice-chancellor of Leeds university, in a document "Acting on Complaints". Copies of this document will be placed in the Library.

Measles Rubella Immunisation Campaign

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of immunisation coverage has been achieved by the measles rubella campaign; and what impact this has had on the number of cases of measles. [15853]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Very high immunisation coverage has been achieved by the campaign so far, and efforts are still being made to reach those children who have not yet been immunised. Coverage in England is 92 per cent. overall; 77 per cent. of districts have immunised at least 90 per cent. of children, with 22 per cent. achieving coverage of 95 per cent. or more; 94 per cent. of school children in Northern Ireland have been immunised and 88 per cent. in Scotland and Wales.

The campaign has led to a fall in measles notifications and in confirmed measles cases. There were 1,774 measles notifications in England and Wales in January and February 1995 compared with 2,476 in the previous two months. In Scotland, where the campaign is not yet complete, there were 283 cases in January and February compared with 437 in the previous two months. About half of the suspected measles cases in England and Wales have been investigated with laboratory tests. There were only nine confirmed measles cases in January and one in February; one further case, a contact of the February case, is being investigated and may be confirmed. This compares with 101 confirmed cases in the previous two months. There have been no confirmed cases in Northern Ireland this year.

Psychiatric Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the yearly cost of a psychiatric bed in the national health service for each of the last five years. [14820]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

Average yearly cost per patient for Psychiatric specialities

	1991–92 £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Directly managed units and national health service trusts—England	37,755.60	41,960.40	43,924.10

Source:

Annual financial returns of regional, district and special health authorities for the London postgraduate hospitals and NHS trusts.

Notes:

1. Figures for 1993–94 are provisional.

2. Figures prior to 1991–92 are not comparable with later years because there were changes in accounting practice and included only direct costs whereas figures from 1991–92 include overheads and capital charges.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role is currently played by the social services inspectorate in terms of establishing whether there are in any particular area reasons for the continued direct provision of local authority part III accommodation. [14707]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of people employed in care homes provided under the National Assistance Act 1948 in each year since 1979. [14706]

Mr. Bowis: The information available centrally relates to whole-time equivalent numbers of staff directly employed by local authority social services departments in residential care homes. Figures for 1979 to 1993 are published in the 1992 and 1993 editions of the "Local Authority Social Services Statistics: Staff of Local Authority Social Services Departments", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions during each year since 1984 it has been necessary to place residents in local authority part III accommodation as a direct result of the closure for whatever reason of a private voluntary care home. [14775]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Out-Patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients failed to attend out-patient appointments in England in each year since 1992; and if she will make a statement. [15110]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is given in the table. Guidance on reducing non-attendance has already been issued to the national health service. This will be supported by further guidance on reducing waiting times. We expect the introduction of the new patients charter standard for out-patient appointments will further encourage purchasers and providers to tackle the problem of non-attenders.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Non-attenders	5,068,256	5,105,459	5,188,838
Total appointments	42,009,254	42,632,497	43,421,464
Proportion of patients who did not attend	12.1 per cent.	12.0 per cent.	11.9 per cent.

Notes:

1. Includes patients referred by a general practitioner or another consultant.

2. Excludes patients who gave advance warning of their non-attendance.

Source:

"Outpatient and Ward Attenders, England", published annually.

Hostels

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State of Health (1) what account has been taken in drawing up her proposals for amending regulations concerning hostels accommodating people aged 16 to 25 years of the conclusions of investigations into where young people leaving care have been subject to abuse. [14789]

(2) what mechanisms will exist under the amended regulations governing hostels for people aged 16 to 24 years for *(a)* checking the suitability of those running hostels and *(b)* checking the suitability of the premises. [14790]

Mr. Bowis: The proposals, currently being consulted on, take account of other provisions of the Children Act and regulations which will adequately safeguard the welfare of the young people.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give a breakdown by member of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority of the sums identified in its account for 1993–94 as *(a)* £55,546 for remuneration of authority members and fees paid to members including the chairman and *(b)* £30,385 paid to members in travel and subsistence. [15438]

Mr. Sackville: Payments made to members of the authority in 1993–94 are as shown in the table:

	Fees £
Prof. Sir C. Campbell (Chairman)	8,214.00
Lady Diana Brittan (Deputy Chairman)	5,304.00
Prof. R. J. Berry	3,682.00
Prof. I. Cooke	1,268.00
Prof. A. Cox	3,036.00
Jane Denton	4,828.00
Liz Forgan	509.00
Mrs. Joan Harbison	2,939.00
Prof. S. Hillier	5,578.00
R. Holloway	1,393.00
Penelope Keith	1,250.00
Mrs. Angela Mays	4,029.00
Dr. Anne McLaren	1,137.00
Dr. Jeannette Naish	1,515.00
Rabbi Julia Neuberger	2,792.00
Prof. R. Shaw	1,003.00
David Shilson	1,905.00
Prof. R. Snowden	1,503.00
Lady Julia Tugendhat	1,408.00
Christine Walby	250.00
Prof. D. Whittingham	2,003.00
Total members fees	55,546.00

Note:

1. Expenses for travelling cost, on average were £1,446.90 per member per year.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the consistency of the impartiality of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority with her Department's target that in the current financial year 70 per cent. of its income should be derived from licence fees. [15440]

Mr. Sackville: Parliament decided that a proportion of the cost of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's licensing function should be recovered by charging fees to licensed centres. The principle under which the costs of regulation are met by bodies such as the authority is well established. Unlike other similar organisations, the authority does not recover all of its costs through fees; the taxpayer currently meets 30 per cent. of its costs. The licence fees charged are determined by the authority with the approval of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Treasury.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the background to the circumstances identified in the foreword to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority account for 1993–94 and which led to *(a)* the proposal not to renew the licence of one centre and *(b)* revoke the licence of a linked centre; what was the outcome of those proposals; and what was the legal cost. [15437]

Mr. Sackville: Licensing decisions under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act are matters for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. The authority decided in June 1994 not to renew the licence of one centre and to revoke the licence of a linked centre. The circumstances of this case cannot be disclosed because the authority's decisions are at present the subject of an appeal. The legal costs of this case are on-going.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give a breakdown of the different professional fees which gave rise to the total expenditure of £89,763 on such fees identified in the annual account 1993–94 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [15439]

Mr. Sackville: Professional and administrative fees set out in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's accounts for 1993–94 comprise:

	£
Legal costs re licensing problems	72,663.50
Payroll costs	913.18
Accountants	6,979.93
Miscellaneous (computer consultants, surveyors fees for rates appeal, legal fees for new lease, personnel consultants, refund on audit fees)	9,206.63
	89,763.24

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Staff (Job Offers)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney General how many job offers were reported by staff in his Department under the requirements of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments in each of the last 10 years by *(a)* staff of grade 3 and above, *(b)* staff below grade 3, *(c)* staff in sections concerned with procurement or contract work, under section 15 of the rules of 1st February 1993 and *(d)* staff in other sections, under section 14; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

The Attorney-General: Owing to a clerical error in my answer of 14 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *368*, an incorrect date was given for the reported approach at the Serious Fraud Office at grade 6 level under section 14 of the rules. The date should have been 1992 not 1993.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the amount of money spent on central administration and policy formulations by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14621]

Mr. Newton: Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years in question are contained in the relevant report of expenditure plans, Cm. 2820, page 102 a copy of which is available in the Members' Library.

DEFENCE

Weapons Establishments Sites

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the licensing of atomic weapons establishments sites; and if he will make a statement. [15649]

Mr. Freeman: Agreement has been reached between the Government, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate and Hunting-BRAE Ltd., the operating contractor of AWE, that the AWE sites at Aldermaston and Burghfield should be licensed during 1997 under the provisions of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. Work has already started on achieving this.

Pilot Training

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many multi-engine pilots are trained each year by the RAF to operational conversion unit input standards; for what reason a contract for training six such pilots is being placed within the commercial sector, as set out in "Future Purchase LC1/0012"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The current RAF requirement is to train 61 multi-engine pilots to operational conversion unit input standards each year.

The defence costs study identified a number of ways in which flying training could be carried out more cost-effectively; for example, by the increased use of civilian instructors and contractors. The study concluded that multi-engine pilot training was an area where commonality of syllabus existed between the military and civil sector, and proposed that consideration should be given to transferring this part of RAF flying training to a civilian flying training school. My Department therefore intends to place a contract to train six RAF multi-engine pilots with the civil sector to assess the viability of this strategy.

Fraud

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department's police fraud squad has examined the placing of shipping contracts in the period 1980 to 1990; and if he will make a statement. [14409]

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence police fraud squad investigated between 1988 and 1990 allegations relating to the placement of Ministry of Defence shipping contracts. The investigation was inconclusive, however; no criminal charges were brought, and the case is now closed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department's police fraud squad is currently taking in investigating claims of fraud during the chartering of shipping in the Gulf War; and what actions are being taken.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence police fraud squad is investigating a number of matters arising from the chartering of shipping during the Gulf war. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in his written answers on 9 March, *Official Report*, column *349*, some of these remain the subject of civil or criminal action.

Gordon Foxley

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the total value of procurement orders which were not given to British defence manufacturers as a result of the activities of Gordon Foxley. [14411]

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible to say with any certainty what impact Foxley's corrupt activities in the field of fuse manufacture had on British defence manufacturing industry.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department is still investigating the extent of the fraud carried out by Gordon Foxley; and if he will make a statement. [14410]

Mr. Freeman: Investigations into Gordon Foxley's activities are continuing. Part 5 of the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General into the risk of fraud in defence procurement—HC 258 Session 1994–95—published on 10 March 1995, contains a full account of my Department's investigations to date.

Biological Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the continued existence of biological weapons in the sea surrounding the British Isles following the end of the second world war; how many biological weapons remain deposited in the sea; what types of weapons are involved; in what locations they are; when the weapons deposited were last inspected; what evidence there is of leakage; and what steps he is taking to ascertain the circumstances of their disposal. [14406]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no knowledge of any biological weapons being dumped in the sea surrounding the British Isles.

Troop Exchange Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his Australian counterpart concerning the troop exchange programme between the United Kingdom and Australia; and if he will make a statement. [14405]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no such discussions.

Housing Stock (Privatisation)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the role of NatWest Markets in the development of proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock; [15486]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, whether he will state the possibilities under consideration by his Department for transferring the married quarters estate to the private sector; and if he will make a statement; [15487]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing

stock, what proposals he has considered for the duration of leasehold to be held by his Department following the privatisation of his Department's housing stock; [15474]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, what provision he has made for the protection of *(a)* the welfare and *(b)* the rights of tenancy of service men and women in developing proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock; [15477]

(5) if all moneys accrued from the privatisation of his Department's housing stock will remain within the Department's budget; [15478]

(6) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, what is his estimate for consultancy and legal fees for the completion of proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock; [15480]

(7) when he expects to announce proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock; [15481]

(8) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, if proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock will be open to consultation by members of the armed services and other interested parties; [15482]

(9) pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, what assessment he has made of potential security risks in considering proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock. [15483]

Mr. Soames: As I said in my reply to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *303*, we intend to develop proposals for the possible transfer of the married quarters estate to the private sector, on the basis of initial work undertaken for us last autumn by NatWest Markets. We are close to completing the competitive selection of financial advisers to assist us in this process. Our consideration of the possibilities for such a transfer is still at an early stage, and a good deal of further development and evaluation is needed. It would therefore be premature at this stage to speculate as to what proposals may emerge from this work, what their details might be, what further independent professional advice might be required to assist the development of these proposals, and what the financial and other implications of such proposals may prove to be. We envisage that we will be in a position to make a further statement on these issues in the second half of the year, and any proposals which we may bring forward in due course will be the subject of appropriate consultation. In the course of our on-going consideration of the possibilities, we shall continue to pay particular attention to the operational and security requirements of the services, and to the welfare and interests of service personnel and their families.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of urgent and unavoidable repairs to be made to his Department's housing stock; and how much has been spent on urgent and unavoidable repairs in each of the last 10 years. [15475]

Mr. Soames: No central record is kept of this information, but the defence housing executive will take on responsibility for the management and maintenance of the married quarters estate from 1 April, and the cost of urgent and unavoidable repairs will be met from within its overall budget. We expect that the improved housing management for which the executive is being established will in due course reduce the incidence of requirements for such repairs.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*, regarding his Department's housing stock, what estimate he has made of the financial value of his Department's housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [15476]

Mr. Soames: The value which might be realised in any transfer of the married quarters estate to the private sector will depend on a range of factors, which we will be able to determine only as detailed proposals are developed.

David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role of Mr. David Hart in the development and execution of proposals for the privatisation of his Department's housing stock. [15485]

Mr. Soames: Mr. David Hart is one of several independent advisers who have contributed to the development of proposals for the married quarters estate. His involvement has been, and continues to be, very valuable.

Budget Reductions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of future reductions in his Department's budget. [15479]

Mr. Soames: The latest plans for the defence budget ensure that British forces will continue to be able to fulfil their wide range of tasks with improved capability. In addition they provide sufficient resources to meet the costs defence will face in moving to the new smaller and more efficient support structures arising from the defence costs study.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *609*, in which cities the memoranda of understanding with Indonesia were signed, of September 1983, March 1984, April 1986 and November 1991, and in each case who were the signatories.

Mr. Freeman: All of the memoranda of understanding referred to were signed in Jakarta by representatives of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and Her Majesty's Government.

Gulf War

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain and evaluate the report to the Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the United States Senate by the United States General Accounting Office on outstanding questions on possible exposure to reproductive toxicants of the allied forces during the Gulf war, in the report coded GAO/PTMD 93.30, dated August 1994. [14582]

Mr. Soames: A copy of this report was obtained shortly after its publication in the United States and was reviewed by scientific and medical specialists within my

Department, as is all material relating to the alleged Gulf war syndrome.

Pensions

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he estimates would be the cost to the Exchequer if the widow of a service man, whom she married after he had left the service, was paid a pension relating to his years of service for marriages before 1978. [14395]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of the number of marriages which were contracted before 1978 by former service men after their retirement, and it is not possible, therefore, to provide an estimate of the cost of awarding pensions to their widows in such cases.

Female Crews

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many sea-going vessels of the Royal Navy have undergone internal refitting to accommodate female crew members; and how many berths were provided and at what total cost in the last five years. [14910]

(2) how many sea-going vessels of the Royal Navy have had internal alterations made to remove accommodation designed for female members of crews; and what is the number of berths removed and at what total cost in the last five years. [14908]

Mr. Soames: Over the last five years, 36 Royal Navy ships and five Royal Fleet Auxiliaries have been converted to accommodate female personnel. This has resulted in 1,313 berths becoming available for female personnel. All conversion work has been carried out as part of major refit programmes and costs of this specific work are not separately identified. In the same period, none has undergone any reversion work.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14247]

Mr. Soames: Details of defence operating costs for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 4 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2801, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of *(a)* service personnel and *(b)* civilians employed at each Ministry of Defence establishment in Cornwall for the last year for which figures are available. [15031]

Mr. Soames: While it is not my Department's policy to give the number of employees at individual establishments, at 1 July last year there were 3,904 service and 611.5 full-time equivalent civilian personnel employed in the county of Cornwall.

Service Housing, Cornwall, South-East

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of Ministry of Defence housing units of accommodation for each location in the Cornwall, South-East parliamentary constituency; and how many are currently unoccupied, giving the reasons for their non-occupation. [15032]

Mr. Soames: As at 31 December last year, my Department owned 199 houses in the Cornwall, south-east constituency, of which 10 were vacant. Of the vacant properties, six were allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly and four were undergoing works. All are located at Torpoint.

Naval Training

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the detailed arrangements for the transfer of Royal Navy sea training from Portland to Plymouth in September. [15033]

Mr. Soames: Operational sea training will end at Portland on 19 July 1995. Flag officer sea training will then move his organisation to Plymouth, where his headquarters will be located in HMS Drake. Full operations should start on 11 September 1995.

TRANSPORT

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14251]

Mr. Norris: Details of my Department's expenditure on central administration for the years 1989–90 to 1997-298 are contained in figure 2 of my Department's annual report, column 2806, copies of which are available in the Members' Library. We cannot separately identify the costs of policy formulation.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received urging the inclusion in the driving test of a test of the ability to use a mobile telephone safely while the vehicle is moving as a condition of being allowed to do this; and if he will make a statement. [15345]

Mr. Norris: We have received no such representations.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many road accidents in the past year the driver of a vehicle involved was using a mobile telephone at the time of the accident. [15344]

Mr. Norris: This information could not be obtained other than at disproportionate cost.

Olympic Airways

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *484*, regarding Olympic Airways flight DA265 of 7 January, if it is intended to prosecute or penalise Olympic Airways and the pilot. [15209]

Mr. Norris: Regulatory responsibility for Olympic Airways rests with the Greek Civil Aviation Authority, to which the UK Civil Aviation Authority passed an information copy of the UK air traffic control occurrence report.

Highlands and Islands Airports

Sir Russel Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many take-offs and landings there have been at Highlands and Islands airports in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norris: The figures for annual aircraft transport movements at the Highlands and Islands airports for the past three years are as follows:

	1992		*1993*		*1994*[1]	
	Arrival	*Departure*	*Arrival*	*Departure*	*Arrival*	*Departure*
Benbecula	1,671	1,669	1,639	1,638	1,956	1,952
Inverness	13,910	13,792	13,600	13,596	11,964	11,958
Islay	1,165	1,186	1,037	1,039	1,154	1,155
Kirkwall	7,018	7,011	6,415	6,413	5,910	5,915
Stornoway	3,680	3,675	3,427	3,427	3,535	3,531
Sumburgh	14,121	14,106	13,773	13,760	13,984	13,982
Tiree	480	485	453	453	608	609
Wick	3,175	3,181	3,267	3,262	3,004	3,003

[1] Provisional figures

Private Security Guards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to date and what is the current cost per month, of his Department's and the Highways Agency's use of private security guards; and if he will give a breakdown of those costs per road scheme or project.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 22 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, what has been the total cost to date, and what is the current cost per month, of his Department's and the Highways Agency's use of private security guards; and if he will give a breakdown of those costs per road scheme or project.

The following table gives the information; the figures have been rounded. The ongoing spend is, of course, dependent on the level of future protest action.

£

Road scheme	*Estimated expenditure to date*	*Estimated ongoing monthly spend*
A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road	10,000,000	300,000
A4/A6 Batheaston-Swainswick Bypass	2,000,000	50,000
A30 Honiton-Exeter	175,000	25,000
M3 Bar End-Compton	4,000,000	Scheme completed
M65 Blackburn Southern Bypass	2,000,000	200,000
Total of all above	18,175,000	575,000

I hope this is helpful.

Royal Train

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average cost of a journey on the royal train in 1993–94. [14727]

Mr. Watts: In 1993–94 the royal train was used on 95 days. On this basis, the average cost per journey was £19,101. In addition, related British Transport police security costs totalled £634,988.

Ro-ro Ferries

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list full details of all inspections undertaken by the Marine Safety Agency of roll-on roll-off ferries using United Kingdom ports in the last 12 months, including the date of inspection, name of the ship, details of defects and remedial action. [15117]

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member. Copies of the tables referred to will be placed in the Library.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Ms Joan Walley, dated 22 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the inspections undertaken on roll-on roll-off (ro-ro) ferries.

A list showing the name of the ship and the date and place of inspection of foreign flagged ro-ro cargo ships and ro-ro passenger ferries inspected by the Marine Safety Agency in the last twelve months is attached (Table 1). A separate list containing the same information on Red Ensign ro-ro passenger ships is also provided (Table 2). The Marine Safety Agency conducted an inspection campaign on ro-ro ships calling at UK ports following the sinking of the Estonia and the details of the inspections are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 attached.

Provision of the details of defects found during these inspections would, we estimate, result in a document of 400–500 pages, and could not be provided other than at disproportionate cost. A list of any deficiencies found during an inspection is left on board the ship and it is the responsibility of the Master to ensure that appropriate remedial action is taken. Serious deficiencies resulting in the detention of a ro-ro passenger ferry were found in only one case in the past twelve months. Details of any ro-ro cargo ships detained can be found in the lists of ships under detention in UK ports which have been published each month by the Marine Safety Agency since June 1994.

A253

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when it is now intended that construction of *(a)* the dual carriageway of the A253 from the end of the Thanet Way-Monkton roundabout—to the Prospect roundabout and *(b)* the dual carriageway of the A253 between the Prospect roundabout and the Lord of the Manor roundabouts will commence. [14864]

Mr. Norris: These projects are part of the Kent county council's Thanet Way improvement scheme designed to improve access to and through north Kent, with particular benefits for Thanet. My Department is supporting the Thanet Way scheme, which will cost well over £100 million, through transport supplementary grant. I understand that Kent expects to begin work on the first of the sections referred to early next financial year. The second of the sections referred to is less far advanced: the county council expects to be promoting the scheme at the Thanet local plan inquiry during this year.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the recent circumstances in which an airliner approaching Heathrow suffered a malfunctioning of its computer system which gives guidance of the flight path, route of approach, correct speed and angle of descent; and if he will make a statement. [15123]

Mr. Norris: The circumstances surrounding this incident are set out in the air accident investigation branch's bulletin No. 3/95, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The AAIB bulletin makes a safety recommendation relating to the Airbus A340 flight management guidance system and the fuel management system. While the safety recommendation is addressed initially to the joint aviation authorities, it is also being considered by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Rail Investment

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much publicly financed investment in the railways has increased since 1987; and what effect this has had on the quantity of new rolling stock, track and signalling. [15269]

Mr. Watts: In 1987–88, publicly financed rail investment totalled £693 million, equivalent to £993 million in 1994–95 prices. In 1994–95, publicly financed rail investment is expected to total around £900 million. In addition we expect some £100 million of privately financed investment to be undertaken this year.

The table compares the level of investment in 1987–88 with the level in each subsequent year.

	Investment £ million 1994–95 prices	*Per cent. change on 1987–88*
1987–88	993	—
1988–89	977	−1.6
1989–90	1,119	+12.7
1990–91	1,216	+22.5
1991–92	1,442	+45.2
1992–93	1,552	+56.3
1993–94	1,188	+19.6
1994–95	c 1,000	+0.7

Over this period, at today's prices, £2,765 million has been invested in new rolling stock. Since the mid-1980s nearly 4,000 coaches, locomotives and other passenger vehicles have been delivered—over a quarter of the whole fleet. Some £1,448 million has been invested in track renewals and £1,401 million in signalling and related track projects.

Privatisation

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the net equity proceeds to Government as a result of privatisation, *(b)* the market value at the end of the first day of trading and *(c)* the current market value. [15350]

Mr. Norris: For those privatisations where the Department acted as vendor, the proceeds to Government were as follows:

Company	*Net equity proceeds to Government (£ million)*
Associated British Ports	96.4
British Airways	853.0
British Airports Authority	1,181.6
DVOIT (the former IT arm of DVLA)	3.7
National Freight Consortium	5.0

Information on the current and past values of private companies is not held by this Department.

Crime (International Air Space and Waters)

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of national and international law dealing with crimes on board aircraft flying through international air space; [15061]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of national and international law dealing with crimes on board ships in international waters. [15060]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Concern has recently been expressed that in some circumstances aircrew and passengers may be left without effective legal protection where offences are committed on board foreign-registered aircraft outside United Kingdom air space which subsequently land in this country. We are currently considering whether the problems which have been identified can be overcome, and we expect to discuss the matter shortly with the Board of Airline Representatives of the UK.

Similar concern has not, however, been raised in relation to offences committed on board ships in international waters, and the Government have not been given reason to believe that the law in this area is inadequate. UK courts have jurisdiction over offences committed on board all British ships in international waters, and also over offences committed by British passengers on foreign ships.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage increase in council tax bills for each band of property under each authority for 1995.

Mr. Curry: The average council tax for band C, two adult dwellings in England in 1995–96 is £543. This is before any reductions for council tax benefit and transitional relief, and represents an increase of 5.3 per cent. on 1994–95 levels.

Shire areas are showing the lowest increases, with an average 4.5 per cent. rise on last year.

In London, the average council tax for band C is £512, an increase of 7.8 per cent. on last year. Metropolitan areas have set band C council taxes at £605, 5.8 per cent. higher than in 1994–95.

I have today placed in the Library of the House a table showing the band C council tax for each authority in England for 1995–96, and the percentage increase from 1994–95.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the band D council tax for 1995–96 for each local authority in England. [14612]

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many families were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, in each year since 1992 in *(a)* England and *(b)* each English housing authority. [14712]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of the average number of households that had been placed temporarily in bed-and-breakfast accommodation by local authorities in England through administering the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 are given below:

1992: 10,430
1993: 6,550
1994: 4,740

The number of households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation had fallen to 4,330 households at 31 December 1994, some 12 per cent. fewer than a year earlier and 68 per cent. below the peak level at the end of September 1991. This confirms that local authorities are heeding the Government's advice to use other forms of temporary accommodation wherever possible.

I have today placed in the Library a table giving the information as reported by each local authority in England for each year from 1992 to 1994.

Protected Birds

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report,* columns *757–58,* which national journals are checked by his Department for any potential offences relating to the sale of birds listed in *(a)* appendix I of CITES and *(b)* annexe CI of EC regulation 3626/82; [15052]

(2) how many potential offences his Department has identified in the national trade journals in each of the last three years involving birds listed in appendix I of CITES and *(b)* annexe CI of EC regulation 3626/82; and how many of these have been passed to the police to investigate; [15038]

(3) in respect of the sale of Livingstone's Turacos, how many specimens of this have been advertised for sale in the trade journals his Department monitors during the last four years; and how many cases were passed to the police to investigate. [15038]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department monitors four trade journals for potential offences relating to the sale of birds. These are two weekly titles—*Cage and Aviary Birds* and *Exchange and Mart*—and two monthly journals—*Bird Keeper* and the magazine of the Parrot Society.

Prior to November 1994, my Department kept no detailed records of cases resulting from monitoring journals. However, a substantial number of potential offences were identified and pursued, and eight cases were passed to the police between January 1992 and October 1994. Since November 1994, 26 potential sales offences have been identified and nine cases have been passed to the police to investigate, including one relating to the sale of a Livingstone's Turaco.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his answer of 3 March, *Official Report,* columns *757–58,* how his Department ensures that an exemption issued to sell a bird listed in appendix I of CITES or annexe C1 of EC regulation 3626/82 relates to the individual specimen in question; and what proportion of bird species listed in appendix I of CITES or annexe C1 of EC regulation 3626/82 his Department requires to be statutorily ringed or marked in order to be sold; [15050]

(2) what steps his Department takes to verify the origin and date of acquisition of the specimens and if the birds have been captive bred when considering applications for individual sales exemptions to sell birds listed in appendix I of CITES or annexe C1 of EC regulation 3626/82; [15051]

(3) how his Department establishes whether a vendor has any convictions under wildlife legislation when considering an application for an individual sales exemption to sell birds listed in appendix I of CITES or annexe C1 of EC regulation 3626/82. [15049]

Sir Paul Beresford: Statutory provisions to register with the Department and ring birds kept in captivity apply to some 5 per cent. of the species listed in appendix I of CITES or annexe C1 of EC regulation 3626/82.

While there is no statutory requirement to ring appendix I or annexe C1 species specifically for the purpose of sale, any sales exemption for a species subject to the registration and ringing requirements would normally require the bird to be ringed in accordance with the statutory provisions. Individual sales exemptions for species not subject to the ringing requirements also contain information that enables the specimen to be identified, including any ring number.

When submitting applications for sales exemptions, applicants must provide full details of the specimen, including origin and details of acquisition. Where appropriate, they have to supply details of any convictions under wildlife legislation. They are also required to sign a declaration that the information provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief.

Any areas of doubt about the information provided would be followed up by the Department. The Department's wildlife inspectorate also has powers to inspect premises to ensure that conditions attached to sales exemptions have been met.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which statutory agencies have authorised persons as defined by the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulation 1985. [15040]

Sir Paul Beresford: Under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1985, the Secretary of State for the Environment has authorised all members of my Department's wildlife inspectorate and certain named police officers. In addition, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has the power, under paragraph 2 of the regulations, to authorise persons.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning appeals have been heard in each of the last five years by his Department; and how many have succeeded. [14870]

Sir Paul Beresford: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. Shepley to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 21 March 1995:

Parliamentary Question Number 1730/94/95

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your question about the number of planning appeals that have been dealt with in England in each of the last five years; and how many have succeeded.

The information requested is set out in the table below:

Planning appeals: England

Year	Number decided	Number allowed
1989/90	26,481	8,852
1990/91	26,393	8,871
1991/92	22,553	7,590
1992/93	17,832	5,979
1993/94	14,113	4,975
1994/95[1]	8,733	2,962

[1] From 1 April 1994 to 31 December 1994.

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, column *264*, if he will name the local authorities which own the zoos listed. [15171]

Sir Paul Beresford: According to our latest information, the zoos and the local authorities that own them are as follows:

Abbey Gardens Zoo—Borough of St. Edmundsbury;
Animal World, Bolton—Bolton MBC;
Battersea Park Children's Zoo—London Borough of Wandsworth;
Birmingham Nature Centre—Birmingham City Council;
Blackpool Municipal Zoological Gardens—Blackpool BC;
Aquarium, Bolton—Bolton MBC;
Butterfly World, Bolton—Bolton MBC;
Clissold Park—London Borough of Hackney;
Crystal Palace Park Zoo—London Borough of Bromley;
Harewood Bird Garden—Leeds City Council;
Lotherton Hall Bird Garden and Deer Park—Leeds City Council;
Newquay Zoo—Restormel BC;
Pudsey Park—Leeds City Council;
Roundhay Park—Leeds City Council;
Sir George Staunton Country Park—Borough of Havant;
Stewart Park—Middlesborough BC;
War Memorial Park Aviaries and Pets Corner—City of Coventry.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and (b) 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14249]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 7 of my Department's annual report for 1995, copies of which are available in the Library.

Short-term Prisoners (Housing)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidance he is issuing to local authorities following cuts in housing benefit for short-term prisoners; [14823]

(2) what financial provision is being made to local authorities to provide for funding homes for released short-term prisoners and their children following housing benefit reductions. [14824]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Where a person released from prison is homeless and in priority need a local authority has a duty, under part III of the Housing Act 1985, to ensure that accommodation is available for his occupation. My Department is discussing with the Department of Social Security the possible financial effects of the changes in housing benefit for prisoners serving longer than 13 weeks.

Income Support

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Social Security since his proposals to reduce income support for mortgage interest about the policy of insurance companies with respect to the payment of mortgage interest in respect of unemployment due to illness caused by exposure to radiation; [14822]

(2) what discussions he has had with the nuclear industry regarding the policy of insurance companies with respect to the payment of mortgage interest if a person is unemployed because of illness due to radioactivity. [14821]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None.

Local Government Commission

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his response to the Local Government Commission's final recommendations for Staffordshire. [14555]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in a statement to Parliament on Tuesday 21 March, *Official Report*, column 145, that we have accepted the Local Government Commission's recommendation of a unitary authority for Stoke-on-Trent with the two-tier system of local government remaining in the rest of Staffordshire.

Research Projects

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the tender documents issued by the Government Office for London for research projects, the contractors to whom research work has been awarded, the budget for each research project and the anticipated completion and publication date of each research project. [15034]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government office for London does not have its own research budget but draws upon the resources available to the research programmes of the Departments of Environment and Transport. To date, the following contracts have been let on behalf of GOL. In most cases, decisions about publication will be made when the projects are complete.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

London Scenarios Tests: Economic Evaluation of Transport and Land use

Name of contractor: Marcial Echenique and Partners

Budget for research project: £16,000 from DoT

Estimated completion date: April 1995.

2. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Role of London in the United Kingdom Economy: A Planning Perspective

Name of contractor: Arup Economics and Planning

Budget for research project: £89,000 from DoE

Estimated completion date: June 1995

3. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

London's Urban Environment

Name of contractor: Building Design Partnership

Budget for research project: £65,095 from DoE

Estimated completion date: June 1995

4. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

London Statistical Digest

Name of contractor: Business Strategies Limited and Rangecroft North Publishing

Budget for research project: £83,200 from DOE

Estimated completion date: June 1995

5. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Trip Generation: Relationship between trip making and land use

Name of contractor: Transport Research Laboratory

Budget for research project: £360,000 from DoT

Estimated completion date: April 1996

6. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Analysis of London Area Transport Survey

Name of contractor: Transport Research Laboratory

Budget for research project: £75,000 from DoT

Estimated completion date: September 1995

7. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Docklands Impact Study: Transport infrastructure

Name of contractor: Transport Research Laboratory

Budget for research project: £35,000 from DoT

Estimated completion date: April 1995

8. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Forecasting Employment in London and the South East (Stage 2)

Name of contractor: Cambridge Econometrics/Oxford Economic Forecasting/Centre for Economic and Business Research

Budget for research project: £5,300 from DoT

Estimated completion date: Completed February 1995

9. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Evaluation of the London Docklands Development Corporation and the Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone

Name of contractor: ECOTEC Ltd

Budget for research project: £340,000

Estimated completion date: December 1998

10. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Non-Work Peak Trips in London

Name of contractor: Transport Research Laboratory

Budget for research project: £75,000 from DoT

Estimated completion date: March 1995

11. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Comparative Study: Comparison of London with its major international competitors

Name of Contractor: Contract yet to be awarded

Estimated completion date: October 1995

Councillors' Declarations

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the application of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to local authority resolutions to require councillors to declare memberships of clubs, unions and societies as well as directorships and shareholdings in companies. [15193]

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* Regulation 3 and the schedule to the Local Authority (Members' Interests) Regulations 1992, made under section 19 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, detail the prescribed direct or indirect pecuniary interests which each elected member is required to declare. DOE circular 9/92 provides further advice on the information which members are required to give, and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Protection Staff

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fisheries protection staff speak more than one of the officially recognised European Union languages.

Mr. Jack: Twenty-eight fisheries inspectors employed by the UK fisheries department have a working knowledge of more than one European Union language and a further 20 have basic communication skills. Similar information in relation to British sea-fishery officers of the Royal Navy's fishery protection squadron is not readily available. All UK fishery protection vessels engaged in inspecting foreign vessels carry language cards for boarding purposes.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14255]

Mr. Jack: Details of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's running costs for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in the table at annexe 5 of the Ministry–intervention board departmental report, CM 2803, copies of which are available in the House.

Organic Fluorides

Mr. Barnes : To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the herbicides, insecticides and fungicides approved by his Department which are organic fluorides, together with their contents of chloride. [14557]

Mrs. Browning: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Ministers approve the marketing or use of a pesticide only if thorough evaluation establishes that it is effective, humane and poses no unacceptable risk to human beings, non-target species or the wider environment.

Wareing Bros.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors he will take into account in assessing the current application for an increased milk quota by Wareing Bros., the Breck, Barrow hill, Chesterfield, Derbyshire. [14559]

Mr. Jack: The Ministry has no record of an application by Wareing Bros. for an increased milk quota.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to develop the monitoring of agricultural tenancies by area and ownership. [14922]

Mr. Jack: My Department regularly reviews its requirements for statistics, and is considering how best to monitor the new farm business tenancies which will be available from 1 September this year.

Food and Drink Statistics

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the United Kingdom food and drink deficit or surplus *(a)* in total and *(b)* with the other countries of the EU for each year from 1990 to 1994. [14929]

Mr. Jack: Imports and exports of food and drink, as recorded in the overseas trade statistics in the years 1990 to 1994, are shown in the table.

		1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993 provisional*	*Jan–Sept 1994 provisional*
Total:	Imports	12,298	12,262	13,406	13,841	10,868
	Exports	6,352	6,827	7,521	8,053	6,435
	Crude trade gap	5,946	5,435	5,886	5,789	4,433
EU:	Imports	8,030	8,019	8,862	8,381	6,510
	Exports	3,632	4,293	4,736	4,730	3,885
	Crude trade gap	4,398	3,726	4,127	3,651	2,625

Source:
Central Statistical Office.
Note:
Because of differences in valuation principles, the crude trade gap overstates the contribution of food, feed and drink to the deficit on visible trade in the balance of payment statistics by about 15 per cent.

EDUCATION

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by her Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if she will make a statement. [14246]

Mr. Robin Squire: Details of the Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 1, annexe A and table 22, chapter 8 of the Department's annual report, Cm 2810, copies of which are available in the Library.

Education, Bedfordshire

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent in total on education in Bedfordshire in each of the last 10 years at constant prices. [14893]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows total expenditure by Bedfordshire local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available. These figures have not be adjusted for any changes of function.

Bedfordshire County Council

	Gross expenditure (1994–95 prices) £ million
1974–75	251.2
1975–76	259.7
1976–77	269.2
1977–78	n/a
1978–79	258.8
1979–80	254.0
1980–81	255.5
1981–82	257.9
1982–83	242.1

Bedfordshire County Council

	Gross expenditure (1994–95 prices) £ million
1983–84	243.0
1984–85	241.5
1985–86	240.1
1986–87	246.4
1987–88	263.1
1988–89	267.1
1989–90	261.4
1990–91	255.1
1991–92	277.9
1992–93	292.9
1993–94[1]	242.8

[1] Provisional. n/a = Not applicable.

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the pupil-teacher ratio in Bedfordshire *(a)* in lower schools, *(b)* in middle schools and *(c)* in upper schools in each of the last 20 years. [14894]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the table.

Pupil:teacher ratios within maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in Bedfordshire LEA position in January each year

Year	*Primary (excluding middle)*	*Middle*	*Secondary[1] (excluding middle)*
1975	22.2	17.9	16.9
1976	21.5	17.8	16.1
1977	21.7	18.0	15.9
1978	21.9	19.0	16.0
1979	21.6	19.9	15.9
1980	21.7	19.8	15.9
1981	22.3	20.1	15.8
1982	21.8	20.0	15.6
1983	22.9	20.8	16.4
1984	23.3	20.7	16.2
1985	23.1	20.3	16.2
1986	22.5	20.6	16.2
1987	22.0	20.0	16.1
1988	22.0	20.2	15.6
1989	21.5	20.3	15.3
1990	21.5	20.4	15.5
1991	21.6	19.8	15.6
1992	21.6	19.5	15.9
1993	21.7	19.6	16.0
1994	22.0	19.5	16.1

[1] Excludes Sixth Form Colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1993.

Pupil Rolls

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make it her policy to apply the same educational standards to schools with fewer than five children as apply to those with higher numbers. [14986]

Mr. Robin Squire: The educational standards required by the national curriculum and the statutory national curriculum assessment and testing arrangements apply to all five to 16–year–olds in every maintained school, regardless of the numbers of pupils on roll. The national curriculum and testing are already raising standards in these schools.

Independent schools, and independent establishments catering for fewer than five children aged five to 16 are not required to follow the national curriculum, although many independent schools choose to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to alter the existing statutory requirements.

Education Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what account is taken of the needs of schools as assessed by Her Majesty's inspectorate prior to decisions on the education standard spending assessment being taken; and what account was taken on the results of Her Majesty's inspectorate's work in determining standard spending assessment limits for Coventry; [15045]

(2) what assessment she has made of *(a)* the unpaid efforts of teachers and parents and *(b)* the financial contribution of parents, on the level of education standard spending assessment awards. [15041]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government take account of a wide range of factors affecting local authorities and schools when deciding the appropriate level of education standard spending. My right hon. Friend welcomes the commitment which teachers and parents bring to the education service.

University Students

Mr. Sherman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many university students dropped out of courses before completion in each of the last 10 years. [14837]

Mr. Boswell: The wastage rates of full-time and sandwich students from first degree courses in former University Funding Council funded United Kingdom universities and former English and Welsh polytechnics are shown below:

Academic year:

1983–84: 14 per cent.
1984–85: 15 per cent.
1985–86: 14 per cent.
1986–87: 16 per cent.
1987–88: 17 per cent.
1988–89: 14 per cent.
1989–90: 16 per cent.
1990–91: 15 per cent.
1991–92: 17 per cent.
1992–93: 17 per cent.

Drop-out covers all those leaving degree courses because of exam failure, ill health, personal and other reasons. It includes those switching to a lower level course but it excludes students transferring between degree courses or subjects. The rate for each academic year reflects the progression of students through the whole length of the course. The calculation for the polytechnic drop-out rate is necessarily approximate because of significant limitations in the underlying data.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Portaferry-Strangford Bridge

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans he has to commission a viability report into a bridge linking the villages of Portaferry and Strangford. [14836]

Mr. Moss: None.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14245]

Sir John Wheeler: Details of the Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 11.1 of the Department's annual report, Cm 2816, copies of which are available in the Library.

Out-patients

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients failed to attend out-patient appointments in Northern Ireland in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [15112]

Mr. Moss: The number of patients who did not attend out-patient appointments and failed to give advance warning to the hospital is as follows:

1991–92: 246,924
1992–93: 243,181
1993–94: 228,092

The number of non-attenders in 1993–94 represents 14 per cent. approximately of those who had appointments in that year. The Department of Health and Social Services is taking steps to ensure that the number of non-attenders is reduced considerably in future. Health and social services boards have been asked to review critically all aspects of out-patients waiting list management and later this year the Department will be launching a major publicity campaign aimed specifically at reducing non-attendances.

Braidside Integrated Primary School

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on what basis the post of a religious education teacher for Braidside integrated primary school was advertised to include the ability to teach Roman Catholic religious education; and if he will make a statement. [14939]

Mr. Ancram: The advertisement is entirely a matter for the school authorities and reflects the school's aim of providing equitably for both religious traditions among its enrolment.

Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland for 1993–94. [16057]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Chief Electoral Officer's report has been laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library.

Construction Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to implement the Latham report on the construction industry. [14433]

Mr. Moss: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is taking the lead in the implementation of the Latham report, which contained a number of recommendations aimed at improving contractual relationships within the construction industry and between the industry and its clients. He has established the Construction Industry Board which oversees and co-ordinates the various working groups and will carry forward the implementation process, including the provision of advice on any legislation which might be necessary.

My officials maintain close contact with colleagues in the Department of the Environment on all aspects of implementation. Any consultations on proposals for legislation will include interested parties in Northern Ireland. Should legislation be proposed for Great Britain, I will give consideration to how such proposals could be given effect to in Northern Ireland.

Civil Servants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of civil servants employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the agencies under his Department's responsibility and *(c)* public and other bodies under his Department's responsibility, for each year since 1979, divided into (1) full-time equivalents, (2) overtime, (3) casuals and (4) other; and whether he will also provide for each year his estimates of (A) civil service job reductions due to privatisations, (B) civil service job reductions due to contracting out, (C) civil service job reductions resulting from other transfer of responsibilities, (D) the total of all other staff undertaking work for the Department or its agencies without being categorised as civil servants, including external consultants, researchers, agency secretarial staff and staff substitution and (E) total manpower expenditures, in 1994 prices. [15093]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The civil service covers the permanent staff of central Government Departments and next steps agencies. The staff of other bodies are outside the civil service.

Details of staff numbers within the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments from 1989–90 onwards, divided into full-time equivalents, overtime and casuals are given in table 12.7 of the Northern Ireland departmental report, Cm 2816. Table 11.1 gives details of the running costs of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments from 1989–1990 onwards.

"Public Bodies", published annually since 1982, contains staffing information for those bodies not covered by the Northern Ireland departmental report.

Copies of both of these publications are available in the Library.

The remaining information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UNESCO

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from organisations and individuals regarding rejoining the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. [15163]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received 38 letters from Members of Parliament, organisations and members of the public in the last six months about the United Kingdom rejoining UNESCO. In addition, there have been 11 parliamentary questions in the same period.

We are continuing to keep this issue under review, but no decisión has been taken.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the decision on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and rejoin this organisation. [15162]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The prospects for a United Kingdom return to UNESCO remain under review, but no decisions have been taken. In considering the question, we have to take into account existing financial pressures and other priority demands for resources as well as progress UNESCO has made on reform.

Spain

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position of the United Kingdom's relationship with Spain. [15357]

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom and Spain are allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and fellow members of the European Union and the Western European Union. We have frequent and close contacts on a wide range of issues. Our relations are generally very good.

Turkey

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey about the arrest of members of the Turkish Parliament and defence lawyers. [15340]

Mr. David Davis: We take every opportunity, at ministerial and official level, bilaterally and with our EU partners, to express our concerns to the Turkish Government about their overall human rights record. We did so most recently during the European Union's Association Council with Turkey on 6 March. Our representations have included specific references to the trial and sentencing of deputies from the Democracy party. Our views on this were reflected in an EU statement of 9 December 1994 expressing concern and seeking an explanation from the Turkish Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs subsequently raised the issue with the Turkish Foreign Minister on 19 December 1994 and on 2 February.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14253]

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the FCO's running costs and administrative expenditure for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in tables 1 and 2 of the FCO's 1995 departmental report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

High Commissions and Embassies

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost of maintaining UK high commissions in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14252]

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the actual and projected costs of maintaining UK high commissions are provided in the following table:

£ million

Year	*Cost*
1993–94	81.3
1994–95	83.8
1995–96	86.7

The figures include the costs of deputy high commissions. Further information can be found in the FCO's 1995 departmental report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what was the total cost of maintaining United Kingdom embassies in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14683]

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the actual and projected costs of maintaining United Kingdom embassies are provided in the following table:

£ million

Year	*Cost*
1993–94	264.7
1994–95	272.7
1995–96	282.2

Further information can be found in the FCO's departmental report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

Armament Sales

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will list those countries to which the United Kingdom Government refuse to sanction the sale of armaments on humanitarian grounds. [15441]

Mr. David Davis: We do not issue licences for the export to any country of equipment likely to be used for internal repression. In addition, we observe arms embargos on China and Burma which were imposed because of repressive internal policies.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what troops, other than those of the Sierra Leone Government, are present in Sierra Leone; and what role they are playing. [14848]

Mr. Baldry: We understand that units of the armed forces of Guinea, Nigeria and Ghana are present in Sierra Leone by agreement between the Governments concerned. We also understand that the Government of Sierra Leone have themselves contracted some former Ghurkas to assist in training the Sierra Leone armed forces.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role has been played by the Commonwealth Secretariat in attempting to ameliorate the situation in Sierra Leone: and what reports he has received from the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth about the need for international preventative diplomacy or other action in Sierra Leone; and how he is going to respond. [14851.]

Mr. Baldry: Staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat have visited the region and sought to establish contact with the various parties to the dispute. We have given our strong support to international efforts to bring about a peaceful solution.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the estimates of the number of people in Sierra Leone who have been killed since the war started in 1991. [14853.]

Mr. Baldry: I refer to my written reply of 16 February to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), column *731*.

TREASURY

Government Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a detailed breakdown of the expenditure described as non-identified in table 7.7 of Command Paper 2821; and if he will make a statement. [14623]

Mr. Aitken: Non-identifiable general Government expenditure is that which cannot be recognised as having been incurred for the benefit of the population of a specific country. It also includes all other general Government expenditure which individual Departments are unable to identify by country from their records. A breakdown is given in the table.

Breakdown of 1993–94 non-identifiable expenditure

	£ billion
Defence	22.9
Overseas Services	3.5
Current transfers abroad (excluding above)	1.8
Nationalised Industries' EFLs	4.4
Law, order and protective service	1.0
Other unidentifiable expenditure	11.2
of which:	
Agriculture market regulation and production support	1.1
Scientific and technological assistance	0.4
Functioning of the labour market	0.2
Arts	0.2
Higher and further education	0.3
Non-contributory pension benefits	0.7
Unemployment, incapacity and other benefits	0.7
Contributory family benefits	0.4
Parliamentary and Privy Council	0.3
Economic and financial administration	3.3
Central Management of Civil Service	1.3
	44.8

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for money gross domestic product in the financial year 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14682]

Mr. Aitken: Last November's "Financial Statement and Budget Report" forecast growth in money GDP of 6 ¼ per cent. in 1995–96.

Customs and Excise Computer Centre

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff employed in the private contractors' operation at the Customs and Excise computer centre at Southend have criminal records. [15319]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None of the staff working for private contractors is known to have a criminal record.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what security arrangements appertain to the private contractors' operation of the Customs and Excise computer centre at Southend; what inquiries are made to ascertain whether any staff employed have criminal records; and if he will make a statement. [15318]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The vetting procedures for private contract staff working at the Customs and Excise computer centre are identical to those for Customs and Excise staff working there. These procedures are in accordance with the statement made to the House by the Prime Minister on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *764-66*, and further amplified by the press notice which accompanied it.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration is being given to offering relief on VAT on fuel for advice centres. [14907]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which products other than fuel VAT is charged both on the product and the standing charges. [14981]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any product which is the subject of a two-part tariff is liable to VAT at the rate applying to the product. A payment as such does not have a VAT liability. A standing charge is the consideration for a past or future supply of the product.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of removing VAT on fuel in respect of standing charges. [14983]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. Standing charges are part payment for the one service—the supply of domestic gas and electricity—and as such are liable to VAT at the reduced rate of 8 per cent.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received against the imposition of VAT on both supply and standing charges. [14982]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received a number of such representations from both Members and direct from the public.

Lloyd's Underwriters

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Inland Revenue's estimate of tax repaid to Lloyd's underwriters during the fiscal year 1994–95. [14431]

Sir George Young: A provisional estimate, based on data to the first week in March, is that £347 million of income tax and capital gains tax will be repaid to Lloyd's underwriters by the underwriters unit of Inland Revenue in the financial year 1994–95. This cover refunds of tax paid over a range of earlier years, and includes any repayment supplement attracted by the tax refunded.

Fraud

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the full annual report summarising frauds committed against Government Departments. [15056]

Sir George Young: The report is a restricted document and it would not be appropriate to place it in the Library as this could prejudice current fraud investigations. However, the report is made available to the National Audit Office.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many participants in profit-related pay schemes were taxed at marginal rates of *(a)* 20 per cent., *(b)* 25 per cent. and *(c)* 40 per cent. in each year since 1988–89;

(2) what information he has on the distribution of salaries among participants in profit-related pay schemes in each year since 1988–89;

(3) what information he has on the distribution of payments among the participants in profit-related pay schemes in each year since 1988–89; how many of the participants failed to obtain a payment under the scheme; how many of the participants received a maximum payment under the scheme; and how many of the participants obtained a payment yielding the maximum tax relief under the scheme.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has of the effect of profit-related pay schemes on *(a)* the companies concerned and *(b)* the economy.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Studies on profit-sharing schemes generally suggest that they are associated with increased employee involvement and increases in productivity.

EU Finances

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *459–62*, regarding sums paid and received by each member state of the EU, if he will publish a table to indicate the net sums received, or paid, by each state in each year since 1984. [14576]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* This information can readily be derived from the tables in my earlier reply. However, as the Court of Auditors' report does not attribute all budget expenditure to individual member states, the difference between payments made to member states and actual own resources paid by member states should not be regarded as indicating definitive net contributions for each member state.

Bank of England

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking under article 109(i) of the Maastricht treaty to bring forward proposals to make the Bank of England independent; and if he will make a statement. [14525]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* None.

Private Finance Initiative

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 February to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), *Official Report*, column *9*, if he will give details of the 29 projects relating to the private finance initiative. [15414]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The 29 projects were as follows:

PROJECT TITLE, BY DEPARTMENT

Environment

1. Docklands light railway Lewisham extension
2. Royal docks energy company initiative
3. Royal docks exhibition centre and car park, London

Health

4. Bishop Auckland hospital
5. Carlisle district general hospital/Cumberland infirmary
6. Durham district general hospital
7. Royal Brompton hospital
8. St. James's University NHS trust: "medi-park" development
9. Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust extension to district general hospital
10. Gloucestershire Royal NHS trust development

Home Office

11. Bridgend prison
12. Immigration and nationality department information technology
13. Merseyside prison
14. Police national telecommunications network

Scottish Office

15. Highland regional council: Fort William sewage plant
16. Highland regional council: Inverness main drainage
17. Royal infirmary of Edinburgh
18. Strathclyde regional council: Dalmuir sewage treatment works
19. Western general hospital molecular medicines centre

Social Security

20. Benefits Agency / Post Office Counters Ltd. integrated benefit automation system

21. National insurance recording system

22. Newcastle site redevelopment—of government property

Transport

23. Channel tunnel rail link

24. Croydon tramlink

25. Design build finance operate—DBFO—contracts for road operation and improvement

26. Midland Metro line one

27. Northern line: leasing of trains

28. Scottish enroute air traffic control centre

Welsh Office

29. University hospital of Wales Cardiff: multi-storey car park

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llywd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14241]

Mr. Horman: Details of running costs and administrative spending by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the Office of Public Service and Science for the years 1989–90 through to 1997–98 are contained in tables 7.5 and 7.6 of my Department's annual report, Cm 2820, copies of which are available at the Members' Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Staffordshire and Somerset training and enterprise councils and Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire chamber of commerce training and enterprise are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [15855]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that Staffordshire and Somerset training and enterprise councils and Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire chamber of commerce training and enterprise have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three-year licences. Their licences will be effective from April 1995.

Temporary Contracts

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees in the United Kingdom are currently employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* under three months, *(b)* under six months, *(c)* under one year and *(d)* over one year in duration. [15064]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested can be obtained from the labour force survey for spring 1994 and is shown in the following table:

Employees with a fixed term contract[1] by length of contract United Kingdom: Spring 1994

	Number
Less than 1 year	492,000
of which:	
less than 3 months	135,000
less than 6 months	270,000
More than 1 year	308,000
Total	800,000

[1] Excludes those temporary employees for whom the length of employment had not yet been fixed.

Jobcentres (Signing Times)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances *(a)* the Employment Service can vary a claimant's signing on time to enable that person to attend a training and education course, and *(b)* a claimant who has been participating in a part-time education or training course can continue in that course and have it included in a training for work action plan; and if he will make a statement. [15249]

Miss Widdecombe: The allocation of signing days and times is the responsibility of Employment Service office managers who are best placed to take account of local circumstances which affect clients' access to jobcentres. Local office managers are encouraged to vary signing times and/or days to facilitate clients undertaking a course of study or training, provided they are satisfied attendance does not prevent an individual from fulfilling the conditions for receipt of benefit.

With regard to the training for work programme, clients are assessed in order to establish the most appropriate mix of training and work experience to meet their needs and to formulate a TFW action plan. This may include continuation of a course they are already following.

Training (Appeals)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what formal and informal rights of appeal exist for a participant in a Government training scheme if he or she has a grievance or feels that he or she has not received the quality of service promised; and if he will make a statement. [15173]

Mr. Paice: Formal arrangements for individuals dissatisfied with their programme of training are written into the contract the Department has with training and enterprise councils which are responsible for the delivery of Government–funded training programmes. These arrangements require TECs to offer alternative training to those persons who have reasonable grounds for dissatisfaction with their training programme.

Training for Work

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are involved in delivering training for work through adult training credits; what plans he has to encourage further development of such credits; and if he will make a statement. [15177]

Mr. Paice: The following training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are understood to be using a form of adult training credit within their training for work provision:

South and East Cheshire TEC;
Hertfordshire TEC;
Bedfordshire TEC;
Bradford TEC;
Barnsley/Doncaster TEC;
North East Wales TEC;
Grampian Enterprise;
Orkney Enterprise.

Responsibility for development projects in Scotland and Wales rests with the appropriate Secretary of State. There are currently no plans for the Employment Department to support further development in this area as TECs have the freedom to deliver TFW through a credit mechanism if they wish.

Training (EU Nationals)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if European Community nationals are allowed to count any period of unemployment in which they were in receipt of benefit in another EC country towards the qualifying period of unemployment for eligibility for *(a)* training for work, *(b)* community action and *(c)* other Employment Service programmes; and if he will make a statement. [15180]

Miss Widdecombe: At present, people who qualify for training for work on the grounds of unemployment need to have been unemployed for six months in the United Kingdom to be eligible, regardless of nationality. Periods of unemployment in other European Union—European economic area countries count towards eligibility for community action and all other Employment Service programmes. We are currently in the process of reviewing all eligibility criteria for Employment Department programmes to ensure they are consistent, simple and clear.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances citizens from other European Community countries can participate in youth training, training for work or community action, or in other employment schemes financed by the Employment Department; once having entered a programme, if they are entitled to complete it; and if he will make a statement. [15181]

Mr. Paice: Citizens of other European Community countries can participate in training and other schemes financed by the Employment Department, provided they otherwise satisfy the eligibility conditions for the individual scheme concerned. Eligible people entering a particular scheme are entitled to complete it provided they continue to satisfy the conditions of the scheme concerned.

Part-time Education and Training

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances participation in a part-time education or training course count as one of the job-seeking steps necessary to satisfy the actively seeking work condition; and if participation in a part-time education or training course is regarded as a positive outcome from a restart interview. [15247]

Miss Widdecombe: The steps an individual is required to take in any week are those which are reasonable in his or her case and which offer him or her the best prospects of receiving offers of employment. Participation in a part-time education or training course cannot count as a step towards satisfying the actively seeking employment condition, because it does not lead directly to offers of employment. However, it is recognised that people undertaking part-time courses will not have as much time to seek work as other clients and this is taken into account in considering the steps taken by a client in any week.

Part-time education can enhance some clients' prospects of finding work in the longer term and so Employment Service advisers will give advice and guidance on part-time education opportunities available and the implications as far as benefits are concerned. However, clients who start part-time education following a restart interview are not counted towards our positive outcome targets unless they also leave the unemployment register.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances an unemployed person participating in a part-time education or training course will not be required to attend a compulsory restart or workwise course or jobplan workshop; and what arrangements are made to ensure that those who are required to attend the course or workshop do not have their part-time study disrupted. [15248]

Miss Widdecombe: It has been a long-standing principle of the social security system that unemployment benefits are not paid unconditionally but involve reciprocal obligations on the part of the claimant. These include fulfilling the requirements of both being available for and actively seeking work for the days on which benefit is claimed. This requirement applies to all unemployed people, including people who may be studying on a part-time basis.

Equally, the requirement to attend jobplan, 1–2–1/workwise—worklink in Scotland—or restart courses includes those who are undertaking part-time study. However, wherever possible arrangements will be made for attendance to fall at a time outside normal study hours or exam times.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances people can participate on a part-time basis in training for work and community action; to what participation allowance they would be entitled; and if he will make a statement. [15172]

Mr. Paice: Under the arrangements that will apply to training for work in 1995–96, non-employed trainees can participate part time as long as their planned training averages at least 15 hours in a seven day period. There are no minimum hours for employed status trainees. Non-employed trainees receive an allowance based on their benefit entitlement when they joined the programme, plus a supplement of £10 per week.

Community action is a part-time programme. Participation lasts for a minimum of 21 hours a week. People participating in this programme receive an allowance equivalent to their normal benefit rate plus £10 per week.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Short: to ask the Secretary of State for Employment what adjudication decisions will be taken by front-line Employment Service officers when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced; what training they will receive to enable them to discharge their new responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [15265]

Miss Widdecombe: The introduction of the new jobseeker's allowance to replace unemployment benefit and income support, and its joint delivery by the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency will mean a number of changes to adjudication work in both agencies. We are currently considering the impact of those changes, and looking at ways of improving the speed and effectiveness of adjudication. If locating some labour market adjudication decisions closer to the front line in jobcentres would speed up the process of decision making and give claimants better service, it is right that such ideas should be considered and piloted if appropriate.

A full programme of training for ES officers is being developed to equip them to deliver JSA effectively. This will include training on the entitlement conditions for JSA and the adjudication process.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the current 21-hour rule enabling unemployed people to participate in independent European social fund courses will be subject to reduction to 16 guided learning hours when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced; and if he will make a statement. [15258]

Miss Widdecombe: People undertaking part-time courses part-funded by the European social fund while claiming jobseeker's allowance will be subject to the rules of JSA. These will include an upper limit of 16 guided learning hours per week for people undertaking Further Education Funding Council-funded courses and a requirement to be available for and actively seeking employment.

Where ESF part-funds Government programmes, such as training for work, trainees will be subject to the rules of those programmes.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the current 21-hour rule enabling unemployed people to study while receiving benefit will be reduced to 16 guided learning hours when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced in Northern Ireland; what difference there will be in the treatment of unemployed people who take up places in either further or higher education courses; and if he will make a statement. [15159]

Miss Widdecombe: People claiming jobseeker's allowance will be able to undertake part-time courses provided that they remain available for, and actively seeking, employment. We have decided to update the rules to reflect changes in the way certain courses are organised. These changes will ensure that the rules can be applied fairly and consistently and allow the same number of unemployed people to study part time while receiving benefits. In the case of courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council in England, unemployed people will be able to study for up to 16 guided learning hours per week. We intend to introduce similar arrangements in Northern Ireland. The rules will be based on definitions used in further education in Northern Ireland, where the concept of guided learning hours is not used. There will be no change in higher education where a part-time definition still exists.

Child Care Costs

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what help he provides for parents and other people with caring responsibilities who want to take up places in training for work and other Employment Department programmes; and if he will make a statement. [15175]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are able to support parents entering training with the cost of child care. In particular, TECs are required to provide child care support for those in the youth training guarantee group. Support with child care most often takes the form of an allowance paid to a childminder, but it is for TECs to determine how the support is given. Career development loans, which help individuals pay for their own vocational training, can be used to pay for part-time and distance learning courses and child care costs.

Gateways to Learning Initiative

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are involved in the gateways to learning initiative; what achievements have been made under the programme; how many TECs and LECs will receive gateways funding in 1995–96; what are his future plans for the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [15179]

Mr. Paice: In 1994–95, 43 training and enterprise councils have had contracts from the Employment Department under the gateways to learning initiative. The majority of these TECs will continue to receive funding in 1995–96. By the time the initiative has ended, a total of 58 TECs will have participated. No local enterprise companies have been involved. The initiative has contributed to the development of quality assured adult careers guidance and information networks in England. Over 70,000 people will have been helped to produce personal action plans relating to their education, training and career opportunities. There are no plans to continue the initiative once current contracts have ended.

Open Learning Credits

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are involved in the open learning credits initiative; what achievements have been made under the programme; how participation in open learning credits affects an unemployed person's eligibility for other Employment Department programmes; how many TECs and LECs will receive open learning credit funding in 1995–96; what are his future plans for the initiative; and if he will make a statement. [15178]

Mr. Paice: The open learning credits pilots were run in 1993–94 to trial the use of open learning for unemployed people. There were 14 pilots involving 17 training and enterprise councils and two local enterprise companies. The pilots were fully evaluated and a copy of the evaluation report has been place in the Library. The findings showed that open learning has a number of potential benefits to offer. Information from the pilots will be disseminated to TECs and LECs to help them decide on what use they want to make of open learning as a training method within their training provision. There are no plans to fund open learning credits as a separate initiative, so the question of participants' eligibility for other Government programmes will not arise.

Skill Choice

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are involved in the skill choice initiative; what achievements have been made under the programme; how many TECs and LECs will receive skill choice funding in 1995–96; what are his future plans for the initiative and if he will make a statement. [15176]

Mr. Paice: Thirteen English training and enterprise councils and four local enterprise companies are involved in the two-year skill choice initiative.

Skill choice will complete its two-year programme on 31 March 1995, but existing TECs and LECs will receive funding in 1995–96 to cover residual commitments from 1994–95.

Since 1 April 1993, 170,000 individuals have been helped to obtain careers information, vocational guidance and assessment services which can lead to recognised vocational qualifications.

There are no plans to continue the initiative once current contracts have ended.

Gardening Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Government have to encourage training in gardening so that those who are unemployed can learn the skills to manage allotments and grow their own vegetables. [15263]

Mr. Paice: Training for work offers training to help unemployed people get back to work. If training in gardening skills is likely to help individuals find jobs, training and enterprise councils may support it. In 1995–96, we aim to help some 104,000 people into jobs through TFW.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14254]

Miss Widdecombe: Details of the Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in annexe A, table iv of the Department's annual report, Cm 2805, copies of which are available in the Library.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many senior inspectors and medical advisers retired from the Health and Safety Executive on 17 March; and for how many years in total they had worked for the executive. [15210]

Mr. Oppenheim: Fifty-eight senior inspectors and nine medical advisers retired from the Health and Safety Executive on 17 March 1995 under the voluntary early retirement scheme. In total, they had 1,180 years service with HSE.

VERS is part of a long-term restructuring exercise designed to ensure that HSE has the talent and experience it needs for challenges now and in the future. No inspectors have been made redundant. A campaign to recruit 60 front-line inspectors is under way.

There will be no diminution of enforcement activity.

Asbestos

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimate of the likely number of deaths due to asbestos which will occur in 10, 20 and 30 years' time; and what changes those estimates represent relative to those made 10 years ago. [14367]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The estimated number of males dying from the asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma in 10 years' time could range between 1,300 and 2,100; in 20 years' time between 1,300 and 3,000 and in 30 years' time between 1,000 and 3,200. Projected figures for females are not available.

Currently, there are estimated to be one or two deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer for each death from mesothelioma. The falling prevalence of smoking is likely to reduce this ratio in the future.

No comparative estimates were produced 10 years ago. This is the first time that projections have been estimated using the Health and Safety Executive's mesothelioma register.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce the caseload of the Belfast Child Support Agency centre as a consequence of that centre's performance against targets.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is the responsibility of the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 22 March 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security concerning the caseload of the Child Support Agency Centres at Belfast.

The caseload, performance and targets of all six Child Support Agency Centre (CSACs) are regularly reviewed by senior operations managers. There are currently no plans to adjust the caseload holdings of Belfast or any other CSAC.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the Child Support Agency's staff was recruited from *(a)* the civil service and *(b)* outside the civil service.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is the responsibility of the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 22 March 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the recruitment of staff by the Child Support Agency.

The precise information that you request is not collated by the Agency for statistical purposes. Full information on the background of staff who formed the Agency at its launch in April 1993 is not readily available, but I expect to be able to provide it within two weeks, and shall write to your further.

Information on recruitment is, however, available for the 12 month period ending 30 September 1994. During that period the Agency recruited a total of 1,847 people. Of these, 323 (17 per cent.) came from the within the Civil Service and 1,524 (83 per cent.) were recruited from outside the Civil Service.

Residential Care

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from nursing and residential home associations regarding proposed social security benefits rates. [14840]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have received a few representations recently from the representative bodies, including the Yorkshire branch of the Registered Nursing Homes Association and the Hereford and Worcester branch of the Residential Care Homes Association, about the income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes.

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has to protect those people on Government training schemes in respect of cuts in income support for mortgage interest payments; [14776]

(2) if he will take into account in his final plans for reduction in income support for mortgage interest the position of women who are unemployed due to pregnancy; [14782]

(3) what proposals he has to protect those people on Government training schemes in respect of cuts in income support for mortgage interest payments. [14882]

Mr. Roger Evans: We are considering the position of all groups during the consultation period and officials are discussing with the Association of British Insurers how best to ensure that the interaction between state and private provision works well.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has given to insurance firms in respect of mortgage protection in respect of unemployment due to pregnancy. [14778]

Mr. Roger Evans: None, but officials are talking to the Association of British Insurers to ensure that the interaction between state and private provisions work well.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assurances he has received from the Association of British Insurers in respect of the availability of mortgage protection policies following cuts in income support. [14777]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Association of British Insurers has said that very few people who are accepted for a mortgage will not also satisfy the conditions for insurance and that even where insurance may not currently be available it expects cover to develop quite quickly.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to examine the Social Security Advisory Committee report of 1993 in regard to the extent of coverage by insurance companies of the whole range of workers for mortgage interest. [14779]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have read the 1993 report by the Social Security Advisory Committee on the regulations introducing an upper limit on the amount of help with income support mortgage interest and responded to it. I also read the committee's 1994 report on state benefit and private provision, which accepted that there was scope for the expansion of private mortgage protection insurance, at the time of publication. The Government's proposals for change in relation to income support mortgage interest payments announced in the last Budget have also been referred to the committee, which is consulting widely on them. I will study in detail the report that it produces on these proposals.

Housing Benefit (Prisoners)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received regarding his plans for reductions in housing benefit for short-sentence prisoners; [14780]

(2) what safeguards he plans to impose to prevent released short-term prisoners from becoming homeless. [14781]

Mr. Roger Evans: This Department has consulted the Social Security Advisory Committee and the local authority associations about proposals for restricting the payment of housing benefit to convicted prisoners to 13 weeks. We have also received a number of representations from other organisations, including the Probation Services, the Scottish Council for Single Mothers, Shelter, citizens' advice bureaux, Bury Accommodation Forum and the North West Landlords Association and from some members of the public. The amendment regulations were laid before Parliament on 10 March and come into effect from 1 April 1995.

Housing benefit will be available to prisoners serving up to 13 weeks, after allowance for any remission, and to all ex-prisoners following their release from prison who have a liability to pay rent. Where a partner remains in the home, housing benefit will continue to be available during the period of absence without restriction.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of money spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14622]

Mr. Hague: Details of this Department's administrative spending for the years 1989-90 to 1997-98 are contained in table 1 of the Department's annual report, Cm 2813, copies of which are available in the Library.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many people are currently receiving invalidity benefit in each of the benefit districts in Wales; and what percentage these figures represent, by district, of the total population of working age. [14892]

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

People in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Benefits Agency districts covering Wales on the last working day of February 1995, and as a percentage of working population

District	*Number of invalidity benefit recipients*[1]	*Percentage of the working population*[2]
North Gwent and Brecon	17,291	—
North Wales Coast	13,766	—
South Glamorgan	16,336	7
Gwynedd	10,900	7
South Gwent and Islwyn	14,008	—
Mid Wales and Maelor	10,818	—
Ogwar Afan Nedd	22,939	—
Cynon, Merthyr and Rhymney Valley	24,171	18
Swansea	17,876	—
Taff Rhondda	18,235	—
West Wales	20,127	—

Notes:

[1] Figures obtained from a 100 per cent. clerical count of cases in the Benefits Agency offices. The figure will include some people who have claimed but are not actually receiving invalidity benefit because they are in receipt of a higher overlapping benefit.

[2] The working population has been taken to be 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women. Estimated mid-year in 1993 population figures supplied by the population estimates unit, Office of Population Censuses and Survey. Figures have been given only where the Benefits Agency district has the same boundaries as the Welsh county districts.

WALES

Water Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he has taken to ensure clean bathing beaches and pollution-free rivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1994, 76 per cent. of the Welsh bathing waters identified under the European bathing waters directive met its mandatory bacteriological standards. The most recent survey for inland waters is for 1991–93 and shows that 86.2 per cent. of river and canal lengths in the National Rivers Authority's Welsh region are of good quality, with 11 per cent. as fair quality, 2.5 per cent. poor quality and 0.3 per cent. bad quality.

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water's investment programme for 1995–2000 involving expenditure of nearly £1 billion includes provision for further significant improvements to inland and coastal discharges. The National Rivers authority is also acting to bring about improvements to many industrial and agricultural pollution sources.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment has been made of the current level of industrial pollution in Welsh rivers and waterways;

(2) if he will list the 10 most polluted rivers in Wales in rank order, indicating the main pollutants contaminating the water and riverbank.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The National Rivers Authority monitors the quality of watercourses in Wales and sources of pollution. It has published "The Quality of Rivers, Canals and Estuaries in England and Wales—Report of the 1990 Survey" and "The Quality of Rivers and Canals in England and Wales (1990–92)" copies of which are in the Library of the House. Last December, the authority published interim results for 1991–93 which showed that, in its Welsh Region, 86. 2 per cent. of river and canal lengths were classed as good quality, 11 per cent. were fair quality, 2.5 per cent were poor quality and 0.3 per cent. were bad quality.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the reason for the planned reduction in expenditure between the 1994–95 allocation of £6.9 million on environmentally sensitive areas and the 1995–96 plans to spend £5.5 million on environmentally sensitive areas, as set out at figure 2.01 on page 8 of Cm 2815.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Planned domestic expenditure on environmentally sensitive areas is £5.5 million which together with planned EC expenditure of £1.4 million, gives a total of £6.9 million, the same as planned for 1994–95. the EC expenditure on this scheme is included under "Other" in the section headed "Commodity Support Measures" in figure 2.01—footnote 3 to the table refers.

Toxic Waste Imports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what factors underlay the omission from the section on waste in his Environmental Agenda for Wales of any discussion or guidance on his policy on the import of toxic waste into Wales for treatment or incineration.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Environmental Agenda for Wales sets out my right hon. Friend's main objectives and priorities for the Welsh environment. It promotes practical greenery, such as energy efficiency and recycling at home and in the workplace, using reclaimed land for development, and other measures aimed at protecting the environment without stifling essential economic development. The import of waste is an international issue, which is fully covered in other Government statements, for example, a draft UK plan on imports and exports of waste was issued for consultation on 3 February.

Housing Renovation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made in regard to the benefit that would accrue to poorer communities in Wales from an increase in the upper grant limit available to households for house renovation. [14581]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh house condition survey 1993 estimated that 96 per cent. of unfit homes could be made fit at a cost of £15,000 or less. The upper grant limit is £24,000 and the present arrangements ensure that grants are targeted to poorer households, Local authorities and also make discretionary awards.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from local authorities in Wales regarding the implications for house renovation of the present cap on the total resources available for improving the housing stock. [14580]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Generally there has been a welcome for the £1 billion which the Government have allocated for renovation since the start of the present grant system, while some councils have indicated that they have substantial inquiries about grants.

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the posts to which he has made appointments in Wales in the last three years that have been *(a)* advertised and *(b)* not advertised. [14404]

Mr. Redwood: All the appointments I make are listed in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", which is updated quarterly and is available in the Library of the House. Of these, in the last three years, the following posts have been advertised in the national press.

Post	
Chair:	Welsh Development Agency
Independent Complaints Administrator:	Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Chairman and members:	Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust
	Glan Y Mor NHS Trust
	University Dental Hospital NHS Trust
	University Hospital of Wales Healthcare
	NHS Trust
	West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust
Chairman:	Gwent Health Authority
	Mid and West Wales Health Authority
	North Wales Health Authority
	South Glamorgan Health Authority
	West Glamorgan Health Authority

Also, in July 1993, the Welsh Office ran a general newspaper advertising campaign inviting people to join the Department's register of candidates for public appointment, from which the majority of appointees are selected.

Mr. Alan Williams: To aks the Secretary of State for Wales how many women are members of the boards of Welsh quangos; and what percentage this is of all members. [14731]

Mr. Redwood: The most recent information about appointments that I make is set out in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales, 1 March 1995", which is available in the Library of the House; 230 or 26.9 per cent. of these appointments were held by women. Of 189 appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies, 41 or 21.7 per cent. were held by women.

Local Authority House Building

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been built in Wales in each year since 1979. [14873]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of local authority dwellings completed from 1979 up to 1993 has been published in table 2.3 of Welsh Housing Statistics No. 14 1994, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

In 1994, the number of new dwellings completed by local authorities in Wales was 227.

Local Authority Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *125*, if he will name the local authorities which own the zoos listed. [15170]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Swansea city council owns Plantasia zoo.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his forecast for Welsh GDP in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [14243]

Mr. Redwood: There are no official forecasts of Welsh GDP. The Budget forecasts a 3.25 per cent. growth in the United Kingdom GDP, and private sector forecasts expect Wales to outperform the UK.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the Welsh GDP in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [14244]

Mr. Redwood: The Central Statistical Office estimates that Welsh GDP at factor cost and current prices was £22,761 million in 1993. Estimates for 1994 are not yet available.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the Welsh percentage of the United Kingdom's forecast money GDP in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [14248]

Mr. Redwood: There are no official forecasts of Welsh GDP.

Fish-eating Birds

Mr. Ron Davies: To the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice he has received from the Countryside Commission for Wales and the National Rivers Authority about the impact of fish stocks in Wales of piscivorous birds; [14553]

(2) how many licences to take piscivorous birds he has issued in each of the last two years; how many birds, by species, were taken under each of those licences; what criteria he used in determining whether to grant such licences; what conditions he attached to such licences; and what arrangements he made to monitor them. [14554]

Mr. Redwood: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Welsh Language

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to sign letters prepared by his Department in Welsh to constituents and other organisations in Wales which write to him in Welsh. [14889]

Mr. Redwood: All correspondents who write to me in Welsh receive a reply in Welsh as well as English. My policy is only to sign letters in a language that I understand.

Out-patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients failed to attend out-patient appointments in Wales in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [15113]

Mr. Redwood: Some hospitals are unable to provide information on patients failing to attend out-patient appointments. The available data are in the following table.

Health Authority area unit trust

	Patients failing to attend out-patient appointments	
	1992–93	*1993–94*
Clwyd		
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	6,249	7,175
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	11,158	16,147
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	19,565	18,619
East Dyfed		
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	10,522	11,169
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	6,434	8,953
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	11,192	13,961
Mental Health Unit	1,784	1,333
Gwent		
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	34,951	50,469
North Gwent Unit	9,203	10,333
Gwent Community NHS Trust	5,435	7,304
Gwynedd		
Acute Unit	22,481	28,705
Community Unit	4,139	6,097
Mid Glamorgan		
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	15,983	20,180
Hensol Unit	—	1
Merthyr Cynon Unit	31,547	41,612
Rhondda Unit	9,277	10,479
Rhymney Valley Unit	4,554	9,799
Taff Ely Unit	13,151	14,475
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	8,266	10,744
Powys Health Care NHS Trust	4,739	5,884
South Glamorgan		
Cardiff Royal Infirmary Unit	n/a	4,695
Llandough Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	9,310
University Hospital of Wales Unit	n/a	n/a
Whitchurch Hospital Unit	n/a	n/a
Dental Unit	n/a	n/a
West Glamorgan		
District Unit	2,121	8,382
East Unit	17,534	17,330
North Unit	4,907	1,341
Swansea NHS Trust	22,978	23,563

Note:

NHS trusts are listed under the name they had in 1993–94 although some did not have trust status in 1992–93.

Usk Barrage Inquiry

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received the Inspector's report on the Usk barrage inquiry; and when he expects to announce his decision. [15274]

Mr. Redwood: The inspector's report was received by my Department on 1 March 1995 and is being considered by officials. The decision will be announced as soon as practicable.

Health Promotion Authority for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a full list of the members of the board of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales; what is the term of service of each membership; and what is the standard notification given to each board member whose term is coming to a close concerning his re-appointment or termination as a member. [15484]

Mr. Redwood: The board of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales consists of a chairman and seven non-executive members appointed by the Secretary of State, and two executive members, namely the chief officer and the financial officer of the authority.

Names and terms of membership are as follows:

	Appointed until
Chairman	
Mr. J. I. Davies	31 March 1996
Non-executive members	
Mr. R. Cutherbertson	31 March 1995
Mr. H. D. Griffiths	31 March 1995
Dr. B. N. C. Littlepage	31 March 1995
Mr. J. Thomas	31 March 1995
Mrs. C. E. Lewis	31 March 1997
Mr. R. C. May-Hill	31 March 1997
Miss A. Thomas	31 March 1997
Executive members	
Chief officer—Vacancy	Ex officio
Financial officer—Mr. M. D. Golding	Ex officio

It is my intention that, wherever possible, members should know in good time whether they will be offered re-appointment.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will name each of the members of the board of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales since its inception; and how many terms each board member, past and present has served. [15490]

Mr. Redwood: The names of each member who has served on the board of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales, their position and the number of terms served are as follows:

	Position	*Terms Served*
Mrs. M. Bond	Non-executive member	1
Professor J. C. Catford	Executive member	1
Miss C. Charlesworth	Non-executive member	1
Mr. A. Crabbe	Non-executive member	2
Mr. R. Cuthbertson	Non-executive member	1
Mr. G. Davies	Non-executive member	1
Mr. J. I. Davies	Chairman	1
Dr. J. Evans	Non-executive member	1
Dr. D. Frances	Non-executive member	2
Mr. M. Golding	Executive member	1
Mr. H. Griffiths	Non-executive member	1
Mr. J. D. Griffiths	Non-executive member	1
Professor R. Hodgson	Non-executive member	1
Mrs. C. James	Non-executive member	1
Councillor T. Jones	Non-executive member	1
Dr. M. Keen	Non-executive member	1
Mrs. C. E. Lewis	Non-executive member	2
Mr. T. Lewis	Non-executive member	1

	Position	Terms Served
Dr. B. Littlepage	Non-executive member	3
Mr. R. C. May-Hill	Non-executive member	2
Miss E. Muir	Non-executive member	1
Mr. S. Roberts	Non-executive member	1
Miss E. Rossiter	Non-executive member	1
Miss S. Sandham	Non-executive member	1
Dr. S. A. Smail	Chairman	2
Miss V. Sugar	Non-executive member	1
Miss A. Thomas	Non-executive member	2
Mr. J. Thomas	Non-executive member	2
Mrs. I. Train	Non-executive member	2

Public Bodies (Expenditure)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of his guidance to non-departmental public bodies on making reductions in their expenditure on consultants fees. [15489]

Mr. Redwood: I have issued no general guidance to non-departmental public bodies.

My strategic guidance letters to the Welsh Development Agency and to the Development Board for Rural Wales set targets for reductions in spending on consultants and my letter to the Cardiff Bay development corporation asked it to reduce its reliance on consultants. Copies of those letters are in the Library of the House.

All public bodies must obtain value for money from consultants and ensure that they are the most cost-effective means of achieving results.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the consultancy fees paid to Mr. Meirion Thomas of the Cardiff business school and Mr. Stewart Rubin of KLR Consulting and if he will make a statement. [15488]

Mr. Redwood: None.

Environmental Agenda for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he undertook with national government officers and local authorities before his launch of his Environmental Agenda for Wales. [15452]

Mr. Redwood: I circulated the text of my Environmental Agenda for Wales to ministerial colleagues prior to its publication; and subsequently copies were also sent to the Welsh local authority associations and to all the county and district councils in Wales.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice he has sought about the effects which financial and staff reductions will have on the Countryside Council for Wales' ability to implement recovery programmes or action plans for endangered specifies in Wales; and what was the result of such advice; [15453]

(2) if he will list the representations he has received from the board of the Countryside Council for Wales expressing concern at the level of funding available for the monitoring of endangered species and statutory designated sites in Wales in 1995–96. [15454]

Mr. Redwood: In meetings held on 10 January 1995 with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales and on 24 January 1995 with the full council, discussions took place on a variety of issues, such as how the Countryside Council for Wales can continue effectively to carry out its range of duties, including those in respect of the EC habitats and special directive, other designated sites and endangered species in Wales, in the light of its settlement for 1995–96. These discussions and all other advice received have formed the basis of the action plan that I intend to publish shortly, setting out the issues on which I want the council to concentrate in the next two years.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list those posts within the Countryside Council for Wales which will become vacant following the budgetary cuts for 1995–96; and which will be re-filled and which made redundant. [15455]

Mr. Redwood: Decisions on staffing are the responsibility of the Countryside Council for Wales. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested. I will arrange for copies of that letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14240]

Mr. Dorrell: Details of my Department's running costs spending for the years 1989–90 to 1996–97 are contained in table 9.4 of my Department's annual report 1995, Cm 2811, copies of which are available in the Members' Library.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued in 1994 by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publications and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1993.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The information that the hon. Member requires is listed in the table. The total equivalent cost in 1993 is given where appropriate.

Title	*Cost 1993* £	*Cost 1994* £
Department of National Heritage		
DNH Annual Report	not available	15,887.34
Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future	—	8,037.90

Title	*Cost 1993* £	*Cost 1994* £
Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future (reprint)	—	2,310.00
Proposed new Library and Information Commission—A Consultation Paper	—	80.48
Report by the Secretary of State for National Heritage on Library and Information Matters during 1993	—	1,514.54
Public Lending Right Annual Report 1993–94	1,165.05	1,200.77
Export Licensing Unit Code of Practice	—	1,360.38
The Future of the BBC, Serving the Nation Competing world-wide (White Paper)	—	5,662.86
BBC White Paper summary sheet	—	223.25
The National Lottery leaflet	—	2,087.32
The Ecclesiastical Exemption—What it is and How it Works	—	1,028.00
The Ecclesiastical Exemption—What it is and How it Works (reprint)	—	926.00
Library Information Series No. 21: School Library Services and Financial Delegation to Schools	—	807.33
'Newsbrief' newsletters	—	561.08
Annual Report of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	6,122.18	6,352.15
A Guide to the Department and its Sponsored Bodies (two issues in 1993 and one in 1994)	3,357.18	2,149.33
What Listing Means	—	2,779.08
What Listing Means (reprint)	—	2,332.33
Review of Grading in Museums	—	68.15
Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Prisons in Scotland	—	1,884.65
How to Appeal against Listing	—	103.40
Treasure Trove Annual Report	104.58	64.63
Response to the Select Committee on the British Library	—	270.00
Royal Parks Agency		
Royal Parks Agency Annual Report 1994	—	34,205.05
Royal Parks of London by Richard Church[1]	4,000.00	nil
Royal Parks guide books[1]	32,000.00	nil
Agency Framework Document	[2]1,160.00	1,115.00
Agency Corporate Plan	[2]3,780.00	300.00
Royal Parks Agency Visitor's Charter	—	560.00
Entertainments Programme	5,670.00	9,000.00
Historic Royal Palaces Agency (HRPA)		
HM Tower of London Palace Guide[3]	112,800.00	122,500.00
HM Tower of London Jewel House Guide[3]	—	138,000.00
Hampton Court Palace Guide[3]	71,840.00	66,151.00
Hampton Court Palace Functions Brochure	—	7,616.00
Hampton Court Palace leaflets	10,448.00	9,969.00
Kensington Palace Guide	—	11,500.00
Banqueting House Guide	—	7,380.00
Banqueting House Brochure Pack	—	11,000.00
Banqueting House leaflet	—	1,150.00
Kew Palace Guide	—	5,215.00
HRPA Annual Report and Accounts	25,275.00	22,852.00
HRPA Marketing leaflets	not available	58,865.00
Travel Trade Fanfare Magazine	5,992.50	4,143.00

[1] The cost of these publications is recovered through sales revenue.

[2] These costs are attributable to DNH, since they were incurred before 1 April 1993 when the Agency came into existence.

[3] The cost of these items is recovered through sales revenue.

In respect of those White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published by HMSO, costs are borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these from sales revenue.

SCOTLAND

Water Services

17. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of COSLA to discuss water services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [13462]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend and I will be meeting representatives of COSLA on 12 June as part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters. It is too early to say if water services will be discussed at that meeting.

Joint Programmes

18. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the joint programmes between the Scottish and Northern Ireland Offices. [13643]

Mr. Lang: There are no joint programmes as such between the Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office, but there are various cases of close working relationships between the two Departments.

Independent Review Commission

19. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for introducing an independent review commission to examine alleged miscarriages of justice along the lines of that being introduced for England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [13644]

Mr. Lang: I have no plans at present to introduce an independent review commission to examine alleged miscarriage of justice along the lines of that being introduced for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I have appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Stewart Sutherland, principal of Edinburgh university, to consider options for change to the procedure in Scotland. I shall decide what action to take on these matters once I have the committee's report.

Road Bridge, Kelso

20. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further discussions he has had with Borders regional council on the proposal to build a new road bridge at Kelso. [13645]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no recent discussions with Borders regional council about the proposed new bridge at Kelso. The bridge would form part of a local road and is thus a matter for the regional council as local roads authority to consider.

Scottish Homes

21. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the contract of Scottish Homes chairman expires. [13646]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current appointment of the chairman of Scottish Homes expires on 31 March 1996.

Scottish Nuclear

22. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will determine the section 36 planning consent for Scottish Nuclear dry fuel stores; and if he will make a statement. [13647]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend expects to reach a decision shortly about section 36 planning consent for Scottish Nuclear dry fuel stores.

Voluntary Sector (Funding)

23. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the voluntary sector to discuss their on-going funding needs. [13648]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to meet with representatives of the voluntary sector. Officials from the Scottish office meet regularly with representatives of the voluntary sector in the Scottish Office voluntary sector forum. The next formal meeting of the forum will take place on Wednesday 24 May.

Woodlands Hospital, Aberdeen

24. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had on the future of Woodlands hospital, Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement. [13649]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about Grampian health board's proposals for the Woodlands hospital, Aberdeen.

My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State for Health has recently had separate meetings with relatives of some of the Woodlands residents and with Grampian Members of Parliament to discuss the future of the hospital and the health board's plans.

In reaching a decision we shall take very careful account of all the views which have been put forward.

Strathclyde Regional Council

25. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Strathclyde regional council will be allowed to transfer capital expenditure into revenue expenditure as a means of reaching his financial targets. [13650]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend announced his provisional capping principles on 29 November. He will assess all Scottish local authorities' budgets against these principles once they have been received and in the light of any representations made to him.

Youth Employment

26. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the prospects for youth employment in Scotland. [13651]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government's economic policies are designed to create a climate in which employers can both maintain existing jobs and create new ones. The skillseekers programme in Scotland, backed up by our youth training guarantee, gives young people the opportunity to receive high quality training, often while in employment, in the occupational area of their choice, with the prospect of a qualification and thus improved employment prospects.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority

27. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in his consultation on the boundary of the new Strathclyde passenger transport authority; and how many of those favoured the existing boundary of Strathclyde region. [13652]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received 147 representations on his consultative exercise on the boundary and constitution of the proposed Strathclyde passenger transport authority. We will announce the outcome of the consultation after detailed and thorough consideration of the responses received.

Council of Ministers

28. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last led the United Kingdom delegation to the European Union Council of Ministers; and what matters were discussed. [13653]

Mr. Kynoch: The last occasion when a Scottish Minister led for the United Kingdom at the European Council of Ministers was on 3 June 1994. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), then Minister for Industry in Scotland, led the UK delegation to the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for regional policy and spatial planning, when matters relating to the European structural funds were discussed.

Mink

29. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of mink on Scottish wildlife. [13654]

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has received advice from Scottish Natural Heritage on the impact of mink on Scottish wildlife. The species is an active predator and established itself in the wild after escaping from mink farms as long ago as 1929. Research results indicate that the mink has generally not had the serious effect on our wildlife that was first expected. However, there is concern about its possible effect on some colonies of ground-nesting sea birds.

Public Appointments

30. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for how many public appointments he is now responsible for in Scotland; and how many people are on his list of possible candidates for such appointments. [13655]

Mr. Lang: There were 3,656 appointments nominally within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland at 1 September 1994, including 1,895 members of children's panels, who are recruited through the local authorities. There are currently about 4,000 names on the Scottish Office public appointments list.

Scottish Sleeper Services

31. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further discussions he has had in respect of the sleeper services to Fort William and Carlisle and the Scottish sleeper services; and if he will make a statement. [13656]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for railways throughout Great Britain rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. My right hon. Friend and I have been keeping in touch with developments.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what plans he has to seek a judicial review of the decision taken by the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising in respect of the Fort William and Carlisle to London sleeper services and the Scotland to London motorail services; and if he will make a statement. [15130]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Junior Doctors

32. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest estimates of additional numbers of junior doctors required to allow the agreed reductions in junior doctors' hours in Scottish hospitals. [13657]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such estimates have been made. NHS employers are expected to meet the targets for junior doctors' hours by measures other than recruiting additional junior doctors.

Housing Development, Niddrie

33. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations led him to reject the recommendation of a Scottish Office inquiry into the housing development in the village of Niddrie; and if he will make a statement. [13658]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend does not consider that a convincing case has yet been made to justify the loss of green belt land for housing purposes in the village of Niddrie.

Inward Investment

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the trend on inward investment into *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the European Community. [13659]

Mr. Kynoch: The year 1994–95 is well on course to being another record year for inward investment in Scotland.

Scotland is currently attracting inward investment projects at the rate of almost two per week.

In 1993–94, Locate in Scotland and the Scottish Office Industry Department helped attract to Scotland 95 inward investment projects involving planned investment of £587 million and the expected creation or safeguarding of over 11,000 jobs. All these figures represent a significant increase over the corresponding figures for 1992–93.

At no time since LIS was set up in 1981 has Scotland secured a higher number of inward investment projects.

Scottish Arts Council

35. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council to discuss its role in the development of the audio-visual industry in Scotland. [13660]

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council from time to time but has no plans to discuss the development of the audio-visual industry. The Scottish Office-funded body with the greater interest in the development of the audio-visual industry is the Scottish Film Council. Its future role is currently the subject of a review.

Scottish Enterprise Tayside

36. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the establishment of Scottish Enterprise Tayside and tourism-related projects. [13661]

Mr. Kynoch: The only representations that my right hon. Friend has received on these matters in recent months have been those submitted by the hon. Gentleman.

Local Government

37. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what change he expects in the overall numbers of staff employed by local authorities in Scotland following the introduction of single-tier local government. [13662]

Mr. Kynoch: The numbers of staff employed will depend on decisions yet to be made by the new authorities, but overall it is estimated that local government reorganisation could lead to a reduction of between 200 and 1,800 in the present work force of around 300,000. In addition, approximately 7,000 staff will transfer from local authorities to the new water and sewerage authorities and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. Further transfers may arise as a result of proposals still under consideration for the maintenance of trunk roads.

Scottish Homes

38. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what allocation of funds he has made to Scottish Homes for 1995–96; and what proposals he has to review the way in which that sum is allocated between regions in Scotland. [13663]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have approved a development funding programme for Scottish Homes which maintains investment in 1995–96 at the 1994–95 level of over £320 million. The allocation of that programme to Scottish Homes's districts is a matter for Scottish Homes.

European Union Expenditure

39. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the value of EU expenditure in Scotland

expressed as a proportion of total tax revenue raised in Scotland; and what is the comparative figure for the rest of Great Britain. [13664]

Mr. Kynoch: European Community expenditure cannot be geographically identified on a comprehensive basis. However, in 1992–93, EC expenditure in Scotland in respect of my right hon. Friend's programmes, together with agricultural intervention expenditure and that financed by receipts from the European social fund, is estimated to have been of the order of £370 million. In that year, revenues raised in Scotland from the four main sources—income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT and local government revenues—amounted to some £12.8 billion. For the UK as a whole, total public sector receipts from EC institutions in 1992–93 were some £2.8 billion and the revenues from the four main sources were some £153.7 billion.

Campbeltown to Ballycastle Ferry

Mr Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about proposals for the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry. [13640]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that Argyll and the Islands Enterprise and Moyle district council, the sponsors of the project, are at an advanced stage in consideration of the harbour works that would be required to allow this service to operate and have initiated discussions with interested shipping operators.

Bishopbriggs (Private Prison)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Bishopbriggs is being considered as a site for a new private prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The site of the existing resettlement unit at Bishopbriggs is one of a number of sites currently being considered as a possible location for a new privately financed prison. No final decisions about the site or about the specification of a new prison have yet been made. Such decisions would require ministerial approval and would be the subject of an application for outline planning permission.

Repair and Improvement Grants

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homes in each district and islands area of Scotland are ineligible for grant aid towards the cost of repairs and improvements because of the application of the rateable value threshold for that area; and what proportion of the private housing stock that represents for each area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Rateable value limits were introduced in 1974 with the intention of excluding from grant assistance some 20 per cent. of homes in each housing authority district. The actual numbers excluded may have varied over time. The limits are not an absolute bar on entitlement to grant. They are waived where local authorities take action on houses in the worst condition or where lead plumbing is to be replaced or levels of radon gas reduced. Neither are they applied for works to adapt a house for a disabled person.

Empty Commercial Property

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will reconsider the decision to implement the proposals to levy 50 per cent. rates on empty commercial property.

Mr. Lang: No. With effect from 1 April 1995, a national non-domestic rate will apply in Scotland at the same level as the unified business rate in England. The valuation methods used at the 1995 revaluation will also now be harmonised across the border and certain express harmonisation measures, for example the rating of plant and machinery, will also take effect on 1 April 1995. The new provisions on the rating of unoccupied property in Scotland are just one of those measures and bring the position into line with that which has existed in England and Wales since 1990.

The Government believe that the net effect of the harmonisation of the Scottish rating system with that in England and Wales will be of great benefit to Scottish business.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect of the imposition of 50 per cent. rates on empty commercial property on the competitiveness of the firms affected.

Mr. Lang: We have no evidence that the competitiveness of companies will be affected by this measure. Parallel provisions already exist in England and Wales and this is part of the overall process of harmonisation to put Scottish businesses in a similar situation to their competitors south of the border.

Prescriptions

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prescriptions were issued in the Grampian health board area for each of the last five years; and how many were exempt from payment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table shows the total number of prescriptions presented for dispensing and the number for which no charge was made. The number of prescriptions issued to patients but not presented for dispensing is unknown.

The number of prescriptions for which no charge was made at the point of dispensing includes items dispensed on presentation of pre-payment certificates.

Financial year	*Total number of prescriptions dispensed*	*Number of prescriptions for which no charge made at point of dispensing*
1989–90	3,813,054	3,020,258
1990–91	3,898,337	3,111,925
1991–92	4,007,418	3,211,843
1992–93	4,137,204	3,328,756
1993–94	4,288,124	3,497,826

Government Expenditure and Revenue

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish an updated version of the 1992 document, "Government Expenditure and Revenues in Scotland."

Mr. Lang: I shall keep this possibility under review.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees of local authority direct labour organisations will be affected by his decision to exclude DLOs from tendering for the management and maintenance contracts for the primary route network due to go to tender in September of this year: and how many of them will lose their jobs as a result of this exclusion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities are not excluded from tendering for contracts for the future management and maintenance of any part of the trunk road network and, therefore, there are no implications for staff employed by local authority DLOs arising from any exclusion.

Lomond Health Trust

Mr. John McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the name of the chairman of the Lomond Health trust and detail his or her qualifications for the post. [15129]

Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton: A press release announcing Mr. Stephen P. Newall from Rhu, Dunbartonshire as chairman of the Lomond Healthcare NHS trust was issued on 7 March 1995. He was appointed to the post because of his distinguished track record of leadership in the public and private sectors.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the current 21-hour rule enabling unemployed people to study while receiving benefit will be reduced to 16 guided learning hours when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced in Scotland; what difference there will be in the treatment of unemployed people who take up places in either further or higher education courses, and if he will make a statement. [15160]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: People claiming jobseeker's Allowance will be able to take part-time courses provided they remain available for and are actively seeking employment. In the case of further education courses, it has been decided that for those funded by the Further Education Funding Council for England, part-time courses will be defined as courses of up to 16 guided learning hours a week. Because the concept of guided learning hours does not apply to Scottish, further education consideration is being given to what similar arrangements will apply in Scotland. They will be designed to ensure that broadly the same number of people benefit from this concession as at present.

For higher education courses, it is expected that the definition of a part-time course will remain essentially unchanged.

Farming Community (Suicides)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many suicides there have been in the Scottish farming community in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [14214]

Sir Hector Monro: The General Register Office, Scotland, compiles figures for suicide where the occupation of the deceased was classified as farmer, farmer's wife or farm worker. This information for the most recent five years available is as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Number	19	16	18	19	17

The Scottish Office is working with other agencies to raise the general awareness of conditions associated with suicidal behaviour.

Forestry

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares the Forestry Commission has planted in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [15030]

Sir Hector Monro: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Area planted (hectares)*
1985	11,021
1986	11,630
1987	13,380
1988	13,129
1989	12,580
1990	11,946
1991	11,137
1992	11,259
1993	10,830
1994	9,289

Out-patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients failed to attend out-patient appointments in Scotland on each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [15111]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of new out-patient appointments where the patient failed to attend is shown in the table. Corresponding information is not available centrally for return out-patients.

New out-patient referrals—patients who did not attend

Date	*Number*
1992	120,054
1993	132,498
1994	134,207

NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply from the chief executive of the West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant; [15195]

(2) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a substantive reply from the chief executive of the East and Midlothian NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant; [15198]

(3) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Fife Healthcare NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant; [15199]

(4) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Edinburgh

Sick Children's NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant; [15200]

(5) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant; [15201]

(6) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply from the chief executive of the Stobhill General Hospitals NHS trust to his letter of 9 February concerning the expenditure of the trust's start-up grant. [15202]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that the chief executives of the West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS trust, the Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS trust and the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust have not responded to the hon. Member. The chief executive of the East and Midlothian NHS trust, the Fife Healthcare NHS trust and Stobhill NHS trust have indicated that they will reply before the end of March.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the chair, chief executive and correspondence addresses of each of Scotland's NHS trusts; [15206]

(2) if he will list the executive and non-executive directors of each of Scotland's NHS trusts. [15207]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information requested in respect of the 39 NHS trusts is rather lengthy, I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines have been issued to NHS trusts about replying to correspondence from hon. Members with particular reference to the time scale for response. [15208]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No specific guidelines have been issued to NHS trusts concerning replies to correspondence from hon. Members.

Quangos

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research his Department has carried out into the employment background of members of quangos operating in Scotland. [15196]

Mr. Lang: None. I am aware of the background of persons whom I am appointing to non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies at the time when I make the appointments.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedures are adopted by his Department in recruiting individuals to the membership of quangos. [15197]

Mr. Lang: The relevant procedures are set out in the Cabinet Office publication "Guide on Public Appointment Procedures", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The recent "Review of Guidance on Public Appointments," published on 6 February and also available in the Library, has recommended a number of changes to make these procedures more effective. The Government have accepted these recommendations and have instructed Departments to implement them, subject to any other changes which may be necessary in the light of the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many quangos operate within Scotland; and what is the total annual expenditure of these bodies in each year since 1978–79. [15203]

Mr. Lang: A full list of non-departmental public bodies, nationalised industries and NHS bodies sponsored by my Department at 1 April 1994 is published in the Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 1994", which is available in the Library of the House. A full list of non-departmental public bodies in existence for each year since 1979 is available in the following publications: "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies"—Pliatzky report, Cm 7797, January 1980; "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Facts and Figures 1980"; "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Facts and Figures 1981"; and "Public Bodies", published annually since 1982. This publication shows the gross expenditure of each body and the amount of that expenditure funded by central government. Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the quangos currently in operation in Scotland. [15204]

Mr. Lang: A list of the non-departmental public bodies, nationalised industries and NHS bodies sponsored by my Department at 1 April 1994 is shown in the Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the quangos which have been established in Scotland in each financial year since 1978–79. [15205]

Mr. Lang: Lists have been prepared centrally for each year from 1986 to 1993 of non-departmental public bodies which have been created and abolished. Copies are available in the Library of the House. Such summary data for the years 1979 to 1985 were not prepared and could be reconstructed only at disproportionate cost. Between 1 April 1993 and 1 April 1994, the following bodies were added to the list of Scottish Office-sponsored non-departmental public bodies: Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Further Education Unit, Post Qualification Board for Health Service Pharmacists in Scotland.

Right to Buy

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the grounds for refusal of an application by a tenant under the right to buy legislation. [14542]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* There are certain safeguards within the right to buy provisions to permit local authorities to retain a stock of houses which are required for specific purposes.

Under section 61(4) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 the right to buy does not apply to groups of houses provided with facilities—including a call system and a warden service—specially designed or adapted for the needs of elderly or disabled people. These are generally known as sheltered housing.

Section 69 of the Act gives public sector landlords discretion to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to refuse to sell houses with features suitable for occupation by persons of pensionable age. Such houses must have facilities which make them substantially different from those of an ordinary house.

An application to purchase may also be refused under schedule 2 to the 1987 Act where the tenant is required to live in the house as a consequence of his employment for the better performance of his duties; or where the house forms part of a building, or comes within the boundaries of another building, which is held by the authority mainly for purposes other than housing.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment the Scottish Office has made of the average profit which is made by an owner-occupier when the owner sells a former council property purchased under the right to buy legislation. [14530]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The Scottish Office does not collect information on the resale price of former council property. When a former council house is sold, the difference between the right to buy discounted price and the price obtained in a sale on the open market will depend on various factors; including the original level of discount, the marketability of the property, and the state of the housing market at the time.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate for each local authority in Scotland *(a)* the number of dwellings they currently own, *(b)* the number of properties sold under the right to buy legislation and *(c)* the number of properties sold as a percentage of their total housing stock listed in descending order. [14531]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* Information on the number of dwellings owned by local authorities is published in the statistical bulletin HSG/1994/9 "Housing Trends in Scotland—Quarter ended 30 June 1994". Information on the number of local authority dwellings sold to sitting tenants by each local authority, including those sold under the right to buy legislation, is published each quarter in the same statistical bulletin series. The series is available in the House Library.

Local Authority Housing Construction

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new dwellings have been constructed by local authorities for each financial year in Scotland since 1979–80. [14532]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	*Number of new dwellings built*
1979–80	4,818
1980–81	5,199
1981–82	3,141
1982–83	2,222
1983–84	2,470
1984–85	2,024
1985–86	1,880
1986–87	1,678
1987–88	2,021
1988–89	1,818
1989–90	1,243
1990–91	987
1991–92	1,030
1992–93	580
1993–94	494

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much revenue the Scottish Office has made available for new house building in each financial year since 1979–80 for each local authority in Scotland. [14533]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* Capital allocations of over £5.9 billion have been issued to local authorities since 1979–80 for investment to meet local housing needs as shown in the table. It is for local authorities themselves to determine how to allocate the resources made available to them between the improvement of their stock and new house building.

The annual publication, "Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics", which is held in the Library of the House, provides information on capital expenditure by local authorities on new house building.

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent on central administration and policy formulation by his Department in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14256]

Mr. Lang: Details of my Department's running costs and administrative spending for the years 1989–90 to 1997–98 are contained in table 7.1 of the Scottish Office departmental report, Cm 2814, a copy of which is available in the Members' Library.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent of preparatory costs for GP fundholders for each health board area in Scotland for each year since the introduction of GP fundholding. [14496]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The information requested is not available centrally. Health board returns on the money disbursed to support the operational costs of GP fundholders in their area do not differentiate between GP practices who are operational fundholders and those in their preparatory period.

A preparatory fundholding practice is entitled to claim an allowance up to a maximum level—£17,500 in 1994–95. A practice may also claim reimbursement for the installation and other associated costs of computer equipment, which is agreed by the health board as being essential to their participation in fundholding. Finance for this reimbursement expenditure comes from the health board's cash-limited GMS allocation for computer expenditure. It is the responsibility of health boards to monitor the cost-effectiveness of each preparatory fundholding practice's use of such preparatory costs, as part of the health board's statutory role in monitoring the overall performance of GP fundholders.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Departments, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14512]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The information requested is shown in the table. The fee paid to individual contractors is commercially confidential and therefore cannot be detailed. The total cost of the 40 surveys listed was £1.153 million.

Subject	*Period conducted*	*Contractor commissioned*	*Objectives*
Environment Department Survey of Homeless Applicants	June-July 1993	Public Attitude Surveys Ltd	To examine the operation of the code of guidance on homelessness.
Edinburgh Castle Visitors Survey (Historic Scotland)	May-December 1993	System Three Scotland	To provide information on visitors to The Castle, their attitudes to services and facilities and to identify priorities for improving these facilities.
Baseline study of good practice in housing management	1994	Public Attitude Surveys Ltd	To provide a description of housing management practice in Scotland as a baseline against which to measure implementation of the tenants charter.
Awareness of Right to Buy and Rents to Mortgages	March-April 1994	System Three Scotland	To identify tenants' awareness of right to buy schemes.
Public Knowledge and Perception of Local Government	September 1994	The MVA Consultancy	To ascertain current public knowledge and awareness of local government, public perceptions of remoteness accessibility and their identification with local government units as a baseline for monitoring change.
Rural Community Development Study	February 1994	System Three Scotland	To provide a baseline picture of life in four representative rural areas in order to monitor change and the impact of rural policy initiatives.
Water and Sewerage	March/August 1994	Market Research Scotland	To test the comprehensibility of the design and contents of the information leaflet; to evaluate recall of the contents and purpose of leaflet.
Sustainable Development	September 1994	The MVA Consultancy	To investigate public awareness and understanding of the concept of sustainable development
Evaluation of GRO-Grants	November 1994—March 1995	Centre for Housing Research and Urban Studies, Glasgow University	To assess the extent to which GRO-grants have met their objectives.
Awareness of Right to Buy and Rents to Mortgages Schemes	February 1995	System Three Scotland	To determine the level of awareness among tenants of the RTB and RTM schemes.
Rural Transport Study	March-April 1995	The TAS Partnership	To establish the type and range of rural transport options and consider how they could be pursued more effectively in rural Scotland.
Home and Health Department Survey of users' experiences of the NHS in Scotland	November-December 1992	MORI Ltd	To measure how well the commitments in the patients charter were being delivered and whether the standards of service met expectations of the users.

Subject	*Period conducted*	*Contractor commissioned*	*Objectives*
Car Crime	November 1992	Research Resources	To determine amongst car users the steps taken to prevent car crime; their perception of car crime compared with other crimes; awareness and effectiveness of the "Hyena" campaign.
Scottish Crime Survey	December 1992—December 1993	The MVA Consultancy	Provide alternative indicator of the level and extent of household and personal victimisation in Scotland; provide information about public perceptions and experiences of crime and the criminal justice system more generally.
Fire Prevention	February/March 1993—February 1994	Research Resources	To measure awareness and understanding of the television commercial and assess the impact of the commercial in motivating householders to maintain their smoke alarms.
Information Needs of Victims	January-August 1994	The MVA Consultancy	Collect information on current provision of information to victims; provide overview of experience and needs of victims with reference to information provided by criminal justice agencies and identify gaps between needs and actual provision; identify what information could specifically be provided by the fiscal service and in what form.
Domestic Violence Media Campaign	July-December 1994	System Three Scotland	Assess the extent of public awareness and comprehension of Scottish Office domestic violence media campaign.
Survey of users' experiences of the NHS in Scotland	May-June 1994	MORI Ltd	To measure progress being made in delivering the commitments made in the Patient's Charter about the standards of service people should expect from the NHS in Scotland.
European Drug Prevention Week 1994	October 1994	System Three Scotland	Awareness of EDPW among eight to 21-year-olds.
Fire Safety Week 1994	Ongoing	Progressive Research	Processing of research on smoke alarms undertaken by fire brigades during Fire Safety Week.
Maternity Services	October 1992—October 1993	Mrs. Yvonne Bostock (Independent Consultant)	To explore women's views on topics concerned with the provision of maternity care in Scotland; to confirm that CRAG-SCOTMEG Consumer Group's Interpretation of the existing research corresponded with women's views and expectations of the services; to provide a sound basis for the group to form recommendations on women's expectations of services.
Civil Court Users	June-July 1992	The MVA Consultancy	To establish public perception of non-judicial aspects of civil business in the sheriff court.
Industry Department			
Evaluation of "Cars Kill" TV Campaign	June-November 1993	System Three Scotland	To evaluate the "Cars Kill" TV campaign through testing children's awareness and attitudes to this campaign, and to other related national road safety campaigns and general road safety issues.

Subject	*Period conducted*	*Contractor commissioned*	*Objectives*
Hotel Signposting Evaluation	July-November 1993	The MVA Consultancy	To investigate inter alia whether the provision of new accommodation signs improve ease of access for visitors and guests and to monitor whether these signs are associated with an increase in occupancy rates.
Scottish Drivers' Attitudes to Speeding Survey	December 1993-June 1994	Market Research Scotland Ltd	To detect any changes in the attitudes of Scottish drivers towards speeding since November 1991 and to explore reasons for these changes.
Evaluation of Year of the Elderly Road Safety Campaign	January 1994 (Part 1) February-April 1994 (Part 2)	System Three Scotland The MVA Consultancy	To evaluate the effectiveness of the Scottish Road Safety Campaign's initiatives in support of European Year of the Elderly.
Setting Forth: Stated Preference Survey	June 1993	Oscar Faber TPA	To provide the data necessary to model the impact of toll increases on driver behaviour across the Firth of Forth.
An Evaluation of Scotland's National Tourist Routes	June-November 1994	Colin Buchanan and Partners	To evaluate the effectiveness of the national tourist routes in encouraging a wider spread of tourist traffic, and to measure the availability of STB and ATB promotional material relating to the NTRs.
Urban Partnership Household Surveys (Wester Hailes, Whitfield, Ferguslie Park)	March 1993-May 1994	Social and Community Planning Research	Repeat of household surveys carried out in 1989–90 in order to evaluate the impact of the urban partnerships now that initiatives are five years old.
Urban Partnership Household Surveys (Castlemilk)	March-May 1994	Public Attitude Surveys	—
Evaluation of Theatre Tours	July 1994-March 1995	The Scottish Council for Research in Education	To evaluate the effectiveness of theatre tours as a medium for road safety education.
Evaluation of "Cars Kill" Cinema Campaign	October-December 1994	Market Research Scotland	To evaluate the Scottish Road Safety Campaign's "Cars Kill" advertising in the cinema.
Drivers' Attitude to the new Variable Message System on trial around the Forth Estuary	February/March 1995	Oscar Faber TPA	To establish the relevancy and effectiveness of the message content shown on the VMS which is currently being trialled around the Forth estuary.
Year of the Young Driver 1995	January-February 1995	System Three Scotland	Testing creative development of advertising scripts.
Education Department			
Further and Higher Education Charter for Scotland	October-November 1992	British Market Research Bureau	To identify issues of importance to current and potential students, their parents, and the general public to help shape the priorities of the charter.
School Education	April-October 1993	Social Community and Planning Research	To provide information on the public's attitudes towards, and expectations of, school education at senior stages for an international study under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Subject	*Period conducted*	*Contractor commissioned*	*Objectives*
Agriculture and Fisheries Department			
Crofting	January-April 1993	Independent Northern Consultants	To obtain information on the aspirations of crofters for the future, and ways in which the Crofters Commission may help to meet these aspirations.
Marketing and processing of agricultural products and related services in the Highlands and Islands	June 1994	Euro A [illegible]	To identify whether the successor to the rural enterprise programme should include support for marketing of agricultural products. The study involved surveys of farmers and applicants under previous schemes.
An evaluation of the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme	March-July 1995	St. Andrew's Economic Consultants	To examine the extent to which CCAGS is achieving the objectives of the Scheme and to provide information which would help assess possible policy options for the future.
Central Services			
The Scottish Office Central Enquiry Unit	July-December 1993	Research Resources	To assess the impact of the press advertisement on awareness and on motivating the public to use the enquiry unit; determining the public's understanding of the role of the Scottish Office.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

World Summit for Social Development

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to support the proposal put forward by the United Nations Development Programme to the world summit for social development, requiring donor states to devote a minimum of 20 per cent. of their development assistance to meeting basic human needs. [14916]

Mr. Baldry: The world summit for social development declaration called for greater efforts to be made, by donors and developing countries, to help meet basic social needs. We welcome this: the whole of the United Kingdom aid programme is about helping people in poorer countries to improve their lives.

Common definitions and measures of "basic social needs" have yet to be established in the international development context—we stand ready to support further work in this area.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the estimates about the number of people in Sierra Leone who have been displaced and the number who have become refugees. [14852]

Mr. Baldry: According to the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, there are currently 500,000 to 700,000 internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone; in addition it is estimated that, as at the beginning of March 1995, there were over 200,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and a further 120,000 refugees in Liberia.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British aid organisations are still active in Sierra Leone; and which have withdrawn because of the security situation. [14846]

Mr. Baldry: British NGOs still active in Sierra Leone are Action Aid, CARE (UK), Concern Universal, the British Red Cross and the Methodist Church Overseas Division. Christian Aid, CAFOD and Village Aid are providing help through local organisations.

Voluntary Service Overseas and Water Aid have recently withdrawn for security reasons.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests for international assistance have been made by the Government of Sierra Leone. [14849]

Mr. Baldry: There has been no official appeal for international assistance by the Government of Sierra Leone.

UNHCR

Mr. Gary Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he is giving to the general programmes budget of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in 1995.

Mr. Baldry: My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has approved a grant of £6 million for UNHCR's general programmes budget for 1995. The UK is one of the foremost national donors of UNHCR; last year our contributions, both in direct payments and assistance in kind, exceeded £60 million in value, the highest level of contribution ever.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 March 1995

TREASURY

Pool Betting Duty

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue he expects to receive from the pool betting duty in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* next year. [15399]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The amount of pool betting duty receipts is expected to be about £340 million in 1994–95. No separate forecasts are made for pool betting duty for future years.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax was received from the pool betting duty in December, January and February 1993–94 and December, January and February 1994–95. [15398]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The amount of pool betting receipts for December, January and February 1993–94 was £88.2 million and for December, January and February 1994–95 was £81.6 million.

Spread Betting

Ms Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the likely effects of deregulating sports spread betting; [14795]

(2) what consultations he has had concerning the deregulation of sports spread betting; [14793]

(3) what alternative forms of regulations he has considered for the control of sports spread betting; [14796]

(4) what regulations exist to protect participants in spread betting and to ensure they are fully informed of the risks. [14794]

Mr. Nelson: Spread bets are currently regulated as investments under the terms of the Financial Services Act 1986. Companies offering spread betting services are required to become authorised by joining one of the self-regulating organisations recognised under that Act. In doing so, they are subject to detailed conduct of business rules.

Spread betting based on matters such as the performance of financial indices will continue to be regulated in this way. But we intend that spread betting on matters such as sporting events and the weather should be excluded from the scope of the Act.

The financial services deregulation task force identified non-financial spread betting as an area for deregulation. My officials have consulted industry representatives, as well as the Securities and Investments Board and the Home Office. A draft amendment to exclude certain non-financial spread betting from the Financial Services Act is under preparation, and the Treasury will shortly be consulting with all interested parties on its terms.

Barings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government and Bank of England officials will co-operate fully with all requests for information made by judicial managers, representatives of SIMEX and other authorised persons in Singapore charged to carry out inquiries into activities at Barings.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* If any such requests are received by the Treasury, officials will co-operate fully to the extent allowed by the applicable statutory framework and the need to avoid confusion or unnecessary duplication between inquiries. I understand that the Bank of England takes the same view.

Privatised Companies

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the total tax receipts for the last financial year from industries that have been denationalised since 1979.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* Corporation tax receipts in 1994–95 from privatised companies are likely to be £2.5 billion.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr Banks) of 17 November 1986, *Official Report*, column 82, as to the number of individual shareholders retaining shares in each of the concerns privatised since 1979. [15401]

Sir George Young: This information is not held centrally, but the number of shareholders may be found in individual companies' annual reports.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the exchequer what was the total amount of debt written off in each of the privatisations and sale of Government assets since 1979, for each company privatised. [15358]

Sir George Young: The table shows the debt written off, and the type of debt concerned, for each company privatised where this occurred. This includes all debt written off since 1979 in companies subsequently privatised. The liability to pay interest on debt remains up to the date of repayment or write-off.

Debt written off prior to privatisation

Year	*Privatisation*	*Amount £*	*Type of Debt*
1980–81	British Steel	509,308,359	National loans fund
1980–81	British Aerospace	60,000,000	Public dividend capital
1980–81	National Freight Corporation[1]	100,000,000	National loans fund
1980–81	British Airways	160,000,000	Public dividend capital
1982–83	British Transport Docks Board[2]	81,293,616	National loans fund
1984–85	British Telecommunications	2,789,865,772	National loans fund

Debt written off prior to privatisation

Year	Privatisation	Amount £	Type of Debt
1986–87	BAA	43,503,340	National loans fund
1988–89	British Steel	500,000,000	Public dividend capital
1988–89	British Steel	3,480,000,000	Borrowing under Iron and Steel Act 1982
1989–90	Water companies	4,973,332,672	National loans fund
1989–90	Water companies	55,013,916	Public Works Loan Board
1991–92	Scottish electricity companies[3]	1,043,573,600	National loans fund
1994–95	British Coal	1,633,400,000	Voted loans

Notes:

[1] privatised as National Freight Consortium—now NFC.

[2] privatised as Association British Ports Holdings.

[3] prior to privatisation, national loans fund debt due to the South of Scotland electricity board nuclear programme of £1,368,390,398 was transferred to Scottish Nuclear Ltd. and subsequently written off.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the administrative costs for the share offers relating to *(a)* British Gas, *(b)* the electricity generating companies, *(c)* the electricity distribution companies, *(d)* the two Scottish electricity companies and *(e)* the water companies in the same manner as he did in his answer to the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) of 5 March 1992, *Official Report*, column *240*. in respect of British Telecom. [15400]

Sir George Young: The table shows the administrative costs for the sales requested.

Administrative costs[1] of privatisation

	Year	Selling and other commissions	Marketing[2]	Recovering bank costs	UK advisers fees	UK underwriting	Other costs[3]	Total
British Gas	1986	8	36	40	4	53	22	163
Water companies	1989	6.7	36.3	26.1	25.8	33.2	15.4	143.5
Regional electricity companies[4]	1990	10.5	15.2	92.3	28.8	36.6	18.5	201.9
Generating companies[4]	1991	3.3	6.9	34.1	17.2	14.9	8.2	84.6
Scottish electricity companies[5]	1991	4.1	5.9	29.4	19.6	21.5	9.1	89.6

[1] Only costs borne by the Exchequer are shown. Costs shown exclude VAT and, where known, stamp duty, the cost of incentives and interest earned on application monies.

[2] Including the operation of the share information office.

[3] Including overseas expenses.

[4] Costs to 31 December 1991.

[5] Costs to 31 March 1992.

Income Tax

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the number of those who will pay income tax in 1995–96; and how many people paid income tax in each year from 1978–79 to 1994–95.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 March 1995]:* Provisional estimates for 1993–94 and onwards are given in the table. Figures for earlier years are available in table 2.1 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1994", a copy of which is in the Library. The increase in taxpayer numbers is largely due to economic growth. In addition, the number of people in work is increasing—UK work force in employment up 174,000 between December 1993 and December 1994.

Year	estimated numbers of individuals paying tax (millions)
1993–94	25.5
1994–95	25.7
1995–96	26.2

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the numbers of poor people who would be assisted by the zero rating of standing charges in regard to VAT on fuel. [14980]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Zero rating of standing charges would not necessarily help the very poor who frequently are on a prepayment meter tariff which is for a single supply and does not identify a standing charge. The Government have put in place a substantial package of help for those least able to meet the increase in their fuel bills. In addition, the Government have increased funding of the home energy efficiency scheme to £100 million a year from April. The burden of VAT on fuel will bear fully only on people of working age not receiving means-tested benefits.

Vocational Courses

Ms Short: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax relief on training costs is given to people who enrol in and pay fees on national vocational qualification and other vocational courses; and if he will make a statement. [15161]

Sir George Young: Since 6 April 1992, tax relief has been available to individuals for the payments they make for training capable of counting towards national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications, subject to certain conditions. Relief at the basic rate of tax is given by deduction at source from the fees by the trainee, so both taxpayers and non-taxpayers can benefit.

Employees may also be able to claim tax relief for certain job-related training expenses under an Inland Revenue extra-statutory concession—ESC A64—if the requirements of the concession are met.

The self-employed can also get tax relief for business expenditure on training which is revenue in nature and incurred wholly and exclusively for the purpose of their trade or profession.

Retail Prices Index

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *275*, on consumer expenditure patterns, if he will ask the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee to consider how the retail prices index might be modified to take better account of the spending patterns of consumers varying in response to sales and special offers. [15387]

Mr. Nelson: I have no plans to do so. The Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee has recommended repeatedly that the quantities and qualities of the contents of the RPI basket should be held constant during the year. The weights given to different items and types of shop are, therefore, reviewed annually. This reflects changes in consumers' shopping patterns more closely than in most other countries, which only re-weight their indices at intervals of about five years.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on his Budget proposal to extend personal equity plans to corporate bonds, preference shares and convertibles. [16474]

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend's Budget proposal to admit corporate bonds, preference shares and convertibles to PEPs has been widely welcomed. The Inland Revenue will be issuing draft regulations, for consultation, on 31 March. Comments will be invited as soon as possible, but, in any event, by no later than 12 May. In the light of the consultation, the regulations will be finalised by the end of May, laid before the House in June and, subject to the negative resolution procedure, will come into force three weeks later.

EMPLOYMENT

Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Cumbria TEC is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [16586]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that Cumbria training and enterprise council has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three-year licences. Its licence will be effective from April 1995.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of full-time employees on adult rates in *(a)* Greater Manchester, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* Cheshire, *(d)* Lancashire and *(e)* the north-west region whose weekly earnings excluding overtime were (i) less than £220 and (ii) less than £200 broken down by the categories (1) manual males, (2) non-manual males, (3) all full-time males, (4) manual females, (5) non-manual females and (6) full-time females giving total numbers of employees in the sample in each case; and what is the number of part-time employees on adult rates in *(a)* to *(e)* whose hourly earnings excluding overtime, were (iii) less than £6 and (iv) less than £5.50, broken down by the categories, (7) manual females, (8) non-manual females, (9) all part-time females, (10) manual males, (11) non-manual males and (12) all part-time males, giving total number of employees in the sample in each case.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information from the 1994 new earnings survey is provided in the following tables:

Full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was not affected by absence for the survey pay period Number in sample with gross weekly earnings, excluding overtime, below the following amounts: April 1994

	Number and percentage of full-time employees with gross weekly earnings less than:			
	£220		*£200*	
Manual men				
Greater Manchester	766	51.4	552	37.1
Merseyside	267	40.0	193	28.9
Cheshire	268	40.4	207	31.2
Lancashire	396	49.0	296	36.6
North West Region	1,697	46.8	1,248	34.4
Non-manual men				
Greater Manchester	330	19.0	260	15.0
Merseyside	154	20.5	117	15.6
Cheshire	83	11.9	63	9.0
Lancashire	173	20.9	137	16.5
North West Region	740	18.4	577	14.4
All men				
Greater Manchester	1,096	34.0	812	25.2
Merseyside	421	29.6	310	21.8
Cheshire	351	25.8	270	19.8
Lancashire	569	34.8	433	26.5
North West Region	2,437	31.9	1,825	23.9
Manual women				
Greater Manchester	291	86.6	265	78.9
Merseyside	106	88.3	97	80.8
Cheshire	103	75.7	88	64.7
Lancashire	162	88.5	154	84.2
North West Region	662	85.4	604	77.9
Non-manual women				
Greater Manchester	734	48.3	573	37.7
Merseyside	387	49.8	296	38.1
Cheshire	274	49.2	211	37.9
Lancashire	393	54.2	316	43.6
North West Region	1,788	49.9	1,396	39.0

Full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was not affected by absence for the survey pay period Number in sample with gross weekly earnings, excluding overtime, below the following amounts: April 1994

	Number and percentage of full-time employees with gross weekly earnings less than:			
	£220		*£200*	
All women				
Greater Manchester	1,025	55.2	838	45.1
Merseyside	493	55.0	393	43.8
Cheshire	377	54.4	299	43.1
Lancashire	555	61.1	470	51.8
North West Region	2,450	56.3	2,000	45.9

Part-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was not affected by absence for the survey pay period Number in sample with gross hourly earnings, excluding overtime, below the following amounts: April 1994

	Number and percentage of part-time employees with gross hourly earnings less than:			
	£6.00		*£5.50*	
Manual men				
Greater Manchester	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merseyside	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cheshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
North West Region	109	83.8	104	80.0
Non-manual men				
Greater Manchester	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merseyside	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cheshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
North West Region	78	57.4	76	55.9
All men				
Greater Manchester	76	69.1	75	68.2
Merseyside	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cheshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
North West Region	187	70.3	180	67.7
Manual women				
Greater Manchester	314	94.9	306	92.4
Merseyside	246	96.5	239	93.7
Cheshire	113	89.0	110	86.6
Lancashire	149	95.5	143	91.7
North West Region	822	94.6	798	91.8
Non-manual women				
Greater Manchester	438	73.7	410	69.0
Merseyside	245	71.4	223	65.0
Cheshire	197	75.8	182	70.0
Lancashire	228	70.6	204	63.2
North West Region	1,108	72.9	1,019	67.0

Part-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was not affected by absence for the survey pay period Number in sample with gross hourly earnings, excluding overtime, below the following amounts: April 1994

	Number and percentage of part-time employees with gross hourly earnings less than:			
	£6.00		*£5.50*	
All women				
Greater Manchester	752	81.3	716	77.4
Merseyside	491	82.1	462	77.3
Cheshire	310	80.1	292	75.5
Lancashire	377	78.7	347	72.4
North West Region	1,930	80.8	1,817	76.1

Enterprise Allowance

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what would be the value of the enterprise allowance at current values if the annual rate of inflation had been applied since the scheme's inception. [15063]

Mr. Paice: It is estimated that the value of the £40 weekly enterprise allowance, introduced nationally in 1983, would be £69 at current values if the annual rate of inflation had been applied throughout.

The standard rate of £40 ceased to apply in 1991 when the programme was renamed the business start-up scheme. Training and enterprise councils, which deliver the scheme, could then pay between £20 and £90 per week.

BSUS resources are now part of the single regeneration budget. This will fund locally initiated economic regeneration projects, including start-up activity, where they are proposed and approved.

Asbestos

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of health dangers to workers associated with asbestos; if he will provide details of enforcement of existing controls; what new steps his Department proposes to take; and if he will make a statement. [15317]

Mr. Oppenheim: The most recent formal assessment of the effects on health of exposure to asbestos was conducted by Sir Richard Doll and Professor Julian Peto on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission. The results were published in 1985. Recent research by Professor Peto and the Health and Safety Executive, published in *The Lancet* on 4 March 1995, has shown that although the assessment is still valid, the extent of occupational exposure to asbestos dust was more widespread than previously thought. That research indicates that those employed in the building maintenance industry such as plumbers and electricians may be at risk from occasional exposure to asbestos installed in existing buildings. HSE is currently mounting a campaign to raise awareness of the risks from asbestos in these occupational groups.

All work with asbestos is governed by the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, as amended in January 1993. In addition, the most dangerous—that with asbestos insulation and coating—is covered by the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations (ALR) 1983. The provisional enforcement figures for 1993–94 are set out in the following table:

	Informations laid	*Convictions*	*Average fine per conviction (£)*
CAWR	31	20	1,395
ALR	6	6	1,117

HSE is satisfied that current legislation and guidance provide an adequate framework for preventing and controlling the risks posed by exposure to asbestos dust.

Training

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether unemployed people who have once been required to attend either *(a)* a restart course, or *(b)* a workwise—worklink in Scotland—course, or *(c)* a job-plan workshop, and who have fully complied with that requirement, will be free from any subsequent requirements to attend such a workshop or course in a particular spell of unemployment; and if he will make a statement. [15151]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 23 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about attendance on Jobplan, Workwise (Worklink in Scotland) and Restart Courses.

It may help if I explain that since December 1990 there has been a requirement for people to attend a Restart Course after two years unemployment if they fail to take up an offer of a place on an Employment Department (ED) programme at their Restart interview. This requirement is covered in the Income Support (General) 1990 Regulation 21A. This regulation was amended in March 1993 to cover people who have been unemployed for 12 months or more and they are now required to attend a Jobplan Workshop if they refuse an offer of a place on an ED programme.

In April a new package of help for 18–24 year olds called Workwise and 1-2-1 will replace Jobplan for people in this age group who have reached 12 months of unemployment.

It is not out intention that people should be required to attend more than one Jobplan Workshop or equivalent for 18–24 year olds or more than one Restart Course within a spell of unemployment if they have already been required to attend and have completed the full programme. I hope this is helpful.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provisions apply when a person has to leave training for work or community action because of *(a)* operational difficulties encountered by their provider, including the unavailability of a suitable work placement, or *(b)* illness or accident, so as to allow the person to qualify for entry to another training for work or community action place; and if he will make a statement. [15183]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils will be required to provide alternative training where a provider is no longer in a position to provide training for work as agreed in the person's individual training plan, so that the individual does not have leave the programme. Where trainees experience an extended period of sickness, they will be able to re-enter the programme without having to requalify.

If people have to leave community action due to operational difficulties encountered by the provider or through illness or accident, they are able to rejoin the programme, if they wish to do so, without having to requalify.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if unemployed claimants are offered a place in *(a)* training for work or *(b)* community action, or *(c)* job clubs or *(d)* the job interview guarantee at a restart or other counselling interview would they lose benefit if they fail to participate; if they take up a place on any of these programmes, if they can leave at any time without incurring a benefit penalty; and if he will make a statement. [15152]

Miss Widdecombe: Participation in employment and training programmes is generally voluntary and failure to participate does not carry a benefit sanction. The only exception to this is at the 12 and 24-month stage of unemployment where clients are asked to attend a job plan workshop and restart course respectively unless they take up a place on another Employment Department programme.

Consequently, people who agree to participate in one of the programmes listed by the hon. Member but who fail to start, or who leave prematurely, are not usually subject to benefit sanctions. They are, however, interviewed to see if there is a problem, to make sure the course of action previously agreed is still appropriate and to see what other help may be needed.

Employment Medical Advisory Service

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many doctors were working within the employment medical advisory service for each year since 1979, broken down by region; what studies are currently in progress on the work of EMAS doctors; what are the estimated number of EMAS doctors for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 broken down by region; and if he will make a statement. [15136]

Mr. Oppenheim: The following tables show the numbers of doctors working by region in the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service on 1 April for each year since 1979.

In 1979 EMAS was organised in the following regions:

	Number
Eastern and Midlands	7.0
London and South East	13.5
Northern	5.5
North East	8.5
North West	13.0
Scotland	9.0
South West	6.5
Wales	3.5
West Midlands	9.5

From 1980 to 1984 EMAS was organised as follows:

Year	*Eastern and SE Midlands*	*London South and SE*	*London North*	*Northern*	*North East*	*North West*	*Scotland*	*South West*	*Wales*	*West Midlands*
1980	6	7	5	6	6.5	13	8	6	4.5	9.5
1981	6	6.5	5	6	7.5	13	8.5	8.5	5.5	8.5
1982	6	6.5	4	5	6.5	10	8	6	4.5	7.5
1983	6	5	4.5	4.5	6.5	10	7.5	6	5.5	8.5
1984	5	6	4.5	5.5	5	10	7.5	6	4.5	8.5

From 1985 to date EMAS has been organised in areas which make up the following regions:

Year	*Home Counties*	*London and South East*	*Midlands*	*North West*	*Scotland*	*Wales and South West*	*Yorkshire and North East*
1985	5	10	12	10	7.5	8.5	9
1986	4.5	10	10.5	8	7.5	10	9.5
1987	5.5	6.5	10.5	9	7.5	9.5	7
1988	5	4.5	10	7	5.5	8.5	6
1989	6	4.5	8	7	6	7	6.5
1990	6.5	4	9	5	6	7	8.5
1991	7.5	4.5	9.5	6	6	6	7.5
1992	7	7.5	10	7.5	6.5	5	8.5
1993	7.5	6.5	9.5	7.5	6.5	7	8.5
1994	6.5	5	6.5	8	5.5	5	8.5

Note:
From 1993 the figures do not include the director or deputy director of medical services who were based in headquarters.

A prior options study of EMAS activities to consider whether they could be undertaken by alternative means is currently in progress.

The following table shows the anticipated numbers of EMAS doctors by region for 1 April 1995 and 1 April 1996.

Year	*Home Counties*	*London and South East*	*Midlands*	*North West*	*Scotland*	*Wales and South West*	*Yorkshire and North East*
1995	6.5	4	4	5	3.5	3	6
1996	6.5	4	4	5	3.5	2	6

Jobseekers' Records

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what records of active job seeking he expects to be kept by claimants who have problems with reading and writing, or whose first language is not English; and if he will made a statement. [15174]

Miss Widdecombe: Clients who have problems with reading and writing, or whose first language is not English, are not expected to keep written records. They are asked to provide a verbal account of the steps they have taken to seek work. If they have particular difficulties, I would expect the Employment Service to offer them appropriate advice and assistance.

Jobcentres

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy in respect of the advertising in jobcentres of full-time jobs at *(a)* £40 and *(b)* £45 a week; and if he will make a statement. [15788]

Miss Widdecombe: Rates of pay for particular jobs are matters for agreement between employers and workers. Jobcentres advise employers who offer vacancies with low pay about the local prevailing rates of pay for the job and their likely prospects of filling the vacancy.

Lifeguards

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce a standard training qualification to be required of all coastal lifeguards. [14784]

Mr. Paice: I am replying as Minister responsible for training and vocational qualifications. The Government have no plans to introduce a new qualification to be required of all coastal lifeguards. The Royal Life Saving Society (UK) awards the national beach lifeguarding qualification.

Repetitive Strain Injuries

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he has given to amending the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 to require cases of repetitive strain injuries to be reported to the Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement. [15213]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Commission is currently considering the responses to its public consultation document on proposals for change to the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. The proposals include adding to the regulations' list of reportable diseases certain categories of upper limb disorder, so-called repetitive strain injuries.

A copy of the commission's consultation document has been placed in the Library.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps his Department is taking to *(a)* monitor the number of men and women dying from mesothelioma, *(b)* monitor the age of the men and women dying from mesothelioma and *(c)* estimate the specific years that the victims of mesothelioma faced exposure to asbestos; [15214]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to monitor the occupational backgrounds of the victims of mesothelioma. [15216]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive receives copies from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the General Register Office (Scotland) of all death certificates mentioning mesothelioma. The age, sex, latest full-time occupation, and other details on the death certificate are recorded on a database. Tabulations of mesothelioma deaths by age and sex are published in "Health and Safety Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library.

An analysis of the occupational breakdown of mesothelioma deaths will be published in the "Occupational Health Decennial Supplement", a joint publication by OPCS and HSE, on Thursday 30 March 1995. A copy will be placed in the Library.

The timing of mesothelioma victims' asbestos exposure cannot be determined from routine sources. This issue is to be addressed in a planned case control study of mesothelioma cases.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by region the annual cost of advertising job vacancies in the press and on radio in Scotland. [15597]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the annual cost of advertising job vacancies in the Press and on the Radio in Scotland, listed by region.

Unfortunately this information is not recorded centrally, as it is the responsibility of the local Business Manager and is therefore managed at a local level.

The Employment Service uses 12 Radio stations spread over Scotland and over 100 different Newspapers. This makes the cost of collecting this information prohibitive.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Outreach Projects

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by region the number of outreach projects providing access to vacancy and advisory services operating in Scotland. [15599]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of Outreach projects providing access to vacancy and advisory services operating in Scotland. We have interpreted Outreach projects to mean those where information outside and complementary to Employment Service (ES) programmes and services is provided by advisors in locations other than ES offices.

The ES has supported, either in full or as part of a joint funded initiative, nine Outreach type projects throughout Scotland in 1995–95. These are based in the following locations;

Strathclyde Region:-

Castlemilk Economic Development Agency Office, Castlemilk, Glasgow;

Ferguslie Park partnership premises, Ferguslie Park, Paisley;

The Ethnic Minority Enterprise Centre in Glasgow, covering projects in Shawlands, Govan and Maryhill areas;

Drumchapel, Glasgow;

The Ashgill, Netherburn and Stonehouse areas of Lanarkshire.

Lothian Region:-

The Pilton Partnership premises in Edinburgh.

Grampian Region:-

The Forres Area Action Project premises in Forres, Morayshire.

I hope this information is helpful.

Freephones

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to extend the Employment Service freephone services in Scotland. [15598]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about what plans the Employment Service (ES) has to extend freephone services in Scotland.

While we are continuously reviewing the services we provide to clients in rural areas, there are no plans at present to extend the freephone facility.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reserves were held by each TEC at the end of the financial year 1992–93 and 1993–94. [15833]

Mr. Paice: A list of English training and enterprise councils and their accumulated reserves, as shown in their annual statutory audited accounts, at the end of the financial year 1992–93 and 1993–94 are shown in the following tables:

TECs by region

	Accumulated reserves	
	1992–93 £000	*1993–94 £000*
North east		
County Durham	6,582	7,845
Northumberland	3,696	5,150
Teesside	9,186	10,738
Tyneside	4,486	3,497
Sunderland (Wearside)	2,514	2,885
	26,465	30,115
Merseyside		
CEWTEC	2,579	2,167
Merseyside	4,210	4,638
QUALITEC	1,055	1,257
	7,844	8,062
North west		
Bolton/Bury	2,861	4,633
Manchester	3,377	4,810
METRO	519	378
Oldham	1,456	1,196
Rochdale	1,087	1,665
South and East Cheshire	2,419	2,222
Stockport and High Peak	2,782	2,827
Cumbria	2,999	2,800
ELTEC	3,364	3,602
LAWTEC	2,917	4,098
NORMID	1,093	1,870
	24,874	30,101
Yorkshire and Humberside		
Barnsley/Doncaster	3,993	3,172
Bradford	3,432	3,135
Calderdale and Kirklees	828	1,662
Humberside	5,193	5,049
Leeds	5,724	5,837
North Yorkshire	4,353	5,270
Rotherham	2,865	3,467
Sheffield	4,157	5,301
Wakefield	3,110	3,856
	33,655	36,749
Eastern		
Bedfordshire	1,556	1,099
CAMBS	622	964
Essex	5,037	4,243
Greater Peterborough	1,532	1,462
Hertfordshire	2,641	2,398
Norfolk and Waverney	2,161	2,951
Suffolk	2,984	1,529
	16,533	14,646
East Midlands		
Greater Nottingham	944	1,258
Leicester	4,597	5,492
Lincolnshire	2,553	3,779
Northamptonshire	1,977	1,355
North Derbyshire	749	1,008
North Nottinghamshire	1,289	2,129
South Derbyshire	4,106	3,675
	16,215	18,696
West Midlands		
Birmingham	1,212	931
Central England	1,340	1,259
Coventry/Warwick	2,203	1,739
Dudley	1,214	1,279
HAWTEC	1,679	1,025
Sandwell	1,706	1,639
Shropshire	1,304	1,625
Staffordshire	5,789	7,086
Walsall	2,340	1,303
Wolverhampton	1,411	899
	20,198	18,785
South west		
Avon	3,071	4,374
Devon/Cornwall	7,407	5,451
Dorset	2,848	2,572
Gloucester	1,575	1,870
Somerset	1,746	2,193
Wiltshire	1,110	2,155
	17,757	18,615
London		
AZTEC	1,932	2,765
CENTEC	906	2,437
CILNTEC	2,161	2,388
LETEC	655	3,260
North London	3,005	2,745
North West London	864	1,412
SOLOTEC	3,439	5,070
South Thames	3,611	2,319
West London	1,163	1,511
	17,736	23,907
South east		
Hampshire	4,679	4,493
Isle of Wight	879	1,014
Kent	5,774	4,938
Milton Keynes/North Buckinghamshire	677	896
Heart of England	2,424	2,496
Surrey	1,663	2,828
Sussex	5,230	5,244
Thames Valley Ent.	3,970	5,145
	25,296	27,054
Grand total	206,572	226,730

PRIME MINISTER

Administration and Policy Formulation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister what was the amount of money spent on administration and policy formulation by the Prime Minister's office in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14648]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* For this purpose, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 22 March 1995 to the hon. Member for Meirionnyd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Official Functions

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister what was the amount of money spent on functions hosted by him in his official capacity as Prime Minister in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14783]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 March 1995]*: Expenditure from my office's budget on functions hosted by me in my official capacity as Prime Minister in 1993–94 was £33,000; information for projected expenditure is not available.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Service Agency

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the logo for the Court Service Agency, *(b)* the winning design, produced by Jeanette Paris, of last year's departmental staff logo competition and *(c)* such of the Epps Partnership drawings working up the design as are in existence. [15780]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Yes. Arrangements have been made for the designs to be placed in the Library.

George Long

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what date the case of George Long was referred to the Court of Appeal; whether a date has yet been fixed for the appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Home Secretary referred the case of George Long to the Court of Appeal on 16 March 1994. The hearing of the appeal was due to take place on 4 April 1995, but was taken out of the list on 20 March 1995 at the request of the parties' solicitors.

Magistrates, West Yorkshire

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the political balance of magistrates within West Yorkshire.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The political balance of magistrates within West Yorkshire on the latest information available is as follows:

Conservative 566
Labour 401
Liberal/Democratic 245
Independent/Not known 160

Structured Settlements

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Government have to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report "Structured settlements and interim and provisional damages". [16476]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government welcome the report and will introduce legislation implementing all the recommendations made in it, both on the rationalisation of the structured settlements system and on other aspects of the law of damages, when a suitable opportunity arises.

Trusts

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Government have to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report "The Law of Trusts—Delegation by Individual Trustees", Law Com. No. 220. [16477]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have decided to accept the Law Commission's recommendations subject to one amendment, agreed with the commission, which will ensure that there will be no need to renew an enduring power of attorney if the donor of the power has a beneficial as well as a fiduciary interest in the relevant property. The Government will introduce legislation to implement these proposals when a suitable legislative opportunity occurs.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much was paid by regional electricity companies to Electricité de France for supplies via the cross-channel interconnector in each of the last five years; and what proportion in cash and percentage terms was accounted for by it being electricity sourced from nuclear power stations. [15839]

Mr. Eggar: The amounts paid for electricity supplies across the interconnector are a commercial matter for the contracting parties. I understand that those RECs with output contracts with EDF have been able to satisfy the Director General of Electricity Supply that the electricity they import from France is supplied from designated nuclear stations.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of the electricity supplied by Electricitié de France through the cross-channel interconnector in each of the last five years. [15840]

Mr. Eggar: This is a commercial matter for the parties to the relevant contracts.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much electricity was imported from France through the cross-channel interconnector in each of the last five years; and how much was produced by nuclear power. [15842]

Mr. Eggar: Electricity imports from France have been as follows:

Electricity imports from France, GWh
Year
1990: 11,749
1991: 16,466
1992: 16,786
1993: 16,763
1994: 16,942
Source: National Grid Company plc

I understand that those regional electricity companies with output contracts with Electricitié de France have been able to satisfy the Director General of Electricity Supply that the electricity they import from France is supplied from designated nuclear stations.

Television Decoders

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of whether it will be possible to oblige manufacturers of decoding systems for television transmission to fit, in addition to the proprietary conditional access system, a connector to the decoder box for a common interface; and if the Government support the concept of a common interface throughout Europe.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government have looked closely at this issue. The development of a common interface for conditional access equipment is an option provided for in the draft EC directive on standards for television broadcasting. A common position on this directive was adopted by the Council on 13 November 1994. The directive is now being considered by the European Parliament. The European Digital Video Broadcasting Group—an industry body with a standard-making role—has developed an agreed technical specification for such an interface. If the directive is adopted in the terms of the common position, the common interface will be an option, but not a requirement, for manufacturers of set-top boxes. However, manufacturers will be obliged to incorporate in equipment the capacity to descramble signals according to a common European algorithm.

The Government have supported these developments. The Government consider that it is important that the option of a common interface should be open to manufacturers and to those establishing conditional access systems for digital television. But the Government are also firmly of the view that a common interface should not be mandatory for conditional access systems: such systems involve a considerable investment, and face a real risk of piracy. Not all operators will want manufacturers to install a common interface; they should not be obliged to do so.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Beith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when and in what form he expects to announce the results of the nuclear review. [15447]

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, column 239.

Surveys

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14501]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The tables list only those surveys commissioned by my Department from polling or public survey organisations in 1993–94 and 1994–95. Information on the individual fees paid cannot be disclosed due to commercial confidentiality considerations, but the total value of those listed was £270,000 in 1993–94 and £329,000 in 1994–95. Most surveys commissioned by my Department are of businesses and are conducted by business consultants or by the Department itself. Polling organisations compete for these contracts in accordance with competitive tendering rules, and sometimes gain contracts for other than polling work.

DTI surveys commissioned from polling or public survey companies 1993–94

Survey	*Objective*	*Contractor*
Enterprise Initiative Tracking Study	Track awareness and perceptions of the Enterprise Initiative programme among businesses	MORI
Evaluation of the LINK programme: Nanotechnology	Evaluate this aspect of the LINK programme	PA Consulting
Survey on small firms publication research	Establish awareness of and attitudes towards Small Firms' division's publications	BLM Research and Marketing
Radiocommunications Agency Customer Survey	Citizens' Charter customer feedback	MORI
Firework Safety Study	Gauge public awareness of/reaction to firework safety publicity to assess 1995 advertising strategy	RSGB
TEC Evaluation	Evaluate TECs' performance	PA Consulting
Renewable Energy Awareness—industrial and commercial sectors	Assess extent of awareness of renewable energy at senior management level	BMRB
Renewable Energy Awareness—general public	Assess extent of public awareness of renewable energy	RSGB

DTI Surveys commissioned from polling or public survey companies 1994–95

Survey	*Objective*	*Contractor*
Metrication Survey	Assess public attitudes before implementation of EC Directive on metric food pricing	RSGB
Survey on the United Kingdom Aerospace sector	Assess needs of aerospace sector for DTI services	PA Consulting
Wider Effects of Inward Investment	Assess what are the wider effects of inward investment	PA Consulting
United Kingdom Measurement Foresight programme	Assess long-term metrology requirements of industry from DTI laboratories	PA Consulting
Radiocommunications Agency—Quality of service improvements for Private Mobile Radio (PMR) users	Obtain customer feedback in order to improve service to PMR users	EDS
Radiocommunications Agency Customer Survey	Citizens charter	MORI

DTI Surveys commissioned from polling or public survey companies 1994–95

Survey	*Objective*	*Contractor*
Business Links Baseline Tracking Study	Tracking research for the Business Link initiative	MORI
Firework Safety Study	Guage public awareness of/reaction to firework safety publicity to assess 1995 advertising strategy	RSGB
TEC Evaluation	Evaluate TECs' performance	PA Consulting

British Coal Allotments

Mr. Enright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has held with regard to allotment holders on British Coal property. [13902]

Mr. Page: We are actively pursuing with British Coal options for the future of allotments. No decisions have yet been taken.

Executive Pay Review

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the Greenbury committee on executive pay to report. [15434]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The CBI announced on 16 January that Sir Richard Greenbury would chair a group to review the structure within which executive remuneration was determined and disclosed. The announcement indicated that the group would aim to report within six months.

Investing Companies

Mr. Legg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what grants, aid or relief are available to companies investing in the United Kingdom from *(a)* Government, *(b)* the European Union and (c) local authorities and how much money was granted in each year since 1990 under each source. [15341]

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not collated. Schemes run by my Department are published annually in "The Government's Expenditure Plans, Trade and Industry", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Legg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* non-EU and *(b)* EU foreign companies have invested in the United Kingdom since 1990. [15323]

Mr. Eggar: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, for the financial years 1990 to 1994, from a total of 1,478 inward investment projects in the UK, 983 were from non-EU countries and the remaining 495 from EU countries. These figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest, and take no account of subsequent developments.

Mr. Legg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the value of assets repatriated from the United Kingdom by overseas companies since 1990. [15320]

Mr. Eggar: The information is not available.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

"Competing for Quality"

Mr. Legg: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide a breakdown of the results of the "Competing for Quality" programme, on a Department-by-Department basis, for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94 giving the proportion of work awarded for each Department which was abolished, privatised, contracted out, awarded to the in-house team or led to internal restructuring and the level of savings achieved by each Department.

Mr. Horam: The results of the "Competing for Quality" programme, covering the period from April 1992 to September 1994, have been broken down as requested. Copies have been placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consulates

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost of maintaining United Kingdom consulates in 1993–94; what are the projections for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [14268]

Mr. Goodlad: Details of the actual and projected costs of maintaining United Kingdom consulates are provided in the following list:

Year	*Cost £ million*
1993–94:	50.1
1994–95:	51.6
1995–96:	53.4

The figures include the costs of consulates-general and one vice-consulate. Further information can be found in the FCO's 1995 departmental report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

Palestine

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what commitment he has made to send United Kingdom observers to supervise the Palestinian legislative elections; and if this has been accepted by President Arafat. [15534]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During his visit to Gaza on 14 March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reaffirmed the EU's willingness to consider co-ordinating international observation of the Palestinian elections. Chairman Arafat warmly welcomed this. The nature of the UK's participation will be considered once the agreement has been reached between the Israelis and the

Palestinians on the arrangements for the elections and their observation.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress was made in implementing the second chapter of the declaration of principles at 9 March meeting between Shimon Peres and Yaser Arafat. [15532]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Mr. Peres and Mr. Arafat agreed to aim to complete negotiations on elections and redeployment on the west bank by 1 July, and on various confidence-building measures—including the opening of safe passage routes between Gaza and Jericho, the reactivation of the ministerial committee reviewing procedures for the release of Palestinian prisoners, and the expedition of passage through checkpoints. They agreed to increase the number of permits for Palestinian workers in Israel to 21,000. Two new joint committees on security and civilian issues have been formed. It was also agreed to transfer additional economic powers to the Palestinians in the west bank.

Foreign Ministers Meeting

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Carcassonne. [15673]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the informal EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Carcassonne on 18 and 19 March. Discussion covered a wide range of topical issues. The EU's relations with Russia and the situation in the former Yugoslavia were the main focus. On Russia, EU Foreign Ministers agreed a broad strategy covering the EU's political, economic and security relationship, taking into account the economic reform process in Russia, the situation in Chechnya and questions of European security architexture.

Discussion on the former Yugoslavia concentrated on the need to ensure the extension of the cessation of hostilities in Bosnia; the continuation of the presence of UN forces in Croatia; and the importance of carrying forward proposals for a durable and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for the current year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constituted.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The number of employees on temporary contracts of less than 51 weeks' duration are as follows:

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
No. of casuals	81	80	83	99	106	115
Percentage of total work force	0.83	0.81	1.01	1.24	1.38	1.53

[1] Projected figures for 1995–96.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Independent Commission for Police Complaints

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* expenditure for the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland for 1994–95 and *(b)* projected expenditure for the same body for 1996–97. [15411]

Sir John Wheeler: Forecast expenditure by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland for the 1994–95 financial year is £781,000. At this stage, projected expenditure by the commission for the 1996–97 financial year is estimated at £823,000.

School Transfer Tests

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the details of the marking formulae for the school transfer test. [14895]

Mr. Ancram: The compilers of the tests prepare a marking key for each of the tests. The key indicates the correct answer, or the range of acceptable answers, to each question and, if appropriate, the basis on which the available marks should be awarded. The marking keys are adjusted to take account of unforeseen acceptable answers which emerge during marking, upon which all candidates' papers are remarked accordingly.

Copies of the marking keys are made available to the principals of primary and preparatory schools when marking is complete.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make available the individual child's marks to parents of children who undertake the school transfer test; [14896]

(2) what marks were awarded in the school transfer results for examinee number 21949/8. [14898]

Mr. Ancram: It is not the Department's policy to issue transfer test marks for individual candidates.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what adjustments are made in the marking results of the school transfer test to take account of the individual child's age. [14897]

Mr. Ancram: The marks obtained by the children in each section—English, mathematics and science—of each test are adjusted for age, using a statistical analysis of the scores to calculate an amount to be added to the scores of the younger children; the younger the child, the larger the allowance will be. The allowance for each child is calculated in accordance with the day of his or her birth.

Public Record Office

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of the launch of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland as a next steps executive agency. [16202]

Mr. Moss: The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland will be formally established as an executive agency on 1 April 1995.

The key performance targets set for the agency for 1995–96 are:

1. to *(a)* process 1,100 linear feet of privately deposited records and ensure that 100 per cent. of all new such "open" material is processed within one year of receipt; and *(b)* reappraise approximately 10,000 linear feet of records with a view to eliminating low-grade material;
2. to reduce the unit cost of £16.62 per reader visit by 6 per cent. to £15.79 without diminishing the quality of service;
3. to process written enquiries from customers within 10 working days of receipt in 70 per cent. of cases and within 14 working days in 95 per cent. of cases; and
4. to manage the agency's work load—including an anticipated 3 per cent. increase in readers and the introduction of extended opening hours—while ensuring that expenditure is within financial limits approved by the Department.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Detective Agencies

Mr. Denham: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the schemes, activities and projects on which Brays Detective Agency has been retained by the Treasury Solicitor, in each case giving the Government Department sponsoring the scheme, activity or project; what is the purpose of the contract with Brays; and what is the total expenditure to date. [15119]

The Attorney-General: Brays Detective Agency is used by the Treasury Solicitor on a case-by-case basis rather than under any standing contract. The principal Government Departments for which work is undertaken by the agency are:

Department	*Activity*	[1] *Amount £*
Department of Transport	Property-related work, mainly in relation to road schemes, actions for possession and actions against trespassers	310,930
Ministry of Defence	Work in relation to possession, debt and personal injury actions	8,400

[1] Amounts paid to the agency to date in the financial year 1994–95.

SCOTLAND

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of cases of ectoparasitic infestation in sheep for *(a)* the two years before compulsory dipping was abolished and *(b)* the two years since compulsory dipping has been abolished.

Sir Hector Monro: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 31 January 1995, *Official Report,* column 652, for the number of cases of sheep scab during the period in question.

Other ectoparasitic infections of sheep have never been notifiable in Scotland and consequently information on the number of cases of these diseases is not available.

Nature Reserves

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the national nature reserves. [15125]

Sir Hector Monro: The national nature reserves are listed in the annual reports of Scottish Natural Heritage. Copies of the reports for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are in the Library.

Scottish Sleeper Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in favour of the withdrawal of the Fort William and Carlisle to London sleeper services and of the withdrawal of Scotland to London Motorail services. [15143]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Rape Convictions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the median age of men convicted of rape for the first time; and if he will make a statement. [14260]

Mr. Maclean: The convictions of two samples of men born in 1953 and 1958 have been traced up to the ages of 39 and 33 respectively. The samples included 75 men convicted of rape for the first time. The median age for this group was 22 years old.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of convicted rapists imprisoned in English and Welsh prisons in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [14261]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 23 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the number of convicted rapists imprisoned in English and Welsh prisons in 1994 and if he will make a statement.

Provisional information for 1994 shows that 446 persons were received into a Prison Service establishment in England and Wales under sentence for rape.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convicted prisoners were admitted to a prison hospital or a general hospital in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; what these figures are as percentages of the general hospital population; and if he will make a statement; [14262]

(2) how many convicted rapists were admitted to a prison hospital or a general hospital in *(a)* 1993 and

(b) 1994; what these figures are as percentages of the total number of convicted rapists in prison; and if he will make a statement. [14263]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 23 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about admissions of convicted prisoners to prison or general hospitals.

I regret that information on admissions for in-patient care is not collected by remand and convicted prisoner categories, or by type of offence.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average sentence given to men convicted of rape in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1994: and if he will make a statement; [14266]

(2) what was the average sentence given to men convicted of rape in 1980; what was the average duration of the sentence served by these men; and if he will make a statement. [14267]

Mr. Maclean: The information on the average sentence length given for adult males convicted of rape for the years 1980, 1990, 1992 and 1993 is given in the table. 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Precise information on the average duration of the sentence served by men convicted of rape in 1980 is not available, but those given determinate sentences would have served up to two thirds of their sentence depending on whether and at what stage they were granted parole.

Average sentence length imposed at the Crown Court on adult males—aged 21 and over—for rape offences, 1980, 1990, 1992 and 1993

England and Wales

Offence	*Year*	*Average sentence length*[1] *(months)*
Substantive rape	1980	50.9
	1990	75.9
	1992	78.9
	1993	77.9
Attempted rape	1980	41.2
	1990	58.7
	1992	60.4
	1993	53.0
Other rape[2]	1980	12.0
	1990	15.0
	1992	10.0
	1993	15.0
Total rape	1980	48.7
	1990	73.3
	1992	76.6
	1993	74.2

[1] Excludes life sentences. The proportion sentenced to Life of those given an immediate custodial sentence for total rape in 1993 was 3.4 per cent.

[2] Includes offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956, Sec. 7, Mental Health Act 1959, Secs. 127, 128(1)(a) and 128(10) (b).

Lifeguards

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make compulsory the provision of lifeguards in coastal areas frequented by holiday-makers; [14785]

(2) if he will make the provision of coastal lifeguards and beach safety procedures a statutory duty of local authorities; [14786]

(3) if he will establish a central body to control and standardise the provision of coastal lifeguards and coastal safety procedures. [14788]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government acknowledge the considerable efforts of voluntary bodies, such as the Royal Life Saving Society and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents which encourage the provision of coastal lifeguards and coastal safety procedures; and the efforts of beach operators, including local authorities in coastal areas, to improve beach safety. We particularly welcome the provision of appropriately trained lifeguards and the introduction of beach safety procedures. However, we are not presently persuaded that it is necessary for these matters to be regulated by statute or by a Government-appointed central body.

Water Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made with the National Water Safety Committee towards guidelines for local authorities on coastal safety. [14787]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The National Water Safety Committee was consulted in the course of the preparation of the joint publication by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Royal Life Saving Society UK of the report entitled "Safety on British Beaches—Operational Guidelines". The Government welcomed that publication, which was circulated free of charge to each local coastal authority, and commend it to all those responsible for the safety of visitors to the British coast.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to reduce the number of drownings on Britain's coastal resorts; and if he will make a statement; [14815]

(2) what resources are made available to local authorities in order to provide coastal safety guidance and procedures towards the cost of coastal lifeguard provision; [14817]

(3) if he will introduce a national standardised flag system to enable bathers in coastal areas to gauge tidal and other water hazards; [14814]

(4) what encouragement and guidance he issues to local authorities in coastal areas on the issue of coastal safety and lifeguard provisions. [14818]

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answers 20 March 1995]:* The Government support the water safety efforts of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents with a grant. We hope that the campaign which ROSPA proposes to launch at the beginning of the summer covering general water safety will help to reduce the number of drownings on Britain's coastal resorts.

The publication "Safety on British Beaches—Operational Guidelines" published in 1993 jointly by ROSPA and the Royal Life Saving Society offers guidance and advice to local authorities and other beach operators on coastal safety and lifeguard provisions. That publication also includes details of the two interacting flag systems which have been adopted in many countries worldwide to warn bathers about sea conditions and designating specific activity areas within a supervised system. Central Government do not make any resources available to local authorities in coastal areas specifically to assist them with their work in connection with coastal safety.

Transport Accidents (Legal Process)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *796*, on reforms into the legal process of inquiry, what conclusions the inter departmental group of officials reached; when the group next expects to make further recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [15835]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The interdepartmental group identified a number of options. These will be contained in a consultation paper, which should be published shortly.

Torture

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government submitted to the United Nations their latest periodic report under the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. [16478]

Mr. Howard: The United Kingdom's second report under the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment was today submitted to the United Nations. Copies of the report have also been placed in the Library.

Live Animal Exports

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries he has made as to the likely policing costs for 1995–96 of proposals to tranship live animals and veal calves from the port of Folkestone; and if he will make a statement. [15253]

Mr. Maclean: These are budgetary matters, which are the responsibility of the police authority. I understand that no estimate of the likely cost for 1995–96 has been made.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of police officers on active duty in the Metropolitan police area *(a)* at the present time and *(b)* in 1979. [15266]

Mr. Maclean: In December 1993—the latest period for which figures are available—operational police strength in the Metropolitan police area was 19,932 and support strength 7.211. Comparable figures are not available for 1979 as data were not collated in this format. The total police strength of the force is now nearly 25 per cent. greater than in 1979.

Criminal Justice Legislation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons recent criminal justice legislation has not removed or amended the assumption that a person aged from 10 to 14 years cannot be convicted of a crime without proof that he or she knew what they were doing was wrong; and if he will make a statement on the Law Lords' ruling of 16 March. [15388]

Mr. Maclean: The Government took the view in 1990—in the White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", Cm 965, paragraph 8.4—that the rebuttable presumption of doli incapax made

> "proper allowance for the fact that children's understanding, knowledge and ability to reason are still developing"

between the ages of 10 and 13.

Following the judgment of the House of Lords given on 16 March, the Government are now giving careful consideration to that judgment.

Intercepted Communications

Mr Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds mail sent by members of the group known as inner sanctum to the Bank of England is being intercepted; and if he will make a statement. [15134]

Mr. Howard: It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments not to confirm or deny whether interception of communications has been authorised in any particular case. Persons who believe that their communications have been intercepted may apply to the tribunal established under section 7 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 for an investigation.

Research (Prisoners)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *547-48*, if he will now place in the Library a copy of the research into public attitudes towards the Prison Service carried out by MORI. [14843]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Further to my reply of 28 February, the research into public attitudes toward the Prison Service carried out by MORI was undertaken to guide the work of the service. There are, therefore, no plans to publish it or to place a copy in the Library.

Custodial Sentences (Women)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women served custodial sentences in each year since 1989, broken down by type of offence committed. [14865]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms. Janet Anderson, dated 23 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many women served custodial sentences in each year since 1989, broken down by type of offence committed.

Information for the years 1982 to 1992 is published in "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (Tables 3.10 (young offenders) and 5.9 (adults) of the 1992 edition, Cm 2581), a copy of which is in the library of the House of Commons.

Information for 1993 and 1994 is given in the attached table, a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons library.

Females received under immediate custodial sentence into Prison Service establishments: by type of offence for England and Wales 1993–94

Type of Offence	*1993*	*1994*
All offences	2,379	2,952
Violence against the person	326	392
Sexual offences	14	7
Burglary	106	125
Robbery	98	112
Theft and handling	785	1,059
Frauds and forgery	215	223
Drug offences	295	283
Other offences	350	461
Offences not recorded	190	290

Note:

Excludes any prisoners held solely in police cells.

Excludes fine defaulters.

Spread Betting

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department intends to monitor the effects of deregulating sports spread betting. [14792]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that the Treasury will shortly be consulting on the terms of a draft amendment to exclude certain non-financial spread betting from the scope of the Financial Services Act 1986. Decisions on the form of any future monitoring will be taken in the light of that consultation.

Staff-prisoners Ratio

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the staff to prisoner ratio for each prison in England and Wales *(a)* at the latest date available and *(b)* for each of the last 20 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 23 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning the staff:inmate ration for prisons in England and Wales.

The attached tables provide a breakdown of the staff:inmate ratio for each prison in England and Wales by category. Copies of these tables have been placed in the Library. Sub totals, and the staff:inmate ratio are provided for each category of prison. The inmate figures exclude those in police cells. Both the inmate figures and the staff figures are for 31 January 1995. The staff figures include all prison officers, senior officers and principal officers and, in the case of private sector prisons, all prisoner custody officers.

The information required to provide a similar breakdown for each of the last 20 years is either not available, or not readilny available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but a second table is attached which supplies the available total staff:inmate ratio since 1975.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Council

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what conclusions he has reached following consultation on the Government's proposals for reform of the Sports Council. [16377]

Mr. Dorrell: The creation of separate United Kingdom and England Sports Councils was warmly welcomed by those who responded to the Government's proposals, and I can confirm that, subject to the grant of royal charters, we intend to proceed to set up both councils from 1 January 1996. As previously announced, Mr. Rodney Walker, the current chairman of the Sports Council, will in due course become the chairman of the English Sports Council. I am pleased to be able to announce today that Sir Ian MacLaurin has agreed to join the Sports Council and to serve in due course as chairman of the United Kingdom Sports Council. I am also pleased to be able to announce the other members-designate of the United Kingdom Sports Council:

UK Sports Council

Mr. Rodney Walker, Chairman-designate of the English Sports Council

Mr. Graeme Simmers, Chairman of the Scottish Sports Council

Mr. Ossie Wheatley, Chairman of the Welsh Sports Council

Mr. Don Allen, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Sports Council

Mr. Gary Lineker

Mr. Rob Andrew

Mr. Clive Lloyd

Dr. Sarah Springman

Mr. Craig Reedie

I would expect the UK Sports Council to work closely with all the appropriate bodies of British sport throughout the UK and in particular with the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the Scottish and Welsh Sports Associations and the Northern Ireland Council of Physical Recreation.

I can also announce today the Government's intention to produce in early summer a White Paper setting out the broader strategic framework for Government policy on sport. It will focus on the development of sporting opportunity for young people, within and outside formal education, and on creating pathways through every stage of sporting activity, including the elite level. This will allow talent to achieve its fullest expression. I have asked the chairmen-designate of the English and UK councils to prepare and submit to me precise definitions of the functions of their respective bodies, taking account of White Paper policies.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the criteria for assessing the competitive bids for the channel tunnel rail link and the Euro passenger services which will ensure that *(a)* the successful bidder is demonstrably competent to run as well as build the railway and *(b)* safety and security against terrorist and other dangers. [15348]

Mr. Watts: The bidders for CTRL and EPS demonstrated these competences at the pre-qualification stage. The successful promoter will be obliged to comply fully with the requirements of existing legislation on railway security and safety, and the requirements of Her Majesty's railway inspectorate and my Department's transport security directorate.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will be issuing his revised guidelines for operating section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1992 before the Select Committee examining the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill finishes taking evidence. [15748]

Mr. Watts: I hope to do so.

Lorry Checks

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many intermodal lorries were checked, and if the accuracy of their consignment notes were considered at the intermodal truck depots in each of the last three years; and how many of these inspections were carried out at the nearest depot to the points of the lorries' departure. [15740]

Mr. Norris: The regulations in question were intended to encourage combined road/rail freight through the channel tunnel. The delayed start of full freight operations through the tunnel meant that, in the half year to 30 September 1994, no vehicles were found to be operating at the higher weight limit. The vehicle inspectorate will shortly be compiling figures for checks carried out up to 31 March this year and I will forward them to the hon. Member as soon as they are available.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will now reconsider the decision regarding the regulation of lorry braking safety and introduce a mandatory test of braking safety at the six month interim between the annual MOT tests of general roadworthiness; what is the current availability of the equipment for such tests; and what is the cost per axle tested. [15529]

Mr. Norris: I have no plans at present to introduce a mandatory six month brake test, although I will keep that option under review. It is the responsibility of vehicle operators to look after their vehicles properly and there are plenty of test facilities available to help them do so. The vehicle inspectorate's current charge to operators for voluntary roller brake testing is £6 per axle.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the prospective bidders for the first eight passenger train operators who have sought to pre-qualify for franchises in respect of the announcement made in December 1994. [15746]

Mr. Watts: The Franchising Director announced today that 37 organisations have applied to pre-qualify for the first group of eight passenger rail franchises, and that many applicants are interested in more than one franchise, taking the total number of applications to more than 160. Under section 145 of the Railways Act 1993 the identity of any individual applicants cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects OPRAF to agree the criteria against which a passenger scheme requirement will be determined for each of the train operating units. [15743]

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, following his instructions of 22 March 1994 if he will place in the Library a copy of the criteria which were submitted to him by the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising in respect of deciding appropriate service specifications for loss-making services; and if he will make a statement. [15138]

Mr. Watts: The guidance issued to the Franchising Director requires him to ensure that passenger service requirements for the first franchises are based upon the timetable being operated by BR immediately prior to franchising. A copy of an explanatory note setting out the Franchising Director's approach to and criteria for setting these passenger service requirements has been placed in the Library of the House.

In addition, the guidance requires the Franchising Director to develop criteria for evaluating the benefits obtained from the provision of loss making services. These criteria are intended to detail the long term basis on which the Franchising Director will make decisions about support for loss-making services as the passenger network develops over time. The Franchising Director expects to submit proposed criteria to the Secretary of State in due course.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the companies which applied for pre-qualification for each of the first eight train franchises. [15517]

Mr. Watts: The Franchising Director has announced today that 37 organisations have applied to be pre-qualify for the first group of eight passenger rail franchises, and that many applicants are interested in more than one franchise taking the total number of applications to over 160. To preserve commercial confidentiality individual applicants will not be named, nor will the number of applicants for each franchise be given.

ScotRail Passenger Services

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the date when the passenger service requirement for ScotRail will be announced. [15744]

Mr. Watts: In early summer.

Sleeper Services

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions took place with OPRAF and British Rail when decisions were taken to exclude *(a)* the Motorail service and *(b)* the Fort William sleeper from the passenger scheme requirement of ScotRail; and what discussions took place before the decision to end bookings for these services. [15745]

Mr. Watts: Regular meetings are held between OPRAF and British Rail to discuss a wide range of issues. The decision to withdraw Motorail services and the London—Fort William sleeper service from May was taken by BR on commercial grounds.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under what statutory powers the Director of Franchising and OPRAF were acting when the decision was taken to exclude the Fort William sleeper and Motorail services from the passenger service requirement for ScotRail. [15747]

Mr. Watts: In indicating that he would not include the Fort William sleeper service and Motorail services in the draft passenger service requirement for ScotRail, the Franchising Director was acting within the bounds of the statutory objectives, instructions and guidance issued by my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) on 22 March 1994 in accordance with the provisions of section 5 of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the additional costs associated with maintenance of the *(a)* Fort William to London sleeper service, *(b)* Carlisle to London sleeper service and *(c)* Scotland to London motorail services, for the purpose of an eight week consultation period commencing in May, indicating the financial assumptions involved; and if he will make a statement; [15139]

(2) what estimate he has made of the costs associated with the closure of the *(a)* Fort William to London sleeper service, *(b)* Carlisle to London sleeper service and *(c)* Scotland to London motorail services; and if he will make a statement; [15141]

(3) what estimate he has made of the start up costs associated with re-opening, after May, the *(a)* Fort William to London sleeper service, *(b)* Carlisle to London sleeper service and *(c)* Scotland to London Motorail services; and if he will make a statement. [15140]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has not made any such assessments on estimates. The decision to withdraw Motorail services and the sleeper service between London and Carlisle and London and Fort William from 28 May was a commercial decision by British Rail. It has undertaken to retain the assets needed to run these services so that they can be restored if the Franchising Director decides to include them in the passenger service requirement for the ScotRail franchise.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will ensure that the inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road is based on a re-assessment of traffic models and growth forecasts; [15257]

(2) what account he has taken of the effects of congestion of the traffic model assumption in respect of the Birmingham northern relief road which assumes that for roads which are full traffic will grow at a reduced rate; [15255]

(3) on what basis traffic modellers have ignored heavy goods vehicles in respect of the Birmingham northern relief road; and if he will make a statement; [15254]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact of an *(a)* untolled and *(b)* tolled west orbital road in respect of the Birmingham northern relief road. [15256]

Mr. Watts: These are matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 23 March 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for information about the traffic modelling used for the Birmingham Northern Relief Road.

We are satisfied that the traffic model uses a robust methodology and has taken account of significant changes, such as the SACTRA report, which have arisen since the draft Orders were published. The ongoing public inquiry into the proposals has received much information on traffic flows and techniques. It will be for the Inspector to form his own judgement on that evidence.

The Original (February 1994) BNRR traffic forecasts assumed a tolled Western Orbital Route. The latest (November 1994) forecasts assume a WOR that will be free to motorists. The traffic impacts of these differing assumptions are contained in evidence placed before the inquiry.

HGVs are not ignored in the traffic model. Tests established the most appropriate methodology for the evaluation of the BNRR proposals; this ensures the most realistic estimate of HGV routing. Details of the methodology used have been presented to the inquiry.

The traffic model takes account of the capacity of the roads in the area. Reduced growth rates have been assumed for all journeys with one or both ends in the conurbation, in line with assumptions made by local highway authorities in the conurbation.

ENVIRONMENT

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to set targets for the phasing out of HFCs. [14984]

Mr. Atkins: There are no plans to phase out HFCs, nor to set targets for phaseout. HFCs have been developed as alternatives to some ozone-depleting substances and are an important part of the solution to the problem of depletion of the ozone layer. However, HFCs are also greenhouse gases and the Government are discussing with industry the scope for voluntary agreements to limit HFC emissions and to ensure that HFCs are not used where emissions are unavoidable if safe, practical and more environmental acceptable alternatives are available.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what qualities he will look for in appointing a new chair of the revamped Local Government Commission. [15058]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On 21 March my right hon. Friend announced the appointment of Sir David Cooksey to the chairmanship of the Local Government Commission, *Official Report*, column *145*. I believe Sir David has all the qualities required of the chairman, and I note that his appointment was immediately welcomed by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson).

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the English counties, following the current reorganisation of local government, that will have no administrative function but will have a lord lieutenant and sheriff; [15072]

(2) if he will list the English counties, following the current reorganisation of local government, which are to be extended beyond their administrative boundaries for ceremonial purposes and where lords lieutenant and sheriffs will have jurisdiction over the wider area; [15070]

(3) if he will list the English counties, following the current reorganisation of local government, that will have no functions. [15071]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Decisions have not yet been taken in all cases. However, I expect that the only county areas without any county councils but with their own lords lieutenant will be Berkshire and East Yorkshire. Most areas whose local authority is granted unitary powers will be deemed to be part of a neighbouring county area for ceremonial purposes.

In those areas for which structure orders have been made, North West Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset will be deemed to be part of Somerset; South Gloucestershire will be deemed to be part of Gloucestershire; North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire will be deemed to be part of Lincolnshire; York will be deemed to be part of North Yorkshire; and Hull will be deemed to be part of East Yorkshire. We are still considering the ceremonial arrangements for Cleveland.

Lords Lieutenant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the English county councils which have their own lord lieutenant and sheriff. [15073]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A lord lieutenant and high sheriff are appointed to the following counties:

Greater London
Greater Manchester
Merseyside
South Yorkshire
Tyne and Wear
West Midlands
West Yorkshire
Avon
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Dorset
Durham
East Sussex
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hereford and Worcester
Hertfordshire
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Kent
Lancashire
Liecestershire
Lincolnshire
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Shopshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Surrey
Warwickshire
West Sussex
Wiltshire

Air Pollution

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have taken place with his European ministerial counterparts concerning the need to reduce levels of air pollution. [15127]

Mr. Atkins: I maintain regular contacts with my European ministerial counterparts on all aspects of environmental protection, including air pollution. Most recently, I met my European Community counterparts in Brussels on 9 March at the meeting of the Environment Council. We had a fruitful discussion on a number of issues related to air pollution, including the proposed directive on integrated pollution prevention and control and the proposed framework directive on ambient air quality assessment and management.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to reduce levels of air pollution; and if he will make a statement. [15133]

Mr. Atkins: The Government announced their strategic policies for managing air quality in the document "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge", published on 19 January. Copies are available in the House Libraries. Those policies are aimed at delivering sustainable improvements in air quality throughout the UK. Proposals include a framework of national air quality standards, a new system of local air quality assessment and management and an action plan for transport.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of *(a)* grant in aid, *(b)* internal income generated and *(c)* total budget for the National Rivers Authority for each year since its establishment. [15321]

Mr. Atkins: The level of grant in aid, income generated from charges and levies and total expenditure of the National Rivers authority are:

£ million

	(a) *Grant-in-aid*	*(b)* *Income from charges and levies*	*(c)* *Total expenditure*[1]
1989–90	74.3	267.9	[2]339.8
1990–91	99.5	274.9	[2]368.7
1991–92	83.9	300.4	[2]422.9
1992–93	74.7	335.9	[2]428.6

£ million

	(a) Grant-in-aid	*(b)* Income from charges and levies	*(c)* Total expenditure[1]
1993–94	61.2	343.1	[2]466.5
1994–95	67.9	295.6	[3]455.4

Note:

[1] Total expenditure does not equal the sum of grant in aid and income from charges and levies because of end year balances and flood defence capital grant.

[2] Actual

[3] Budget

Sources:

(a) DoE departmental reports

(b) and (c) NRA corporate plan 1994–95

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of people working *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time for the National Rivers Authority in each year since it was established. [15322]

Mr. Atkins: The NRA does not separately record numbers of part-time staff. The data show permanent staff, including part-time staff, and temporary staff, including those working for limited periods and those on fixed term contracts:

	Permanent staff	*Temporary staff*
31 March 1990	6,382	153
31 March 1991	6,886	476
31 March 1992	7,568	581
31 March 1993	7,483	758
31 March 1994	7,072	637

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each of the major establishments which are part of the National Rivers Authority, giving number of employees and budget for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 in 1994 prices. [15316]

Mr. Atkins: The number of people employed by the National Rivers Authority on each of its functions is:

Number of employees

Function	*(a)1993–94 number*	*(b)1994–95 number*	*(c)1995–96 number*
Water Quality	1,298	1,279	1,242
Water Resources	788	802	791
Flood Defence	3,094	2,970	2,948
Fisheries	526	522	511
Conservation	87	92	91
Navigation	85	84	84
Recreation	29	31	30
Support Services	1,451	1,345	1,326
National Centres	351	397	397
Total	7,709	7,522	7,420

Source:

NRA.

The National Rivers Authority's budget for 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 at 1994–95 prices is:

Budget in 1994–95 prices

Function	*(a) 1993–94 £ million*	*(b) 1994–95 £ million*	*(c) 1995–96 £ million*
Water Quality	89.7	88.1	83.5
Water Resources	80.8	75.4	72.1
Flood Defence	255.4	242.0	237.7
Fisheries	24.5	21.6	21.1
Conservation	3.5	3.5	3.3
Navigation	7.5	6.0	5.8
Recreation	2.3	2.1	1.8
Other	12.2	16.7	12.2
Total	475.9	455.4	437.5

Source:

NRA corporate plan 1994–95.

Regional Water Companies

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each regional water company *(a)* the net equity proceeds to Government as a result of privatisation, *(b)* the market value at the end of the first day of trading and *(c)* the current market value. [15351]

Mr. Atkins: Information on the proceeds resulting from privatisation, the market capitalisation at flotation and movement in share values at the end of the first day's trading in shares in the 10 water holding companies in England and Wales, is contained in the National Audit Office report "Department of the Environment: Sale of the Water Authorities in England and Wales", a copy of which is in the Library. Current market values vary according to fluctuations in the share price of the companies. This information is not held by my Department.

Local Authorities

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward legislation to require local authorities to disclose in their annual accounts *(a)* the number of staff employed, *(b)* their total remuneration, *(c)* the number of staff in receipt of remuneration in excess of £10,000 per annum in salary bands of £5,000 and *(d)* the remuneration of the highest paid chief officer in a format similar to that used in company accounts. [15165]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There is a strong case for local authorities to publish details of the pay of their senior staff in broadly the same way as companies are required to publish details of the pay of their senior employees. However, I am keen to keep the new obligations on local authorities under control.

My Department is considering what information it would be appropriate for local authorities to publish and the best way for the local authorities to be encouraged to make that information public. Of course, no new stipulations would be introduced without consultation with the local authority associations.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the *(a)* total staff numbers, *(b)* total revenue and capital expenditure and *(c)* local authority housing stock in all district authorities in East and West Sussex. [14890]

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The available information is:

East and West Sussex

	(a) Total staff as at March 1994	(b)[1] Net revenue expenditure 1993–94 outturn £000	(b)[2] Total capital expenditure 1993–94 £000	(c)[3] Dwelling stock as at 1 April 1994
Brighton	1,845	23,378	14,945	10,507
Eastbourne	666	10,970	7,834	4,771
Hastings	787	10,440	5,648	4,671
Hove	555	11,357	4,763	3,505
Lewes	429	8,563	3,748	3,923
Rother	375	8,579	4,738	3,355
Wealden	520	13,013	6,179	3,849
Adur	472	6,048	3,431	3,316
Arun	586	13,634	8,234	4,202
Chichester	n/a	13,516	9,087	6,436
Crawley	816	10,448	5,602	10,389
Horsham	558	9,505	13,713	5,435
Mid Sussex	n/a	9,333	2,875	0
Worthing	645	9,567	3,609	2,705

Notes:

(1)(2) Revenue expenditure and capital expenditure cannot be added together to give a "total" expenditure figure at an individual authority level. This is because some of the capital expenditure is funded from revenue.

(1) Net revenue expenditure is expenditure on recurring items including the running of services and capital financing. It excludes spending funded by special and specific grants and income from licence fees, etcetera. This is the expenditure figure to compare to standard spending assessment.

(2) This is gross capital expenditure on all services, including housing, and includes expenditure reimbursed by grants and expenditure financed from revenue.

(3) Includes dwellings owned by the named local authority but which are situated outside of this local authority's area.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his proposals for local authority participation in companies and for amending the capital finance regulations. [16203]

Mr. Curry: The Local Authorities (Companies) Order 1995 and the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Approved Investments) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 have today been laid before Parliament. These implement the package of proposals to encourage closer partnership between local authorities and the private sector, announced by my right hon. Friend on 31 October 1994.

The Local Authorities (Companies) Order 1995 establishes a regime for local authority participation in companies, under which those companies, including companies limited by guarantee, which are led by the private sector will be subject to few controls other than those applicable generally under the Companies Acts. We are providing in the regime transitional provisions for local authority companies established before 1 April 1995, and we are also allowing certain exemptions.

The Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Approved Investments) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 make a number of changes to the local authority capital finance rules, with the intention of promoting the use of private finance.

The order and regulations laid take account of extensive consultation conducted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales with the local authority associations, individual local authorities, and other interested parties. The main changes made following this will:

- free authorities of all subsequent capital finance impact from a company's operations provided it leaves the public sector, permanently, by 31 March 1996.
- increase to 75 per cent. the usable proportion of receipts of sale of local authority shareholdings in airport companies arising before 1 April 1997, and in bus companies arising before 31 March 1996. This was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 3 March, *Official Report*, column *732*.
- allow authorities holding leases of non-housing property taken out before 1988 to extend them for up to 10 years without capital costs.
- allow authorities to transfer assets to companies in return for a mixed consideration of cash and shares, without needing to set resources aside in relation to the shares.

The regulations also introduce other beneficial changes which reflect consultations with and representations from local authorities. These will:

- allow authorities to renew, for up to two years without capital cost, leases on privately owned homes expiring after 20 December 1994. This will enable authorities to continue present arrangements by renewing short-term leases on good quality homes in the private rented sector, rather than using bed-and-breakfast hotels to provide temporary accommodation. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation has fallen by 43 per cent. over two years.
- allow costs of computer software to be capitalised.

In addition, there are many clarificatory and drafting changes.

I will also be laying before Parliament later in the year further regulations which will have the effect of increasing to 90 per cent. the usable proportion of local authorities' receipts from sales of car parks and retail property arising between 1 September 1995 and 31 August 1996.

Thus local authorities and prospective private sector partners can now look forward to a total of four targeted reductions in set-aside to take effect during this year. It is up to authorities to take advantage of these and to persuade us of the case for others.

I have been impressed by the strength and depth of partnership arrangements already established by many local authorities with the private sector. The changes I am now making will support those initiatives and give authorities even greater scope to harness the private sector's investment potential and management skills in delivering capital projects.

We regard this improved package of measures as just a start. We shall be looking at other areas of the capital finance regulations, in particular those relating to allowance of cost deductions from capital receipts before set-aside is calculated, with a view to further amendments later in the year.

I have arranged for copies of two documents which summarise the new measures—"New Private Finance Rules for Local Authorities" and "A Guide to Local Authorities' Interests in Companies"—to be placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 English districts with the lowest total capital and revenue expenditure. [14891]

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* Revenue expenditure and capital expenditure cannot be added together to give a "total" expenditure figure at an individual authority level. This is because some of the capital expenditure is funded from revenue.

The available information is.

The 10 English Districts with lowest Total Capital Expenditure in 1993–94

	£000
Oadby and Wigston	1,120
Epsom and Ewell	1,187
Castle Point	1,276
Rutland	1,378
Bromsgrove	1,378
West Somerset	1,491
Oswestry	1,513
Castle Morpeth	1,514
West Devon	1,525
South Herefordshire	1,606

Total capital expenditure

This is gross capital expenditure on all services, including housing, and includes expenditure reimbursed by grants and expenditure financed from revenue.

The 10 English Districts with the lowest net revenue expenditure in 1993–94—outturn

	£000
Wellingborough	171
Berwick Upon Tweed	2,263
Teesdale	2,595
Alnwick	2,776
Rutland	2,859
Oswestry	2,995
Tamworth	3,035
Christchurch	3,227
Purbeck	3,278
Leominster	3,570

Net revenue expenditure:

This is expenditure on recurring items including the running of services and capital financing. It excludes spending funded by special and specific grants and income from fees and charges, interest, etcetera. This is the expenditure figure to compare to SSA.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing, for each local authority in England, the latest available net revenue expenditure figures to compare with standard spending assessment, broken down by broad service block, in each year since 1990–91; and if he will place this information in the Library in personal computer spreadsheet readable format. [14574]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* I have placed the information in the Library of the House.

Housing Partnership Schemes

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what application he has had for housing partnership schemes from the Isle of Wight; and when he expects to make an announcement. [15851]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department has received three applications under the housing partnership fund from the Isle of Wight. The successful schemes for the 1995–96 housing partnership fund are being announced today, and I am pleased to tell the hon. Member that the Hansford store conversion scheme in Ryde is to be allocated £177,000 to redevelop part of a redundant furniture store into 15 flats.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the allocation of resources to local authorities under his Department's housing partnership fund for 1995–96. [16204]

Mr. Curry: Some 220 schemes in 170 housing authorities will benefit from £30 million housing partnership fund for 1995–96.

Councils continue to be very enthusiastic about the scheme. This year we received over 740 bids. The scheme demonstrates the Government's commitment to supporting imaginative high-quality housing projects which will be of long-lasting benefit to local communities.

The successful bids involve a wide range of innovative and valuable housing projects, which address local housing needs. This year we have particularly focused on schemes to bring empty properties back into use and those which effect major energy efficiency improvements. The schemes have been put together in partnership with the private sector, housing associations and other local organisations.

The combination of public and private sector money means that up to £108 million will be invested to meet local housing need, help stimulate local economic growth and create jobs.

A list of the resources being allocated to local authorities under the housing partnerships fund for 1995–96 has been placed in the Library.

Water and Sewerage

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State if he will list, by water company, the percentage 1995–96 price increase for water and sewerage charges for *(a)* domestic customers paying water rates, *(b)* domestic customers paying by water meter and *(c)* commercial customers. [15782]

Mr. Atkins: The information relating to domestic customers is shown. Information about charge increases for commercial customers is not held centrally.

Percentage change in Water and Sewerage Services 1995–96 on 1994–95

	Water		*Sewerage*	
	Unmeasured	*Measured*	*Unmeasured*	*Measured*
Anglian Water Services Ltd.	6.6	2.0	8.3	4.5
Dwr Cymru Cyfyngedig	1.0	0.3	5.2	4.2
North West Water Ltd.	6.3	0.0	7.3	6.7
Northumbrian Water Ltd.	7.1	0.2	5.4	5.7
Severn Trent Water Ltd.	2.5	0.7	7.5	–2.1
South West Water Services Ltd.	5.3	–8.1	5.3	–9.3
Southern Water Services Ltd.	7.7	12.0	7.2	–0.1
Thames Water Utilities Ltd.	4.3	–1.0	7.4	–0.7
Wessex Water Services Ltd.	6.2	3.0	4.2	2.8
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.	2.3	3.3	14.0	2.4
Bournemouth and W Hampshire Water Cos.	1.6	0.2	—	—
Bristol Water plc	6.4	–12.6	—	—
Cambridge Water Co.	2.0	–0.5	—	—
Chester Waterworks Co.	0.8	0.0	—	—
Cholderton and District Water Co. Ltd.	2.7	0.0	—	—
East Surrey Water plc	2.2	1.9	—	—
Essex and Suffolk Water plc	7.2	–13.4	—	—
Folkestone and Dover Water Services Ltd.	5.2	2.9	—	—
Hartlepool Water plc	4.9	–15.6	—	—
Mid Kent Water plc	4.0	–1.7	—	—
Mid Southern Water plc	2.7	–3.9	—	—
North East Water plc	2.4	–2.0	—	—
North Surrey Water Ltd.	6.5	–5.1	—	—
Portsmouth Water plc–April–March tariff	2.9	–6.5	—	—
South East Water Ltd.	2.3	–9.6	—	—
South Staffordshire Water plc	0.0	–14.0	—	—
Sutton District Water plc	2.0	–16.1	—	—
Tendring Hundred Water Services Ltd.	2.2	–2.2	—	—
Three Valleys Water Services plc	9.9	–3.7	—	—
Wrexham and E Denbighshire Water plc	1.0	–4.2	—	—
Yorkshire Waterworks plc	2.3	–13.9	—	—

PSA Projects

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what adjustments have been made to the value of the liabilities retained by Government following the sale of the former PSA Projects business. [16475]

Sir Paul Beresford: Two reductions have been made to these liabilities in line with the terms of the sale agreement for PSA Projects. First, the limit on the Government's liability to contribute to the costs of redundancies of staff formerly employed in PSA Projects has been reduced by £800,00 to £39.5 million, as calculated by using the formula in the sale agreement. This follows a correction to the previously reported transferring staff total to 704. Secondly, there has been a consequential reduction of £200,000 to £4.34 million in the consideration adjustment due to the purchaser on the first anniversary of the sale.

DEFENCE

Nerve Agent Destruction

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of progress in development of the Silver II electro-chemical disposal method; and if he will make a statement. [14407]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 23 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what assessment he has made of progress in development of the silver II electro-chemical disposal method and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. CBDE, working in close collaboration with AEA Technology, has undertaken an initial evaluation of the efficacy of the silver II process. Extensive laboratory tests successfully demonstrated that the method is suitable for the destruction of a range of CW agents including nerve agent and mustard gas. A pilot plant at Dounreay has carried out extensive experimental work with simulants and it is planned, subject to funding approval, to build a similar plant at Porton Down this summer. This would be used to prove the technique on a larger scale using live agents. If this trial is successful, the plant could be used to destroy agent from old CW munitions found within the UK. The process has a number of potential advantages for the destruction of chemical agents. It is an

intrinsically safe process as the procedure stops as soon as the supply of electricity is switched off and the process is carried out at relatively low temperatures ie below 100°C. The volume of effluent is minimal and, because the organic matter is totally oxidised, consists of an aqueous solution of inorganic salts. The method should allow complete decontamination of CW munitions, including their explosive content, regardless of their nature.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the potential cost savings to the United Kingdom Exchequer of the withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland. [14842]

Mr. Soames: The units withdrawn from Northern Ireland remain on standby to return, should there be a resumption of terrorist violence. Significant cost savings will not arise until progress towards a permanent peace justifies permanent withdrawals.

Arms Exports

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the payment of commissions to those involved in the sale of arms to overseas Governments in respect of *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* members of the Government, *(c)* Members of Parliament and *(d)* relatives of Members of Parliament of the country concerned; and if he will make a statement. [15054]

Mr. Freeman: The British Government do not pay commissions to those involved in arms sales. I cannot comment on other countries' requirements or conventions on the payment of commissions to their nationals.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of black or Asian *(a)* warrant officers and *(b)* commissioned officers up to the rank of (i) captain, (ii) colonel and (iii) field-marshal or equivalent ranks serving in Her Majesty's forces. [14899]

Mr. Soames: According to the results of the ethnic origin survey of the regular armed forces, based on the 57 per cent. of responses received as at 1 October last year the following numbers of personnel classified themselves as black or Asian:

	Black	*Asian*
Warrant officer or equivalent	64	40
Commissioned officers:		
up to the rank of captain or equivalent	59	94
Major to colonel or equivalent	31	66
Brigadier to field marshal or equivalent	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Figure less than 5. Where numbers are less than 5, figures are not given in order to avoid individuals being identified.

The first results of ethnic origin survey of the regular armed forces, giving percentage figures, have been published in the new tri-service personnel statistical return entitled "Ethnic Composition of the Regular Armed Forces", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Land Sales

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all surplus Ministry of Defence land sold in the last 12 months with the names of the purchasers; what surplus land is currently for sale; and if he will make a statement about his Department's policy towards the disposal of surplus land. [15212]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Sirius

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his Department's instructions for the future use of HMS Sirius; and if he will make a statement. [15444]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 15 December 1994, *Official Report,* columns *815–16*. No decisions have yet been taken.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Sirius was built and at what cost, together with the dates and costs of subsequent maintenance and refits. [15445]

Mr. Freeman: HMS Sirius was accepted from the shipbuilder, HM Dockyard Portsmouth, in June 1966. Acquisition cost details for the ship are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dates of major maintenance and refits carried out on HMS Sirius are set out in the table. Details of routine and operational maintenance, and the costs of refit and maintenance work carried out before the royal dockyards passed into commercial management in April 1987 are not available. The total cost of her last major maintenance period, undertaken between October and December 1987, was some £1.2 million. The total cost of the final refit, undertaken between October 1989 and May 1991, was in the region of £25 million.

Major maintenane Periods
19 November 1967 to 5 January 1968
2 March 1970 to 23 March 1970
22 February 1971 to 19 March 1971
30 May 1973 to 22 June 1973
29 February 1980 to 31 March 1980
28 October 1987 to 11 December 1987
Refits
18 August 1969 to 12 December 1969
10 January 1972 to 26 May 1972
10 March 1975 to 10 February 1978
5 May 1981 to 30 June 1982
15 April 1985 to 6 December 1985
23 October 1987 to 19 May 1991

Empty Housing

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of unoccupied homes under the control of his Ministry as at 1 July 1994 and at 1 January 1995 in each local housing authority area in England, Wales and Scotland. [15834]

Mr. Soames: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Plymouth Airport (Training Flights)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total annual cost to his Department for services at Plymouth airport in connection with Royal Navy training flights. [15778]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of Royal Navy training flights at Plymouth airport is £626,000 per annum.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the need to carry out Royal Navy training flights from Plymouth airport; and if he will make a statement. [15779]

Mr. Soames: There has been no recent assessment of the need to carry out Royal Navy training flights from Plymouth airport.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost to his Department of Sea King helicopters using Plymouth airport in relation to sea training. [15777]

Mr. Soames: The transfer of flag officer sea training from Portland to Plymouth in September this year will require the continuation of certain aviation support. Various options for the provision of the service are being investigated, including the use of civil aircraft under contract operating out of Plymouth airport, but comparative cost are not yet available.

RAF Training

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what plans he has for the future of flying training in the Royal Air Force. [16378]

Mr. Soames: Following the issue of consultative documents on 17 November 1994 recommending the closure of RAF Scampton and RAF Finningley, representations have been made by local authorities, Members of Parliament and members of the public. My Department has consulted thoroughly with the trade unions and those local authorities closely associated with the stations, and full and careful consideration has been given to all of the representations that we have received.

Following this work, I am satisfied that no issues have been raised which call into question the viability of the proposals, which satisfactorily meet out future flying training needs and save £23,000,000 per annum. I have therefore decided that both RAF Finningley and RAF Scampton should close in April 1996, and that all future non-fast jet fixed wing fixed flying training will be undertaken at RAF Cranwell and RAF Linton-on-Ouse.

We will, of course, continue to consult the trade unions about the detailed implementation of these measures.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Abattoirs

11. **Sir Peter Emery:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that there is sufficient abattoir capacity for farmers in Devon. [13886]

Mrs. Browning: I know the area well. I know that the replacement of an old abattior with a new one will be welcome in east Devon..

Calves (Human Food)

14. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the brain and spinal cords of calves under the age of six months from going into human food. [13889]

Mrs. Browning: In a large experimental study of the pathogenesis of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, no infectivity has been demonstrated in the brain and spinal cord in calves two and six months after oral challenge with a large dose of BSE-infected cow brain at four months of age. We would, of course, act in response to scientific advice if there were to be any new evidence.

Tobacco Regime

17. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the total cost of the common agricultural policy tobacco regime in 1995. [13892]

Mr. Waldegrave: The latest estimate is around £900 million.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

20. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to review the level of hill livestock compensatory allowance payments. [13896]

Mr. Jack: Agriculture Ministers expect to review the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances which will apply for the 1996 scheme this autumn, as part of the annual review of public expenditure.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with the farming unions about the payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement. [13879]

Mr. Jack: We invariably consult the farming industry before we determine HLCA rates or make any changes to the scheme and listen carefully to what it says.

Animal Welfare

21. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to improve the welfare of livestock in the European Union. [13897]

Mrs. Browning: In response to my right hon. Friend's request in January, the European Commission is bringing forward from 1997 to this year its report to the Council reviewing directive 91/629 on the welfare of calves. The resulting discussions in the Council of Ministers will provide the opportunity to press again for Community-wide standards which rule out the use of the veal crate, which has been illegal in the United Kingdom since 1990, I have visited Ministers in other member states to enlist support for our opposition to the veal crate and the response has, in many cases, been encouraging.

In the continuing Council negotiations on the welfare of animals in transit, we shall persevere in refusing to accept unsatisfactory compromises, and in pressing for a satisfactory Community measure which includes journey limits.

Animals (Human Genes)

22. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were reared in the United Kingdom last year following the incorporation of

human genes in their genetic make-up; and whether he will take steps to have food products marked accordingly. [13898]

Mrs. Browning: The statistical information sought is not readily available. However, no animals containing copy genes of human origin have been cleared for food use in the UK. I can assure the hon. Member that if any such clearance was to be given, a labelling requirement would be imposed so as to allow consumers to make an informed choice.

Horses

23. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that the minimum value rule for horses exported to continental Europe remains; and if he will make a statement. [13900]

Mrs. Browning: Council directive 91/628 on the welfare of animals during transport contains a provision, for which we fought hard in the negotiations, which allows our national rules on the export of equines to continue. We shall resist very strongly any proposal to revoke or amend this provision.

EC Grubbing-up Scheme

24. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the uptake of the latest EC grubbing-up scheme in the United Kingdom. [13901]

Mr. Jack: The latest EC apple orchard grubbing-up grant scheme was open to applications in the UK during 25 October to 1 December 1994 and 13 to 31 January 1995. Some 318 applications covering 2,777 hectares were received. By the end of February, 260 covering 2,343 hectares, had been approved and 32 covering 133 hectares had been either rejected or withdrawn. The remaining applications were still being processed.

Approval of an application does not carry an obligation to grub. That is a decision for the applicant. Consequently, we shall not know the uptake of the scheme for several months.

Live Animal Exports

25. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of live farm animals exported from the United Kingdom for slaughter in other EU member states in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1994. [13903]

Mrs. Browning: Official trade statistics for the total number of livestock, in thousand head, exported from the United Kingdom to other EU member states are as follows;

	1979	*January to November 1994*
Cattle	505	463
Sheep	445	896
Pigs	37	172
Poultry	3,731	19,642

These statistics do not distinguish animals for slaughter or for fattening. Figures for 1979 include exports to Spain, Greece and Portugal which joined the EU after this date, but all figures exclude exports to the member states that joined the EU in 1995. Figures for 1994 are provisional and are thought to under-record the true level of exports.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has had to the rural White Paper consultation exercise. [13889]

Mrs. Browning: We have received about 350 written submissions. Views have also been expressed in a series of regional and subject seminars.

Milk Quota

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent speculators exploiting the shortage of milk quota in the United Kingdom. [13899]

Mr. Jack: There is no evidence to support allegations of speculation in milk quotas. Milk quota may be leased only between producers who are registered with the Intervention Board; while quota may be purchased only by producers actively involved in milk production or by those who acquire, on a permanent basis, the land to which milk quota is attached.

Common Agricultural Policy

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the weekly cost of all agricultural support for a family of four in *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* currently.

Mr. Jack: A note entitled "The Cost of the Common Agricultural Policy to Taxpayers and Consumers", produced by my Department, was deposited in the Library of the House on 9 March. This gives estimates of the cost to UK consumers and taxpayers of all forms of agricultural support of £4.15 per person per week in 1993, the most recent year for which information is available. The equivalent figure for 1985 is estimated at £2.39 per person per week. Both estimates include national agricultural expenditures as well as transfers resulting from the operation of the CAP. These estimates are based on calculations of total transfers resulting from agricultural policies in the European Union, made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Comparable figures for 1975 are not available. The estimates are likely to overstate the savings which could be made by consumers and taxpayers if agricultural support policies were removed, because, in the absence of support, world prices would be higher than at present.

In 1965, the UK operated a system of deficiency payments. The cost to UK taxpayers of these and other measures was equivalent to £0.08 per person per week—or £0.82 per person per week in 1994 prices. In addition, there were a number of policies which had the effect of raising prices to consumers. It is not possible to quantify these costs, but it is likely that they were smaller in real terms than the present consumer costs of the CAP.

Suicides

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many suicides there have been in the English farming community in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [14258]

Mrs. Browning: The information is set out in the table.

Suicides of farmers and farm workers in England

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*Total*
Farmers	32	33	36	31	31	163
Farm workers	21	21	18	17	14	91
Total	53	54	54	48	45	254

Source:
OPCS

The relatively high rate of suicides among farmers is, of course, a cause of concern and with other agencies we are seeking means to reduce it. However, the underlying causes are many, and there is no single solution to this complex issue.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of cases of ectoparasitic infection in sheep for *(a)* the two years before compulsory dipping was abolished and *(b)* the two years since compulsory dipping was abolished. [14570]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *215*, for the number of cases of sheep scab during the period in question.

Other ectoparasitic infections of sheep have never been notifiable in England and consequently information on the number of cases of these diseases is not available.

Farm Investigation, Derbyshire

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish information held in his Department and all readings for levels of sulphur, molydenum, fluorides and dioxins at the farm of Wareing Bros., the Breck, Barrow Hill, Chesterfield, Derbyshire since 1984. [14557]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The results of investigations undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on behalf of individual farmers are not published for reasons of commercial confidentiality. The Ministry, as part of its own investigations, took samples of milk for dioxin analysis in April 1991 and May 1993 from several farms in the Bolsover and Staveley areas, including the Breck. The Ministry published the results of these surveys for dioxins in August 1992 and May 1993 respectively. Mr. M. J. Wareing was informed of the dioxin levels in the samples which he provided.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make assessments and publish a report on investigations undertaken by the veterinary investigation service, ADAS, the alkali inspector, HM inspectorate of pollution and environmental health officers into the farm of Wareing Bros., the Breck, Barrow Hill, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, since 1984. [14560]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* No, reports on the investigations carried out by the veterinary investigation service and ADAS, as for similar investigations into individual animal disease outbreaks, contain information which is inappropriate for disclosure on commercial confidentiality and other grounds. The alkali inspector, HM inspectorate of pollution and environmental health officers are not a part of MAFF and it is up to those organisations to decide whether to make any information they hold public.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the records he holds on cattle reared on the farm of Wareing Bros., the Breck, Barrow Hill, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, since 1984, including details of stillborn calves, calves born with eye defects and cattle which have not been able to be sold directly to market since the introduction of the Animals, Meat and Meat Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) Regulation 1991. [14561]

Mrs. Angela Browning *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* No, reports on the investigations carried out by the veterinary investigation service, as for similar investigations into individual animal disease outbreaks, contain information which is inappropriate for disclosure on commercial confidentiality and other grounds.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make assessments and publish a report on the impact of sulphurs, molydenum, fluorides and dioxins on crops, soil, cattle, residents and workers at the farm of Wareing Bros., the Breck, Barrow Hill Chesterfield, Derbyshire and in its vicinity; and if he will take steps to recommend a spray programme for the crops and fodder at the farm. [14562]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* It is appropriate for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to undertake such assessments only if issues of public concern such as food safety are involved. No evidence exists to indicate that this is the Breck or other farms in its vicinity as, for example, the levels of dioxins in cows milk taken from the Breck in April 1991 and May 1993 were within the normal background range for milk in the UK. It is not the Ministry's responsibility to provide advice on a spray programme for crops and fodder on the Breck as this information is available from commercial consultants.

SOCIAL SECURITY

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring arrangements are in place to assess whether vulnerable groups are reducing their consumption of fuel as a result of the imposition of VAT. [14979]

Mr. Roger Evans: None, the family expenditure survey, published by the Central Statistical Office, provides estimates of spending patterns of households in the United Kingdom.

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new proposals he has to increase earnings disregards.

Mr. Roger Evans: From April 1996 we propose that couples receiving income support or jobseeker's allowance should have the first £10 of their earnings in any week disregarded, rather than the current £5 each. From October 1996 we will also be introducing the back to work bonus, which will provide a lump sum payment of up to £1,000 to claimants with earnings above the disregard when they move off benefit into work.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in north Tyneside are currently in receipt of invalidity benefit. [14556]

Mr. Hague: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Tony Laurence to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 22 March 1995:

As Michael Bichard is on leave at the moment, the Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of Invalidity Benefit (IVB) recipients in North Tyneside.

The information is not available in the form requested. This is because Benefits Agency (BA) District areas do not correspond with county or borough boundaries.

The BA North Tyneside District, comprising North Shields District Office (DO) and Wallsend Branch Office (BO), has responsibility for administering claims for almost all IVB customers resident in the North Tyneside District Council administrative area.

However, that District also deals with a small number of IVB customers who reside within the Newcastle City Council administrative area. Furthermore, the Newcastle East Branch Office of the BA Newcastle District also deals with a small number of IVB customers resident in the North Tyneside District Council area. Figures relating specifically to these small groups of customers would only be available at disproportionate cost.

For this reason, I am providing the latest figures available for IVB customers within the BA North Tyneside District only:-

Number of IVB Customers in North Tyneside District at 28 February 1995

	Number
North Shields DO	4,501
Wallsend BO	3,504
Total	8,005

These figures include a very small number of customers who are entitled to IVB but are not actually receiving it because they are receiving an overlapping benefit (such as Widows Benefit) payable at a higher rate.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving invalidity benefit in the Rhondda benefit district; what percentage this is of the total population of working age; and what are the average percentages for *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England and Wales. [14845]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the tables.

Table A: People in receipt of invalidity benefit in the Taff Rhondda District Office area on the last working day of February 1995

	Number
Taff Rhondda District Office	18,235

Notes:

1. Figures obtained from 100 per cent. clerical count of cases in the Benefits Agency offices.
2. The figure will include some people who have claimed but are not actually receiving Invalidity Benefit because they are in receipt of a higher overlapping benefit.

Table B: People in receipt of invalidity benefit on 3 April 1993 by country and percentage of working population

Country	*People in receipt of invalidity benefit*	*Percentage of the working population*
Wales	172,000	10
England	1,184,000	4
England and Wales	1,356,000	4

Notes:

1. The working population has been taken to be 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women.
2. Invalidity benefit information based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Estimated mid-year—1993—population figures supplied by the population estimates unit, OPCS.

War Pensions

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he estimates would be the cost to the Exchequer if war pensions awarded to widows continued for their natural life and not until their re-marriage or permanent co-habitation. [14394]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that the net cost of awarding the war widow's pension for life would be in the order of £100 million in a full year.

Social Fund

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances participants on Government programmes including training for work and community action can obtain help from the social fund; and if he will make a statement. [15153]

Mr. Roger Evans: People who were in receipt of income support prior to starting these programmes continue to be eligible to apply to the social fund. Such people will be eligible for awards of both community care grants and budgeting loans. People can apply to the social fund for crisis loans whether or not they are in receipt of an income-related benefit.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to make social fund loans available for the purchase of gardening equipment, allotment rents and seed, so that people can begin to grow their own vegetables. [15262]

Mr. Roger Evans: In considering whether or not to make an award from the fund, social fund officers are required to take account of the nature, extent and urgency of the need. Although loans for gardening equipment are not excluded, social fund officers take account of all the individual circumstances surrounding each application, as well as the priority guidance provided by the Secretary of State and the area social fund officer, when using their discretion to reach a decision.

21-hour Rule

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many private hours of study should be included by adjudication officers when calculating the 21-hour rule; what counts as private study to be included in the total number of hours studied; when and where the rule about private hours was established; and if he will make a statement. [15157]

Mr. Roger Evans: A course, for the purpose of the 21-hour rule, is defined in regulations as including time spent receiving instruction of tuition, undertaking supervised study and other course requirements, which does not exceed 21 hours a week. A social security commissioner in a decision dated May 1990, held that, for the purpose of this rule, supervised study can include work set by a supervisor and done privately by the student in his own time.

Decisions on income support, including the 21-hour rule, are the responsibility of the independent adjudication officers who apply the law and case law taking into account the fact of each individual case.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if participants in training for work or community action who are unable to get jobs after they leave their scheme can immediately take advantage of the 21-hour rule and take up part-time places on education or training courses and retain their right to income support; and if he will make a statement. [15156]

Mr. Roger Evans: One of the qualifying conditions for the 21-hour rule is that immediately before the start of the course the claimant was in receipt of income support, unemployment benefit or sickness benefit for three months. People who have completed the learning for work scheme or the community action programme have to satisfy the normal qualifying conditions before they can take advantage of the 21-hour rule concession. Those who receive an element of income support during their participation will be treated in the same way as other income support recipients. The three months in receipt of a qualifying benefit required under the 21-hour rule can therefore include time spent in either scheme.

Mortgage Interest

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assistance his Department can provide to unemployed people who, on joining training for work, find that their insurance cover for mortgage, hire purchase and other agreements becomes invalid as they are no longer technically unemployed; and if he will make a statement. [15154]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on 22 March at column *251*.

Expenditure

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the gross domestic product has been spent on social security in each year since 1974. [15168]

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table:

Total benefit expenditure as a percentage of GDP 1974–75 to 1994–95 (cash prices)

	Total benefit expenditure (£ billion)	*Money GDP (£ billion)*	*Benefit expenditure as percentage of GDP*
1974–75	6.6	89.4	7.4
1975–76	8.9	111.2	8.0
1976–77	10.6	130.0	8.2
1977–78	12.8	151.3	8.5
1978–79	15.9	173.7	9.2
1979–80	18.8	208.6	9.0
1980–81	22.7	237.7	9.6
1981–82	27.7	261.0	10.6
1982–83	31.6	285.8	11.1
1983–84	35.3	310.0	11.4
1984–85	38.3	332.1	11.5
1985–86	41.8	364.9	11.5
1986–87	44.9	392.7	11.4
1987–88	46.7	434.8	10.7
1988–89	47.3	484.1	9.8
1989–90	50.2	525.8	9.6
1990–91	56.5	556.8	10.2
1991–92	66.1	580.8	11.4
1992–93	75.2	604.8	12.4
1993–94	82.4	639.0	12.9
1994–95	[1]85.2	678.0	12.6

[1] Estimated outturn.

WALES

Information Super-highway

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what grant support is available to encourage the development of fibre-optic cabling of towns and villages in Wales; what proportion of Wales now has fibre-optic cable links already established of a standard adequate for the foreseeable needs of the super-highway technological revolution; and what take-up there has been to date of grant support for the further development of this network.

Mr. Redwood: Cabling is one of my priorities for Wales. I have been pressing for swifter action on licences. Local delivery franchises have already been awarded for areas covering West Glamorgan, Cardiff and Newport. An announcement about a franchise operator for most of the remainder of mid, south and west Glamorgan and Gwent is expected in the summer. This should be followed by the offer of a franchise for an area of north Wales. My Department does not hold full details of the miles of fibre optic cable in existing networks, but this is known to be significant.

I have been told by cable companies that radio links may provide high quality access to less densely populated areas. They are also looking at ways of making greater use of existing pylons and telegraph poles. The development of these alternative technologies will, I hope, ensure that the whole of Wales can be linked to the super-highway.

I will provide grant support for this work in remote areas, if it is needed, through the strategic development scheme and other existing grant schemes. I am looking closely at the powers at my disposal. I am told by those interested that grant availability is not the crucial issue. For remoter areas, technology holds the key.

Community Pharmacist Dispensing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prescriptions were made up by community pharmacists in 1993; and what was the total cash value of these prescriptions. [14667]

Mr. Richards: A total of 32.5 million prescription items were dispensed by community pharmacists in 1993 with a total net ingredient cost of £215.4 million. The figures include all items prescribed by hospitals and dispensed in the community and items prescribed by GPs, excluding dispensing doctors, and dentists.

Drug Treatment Centres

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from psychiatric doctors and other professionals in Wales concerning the inadequacy of treatment centres available in Wales for those suffering from drug dependency; and if he will make a statement. [14669]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend has received two letters, both concerning services in Gwynedd.

Dentists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest figure for the number of general dental practitioners in practise in the county of Gwynedd; and how many of these are giving no service on the NHS. [14722]

Mr. Richards: Information available centrally relates to the number of general dental practitioners who have some NHS patients on their lists. At 31 December 1994 there were 66 such practitioners in Gwynedd.

School Balances

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of annual maintenance grants is held in reserve by *(a)* grant-maintained schools in Wales and *(b)* non grant-maintained schools. [14734]

Mr. Richards: At the end of the 1993–94 financial year, the latest date for which these details are available, grant-maintained schools in Wales held reserves of £845,458. This represented 6 per cent. of the total annual maintenance grant allocated in that year. According to financial outturn statements prepared by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988, during that same period LEA maintained schools were allocated £758,376,907 under authorities' local management of schools schemes. Of this, 6.28 per cent. was carried forward into the next financial year.

Housing

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of representations received by the Welsh Office on the issue of licensing of housing in multiple occupation; and what percentage of these representations was in favour of a licensing scheme. [14564]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office received 46 replies to my right hon. Friend's letter of 8 December 1994. Eighty per cent. were broadly in favour of licensing. However, there was no clear consensus on the way in which a licensing system should operate and the replies raised a wide range of issues for further consideration.

Residential Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve residential care for the elderly. [14665]

Mr. Richards: We are considering guidance on improving the way in which local authorities apply and enforce the Registered Homes Act 1984. We intend to ensure that there is a sensible level of regulation which safeguards residents by ensuring there are uniform standards throughout Wales.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are now waiting for NHS hospitals and trust appointments; and if he will make a statement. [14668]

Mr. Richards: At 31 December 1994, there were 119,339 people waiting for a first out-patient appointment at NHS hospitals in Wales. This represents a reduction of 9 per cent. on the number reported for 30 September 1994.

Learning Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the per capita average cost of resettling people from long stay hospitals into the community, excluding the costs of decommissioning the hospitals themselves. [14689]

Mr. Richards: It is for local and health authorities to determine individuals' care and support needs and to provide facilities and services accordingly, consequently the information requested is not available centrally.

In 1994–95 agreement was reached on the transfer of 50 individuals with a learning disability into the community. Approximately £1.7 million will be made available each year from mental handicap strategy funds to pay for these individuals' care and support. A further £0.53 million each year will come from resources released from long stay mental handicap hospitals. This is in addition to funds from other sources, such as authorities' own resources and social security and housing benefits, where appropriate.

NHS Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report,* column 79, if he will now make it his policy to collect information on those communities in Wales where there are no dentists providing a service on the NHS. [14725]

Mr. Richards: Local situations can change quickly and often. Welsh Office officials keep in close touch with the family health services authorities who are best placed to provide the most up-to-date information on local availability of NHS general dental services. It would be unnecessarily bureaucratic to require the submission of formal returns.

Public Appointments

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the current contracts for the chairman and the chief executive of each Welsh quango end. [14735]

Mr. Redwood: The end dates of the current contracts for the chairman and chief executive of each executive non-departmental public body in Wales are shown in the following table:

	End date of contract/appointment	
Name of NDPB	*Chairman*	*Chief executive*
Agricultural Wages Committee—6	31.12.95	[1]See note
Arts Council of Wales	29.03.97	18.04.98
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	1.04.96	30.06.95
Countryside Council for Wales	4.11.96	[2]See note
Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales	30.09.96	[3]13.02.97
Development Board for Rural Wales	6.07.97	[4]30.08.95
Further Education Funding Council for Wales	5.05.95	5.05.97
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	5.05.95	5.05.97
Housing for Wales	30.11.96	[5]See note
Land Authority for Wales	25.11.95	[6]See note
Local Government Reorganisation Residuary Body	31.01.00	[7]See note
National Library of Wales	[8]See note	[9]See note
National Museum of Wales	[8]See note	31.10.98
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales	[10]31.12.95	[1]See note
Sports Council for Wales	31.03.96	31.03.96
Wales Tourist Board	30.09.95	[5]See note
Wales Youth Agency	31.03.95	31.03.97
Welsh Development Agency	30.06.96	[5]See note
Welsh Language Board	20.12.96	10.12.96
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	31.03.97	[5]See note

Notes:

[1] No Chief Executives.

[2] After 21 November 1995, the Countryside Council for Wales can terminate the contract by giving 6 months notice in writing. The Chief Executive can resign at any time by giving 13 weeks notice in writing.

[3] Unless extended by mutual agreement.

[4] Initial fixed term contract of 5 years, subject to annual redetermination.

[5] Permanent Post.

[6] Chief Executive's contract expires on retirement.

[7] Chief Executive not yet appointed.

[8] Appointment not made by Secretary of State.

[9] The Librarian is a permanent employee.

[10] The chairman is appointed under Royal Warrant.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of cases of ectoparasitic infestation in sheep for *(a)* the two years before compulsory dipping was abolished and *(b)* the two years since compulsory dipping has been abolished. [14569]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 20 January 1995, *Official Report,* column *269,* for the number of cases of sheep scab during the period in question. Other ectoparasitic infections of sheep have never been notifiable in Wales and consequently information on the number of cases of these diseases is not available.

Learning Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what mechanism he plans that adults already living in the community but with significant learning difficulties, will in future be enabled to secure living accommodation which will enable them to have an independent life of their own in the community without dependency on ageing parents; and if he will make a statement. [14578]

Mr. Richards: It is for local and health authorities to provide care and support for individuals with a learning disability.

A key objective in guidance on the Welsh mental handicap strategy, which was issued in July last year, is provision of support to help individuals with a learning disability who already live in the community to continue to do so. Furthermore, Welsh Office Circular 7/95 "Mental Handicap Strategy: Planning Alternative Care and Support for Individuals Living Unnecessarily and Inappropriately in Long Stay Mental Handicap Hospitals", stresses the need for authorities to consider the future accommodation and support needs for individuals already living in the community, when drawing up plans for the resettlement, into the community, of individuals living inappropriately and unnecessarily in long-stay hospitals.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of GPs in Wales are fundholders; how many fundholding applications are outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [14666]

Mr. Richards: There are 117 GP fundholding practices, comprising over 30 per cent. of GPs, in Wales covering one third of the population. A further 29 practices are preparing to become fundholders from 1 April next, at which time general practitioner and population coverage is expected to increase to some 35.5 per cent. and 40 per cent. respectively.

Private Recruitment Agencies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the guidelines issued by his Department to local education authorities with regard to using private recruitment agencies to provide supply teachers to state sector schools; what quality controls exist to ensure that supply teachers provided in this way meet the necessary standards required of teachers in state schools, in terms of professional competence and record of conduct; and what assessment he has made of whether children are vulnerable to being taught by unsuitable teachers as a result of the recruitment system. [14687]

Mr. Richards: The responsibility for the appointment and continued employment of teachers is primarily for local education authorities and school governing bodies. The Welsh Office has not issued guidance to them on the use of private recruitment agencies although consideration is being given to the issue of such guidance. LEAs and schools should ensure that all the necessary checks, including those in relation to the qualifications of teachers and their past employment record, have been carried out before an individual is recruited to a teaching post in a maintained school; this applies regardless of the method of recruitment used. It is, amongst other things, a statutory requirement that teachers employed to teach in maintained schools in England and Wales have qualified teacher status.

Employment

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many years it would take for Welsh unemployment to return to the 1979 level at the rate of change of the last three years. [14733]

Mr. Redwood]: Seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment fell from 123,500 in February 1992 to 107,600 in February 1995, an average fall of 442 claimants a month. It is difficult to say when unemployment would reach the same percentage as 1979 as that depends on whether more women wish to join the workforce or not. There has been a big expansion in numbers joining the workforce in the last 15 years. Over the past year unemployment has been falling at the faster average rate of 1,567 claimants a month.

New School Construction

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new schools have been completely constructed since 1979 in Wales; and at what cost. [14868]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Hospital Construction

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new hospitals have been completely constructed since 1979 in Wales; and at what cost. [14872]

Mr. Richards: Eight hospitals have been completely constructed since 1979 at a cost of £82.1 million at the time of construction.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the Welsh Office; and what was the corresponding figure 12 months ago. [15418]

Mr. Redwood: My Department employed 2,504 people at the end of February. This is 123 fewer than at the end of February 1994.

Medical Records

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospital trusts and health authorities who will release medical records to patients only if they first guarantee not to take legal action against the authorities or trust.

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally. In any event such guarantees would be inappropriate where the provisions of the Access to Health Records Act 1990 apply.

Suicides

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many suicides there have been in the Welsh farming community in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [14257]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Deaths registered in 1993 by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys as being suicides among farmers and farm workers in Wales numbered 11 in total.

The information on suicides among farmers for the years 1988 to 1992 given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend on 25 March, *Official Report*, column *454* and for 1992 on 4 May 1994 at column *533* have been found to be incorrect. I shall write to the hon. Member when corrected data have been verified and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Renovation Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the issue of housing renovation grants during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [14264]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office regularly receives letter on renovation grants. Renovation policy and progress are also discussed with each of the 37 district councils on the basis of their housing strategy and operational plans.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review the present formula determining the allocation of housing renovation grants; and if he will make a statement. [14265]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The formula is reviewed annually following consultation with the Council of Welsh Districts.

North East Wales Institute

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the financial management of the North East Wales institute at Wrexham; and if he will make a statement. [15742]

Mr. Richards: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library details of the remuneration and expenses allowable to members of the governing board of the North East Wales institute at Wrexham and the present salaries of the principle and deans. [15741]

Mr. Richards: Governors of higher education institutions do not receive remuneration. They are entitled to receive the repayment of expenses incurred in connection with their duties as governors. Beginning with the academic year ending on 31 July 1995 all higher education institutions will be required to publish emoluments of the principal and remuneration of higher paid staff in their annual accounts.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the Touche Ross report commissioned by the Welsh Higher Education Funding Council into the finances of the North East Wales institute at Wrexham. [15739]

Mr. Richards: No. The report was commissioned by the High Education Funding Council for Wales. It deals with the financial and management systems at the institute which is an independent corporation. The report is being treated as confidential to the council and the institute.

Civil Servants

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's policy in respect of civil servants whose name, position and telephone numbers are not publicly available answering queries from members of the public and what is the external distribution of his Department's internal telephone numbers. [18500]

Mr. Redwood: Welsh Office staff answering queries from the public are normally expected to give their names, in line with the principles of the citizens charter. Their office telephone numbers are available from the Welsh Office exchange. The Welsh Office internal telephone directory is sent on request to central Government bodies, non-departmental public bodies and the National Audit Office.

NNR Management

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what levels of funding were allocated to the Countryside Council for Wales for the management of its national nature reserves in Wales in 1994–95; and what has been allocated for 1995–96;

(2) what levels of funding were allocated by the Countryside Council for Wales for the management of its national nature reserves in Wales in 1994–95; and what has been allocated for 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* The amounts allocated by the Countryside Council for Wales are as follows:

1994–95: £430,000
1995–96: £300,000

I have asked the CCW to look at the ways of reducing its overhead and reconsider its programme expenditure.

HEALTH

Disability

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the recommendations in the report of the Disablement Income Group entitled "An Opportunity Lost". [15058]

Mr. Bowis: The report makes seven recommendations, most of which are aimed at local authorities. The recommendation to central Government that former independent living fund resources within the special transitional grant should be ringfenced has been considered. It would, however, restrict their flexibility in using their resources. Local authorities are, of course, free to ring fence their own funds. We do not, however, consider that the important tool of ring fencing should be used at central Government level in this instance.

Care Homes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines apply in respect of the eviction from nursing homes of elderly people whose funds are exhausted. [14912]

(2) what powers are available to her to prevent poor elderly citizens from being evicted from homes for the elderly. [14913]

Mr. Bowis: Since April 1993, local authorities have had a responsibility to arrange accommodation in residential care and nursing homes for elderly people who for whatever reason are assessed as needing such care but are unable to meet the cost.

Elderly people who entered independent sector homes before April 1993 may have preserved rights to the higher rates of income support. If such people have been evicted or are threatened with eviction from a residential care home, local authorities have a responsibility to make alternative arrangements. In the case of elderly people in nursing homes who are in this position, the national health service has a responsibility to assess their health needs and to offer appropriate services within the resources available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment she has made of the implications of the Department of Environment's proposals for the removal of the requirement for local authorities to retain directly provided residential accommodation in respect of a local authority's duties under *(a)* the National Assistance Act 1948, other than part III, *(b)* the Registered Homes Act 1984 and *(c)* the NHS and Community Care Act 1990; and if she will make a statement. [14708]

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities already and increasingly discharge their statutory duties to provide residential care through contracts with independent sector providers. Under the Government's proposals, if local authorities thought they were unable to contract for particular services from the independent sector, they could continue to provide them directly.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority care homes provided under the National Assistance Act 1948 have offered *(a)* respite care, *(b)* day care and *(c)* assessment facilities for each year since 1979. [14709]

Mr. Bowis: The information available centrally is shown in the table.

Local authority homes for all client groups, England

As at 31 March	*Number of homes with short-stay admissions*	*Number of homes with day care places available*
1987	2,849	1,529
1988	2,947	1,765
1989	2,987	1,848
1990	2,957	1,777
1991	2,945	1,755
1992	2,659	1,581
1993	2,388	1,422
1994	2,317	1,336

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to amend the rules governing personal contributions to the cost of long-term residential care. [15678]

Mr. Bowis: None but they are kept under regular review.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue has been spent on accommodation provided by local authorities under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948 in each year since 1979. [14774]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The information available centrally relates to capital and revenue expenditure on residential accommodation for adults and is shown in the table for the years for which figures are available.

Local authority expenditure on residential accommodation for adults, England

Financial year	*Capital £ million*[1]	*Revenue (gross) £ million*[2]
1978–79	—	420
1986–87	—	975
1987–88	—	1,074
1988–89	127	1,179
1989–90	148	1,283
1990–91	119	1,413
1991–92	121	1,483
1992–93	130	1,504

[1] Information is not available prior to 1988–89.

[2] Information is not available for the years 1979–80 to 1985–86.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many renal patients currently on FP10 prescriptions will be transferred to the district health authority contract system as of 1 April. [15375]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what her Department estimates the change in the number of renal patients in England and Wales will be from 1994–95 to 1995–96. [15374]

(2) how many new renal patients per million of population she expects to undergo treatment in the National Health Service in the coming year. [15376]

Mr. Sackville: Both the total number of renal patients and the number of new renal patients per million population are expected to increase. Local purchasers and providers should take this into account in their planning. Specific information in the form requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what efforts her Department has made to ensure that general practitioners are aware of the forthcoming changes to the funding arrangements for the treatment of kidney patients. [15384]

Mr. Malone: All general practitioners and pharmacists have received a family practitioner notice giving guidance and instructions on the changes to the system for providing high tech health care for patients at home. More detailed instructions in the form of an executive letter, EL(95)5 copies of which are available in the Library, have been sent to regional, district and family health services authority General Managers, national health service trust chief executives and general practitioner fundholders. Both of these set out clearly what is expected of GPs in implementing these changes.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she now expects her Department to publish the renal review; and what factors led to the delay in publication. [15382]

Mr. Sackville: We are currently considering the practical implications of the report on the review of renal services. We intend to publish purchasing guidance based on the report once those implications are clear.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts she is making to ensure that the new contracts between district health authorities and renal units are in place before 1 April. [15385]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities have been asked to ensure that new arrangements are in place by 1 April where continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis is currently being funded through general practitioner prescribing. This affects about half of CAPD patients. District health authorities have been asked to ensure as a priority that there is a continuity of care for these patients. In order to facilitate this they only have been authorised, if necessary, to contract with the supplier currently providing the services for 1995–96.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been made by her Department as to the effect of the new funding arrangements for renal units on the level of care provided for kidney patients at the Royal Victoria infirmary and the Freeman hospital in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. [15377]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Newcastle and north Tyneside health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. S. Murray, chairman of the authority, for details.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for health how many renal units there are in England and Wales; and how many patients they treat *(a)* by region and *(b)* in total. [15381]

Mr. Sackville: In 1992, the latest year for which figures are held for England and Wales, 53 adult renal units in England, and eight in Wales treated a total of 18,768 patients. Regional details are as follows:

Regions	*Number*
Northern and Yorkshire	1,944
Trent	1,814
Anglia and Oxford	1,910
North Thames	3,534
South Thames	1,927
South and West	2,239
West Midlands	1,350
North West	2,849
Wales	1,201
Total	18,768

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the policy of her Department regarding rationing renal treatment and peritoneal dialysis on the basis of age. [15379]

Mr. Sackville: National health service treatment should be available to all on the basis of clinical need. It is for the clinician concerned to determine the appropriate treatment, which should not be denied on the ground of age alone, although age will be one of the factors which the clinician will take into account.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which groups were consulted by her Department during its renal review. [15383]

Mr. Sackville: All providers of renal services in England, all regional and district health authorities and a number of professional and patient interest groups were consulted on the renal review.

Casualty Units, London

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will establish and set out the dates, periods and reasons when, in 1995 to date, at casualty units in the area of the former North East Thames regional health authority within Greater London, those arriving either before or after diagnosis and treatment were accommodated on trolleys from emergency ambulances, and the maximum number so used on any such occasion. [15820]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Local health authorities are responsible for monitoring the performance of hospitals providing services for their residents.

Patients at Home (Care Packages)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she will take to monitor the introduction of EL(95)5. [15128]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities have been asked to introduce changes in the way some packages of care are provided in the national health service from 1 April 1995. They have been further asked to develop strategies for providing these treatments from April 1996. Their progress in implementing these requirements will be monitored by the NHS Executive in the usual way.

Intensive Care

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average percentage bed occupancy rate for each intensive care therapy unit in England during 1994 and for each of the last 10 years. [15360]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care units in England have an intensive care consultant available 24 hours a day; and what percentage of all intensive care units that represents. [15359]

Mr. Sackville: Intensive care does not have specialty status and does not, therefore, have its own dedicated consultants. Patients in intensive care are attended by consultants in various specialties.

Deprivation and Ill Health

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment her Department is making as to any link between poor housing and ill health; [15390]

(2) what assessment her Department has made as to regional and local inequalities in health; and what action is being taken to tackle inequalities; [15386]

(3) what assessment her Department is making as to any link between low incomes, poor diet and ill health; [15392]

(4) what assessment is being made by her Department as to any link between income inequality, relative deprivation and ill health; [15393]

(5) what assessment her Department is making as to any link between unemployment, stress and ill health; [13389]

(6) what assessment is being made by her Department as to any link between low income and ill health. [15391]

Mr. Sackville: The White Paper,"The Health of the Nation", Cm 1986, acknowledged that good housing is important to good health and that in England, as in all other westernised countries, there are variations in health status between different socio-economic groups within the population. A sub-group of the Chief Medical Officer's health of the nation working group is currently looking at how the Department and the national health service can make best use of existing information in tackling ethnic, geographical, socio-economic and gender variations in health status in the current health of the nation key areas. The sub-group will also be advising on areas in which new epidemiological and research information is needed.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects that beta-interferon will be prescribable on the NHS for the treatment of multiple sclerosis. [15378]

Mr. Malone: No beta-interferon drug for multiple sclerosis has been licensed for use in the United Kingdom. A licence application for such a drug is currently being assessed by the European Medicines Evaluation Agency.

AIDS

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how much money has been ring-fenced for HIV/AIDS prevention in 1995; and what proportion of this figure has been allocated to the Health Education Authority for this specific area of work. [15315]

Mr. Sackville: A total of £49.612 million has been earmarked for HIV/AIDS prevention in the national health service in 1995–96. This includes funding to safeguard the blood supply, train health care workers for infection control and HIV testing as well as monies for local prevention/public education work. The Health Education Authority budget, available for national public education, is separate from this budget. The amount of money to be provided for the HEA's work on HIV/AIDS in 1995–96 has yet to be determined.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what were the costs of operating Solihull hospital for 1994–95; what estimates she has made for 1995–96; and if she will make a statement. [15132]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally, however, I understand from West Midlands regional health authority that the 1994–95 budgeted costs were £32.9 million and that for 1995–96 proposed costs of £39.5 million have been identified. It is estimated that these costs will lead to an £850,000 deficit in 1994–95 rising to a potential deficit of £7.8 million the following year. A project team has been set up by West Midlands regional health authority, including representatives from Solihull hospital and Birmingham Heartlands national health service trust, to explore ways of resolving this situation. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Baker, chairman of the authority, for further details.

Road Traffic Act (Emergency Treatment Fee)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what representations she has received about section 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988; and if she will consider bringing forward proposals to annul that section of the Act. [15371]

Mr. Sackville: During 1994 the Department received a number of letters from hon. Members and the public expressing concern about the emergency treatment fee, collected under section 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. We have no plans to change the Act.

General Practitioners

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money fundholders currently have in savings, by region; and how much this figure was for each of the last three years. [15365]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 November 1994 at cols *321–22* and on 14 March at col *545*.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each family health service authority what percentage of the costs for *(a)* computer hardware, *(b)* computer software and *(c)* computer maintenance (i) non-funding and (ii) fundholding GPs are presently allowed to claim back. [15363]

Mr. Malone: Under the terms of the cost-plus contract for general practitioners, the profession is fully reimbursed all expenses incurred in the delivery of general medical services.

All GPs, non-fundholders and fundholders alike, are able to claim direct reimbursement of normally up to 50 per cent. for practice computer systems to support general medical service activity.

In addition, GP fundholders are required to have systems to manage their budgets, for which they are able to claim up to 100 per cent. of specialist computer software and related maintenance costs and 75 per cent. of computer hardware and associated maintenance costs.

The balance of expenditure on computer hardware, software and maintenance will continue to be met indirectly through the expenses element in the gross fees and allowances.

Information on the percentage costs reimbursed by individual family health services authorities is not available centrally.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the waiting time in each regional health authority area are in England for the delivery to a patient of a standard wheelchair. [15328]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. Health authorities are responsible for setting and monitoring the standard of services locally for people with physical disabilities, including the wheelchair services.

NHS Medical Staff

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, for each of the last 10 years, how many *(a)* house officers, *(b)* senior house officers, *(c)* registrars, *(d)* senior registrars and *(e)* consultants were employed in each of the regional health authorities and for the NHS as a whole. [15367]

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Anorexia Nervosa

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide an estimate of the annual cost to the NHS of the treatment of anorexia nervosa. [15433]

Mr Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Runwell Secure Hospital Unit

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for the future of the Runwell secure hospital unit; what accommodation was available there and where its replacement beds are to be located; and what is the overall short and long-term demand for such accommodation arising from the health authorities for the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Barking and Havering. [15819]

Mr. Bowis: Runwell medium secure unit is run by the Southend Community Care Services national health service trust. In October 1994 the trust expanded the number of beds in the secure unit from 14 to 28. The trust's plans to expand medium secure provision further on the Runwell hospital site and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust about these plans.

South and West RHA Headquarters

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the cost of acquiring and equipping the premises for the South and West regional health authority at the Parkway business park, Bristol. [16063]

(2) what is the total cost of re-locating staff from Bristol and Winchester to the new South and West regional health authority headquarters at the Parkway business park, Bristol. [16064]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the regional health authority. The hon. member may wish to contact Ms Rennie Fritchie, chairman of the South and West regional health authority, for details.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of deaths of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England, Wales and Scotland for which mesothelioma is mentioned on the death certificate for each year since 1968. [15215]

Mr. Sackville: This information is shown in the table:

Deaths in Great Britain where Mesothelioma was specifically mentioned on the death certificate, 1968–1991.

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1968	115	39	154
1969	123	36	159
1970	145	49	194
1971	141	40	181
1972	169	43	212
1973	182	42	224
1974	185	58	243
1975	218	52	270
1976	256	56	312
1977	273	60	333
1978	328	63	391
1979	340	93	433
1980	355	102	457
1981	395	73	468
1982	411	91	502

Deaths in Great Britain where Mesothelioma was specifically mentioned on the death certificate, 1968–1991.

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1983	474	95	569
1984	534	84	618
1985	531	83	614
1986	599	101	700
1987	702	106	808
1988	751	111	862
1989	767	132	899
1990	763	117	880
1991[1]	861	148	1,009

[1] Provisional.

Surgery (Qualifications of Staff)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the circumstances in which a person with no formal medical qualifications was asked to assist in a hip replacement operation at Newham general hospital; who was the employee; and what was his or her contract of employment. [15837]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Newham Healthcare national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Mrs. Rosemary Walters, for details.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grades of personnel, other than qualified medical practitioners and nurses are, under health service regulations, permitted to participate in surgical operations; and what records are kept of such occasions. [15836]

Mr. Sackville: The law does not specify who may participate in an operation. Theatre nurses, operating department assistants and operating department orderlies working under the direct supervision of medical staff may assist in some operations where needed, within the limits of their competence.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make available in the Library copies of the written evidence submitted to, and the transcripts of oral evidence taken by, the Warnock committee which produced the report on human fertilisation and embryology; and if that evidence and those transcripts have ever been published. [15838]

Mr. Sackville: Copies of written evidence to the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology and responses to the Warnock report from organisations were placed in the Library in 1985, where the organisation consented. Transcripts of oral evidence to the committee were not made. Organisations who gave oral and written evidence to the committee are listed in the appendix to the Warnock report. Some of them are believed to have published their own evidence.

Community Care Forum

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *1036*, if she will list the schedule of dates for the meetings of the Community Care Forum, its terms of reference, and who is to be appointed to the chair. [15774]

Mr. Bowis: The first such meeting will be held on 3 April and chaired by an official from this Department.

Orsett Hospital

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assurances about maintenance or planned improvements of service delivery were given to her predecessor when authority was sought to close the accident and emergency department at Orsett hospital in Thurrock; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* The then Basildon and Thurrock health authority envisaged a continuing major role for Orsett hospital in the provision of health care in the district.

EDUCATION

Hearing Impaired Children

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many vacancies exist for teachers of the deaf; [15456]

(2) how many teachers of the deaf have qualified in each of the last three years. [15457]

Mr. Robin Squire: The results of a DFE survey covering the 1993–94 financial year indicate that in the 87 local education authorities that completed the survey, 68 teachers completed their training to gain a mandatory qualification in the teaching of hearing impaired children.

The same survey indicated that there were 24.2 vacancies for teachers of hearing impaired children in the 87 LEAs concerned.

Figures are not available for earlier years, but a similar survey is currently being undertaken covering the 1994–95 financial year.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many further education colleges in the north-west have not met their targets for *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; [15674]

(2) which colleges of further education in the north-west have made the biggest claims for demand lead element in 1994–95; and what vocational training contributed most to these demand lead element bids; [15676]

(3) what are the consequences for colleges that have been awarded grants but not achieved their targets; in which cases reimbursement of public funds will be sought; and how the reimbursement will be operated. [15675]

Mr. Boswell: These are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I have written to the FEFC's chief executive, Sir William Stubbs, and asked him to respond to the hon. Member's questions directly by letter.

National Curriculum

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of the Dearing review of the national curriculum. [15593]

Mr. Forth: The estimated total cost of the Dearing review of the national curriculum is £4.7 million, comprising:

i. £755,000 for the interim and final Dearing reports on the national curriculum;

ii. £528,000 for work on slimming down the curriculum by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and its advisory groups, excluding SCAA internal staff costs;

iii. £2 million for the consultation on the revised curriculum proposals, including the cost of publishing and distributing the consultation documents and a report on the outcome of consultation;

iv. £1.4 million for publication and distribution of the final subject documents in January 1995, excluding staff costs.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total cost of the work on the national curriculum before the Dearing review. [15592]

Mr. Forth: Central Government expenditure on the national curriculum between 1988 and 1993 was an estimated £469 million. Some £350 million of this was in the form of grants for education support and training to support expenditure by local education authorities and schools mainly on books, equipment and training. The £469 million also includes the full grants to the former National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council, and thus includes some expenditure on the curriculum and assessment which was not directly concerned with the national curriculum.

Secondary Education Advisory Council

Mr. Don Foser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* winding up the Secondary Education Advisory Council and the National Curriculum Council. [15595]

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Whittingham Communities Primary School

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she will be in a position to give a full answer to the letter from the hon. Member for Walthamstow of 27 February, regarding Whittingham school: and when the council of the London borough of Waltham Forest will be giving a decision on the rebuilding of Whittingham school. [15850]

Mr. Robin Squire: My letter of 13 March to the hon. Member explained the position on the proposals to establish the Whittingham community primary school. I expect a decision to be made shortly and shall advise the hon. Member of the outcome.

School Inspections

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of *(a)* an average primary school Office for Standards in Education and *(b)* an average secondary school Ofsted inspection for the most recent year for which figures are available. [15594]

Mr. Forth: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Funding Agency for Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of setting up the Funding Agency for Schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The sum of £1.044 million was spent on the FAS headquarters in York, initial staff-related costs, and other miscellaneous items prior to the agency's formal establishment on 1 April 1994.

Asbestos

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what steps her Department has taken over the last year to inform local education authorities and grant-maintained schools of the dangers of school buildings containing asbestos for individuals carrying out repair, refurbishment and building maintenance work; [15147]

(2) what consideration her Department has given to the sending of a guidance note to head teachers informing them of the dangers of asbestos for individuals carrying out repair, refurbishment and building maintenance work on school buildings; and if she will make a statement. [15149]

Mr. Robin Squire: General information and advice about asbestos is set out in the Department of the Environment's booklet "Asbestos Materials in Buildings", which was revised most recently in 1991. The Department for Education will shortly be issuing, as part of a document dealing with building matters generally, additional guidance about asbestos.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration her Department has given to the risk of voluntary staff facing exposure to asbestos dust when carrying out repair, refurbishment and building maintenance work on school buildings. [15148]

Mr. Robin Squire: All work with asbestos is regulated by the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987. These regulations impose duties on employers, including local education authorities and schools, to protect their employees from exposure to asbestos, but also extend this duty to include the protection of anyone else who may be affected by the work. Schools can seek professional advice about asbestos either from their local education authority or other sources. They should certainly do so if they believe that asbestos poses any threat to staff or pupils. Detailed guidance is available in the Department of the Environment booklet "Asbestos Materials in Buildings".

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration her Department has given to encouraging local education authorities to survey school buildings so as to create detailed registers of school buildings that contain asbestos; and if she will make a statement. [15150]

Mr. Robin Squire: Responsibility for the condition of school buildings and the health and safety of pupils and staff lies with local education authorities and school governors. Although the Department would suggest that in all cases the presence of asbestos in school buildings should be recorded and its condition monitored, how local education authorities and schools exercise their responsibilities for health and safety must be for them to decide.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what financial provision has been made by central Government for increases in teachers' pay in 1996 both in cash terms and in percentage terms. [15267]

Mr. Robin Squire: The provisional figure for the aggregate total standard spending on all services in 1996–97 is £44,073 million. Individual service shares will be decided in next year's settlement.

Grant-maintained Schools

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the capital allocation to each grant-maintained schools in Birmingham since their establishment; and what information she has on the annual capital expenditure of each school. [15443]

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education with which bodies she consulted prior to the announcement of the standard spending assessment for education. [15044]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government consulted the local authority associations through the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance and the working groups which support it. In addition, my right hon. Friend and other Ministers and I regularly meet representatives of local education authorities and other bodies; discussions cover a range of issues including education funding.

Green Fold School

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the registered capacity of Green Fold school in Bolton, Lancashire when it was first opened in 1981; what has been the registered capacity for each year since then; and what is the latest projection. [144434]

Mr. Robin Squire: Our records show that in 1981 Green Fold special school had approval for 80 "educationally sub-normal (severe)" boys and girls aged three to 18. The capacity remained the same until 1988, when the then Secretary of State gave approval for the school for 60 boys and girls with severe learning difficulties aged three to 11. The capacity has remained at this level for each year since then. Any change to this figure would require Bolton local education authority to submit proposals to the Secretary of State under section 183 of the Education Act 1993.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 March 1995

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Zoological Society of London to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 22 May to Friday 26 May 1995.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Association for the Prevention of Addiction to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 24 July to Friday 28 July 1995.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Housing, London

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 London boroughs with the highest number of empty units of accommodation, and the political control of each. [14437]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The 10 London boroughs reporting the highest number of management vacants—dwellings available for letting immediately or after minor repairs—on 1 April 1994 in their 1994 housing investment progamme HIP1 returns, were.

	Number of management vacants	*Present political control*
Hackney	2,168	Labour
Lambeth	799	Noc
Tower Hamlets	744	Labour
Greenwich	667	Labour
Southwark	645	Labour
Islington	602	Labour
Lewisham	438	Labour
Croydon	396	Labour
Newham	389	Labour
Barking and Dagenham	364	Labour

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 London boroughs with the lowest record on collecting council rents, the cost and percentage owed and the political control of each authority. [14435]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on local authority rent arrears is collected from authorities on their housing subsidy claim form returns. The 10 London boroughs with the highest cumulative rent arrears—including arrears for former tenants—as a proportion of rent roll on 31 March 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, are as follows:

	Cumulative arrears as a percentage of 1993–94 rent roll	*Total cumulative rent arrears (£000s)*	*Present political control*
Hackney	36.8	34,684	Labour
Haringey	35.4	22,482	Labour
Lambeth	23.5	22,491	Noc
Ealing	22.5	14,239	Labour
Greenwich	22.3	16,300	Labour
Southwark	20.6	26,424	Labour
Newham	17.7	10,190	Labour
Brent	16.6	8,280	Noc
Camden	16.0	12,610	Labour
Islington	15.8	15,369	Labour

Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14596]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* To supply all the information requested would involve disproportionate expense. The following information is readily available.

Publicity expenditure by my Department, excluding agencies, expressed in 1994 prices, is as follows:

Year	
1985–86	5.4
1986–87	6.3
1987–88	6.9
1988–89	9.3
1989–90	[1]39.5
1990–91	8.7
1991–92	3.0
1992–93	[2]14.1
1993–94	13.3
1994–95	9.7

[1] The figure for 1989–90 includes publicity costs associated with water privatisation.

[2] The figures from 1992 include publicity costs associated with the carbon dioxide reduction campaign, "Helping the Earth", and the introduction of the council tax.

The expenditure by my Department and its agencies and public bodies on publications—excluding Property Holdings and its agencies and PSA Services—expressed in 1994 prices, is as follows:

	£ million
1985–86	1.3
1986–87	1.7
1987–88	0.8
1988–89	1.0
1989–90	1.1
1990–91	1.2
1991–92	1.5
1992–93	1.5
1993–94	1.4
1994–95 (forecast)	1.7

Notes:

It is not possible to identify readily any expenditure related to privatisation within the figures shown.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14513]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The Department undertakes a wide range of research activities to assist in meeting its priority aims, as set out in the Department's annual report. In order to achieve this in an efficient and cost-effective manner, the Department employs research organisations on short-term contracts to undertake relevant and necessary public survey work. The main purpose of these surveys is to seek public views on key issues in order to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of departmental policy. Contracts are awarded on the basis of open competitive tendering, in line with government purchasing procedures.

In the current and previous financial years—that is, 1994–95 to date and 1993–94—the Department commissioned 39 public surveys from a variety of research bodies, including market research companies, academic bodies and commercial organisations. The total value of these contracts was in the order of £2.2 million. The value of individual contracts is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Allotments

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many spare allotment spaces there are currently *(a)* in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, *(b)* in the Ancoats area of Manchester, on Teesside and *(d)* nationally.

Sir Paul Beresford: Allotments are a matter for the appropriate local authority, and this information is not held centrally. However, my Department is currently funding the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners to conduct a survey of allotment authorities. This aims, within the next two years, to produce statistics on the number of plots, vacancies and waiting lists, whether the site is local authority run or self-managed, and details of the site facilities.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Government have to make available information to the unemployed on how to manage allotments and grow their own vegetables. [15260]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department is this year funding the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners with a grant of £35,000, part of which is designed to help promote allotment gardening and increase the take-up of vacant allotment plots, particularly by the unemployed. NSALG has a number of information leaflets available, including a starter pack for new tenants on how to grow vegetables.

Cabling

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the code of practice being prepared by his Department on cabling will be completed. [15761]

Sir Paul Beresford: The national joint utilities group in producing guidelines to encourage operators of underground services to adopt practices which minimise damage to ~~trees.~~ They will be published shortly.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if a report or survey will be produced on the damage to tree roots that has resulted from cabling. [15762]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. However, the national joint utilities group will shortly publish guidelines to help minimise damage to tree roots by operators of underground services. The guidelines will be reviewed six months after their implementation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Commonwealth Development Corporation (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the exact date on which it was decided in principle to set up an office of the Commonwealth Development Corporation in Indonesia; on what exact date it was set up; how many staff it has employed in each year since it was set up; what has been its running costs in each year; what account the Commonwealth Development Corporation takes in its funding arrangements on human rights abuses in Indonesia; and if the Commonwealth Development Corporation has supported projects with implications for the development of East Timor. [15473]

Mr. Goodlad: The CDC representative office in Indonesia was opened in 1971 following ministerial approval in 1970 for CDC to operate in Indonesia. I understand from the CDC that the office has three executive and 10 support staff. Running costs in 1994 were £413,000. Staffing and costs since 1971 have been similar; details for each year could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

When deciding on its programme in particular countries, the Government expect CDC to take account of any decision to suspend other aid programme activities on human rights grounds. This does not arise in Indonesia, where we believe there is a good economic and development case for continuing to provide aid.

CDC does not have, and has never had, any involvement in East Timor.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial support the Commonwealth Development Corporation has given to projects in Indonesia in each year since 1980; and if he will list the project supported and the cost in each case. [15450]

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* CDC Investments, and projects committed since 1980, are shown in the following tables.

CDC investments in Indonesia 1980 to 1993–94

	£000s
1980	1,635
1981	7,535
1982	6,055
1983	2,843
1984	15,473
1985	1,869
1986	1,435
1987	2,829
1987–88	4,537
1988–89	4,350
1989–90	9,707
1990–91	5,550
1991–92	10,952
1992–93	9,041
1993–94	10,439

Source:
British Aid Statistics.
Note:
British Aid Statistics was published by financial year from 1992.

	Total CDC commitment £000
PT Coklat Ransiki—Cocoa in Irian Jaya	2,287
Nusantara Investment Fund—Development Capital Fund and Development Project	6,527
PT Semen Andalas—Cement Company	11,608
PT Sumatex—Textiles	2,758
PT BBL Dharmalaa Finance—Finance Leasing Company	12,821
PT Kewalram—Textiles	4,950
PT Wiraswasta—Lube Oil Recycling	11,149
PT Gunung Raja—Paksi—Steel Rolling Mill	6,081
PT Samudera—Shipping	10,068
PT Tata Anya—Tea Estates	2,451
PT Amerta—Road Materials	940
PT Tasik Raja—Oil Palm Estates	4,000
Smallholder Rubber Development Project	15,000
NES VII—Nuclear Estate and Smallholders (rubber/oil palm)	19,000
NES IV—Nuclear Estate and Smallholders (rubber/coconuts)	15,600
PT Cirata—Hydro-electricity	13,000
PT Tubantia Kudus—Yarn Spinning	150
Total	138,390

Some of the loans shown have now been repaid or investments realised. At 31 December 1994, CDC investments in Indonesia totalled £71.8 million in 16 projects.

Madagascar

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is currently being provided by the United Kingdom Government to the Government of Madagascar to promote sustainable development and the conservation of biodiversity in Madagascar.

Mr. Baldry: Under our joint funding scheme we are providing £385,000 in support of two World Wide Fund for Nature projects to assist the Government of Madagascar in biodiversity and protected areas management and environmental education. Our bilateral development programme is confined to English language teaching and training awards.

Mr. Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the use of United Kingdom public funds in the Rio Tinto Zinc project to mine for titanium dioxide in southern Madagascar.

Mr. Baldry: No British aid funds are involved in this project.

PRIME MINISTER

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the sources and calculation behind his statement in January on the extra amount that a Scottish Parliament could cost the average Scot. [14917]

The Prime Minister: I have no intention of introducing a Scottish Parliament which would undermine the integrity of the Union and make Scotland the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom. As I said in January, a tax-raising Scottish Parliament able to raise income tax by 3p in the pound could cost the average family on Scottish male average earnings £6 per week. I am arranging for the basis for this calculation to be placed in the House library. Moreover, if identifiable public expenditure in Scotland were to be reduced after the establishment of a Scottish Parliament to the same level per head as the United Kingdom average, the shortfall to be made up by Scottish taxpayers would be equivalent to at least an extra 19p in the pound on income tax. The basis for this calculation is also being placed in House Library.

The proponents of a Scottish Parliament should have calculated the cost to taxpayers in Scotland before they committed themselves to its introduction.

Bank of England

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will ensure that the replacement for the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England in a senior industrialist or trade unionist who understands manufacturing economy and its needs in competitive industry. [16066]

The Prime Minister: The Government will ensure that the person appointed to this post will be the one best qualified to fill it.

Scott Report

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Prime Minister how soon after the publication of the Scott report the minutes of evidence will be available; and if he will make a statement. [16067]

The Prime Minister: The transcripts of the public hearings of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry are available in the House Library and Westminster city library. In addition, Sir Richard Scott has made it clear that he will publish as soon as practicable following the publication of his report as much as possible of the documentary evidence submitted to the inquiry, including witness statements and the questionnaires sent by the inquiry to the witnesses.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Privatisation

Ms Armstrong: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list in respect of each privatisation since 1979, including industries previously located at the Department of Energy, *(a)* the loss or profit of each company in the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* the grants or loans made over the same period. [15352]

Mr. Heseltine: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. Such information as is readily available on the finances of privatised bodies when they were in the public sector can be found in the following published sources:

> "The Government's Expenditure Plans", for each of the years up to and including 1989;
>
> The annual "Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement", for 1990 to 1992, succeeded for 1993 and 1994 by the "Statistical Supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report".

These were published by HMSO as Command Papers and are available in the Library of the House.

Microsoft Corporation

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with Mr. Bill Gates of Microsoft Corporation with particular reference to employment issues. [15526]

Mr. Heseltine: We had a wide-ranging discussion about a number of matters. I would not be prepared to make a public statement about matters discussed in confidence.

Inward Investment

Mr. Legg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much equity capital has been invested in the United Kingdom since 1990 by *(a)* EU companies and *(b)* non-EU companies; [15327]

(2) how much has been invested in the United Kingdom by overseas companies by way of additional loans since 1990. [15324]

Mr. Eggar: The latest available information was published by the Central Statistical Office in table 2.10 of Business Monitor MA4, "Overseas Direct Investment", which is available in the Library of the House. Official statistics do not distinguish between share capital and loan capital.

Coal Imports

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the tonnage of coal imported into the United Kingdom, and the power stations which used it, in each of the last five years. [15841]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The total quantities of coal imported into the United Kingdom and the quantities imported by the major power producers over the past five years were:

Year	*Total imports*	*(Thousand tonnes) Imports by major power producers*
1990	14,783	4,721
1991	19,611	7,261
1992	20,339	7,568
1993[1]	18,400	4,508
1994[1]	15,850	2,889

[1] Figures for 1993 and 1994 are provisional and include a small element of estimation.

Figures for individual companies are confidential.

EDUCATION

Youth and Community Workers

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what financial provision will be made to training youth and community workers beyond the current financial year; and if she will make a statement. [15542]

Mr. Boswell: Local education authorities are free to decide on how much they budget for youth and community work and other educational areas from within their more general education budgets.

In 1995–96, an allocation of £1.2 million from the Department's budget for the grants for education support and training—GEST—programme will be specifically target training in youth and community work. The GEST programme accounts for less than 2 per cent. of overall LEA expenditure.

Through the funding councils the Department also funds higher and further education institutions which provide youth and community worker training.

Youth Service Unit

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what role is projected for her Department's youth service unit beyond 1995. [15541]

Mr. Boswell: The youth service unit's principal role will be to assist in discharging the objective for the youth service described in the Department's document "Better Education for All", which is to support statutory and voluntary youth service providers in promoting the personal and social education of young people.

Prescriptions (Students)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask (1) the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of students in the last year for which figures are available are eligible for free prescriptions. [15950]

(2) the Secretary of State for Health at what stage the Prescription Pricing Authority regarded a student loan as income when deciding on a claimant's eligibility for free prescriptions. [15952]

Mr. Malone: I have been asked to reply.

Student loans have been an integral element of the provision made from public funds for student support since September 1990. Since that day they have been taken into account as income when assessing students' entitlement to help through the national health service low-income scheme. In 1993–94, around 308,000 low-income scheme claims were made by students, of which about 60 per cent. resulted in entitlement to free prescriptions.

TRANSPORT

Rail Services, Carshalton and Wallington

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to franchise rail services serving the constituency of Carshalton and Wallington in the current Parliament; and what guarantees he can give about the safety, frequency and reliability of the services. [15270]

Mr. Watts: The Franchising Director proposes to issue invitations to tender for the Network SouthCentral franchise later this year. He aims to let the franchise by April 1996. The passenger service requirement for the franchise will specify, among other things, the frequency of trains to be operated and maximum journey times. The Franchising Director will monitor operators' performance regularly and he will be able to impose penalties if the passenger service requirement is not delivered. The Rail Regulator requires train operators to have a validated safety case before he will issue a licence to operate.

Road Schemes, North-west

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff currently employed in the Highways Agency are being re-deployed to the roads programme directorate in Birmingham to provide local knowledge of schemes in the north-west. [15664]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 24 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, how many staff currently employed in the Highways Agency are being re-deployed to the Roads Programme Directorate in Birmingham to provide local knowledge of schemes in the North West.

We are keeping the Directorate's Northern Operations Division in Manchester, therefore our oversight of the preparation and design of major improvements to trunk roads in the North West will not change location.

As part of our total restructuring package we asked staff to indicate their preferences for future location and type of work. Many wished to stay working in the same location and are likely to stay on the same work. Supervision of construction is being brought together in Birmingham and 3 staff presently based in Manchester are to be transferred with that work.

None of our restructuring and reorganisation affects the terms of employment of either firms of consultants or local authorities who are designing the schemes or acting as engineers to the contracts.

Airport Safety

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if individual airports are permitted to carry out self-assessment on the need for arrestor beds; [15776]

(2) if the Civil Aviation Authority has reviewed the potential safety hazards beyond current runway and safety areas and determined the need for ground arrestor systems at Plymouth airport in accordance with recommendation 94-15 of the air accidents branch; [15775]

(3) if he will make a statement regarding the progress being made by the Civil Aviation Authority to implement recommendation 94-15 of the air accident branch report on the accident for Cessna 550 Citation II at Southampton Eastleigh airport on 26 May 1993. [15781]

Mr. Norris: These are matters for the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority who, I understand, wrote to the hon. Member on 22 December 1994. As was pointed out in that letter, it is consistent with good safety management practice for individual airport authorities to conduct their own safety risk assessments of any potential hazards beyond the ends of runways and to take any action they consider appropriate to eliminate or mitigate the potential risks posed.

I expect the Civil Aviation Authority to advise me later this year on progress with the review that it is conducting in response to the air accident investigation branch's recommendation 94-15.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the United Kingdom post in Islamabad asked the Home Office to interview the sponsor in the United Kingdom of Mr. Shahid Iqbal, IMM/89155 and J238169; and when and where the sponsor is to be interviewed. [16147]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The request from the British high commission in Islamabad for an interview from Mr. Shahid Iqbal's sponsor was received by the Home Office on 22 February 1995. The papers are currently at Leeds-Bradford airport, which will contact Mr. Iqbal's sponsor to arrange an interview in due course.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when papers were forwarded to Leeds-Bradford airport in connection with a request to interview the sponsor of Mr. Parvez Akhtar, IMP A518185/2(S) and PO 28871/94; if an interview date has been allocated to the sponsor; and if he will make a staement. [16145]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The papers in connection with the request to interview the sponsor of Mr. Parvez Akhtar were sent to Leeds-Bradford airport on 1 June 1994. Since

I wrote on 15 February, Leeds-Bradford airport has written to Mr. Akhtar's sponsor to ask whether she would be willing to travel to a port in the north-east other than Leeds-Bradford airport to be interviewed. As a result of the response, the papers have now been transferred to the immigration office at North Shields who will shortly contact Mr. Akhtar's sponsor to offer her an appointment for an interview.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which of Her Majesty's prisons action to control the use of illegal drugs has been intensified within the past six months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 24 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about which of Her Majesty's Prisons have intensified action to control the use of illegal drugs within the past six months.

Reducing the level of drug misuses is one of the Prison Service's main strategic priorities for 1994 to 1997 and as part of this all prisons have been asked to take additional action to prevent the misuse of drugs within their establishments. This is being supported by a range of initiatives from Headquarters to control further the use of illicit drugs, including the development of a new and comprehensive strategy for reducing drug misuse which will be issued shortly.

Examples of measures being adopted to combat drug misuse across the Prison Service include:

wider use of closed (non-contact) visits for those found guilty of drug-related offences;

increased use of drug sniffer dogs;

more extensive use of closed circuit television cameras during visits;

better use of intelligence to target drug dealers and those inmates and visitors attempting to smuggle drugs into prison;

improved training for staff in identifying drug substances and in searching techniques.

the start of mandatory drug testing at eight establishments prior to its extension to all establishments.

Police Authority Clerks

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance he issues to police authorities on the remuneration scales to be used for the employment of the clerk to the authority; and if such posts have to be advertised for open competition. [15582]

Mr. Maclean: No guidance has been issued to police authorities on the remuneration scales to be used for the employment of the clerk to the authority; this is a matter for police authorities to determine. There is no requirement for such posts to be advertised for open competition.

Victims Helpline

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of the victims helpline to 8 March. [15167]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 24 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of the Victim Helpline up to 8 March.

The total costs are estimated to be in the region of £19,000. This includes start up costs of £8,400, and running costs of £10,600.

Live Exports (Policing Costs)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of additional policing costs arising from the transhipment of *(a)* live animals and *(b)* veal calves for 1994–95 at (i) Coventry airport, (ii) Shoreham point, (iii) Brightlingsea, (iv) Plymouth and (v) Swansea. [15252]

Mr. Maclean: These are matters for individual police authorities. I understand that the latest estimates of the additional policing costs to be incurred in 1994–95 are:

	£
Coventry Airport	385,000
Shoreham	3.74 million
Brightlingsea	1.8 million
Plymouth	[1]100,000
Swansea	2,500

[1] Actual expenditure to 17 March.

It is not possible to apportion costs by type of animal.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equal Opportunities (Teachers)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if teachers of the Protestant faith can be appointed to schools controlled by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; and if he will make a statement about fair employment practices in controlled schools. [14844]

Mr. Ancram: Teachers of the Protestant faith can be appointed to schools controlled by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. Fair employment legislation does not, however, apply to teachers in any schools but does apply to non-teaching staff in all schools. Education and library boards have in place an equal opportunities policy statement which is used by controlled schools for their non-teaching staff and are presently preparing a statement to be used by controlled schools for their teaching staff.

Fishing Industry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fishing vessels are estimated to be involved in the catching of nephrops; and how many of these vessels previously caught white fish. [15124]

Mr. Ancram: In the Northern Ireland fleet 184 vessels of over 10 m in length landed nephrops during 1994.

While fishing for nephrops, there is an inevitable by-catch of white fish and all these vessels caught white fish.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the 18 projects grant-aided in 1992–93 by the EC Commission in the fishing industry in Northern Ireland as described in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 5.22. [15428]

Mr. Ancram: The 18 projects grant-aided in 1992–93 by the EC Commission in the fishing industry in Northern Ireland are set out in the table.

Payments made under regulation EEC 4028/86 in 1992–93

Project number	*Type of project*	*Payment made £*
UK/212/89/02	Vessel modernisation	7,350
UK/8/91/01	Vessel modernisation	7,490
UK/9/91/01	Vessel modernisation	22,625
UK/10/91/01	Vessel modernisation	5,950
UK/12/91/01	Vessel modernisation	13,510
UK/13/91/01	Vessel modernisation	8,043
UK/14/91/01	Vessel modernisation	14,950
UK/44/91/01	Aquaculture unit construction	4,148
UK/45/91/01	Aquaculture unit construction	10,686
UK/66/91/02	Vessel modernisation	28,131
UK/67/91/02	Vessel modernisation	12,500
UK/68/91/02	Vessel modernisation	8,760
		(86,800
UK/74/91/02	Aquaculture unit construction	(48,318
UK/16/92/01	Vessel modernisation	23,610
UK/17/92/01	Vessel modernisation	26,204
UK/19/92/01	Vessel modernisation	48,091
UK/20/92/01	Vessel modernisation	18,283
UK/22/92/01	Vessel modernisation	18,425

Animal Diseases

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of enzootic disease in animals have been diagnosed in Northern Ireland each year since 1989; and what proportion of these cases was introduced from outside Northern Ireland. [15404]

Mr. Ancram: Enzootic disease is the term used to describe any animals or poultry disease which exists in a particular area. Listed in the table are the number of cases of the main notifiable enzootic diseases present in Northern Ireland for which statistics are available since 1989. It is not possible to provide the proportion of cases introduced from outside Northern Ireland.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Tuberculosis	2,493	3,124	4,108	4,601	6,241	5,286
Brucellosis	34	23	122	27	3	20
Salmonella (poultry flocks)	47	26	65	25	11	20
Salmonella (other species)	238	193	131	198	148	134
Sheep scab	14	36	46	59	48	71
Johne's Disease	8	26	25	13	6	11
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy	30	100	170	333	487	363
Enzootic abortions in ewes	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24	56

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of epizootic disease in animals have been diagnosed in Northern Ireland each year since 1989; and when he projects the eradication of this disease. [15405]

Mr. Ancram: Epizootic disease is the term used to describe any highly infectious disease which affects a large number of animals in a wide area at the same time and spreads with great rapidity.

Since 1989 the only instances of epizootic disease in Northern Ireland was in 1991 when six cases of Newcastle disease occurred in poultry.

Action continues to be taken to prevent the introduction of any epizootic disease of animals or poultry into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of cases of ectoparasitic infestation in sheep for *(a)* the two years before compulsory dipping was abolished and *(b)* the two years since compulsory dipping has been abolished. [14567]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* With the exception of sheep scab, the number of ectoparasitic infections in sheep are not recorded in Northern Ireland.

Compulsory dipping of sheep was abolished in Northern Ireland in 1993. The number of cases in sheep scap in Northern Ireland for the years in question is as follows:

1991: 46

1992: 59

1993: 48

1994: 71

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the areas in Northern Ireland that have been designated as environmentally sensitive, *(b)* the amount of money spent on each of these areas since 1989, *(c)* the expenditure for each of these areas in 1994–95 and *(d)* the projected expenditure for each of these areas for 1996–97. [15424]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows.

There are five environmentally sensitive areas in Northern Ireland:

Area	
Mourne mountains and Slieve Croob	Designated as pilot ESA in 1988 Redesignated May 1993
Antrim coast, Glens and Rathlin	Designated as pilot ESA in 1989 Redesignated and extended May 1993
West Fermanagh and Erne Lakeland	Designated in May 1993
Sperrins	Designated in June 1994
Slieve Gullion	Designated in June 1994

As ESA payments are not due until 12 months from the date on which a farmer enters into an ESA agreement, the only payments to date have been the original pilot ESAs as follows:

	To date *£ Million*	*1994–95* *£ Million*
Mourne mountains and Slieve Croob	1.6	0.350
Glens of Antrim	0.652	0.215

Projected expenditure for all five ESAs in 1996–97 is £5.104 million.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the criteria for an area of land to be designated as environmentally sensitive. [15423]

Mr. Ancram: The following criteria were applied to the selection of the existing five environmentally sensitive areas in Northern Ireland:

> "Each area must be of national environmental significance; must represent a discrete and coherent unit of environmental interest; its conservation must depend on adopting, maintaining or extending particular farming practices; farming practices in the area must have changed, or must be likely to do so, in ways that pose a threat to the environment."

Agricultural Helpline

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many calls the helpline planned by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland—see "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 5.8—received in its first year; and how much it cost. [15426]

Mr. Ancram: In its first year the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland's helpline received 750 calls. The cost of each call was borne by the caller and the estimated cost of handling the calls was £370.

Industrial Research and Technology Unit

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons there is a planned decrease of £3 million in spending on the industrial research and technology unit in Northern Ireland between 1995–96 and 1996–97, referred to in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", table 6.1. [15409]

Mr. Ancram: The budget for the industrial research and technology unit will, in addition, receive European regional development fund funding which is included in the ERDF line of the table. Taking account of this, the total funding planned for the unit is:

1995–96: £13.5 million

1996–97: £13.3 million

1997–98: £13.2 million

Official Travel

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the review of arrangements for ministerial and official travel mentioned in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 4.49 has taken place; and if he will list how much each Minister and other officials spent on travel *(a)* in 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [15420]

Sir John Wheeler: Three reviews have been taken in 1994–95 into the use of *(a)* executive jets provided by the private sector; *(b)* agents to provide travel and hotel bookings in Belfast; and *(c)* the use of the Government car service. As a result of each review, the new contracts have provided improved value for money through reducing costs and higher discounts.

It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to identify the separate travel costs for each individual Minister and officials. The total expenditure by the Northern Ireland Office on all travel and subsistence, including police escorts for Ministers, broken down as between *(a)* Ministers and their personal support staff *(b)* senior officials and team support staff and *(c)* all other Northern Ireland Office staff, including the Prison Service and the Compensation Agency was £3,859,514 in 1993–94 and £3,338,609 for 1994–95 to 22 March 1995 as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95 (to 22 March 1995)* £
(a) Minister and support staff:		
(1) Travel and subsistence	792,601	779,092
(2) Car service	322,922	272,694
(3) RUC escort	509,607	522,969
Total	1,625,130	1,574,755
(b) Senior NIO officials and support staff:		
(1) Travel and subsistence	140,067	131,706
(2) Car service	48,060	43,040
Total	188,127	174,746
(c) All other NIO staff (including Prison Service and Compensation Agency		
(1) Travel and subsistence	2,046,257	1,589,108
Grand Total	3,859,514	3,338,609

Watercourse Management

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been spent on watercourse management in Northern Ireland since 1989;

and what is the projected expenditure for watercourse management in 1996–97. [15407]

Mr. Ancram: Expenditure for watercourse management division from April 1989 to March 1995 was £110.4 million. Projected expenditure for 1996–97 is £18.8 million.

Milk Marketing Board

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of converting the Milk Marketing Board for Northern Ireland into a voluntary co-operative. [15406]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland's expenditure on this matter is estimated at £250,000 over the two years 1993–94 and 1994–95. This is compromised mainly of staff time but includes payments for independent financial advice. The Milk Marketing Board for Northern Ireland has estimated its expenditure at £650,000.

Agricultural Pollution

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the success of the campaign introduced in 1991 by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland to reduce farm pollution from farms in river catchment areas as described in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 5.16(i); what were the costs of setting up this campaign; what were the costs of this campaign for 1994–95; and what are the projected costs of this campaign for 1996–97. [15427]

Mr. Ancram: More than 30 per cent. of farmers took action to minimise the risk of pollution.

There were no additional costs in setting up the campaign. It was rather a focusing of existing resources to target high-risk farms on selected river catchments with a known history of pollution from agricultural activities.

Measures to reduce farm source pollution remain a priority. The Department of Agriculture offers free advice to farmers at a cost of £186,000 in 1994–95.

Projected costs for 1996–97 are broadly similar to 1994–95.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the £4 million planned for the Forensic Science Laboratory in Northern Ireland in 1994–95 was or will be recovered from the Police Authority as charges for services. [15410]

Sir John Wheeler: It is estimated that, of the laboratory's total expenditure of £4.8 million in 1994–95, £4.6 million will be recouped from the Police Authority.

Civil Defence Services

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* projected spending for the civil defence services for 1996–97 and *(b)* the areas within this where savings have been identified, as mentioned in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 4.41. [15412]

Sir John Wheeler: The projected spending for civil defence services for 1996–97, based on the 1994 public expenditure survey exercise, is contained within a budget of £522,000 for all emergency planning services within the Northern Ireland Office. However, the projected spending is likely to be reduced to £403,000 as a result of the 1995 PES exercise which is not yet complete. The savings identified, as mentioned in "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97", section 4.41 are primarily in respect of the elimination of costs for the rental and maintenance of food stores following the programme of disposal of the food stockpile, in line with United Kingdom policy, and the disposal elements of the former air attack warning system.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseekers Bill

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated numbers of employees in respect of whom employers will qualify for national insurance contribution rebates under clause 23 of the Jobseekers Bill in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; what is the estimated resulting reduction in the number of unemployed people receiving a jobseeker's allowance; and what are the estimated resulting reductions in contribution revenue and benefit expenditure. [15135]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that in 1996–97 employers will qualify for rebates under clause 23 of the Jobseekers Bill in respect of some 120,000 employees. It is expected that employers will reclaim some £45 million from their national insurance payments. The figures for 1997–98 are expected to be broadly the same.

It is not possible to estimate the likely effects of the measures at this stage, but unemployment might be cut ultimately by up to 100,000 by all the work incentive measures, including the national insurance contribution rebate, announced by the Chancellor in the November 1994 Budget.

Private Pensions

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom; and what is the equivalent figure for the two next largest European Union countries. [15330]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In 1992, the total amount of funds in private pension provision in the United Kingdom was around £550 billion. This is more than three times the amount in either of the two European Union countries with the next highest level of pension funds—£160 billion for Germany and £140 billion for the Netherlands.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefit entitlement applies pending the outcome of the appeal when a recipient of incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance who is found to be capable of work under the all-work test lodges an appeal against the decision and declines to register as unemployed. [16139]

Mr. Hague: Incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance cease to be payable when a recipient is found to be capable of work under the all-work test. A claimant who has lodged an appeal and has not registered as unemployed may qualify for income support. Where a claimant would normally be entitled to income support only if he were available for work, and he has declined to register as unemployed pending his appeal, income support will be reduced by an amount equal to 20 per cent. of the single person's personal allowance. This reduction will not be made if the claimant was in receipt of invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance on 12 April 1995, and the appeal is against a decision based on the first application of the all-work test to him.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if recipients of invalidity benefit, incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance may take up part-time or full-time education or training courses without prejudice to their benefit entitlement; and if the taking up of such a place affects the assessment of their capacity for work. [16138]

Mr. Hague: Days on which a person attends a Government-funded course in respect of which he is paid a training allowance are not treated as days of incapacity for work, and benefit would not be payable. People getting invalidity benefit, sever disablement allowance or, from 13 April, incapacity benefit before starting the course will get a training allowance based on the rate of benefit they were receiving, plus £10.

Attendance on a course of education, either part-time or full-time, or a non-Government funded course, will not generally affect payment of benefit unless the nature of the course raises doubts about a person's continued incapacity for work.

Young people aged between 16 and 19 cannot get severe disablement allowance if they are in full-time education which would be suitable for young people of the same age who are not disabled.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many hours of study people in receipt of invalid care allowance will be allowed to undertake without jeopardising benefit entitlement when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced. [16144]

Mr. Hague: Those in receipt of invalid care allowance will be allowed to undertake a part-time course at a higher education establishment or up to 16 guided learning hours of study at a college of further education without jeopardising entitlement to jobseeker's allowance. We have no plans at present to change the invalid care allowance rules, which allow 21 hours study a week. As now, full-time students will be excluded from benefit.

EMPLOYMENT

Pay Rates

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the number of employees in employment in every wages council industry whose hourly pay rate was the wages council hourly rate for all quarters from spring 1992 to summer 1993, *(b)* the number of employees in employment in every former wages council industry whose hourly pay rate was the wages council hourly rate for all quarters from autumn 1993 to the last quarter, in each case expressing the data by individual wages council industry and using micro data from the quarterly labour force survey; [14228]

(2) if he will list the hourly wage rate for all employees in employment in every former wages council sector whose hourly wage rate was the wages council rate prior to the abolition of the wages councils, expressing the data by individual wages council sector, for all quarters beginning autumn 1993 up to the latest quarter, and using micro-data from the quarterly labour force survey. [14229]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 March 1995]:* The labour force survey did not ask questions about earnings until winter 1992–93. The information from LFS that could be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs is in the following table:

Employees aged 21 and over sampled in the labour force survey whose earnings were at their usual level

			Number earning per hour				
	Number in sample	*Average hourly earnings £*	*£2.70 to £2.80*	*£2.80 to £2.90*	*£2.90 to £3.00*	*£3.00 to £3.10*	*£3.10 to £3.20*
Autumn 1993 (based on SIC 1980)							
Clothing manufacture	28	4.38	4	2	1	1	—
Retail distribution	499	4.68	11	19	11	26	34
Restaurants	41	4.04	3	1	—	4	2
Public houses	56	3.84	1	2	2	13	2
Hotels	40	4.46	1	1	2	8	3
Winter 1993 (based on SIC 1992)							
Clothing manufacture	49	4.84	3	2	2	1	1
Retail distribution	505	4.48	12	15	12	30	34
Restaurants	54	3.89	2	2	—	4	2
Public houses	41	3.37	1	2	1	14	5
Hotels	35	4.72	1	—	—	2	1
Spring 1994 (based on SIC 1992)							
Clothing manufacture	57	4.17	4	2	1	1	2
Retail distribution	710	4.79	12	10	6	33	36
Restaurants	62	3.64	2	4	—	11	3
Public houses	64	3.88	3	1	1	10	2
Hotels	55	4.66	1	1	—	7	1

Employees aged 21 and over sampled in the labour force survey whose earnings were at their usual level

	Number in sample	Average hourly earnings £	Number earning per hour £2.70 to £2.80	£2.80 to £2.90	£2.90 to £3.00	£3.00 to £3.10	£3.10 to £3.20
Summer 1994 (based on SIC 1992)							
Clothing manufacture	38	4.69	1	—	2	1	2
Retail distribution	537	5.22	8	12	7	25	22
Restaurants	42	4.05	2	3	—	5	1
Public Houses	42	3.25	1	3	1	7	3
Hotels	47	4.94	1	4	3	5	3
Autumn 1994 (based on SIC 1992)							
Clothing manufacture	42	4.16	2	1	2	—	4
Retail distribution	498	5.11	4	11	3	25	23
Restaurants	46	3.89	—	2	3	1	2
Public Houses	42	3.91	1	1	1	7	5
Hotels	57	4.32	3	2	1	9	1

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in each English region and for Wales and Scotland in *(a)* full-time work and *(b)* part-time work earn (i) less than £1.50 an hour, (ii) between £1.50 and £2 an hour, (iii) between £2 and £2.50 an hour, (iv) between £2.50 and £3 an hour, (v) between £3 and £3.50 an hour and (vi) between £3.50 and £4 an hour. [14227]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 March 1995]:* Estimates derived from the results of the 1994 new earnings survey are given in the following table:

Estimated numbers of employees, rounded to nearest 10,000

	Number earnings Less than £1.50	£1.50—£2.00	£2.00—£2.50	£2.50—£3.00	£3.00—£3.50	£3.50—£4.00
Full-time						
South East region	10,000	10,000	20,000	40,000	90,000	160,000
East Anglia region	—	—	—	10,000	20,000	30,000
South West region	—	—	10,000	10,000	40,000	70,000
West Midlands region	—	—	10,000	20,000	60,000	90,000
East Midlands region	—	—	10,000	20,000	50,000	70,000
Yorkshire and Humberside region	—	—	10,000	20,000	60,000	80,000
North West region	—	—	10,000	30,000	60,000	90,000
North region	—	—	10,000	10,000	30,000	50,000
Wales	—	—	—	10,000	30,000	40,000
Scotland	—	—	10,000	20,000	60,000	90,000
Part-time						
South East region	10,000	20,000	20,000	70,000	210,000	240,000
East Anglia region	—	—	—	20,000	40,000	40,000
South West region	10,000	—	10,000	40,000	120,000	80,000
West Midlands region	10,000	—	10,000	30,000	110,000	90,000
East Midlands region	10,000	—	10,000	30,000	90,000	80,000
Yorkshire and Humberside region	10,000	—	10,000	30,000	100,000	110,000
North West region	—	—	20,000	40,000	120,000	140,000
North region	—	—	10,000	20,000	60,000	60,000
Wales	10,000	—	10,000	20,000	50,000	50,000
Scotland	—	10,000	10,000	20,000	110,000	100,000

Note:—signifies that the estimate was less than 10,000.

Unemployment

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of using narrow based rates in the regional unemployment statistics. [14919]

Mr. Oppenheim: The wide-based rate is a sensible way to expressing the claimant unemployment rate since its denominator has a more complete coverage of the workforce and it is the only rate which is quoted in the labour market statistics national press notice. Narrow-based rates are published in the *Employment Gazette* and on NOMIS, the Department's on-line database. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to whom training and enterprise councils are financially accountable. [15787]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are independent companies, mostly limited by guarantee, and are run by a board of directors who are also their members. The board has ultimate responsibility for all its TEC's financial obligations.

As with other independent private companies, these obligations arise from a TEC's contractual relations with other parties.

In the event of a TEC being unable to meet its financial obligations, the Companies Acts and Insolvency Act make provision for relevant affected parties to seek redress. These parties can request the courts and/or the Department of Trade and Industry to appoint an administrator, receiver or liquidator, with a view to controlling, disposing and investigating the company's affairs.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made in awarding TECs three-year licences; and how many have been granted such licenses. [16141]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils have made significant progress in meeting the demanding criteria required to be awarded three-year licences. Twenty-one TECs have already obtained licences to operate from 27 March this year. The other 53 English TECs have until 1997 to meet the criteria.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what significant changes are being made to *(a)* the TEC operating agreement for 1995–96 and *(b)* the TEC quality assurance supplier management requirements; and if he will place copies of these in the Library. [16140]

Mr. Paice: The training and enterprise council operating agreement for 1995–96 has been significantly redrafted to:

incorporate the requirements of TEC licensing;

include new programmes announced in the competitiveness White Paper;

include the services funded by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade; and

improve the clarity of the Government's contract with TECs.

There have been no changes to the TEC quality assurance supplier management requirements. Copies of all relevant documents have already been placed in the Library.

WALES

General Practitioners

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been removed from doctors' lists in each of the last three years. [14736]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the family health services authorities concerning the adequacy of supply of the doctors entering general practice; if he will list which authorities have made representations regarding shortage of latent supply; and if he will make a statement. [16191]

Mr. Redwood: I have held no specific consultations with chairmen of FHSAs nor received any representations. Over the past three years there have been approximately 1,400 new entrants to general practice per year in England and Wales. This has been sufficient to ensure a continuing increase in overall numbers of GPs.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of Sate for Wales how many planning appeals have been decided by his Department in each of the last five years; and how many have been successful. [14871]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The provision of statistical information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. C. Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. Shepley to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 21 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Wales has asked me to reply to your question about the number of planning appeals that have been dealt with in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many have succeeded.

The information requested is set out in the table:

Planning Appeals: Wales

Year	*Number decided*	*Number allowed*
1989–90	1,431	429
1990–91	1,442	488
1991–92	1,208	453
1992–93	1,051	350
1993–94	955	334
1994–95[1]	647	210

[1] From 1 April 1994 to 31 December 1994.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Cynog Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if environmental appraisal will be required for project funding bids for ERDF moneys in all circumstances; [14826]

(2) at what stage in the bidding process for project funding for ERDF moneys environmental appraisals will be assessed; [14825]

(3) if he will establish a specialist advisory group to undertake critical evaluation of environmental appraisals relevant to project funding bids for ERDF moneys; [14827]

(4) when he will issue guidance notes on the significance attached to environmental appraisals in project funding bids for ERDF money. [14828]

Mr. Redwood: A statement in respect of the environmental impact of development proposals is required for all ERDF applications; in addition, a full environmental impact assessment is required for all projects with costs above 15 million ecu.

These statements and assessments are taken into account during the process of project appraisal, and the environmental contribution of a project is one of the key criteria used in selecting projects for ERDF assistance. Given the considerable experience in environmental matters available to assist the secretariat and the wider partnership in appraising projects, it is not considered necessary to establish a specialist advisory group in this field. A comprehensive guidance note intended to assist ERDF applicants has recently been issued to the rural Wales and industrial south Wales partnerships; it includes guidance on environmental appraisals.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with Welsh health authorities and trusts concerning the availability of adequate supplies of junior doctors for hospital appointments, with particular regard to the staffing of accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement. [16189]

Mr. Redwood: My officials are undertaking extensive discussions with Welsh health authorities and trusts concerning the present problems of attracting adequate junior staff to accident and emergency departments with a view to establishing a co-ordinated strategy for dealing with any future shortages.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each hospital or hospital group unit which have either gained or lost accreditation for the training of junior doctors in each of the last three academic years, including parts of years, up to the present. [16194]

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list which health authorities, family health services authorities and hospital trusts have undertaken overseas recruitment drives during the past 12 months to match supply with the demand for junior doctors and new entrants into general practice; and what information he has received concerning the countries from which overseas doctors have been recruited. [16192]

Mr. Redwood: As part of their general recruitment policy, a number of health authorities and hospital trusts have employed doctors from overseas, but precise details are not available centrally.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those health authorities and trusts where there have been occasions of enforced closure at a hospital casualty unit for significant periods during the past two years; and if he will list each such occasion, the length of time for each such closure and the principal reason given for the closure. [16190]

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally, but can be obtained from health authorities.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will conduct an all-Wales review of casualty, accident and emergency and trauma units, in terms of demand, distribution and staffing requirements. [16195]

Mr. Redwood: My Department is currently undertaking such a review, and advice to the NHS in Wales will be available later this year.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from the Cardiff community health council, the South Glamorgan health authority and the university hospital of Wales—Cardiff Royal Infirmary NHS trust-designate concerning the procedure to be followed pursuant to the vote by the Cardiff community health council against the transfer of accident and emergency services to the university hospital of Wales site at the Heath, Cardiff; and if he will list each step of the statutory procedure. [16196]

Mr. Redwood: I have not received any representations on this issue. Guidance on the procedures to be followed in the event of a community health council objecting to a health authority proposal for a major service change is set out in "Substantial changes in the use of health buildings: consultation procedures", which was published by my Department in June 1991. I will place a copy of the guidance in the Library of the House.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what criteria three-year operators' licences are being awarded to training and enterprise councils in Wales; and how many have been awarded. [16143]

Mr. Richards: Arrangements for training and enterprise councils to apply for three-year operating licences have not been introduced in Wales.

Community Services

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has reached a decision on the future of the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme; and if he will make a statement. [16861]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Further to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 20 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *716* the consultation period on my proposal has ended. I received eight responses.

I have concluded that the programme should be wound up and the finance transferred to local authorities with effect from 31 March 1997. This is in line with our policy that decisions on the funding of local facilities should, wherever possible and appropriate, be taken by local authorities. After that date, assistance to local youth, voluntary and community groups to repair existing facilities and to construct new premises will not normally be funded under these regulations.

This decision does not affect projects which have already been approved under the programme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Social Development Summit

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement following the completion of the world summit for social development on the issues raised at the summit. [15979]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *15*.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Marine Pollution

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department carries out of the endocrine effects of pollutants, or industrially discharged chemicals, on marine mammals, shellfish or fish.

Mr. Jack: Industrial discharge of chemicals to seas and rivers may only take place in accordance with consents or authorisations issued by the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The Ministry carries out general pollution monitoring in the marine environment and has undertaken some research on levels of alkylphenolethoxylates and alkylphenols in river and estuarine waters. This research, funded by DOE, was to identify effects on caged male fish in rivers close to discharge points from sewage treatment works. Oestrogenic responses were observed close to discharge points but disappeared rapidly with distance downstream. Work is being carried out by the NRA to determine possible causes of the observed effects in fish. No work has been carried out on marine mammals. However, a further MAFF-funded programme of investigation on marine fish species is currently under consideration.

Live Exports

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *329*, what information he has on the number of calves exported from Coventry airport in each of the last two years and the number of times flights have been delayed; and how often during that period officials have used their powers to ensure calves do not go for longer than 15 hours from the start of their journey without being fed and rested. [15166]

Mrs. Browning: A total of 20,213 calves were exported from Coventry airport in 1994. The number of calves exported by this route in the current year so far, to 20 March, is 6,873.

Delays long enough to compromise the 15-hour journey time on flights from Coventry airport occurred on 7 and 8 December because of bad weather—one flight on each date—and on 3 February, when the activities of protesters affected three flights. On each of these occasions calves that had arrived at the airport had to be returned to their premises of origin. In one instance on 3 February, the calves which were delayed at the airport would have exceeded the 15-hour statutory period in returning to their premises of origin. The calves were therefore returned under a notice requiring their feeding immediately on arrival at the home premises. The other journeys of calves returning to their premises of origin could be completed before expiry of the 15 hours, and so notices did not need to be served by officials.

Farming Incomes

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate in real terms the change in farming incomes in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and by how much he estimates farming incomes will change in 1995. [15791]

Mr. Jack: Total income from farming rose in real terms by 35.8 per cent. in 1993 and by 4.4 per cent. in 1994.

Estimates of future changes in income are not made.

HEALTH

Occupational Therapy

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of referrals to social services is for occupational therapy; and what percentage of occupational therapists' posts were unfilled in each of the last five years. [15361]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Surgery Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost to the NHS of *(a)* a hip replacement, *(b)* coronary artery bypass, *(c)* a hysterectomy, *(d)* a tonsillectomy, *(e)* a cataract extraction, *(f)* a kidney transplant, *(g)* a hernia repair and *(h)* correction of glue ear. [15831]

Mr. Sackville: The costing systems in the national health service are currently under review to enable the methodologies used to be standardised in all hospitals.

Cancer

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the length of survival after diagnosis of breast cancer in *(a)* the South Birmingham district health authority area and *(b)* the west midlands; what is the comparative figure in respect of the Nottingham prognostic index; what was the number of new cases diagnosed in each of the last five years in (i) South Birmingham and (ii) the west midlands; and what was the number of deaths in each of the last five years for each health authority weighted to take population into account. [15823]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Stoten, chairman of South Birmingham health authority, and Mr. Bryan Baker, chairman of West Midlands regional health authority, for details.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department monitors the rate of reproductive cancers, with particular reference to testicular cancer, on a continual basis; and if she will make the most recent statistics available. [15956]

Mr. Sackville: Data on the number of new cases of cancer registered each year with the 11 cancer registries in England have been published annually by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on behalf of the Department in "Cancer statistics—registration"—series MB1—reports since 1971. Prior to 1971, these data were published in the Registrar General's "Statistical Review of England and Wales, Supplements on Cancer".

In 1989—the latest available figures—there were 4,758 new cases of malignant neoplasm of the ovary and other uterine adnexa—ICD 183—registered in England, compared with 1,178 new cases of malignant neoplasm of the testis—ICD 186.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made to accommodate expansion of renal services within the new home-based care services. [15663]

Mr. Malone: The changes being made in the way in which continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis is funded affects only those patients whose treatment is currently funded by general practitioners writing a prescription. This is about half all CAPD patients. From 1 April 1995 all patients will receive their treatment as part of contracts between health authorities and renal units. As far as allowing for expansion is concerned, as with other hospital services, it is for purchasers to assess need in their area and allocate resources based on local priorities.

Mr. Soley: To aks the Secretary of State for Health if her Department has fully informed general practitioners about the revised arrangements for the provision of home-based continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis. [15656]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 23 March *Official Report*, columns *351-53*.

South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria were used in the selection of the new chair of South Birmingham Mental Health Trust; and which organisations were consulted about the selection; [16169]

(2) what was the cause of the delay in appointing a new chair of the South Birmingham Mental Health Trust; and if she will make a statement; [16168]

(3) which body recommended the appointment of the new chair of South Birmingham Mental Health Trust. [16170]

Mr. Malone: Following a process of identification and formal assessment, a choice of suitable candidates for the chairmanship of the South Birmingham Mental Health National Health Service Trust was submitted to Ministers by West Midlands regional health authority. The RHA also undertook consultation with local Members of Parliament. Mrs. Anne Hingley was appointed as chairman of the South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust on 1 March 1995 following her previous service as chairman of the Wolverly NHS Trust.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital consultants who have let the NHS in each year since 1979 to set up their own independent small business are still providing health care, but outside the NHS. [16065]

Mr. Malone: The activities of consultants who leave the national health service are a private matter for the individuals concerned.

Income from Leased Assets

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total annual income from NHS assets and services which are leased or contracted out to the private sector. [16187]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Weighted Capitation, North West

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent table 6 of her latest departmental annual report understates the amount of money the north-west region of the national health service should receive under the Government's new weighted capitation formula. [15865]

Mr. Sackville: For 1995–96, the allocation for North West regional health authority if based fully on weighted capitation using the modified national formula, would be £3,217,091,000. The figure of £2,217.1 million for North West regional health authority in table 6, column 2 of the departmental report 1995 is incorrect.

Copies of the departmental report entitled "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995–96 to 1997–98", Cm 2812, which are available in the Library, will be amended accordingly. I am grateful to the hon. Member for bringing this to my attention.

Inquiries

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the internal or public inquiries begun since April 1991 after NHS service provision failure and conducted by regional health authorities, health authorities, her Department or an independent assessor; what was the reason for each inquiry; and what was the cost of each and in total. [16165]

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

False Memory Syndrome

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical evidence her Department has evaluated which supports the existence of false memory syndrome. [14156]

Mr. Bowis: None, but we are currently considering a report by the British Psychological Society.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received about false memory syndrome in the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [14157]

Mr. Bowis: We have received a small number of representations from members of the public.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give a breakdown, by week of pregnancy, of the number of abortions performed on women in England and Wales *(a)* under ground A, risk to life of woman, *(b)* under ground B, to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman, *(c)* under ground E, there is substantial risk of the child being born seriously handicapped, and *(d)* under grounds F and G, to save the life of woman and to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman (i) in 1992 and (ii) in 1993. [15960]

Mr. Sackville: Data for 1992 will be published in table 13 of "Abortion Statistics 1993", series AB, No. 19 on 30 March 1995, copies of which will be placed in the Library. Data for 1993 are not yet available.

TREASURY

Council of Ministers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the most recent

Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European union. [15854]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the United Kingdom at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 20 March.

The Council agreed to recommend granting discharge to the Commission for the 1993 Community budget after a discussion on the Court of Auditors' report and in the light of a progress report from the new Commission on proposed improvements in financial management.

The Council adopted draft conclusions on a proposed regulation on the protection of the Community's financial interests and agreed that rapid progress needed to be made on the matter.

The Council reached political agreement on the draft second VAT simplification directive, agreed on a common position on the trans-European networks financial regulations, and adopted conclusions on the Commission report on the implementation of the money laundering directive, 91/308/EC.

The Council agreed on criteria for future lending to third countries, gave agreement in principle to a Commission proposal for a guarantee on the Community budget for EIB lending to South Africa of 300 mecu over two years, and agreed in principle to a loan to Belarus.

The Council asked the Commission to produce a report on the progress being made by the CEEs on preparation for integration into the internal market in time for discussion prior to the joint meeting between ECOFIN Ministers and associated central and eastern European Finance Ministers scheduled for 22 May.

The Commission presented a communication on the follow-up to the Essen conclusions on employment. The Council decided to discuss the issue further at the informal ECOFIN in early April.

There was unanimous agreement to the TENs financial regulation. No other formal votes were taken.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information for Her Majesty's Treasury, the Central Statistical Office, the Royal Mint and the Department for National Savings is as follows:

Her Majesty's Treasury

	Less than 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force	Over 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force
1995	36	2.6	3	0.2
1994	[1]11	0.7	[1]19	1.3
1993	[1]16	1.0	[1]22	1.4
1992	[2]7	0.4	[2]15	1.0
1991	[2]12	0.7	[2]15	1.0
1990	[2]28	1.7	[2]8	0.5

Notes:

[1] figures exclude those relating to forward.

[2] figures exclude those relating to forward, CCTA and CCC.

Central Statistical Office

	Less than 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force	Over 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force
1995	13	0.8	1	[1]—
1994	150	10.0	15	1.0
1993	52	3.5	8	0.5
1992	34	2.2	8	0.5
1991	16	1.0	7	0.5
1990	15	1.2	1	[1]—

Notes:

[1] Figures are less than 0.1 per cent.

Royal Mint

	Less than 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force	Over 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force
1994	91	10	0	—
1993	60	6	0	—
1992	32	3	0	—
1991	36	4	0	—
1990	94	9	0	—

Department for National Savings

	Less than 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force	Over 51 weeks	Percentage of total work force
1995	111	2.0	176	3.2
1994	327	5.5	157	2.3
1993	209	3.4	31	0.5
1992	180	2.8	18	0.3
1991	191	2.8	1	—[1]
1990	353	4.3	3	—[1]

Note:

[1] Figures are less than 0.1 per cent.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information for HM Treasury, the Central Statistical Office, the Royal Mint and the Department for National Savings is as follows:

HM Treasury

	Less than 51 weeks	Over 51 weeks
1995	3	0
1994	3	0
1993	3	0
1992	0	0
1991	0	0
1990	0	0

Central Statistical Office

	Less than 51 weeks	*Over 51 weeks*
1995	4	0
1994	15	0
1993	12	0
1992	5	0
1991	4	0
1990	4	0

Royal Mint Figures are not available in the format requested.

Department for National Savings

	Less than 51 weeks	*Over 51 weeks*
1995	64	0
1994	75	0
1993	74	0
1992	20	0
1991	12	0
1990	0	0

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* This information is not available for all Departments. HM Treasury is currently in the process of a fundamental expenditure review and the likely future requirements for temporary staff cannot be forecast at this stage.

Central Statistical Office

	Less than 51 weeks	*Over 51 weeks*	*Staff previously employed*
1996	65	0	5
1997	72	0	5
1998	70	0	4

For the Royal Mint, figures are not available in the format requested. The current trend is expected to continue which would mean an average of about 90 temporary staff being employed with approximately 50 of these being employed previously in a similar position.

Department for National Savings

	Less than 51 weeks	*Over 51 weeks*
1995–96	262	50
1996–97	190	35
1997–98	180	25

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what guidance has been issued in respect of the recruitment and appointment of non-permanent employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* all executive agencies supervised by his Department;

(2) if he will publish the full terms of employment as specified to employees in his Department and all executive agencies for which he is responsible who are employed on a temporary contract of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* All Departments base their procedures—including terms of appointment—on the guidance in the civil service management code concerning recruitment and the use of casual staff, "Personnel Management", paragraphs 2.1.3 to 2.1.4, and general circular GC/375. Copies of these publications are available in the Members' Library. From 9 November 1994, line managers in Her Majesty's Treasury have had the flexibility to recruit casual staff, and have received extracts from the central guidance on procedures—most recently circulated in February 1995. A copy has been placed in the Members' Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what positions in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible are filled by employees who are employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks' or *(b)* less than 51 weeks' duration.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information for Her Majesty's Treasury, the Central Statistical Office, the Royal Mint and the Department for National Savings is as follows:

51 weeks:	*Position*
HM Treasury	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Support grade band B Student Trainee librarian
Central Statistical Office	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Executive officer
Department for National Savings	Administrative assistant Reprographic officer Graphic officer Senior assistant statistician Design studio manager

Less than 51 weeks:	*Position*
HM Treasury	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Support grade band B Student
Central Statistical Office	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Executive officer Assistant statistician
Royal Mint	Administrative assistant Administrative officer Industrial posts
Department for National Savings	Administrative assistant Support grade band II Typist

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the tasking of the two battalions being withdrawn from Northern Ireland. [15356]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced on 14 March 1995 that 5 Regiment Royal Artillery would be relocated from Drumadd barracks, Armagh, to Catterick. Their role remains the provision of support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary when required, and they will continue to train in this role and to be prepared to move back to the Province at short notice. This relocation has been made possible because of the reduced level of day-to-day support now required by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and will allow the regiment to rejoin their families and to maintain their artillery skills without detriment to their continuing Northern Ireland role.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado aircraft have crashed while on exercise over *(a)* the land area of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the sea. [15329]

Mr. Soames: Since the aircraft entered service in 1981, 17 Tornado aircraft have crashed over the land area of the United Kingdom and 10 have crashed at sea in UK waters while engaged in training sorties.

Corrective Training Centre

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female service personnel of those detained in the military corrective training centre in Colchester have been (i) retained in service and (ii) dismissed or discharged from service upon completion of sentence in each of the last 10 years; [16074]

(2) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female service personnel have been detained in the military corrective training centre in Colchester in each of the last 10 years. [16073]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

	Retained in service		*Dismissed from service*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1984	447	—	388	—
1985	415	—	457	—
1986	555	—	314	—
1987	738	—	288	—
1988	848	—	293	4
1989	713	—	471	2
1990	582	4	384	7
1991	514	33	366	9
1992	605	43	395	8
1993	575	71	426	7
1994[1]	355	23	349	4

[1] Figures for 1994 are not yet complete.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the proposals currently under consideration by his Department for the contractorisation of the military corrective training centre in Colchester. [16071]

Mr. Soames: A feasibility study into all aspects of the military corrective training centre functions has been completed and we are considering the recommendations. It would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by his Department on management consultancy fees in relation to the preparation and development of proposals for the contractorisation of the military corrective training centre in Colchester. [16072]

Mr. Soames: Approximately £63,000.

Long Marston Army Camp

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent construction and repair work has been done to Long Marston army camp; and what was the cost. [16076]

Mr. Soames: Since 1 April last year, the construction of a tactical fuel handling facility has been completed and work has commenced on repairs to the water ring main system. Property management work, including repairs to boundary roads, concrete hardstandings and underground cabling has also been undertaken. The total cost of this work has been some £1.2 million.

Nerve Agents

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of nerve agents his Department possesses; and if he will make a statement. [16080]

Mr. Soames: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 24 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what stocks of nerve agents his Department possesses and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. Consequently, small quantities of nerve agent are held at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment in order to enable us to carry out our work to ensure that the protective measures for the UK Armed Forces are effective. It would not be in the national interest to disclose the precise quantities held; however, the UK holdings of nerve agents are within the aggregate amount of Schedule 1 chemical that will be permitted to be held for protective purposes under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department is in possession of the nerve agent sarin; and if he will make a statement; [16079]

(2) if his Department has undertaken research into the effects of the nerve agent sarin. [16081]

Mr. Soames: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 24 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if his Department has undertaken research into the effects of the nerve agent Sarin, if his Department is in possession of the nerve agent Sarin; and if he will make a statement, has been passed to me to answer has Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work, the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Research on the nerve agent Sarin (GB) at CBDE Porton Down, has addressed all aspects concerned with the provision of effective protective measures against the threat that Sarin might be used by an aggressor against the UK Armed Forces. This has included hazard assessment, detection and identification, physical protection, contamination monitoring and management and the use of prophylactic and therapeutic medical countermeasures.

4. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of materials such as Sarin which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor. However, the quantities held are within the aggregate amounts of Schedule 1 chemicals permitted to be held for protective purposes under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the potential effectiveness of the chemical weapons convention in restricting the proliferation of chemical weapons to *(a)* non-signatory states and *(b)* terrorist organisations; and if he will make a statement. [16082]

Mr. Soames: Once fully implemented, the chemical weapons convention will make a significant contribution to international security. The convention includes extensive provisions to control trade in certain key chemicals to non-state parties. It also requires each state party to the convention to pass national legislation making it a criminal offence for persons under its jurisdiction, to undertake the development, production, acquisition, transfer or use of chemical weapons.

Apprentice Training

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals for the provision of army apprenticeship training at Princess Marina college, Arborfield, are currently being considered by his Department; and if he will make a statement; [16068]

(2) what is his assessment of the consequences of proposals for the provision of army apprenticeship training at Princess Marina college, Arborfield, with regard to *(a)* the duration of training, *(b)* the staff to student ratio, *(c)* eligibility for Business and Technology Education Council national and City and Guilds qualifications and *(d)* extra-curricular activities. [16069]

Mr. Soames: My Department is considering proposals relating to the future of army apprentice training. Final decisions will, however, be made only after consultation.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the terms of reference for the inspectorate general of doctrine and training study into technician and craftsmen training; and if he will make a statement. [16070]

Mr. Soames: The terms of reference are being considered at present for a study of the current system of Army apprentice recruitment and training. The aim of this would be to determine the most efficient, cost-effective and affordable means of achieving the Army's continuing requirement for technically training recruits.

Trigat Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent by his Department on the development of the Trigat programme. [16075]

Mr. Freeman: The total amount spent by the Ministry of Defence to 28 February 1995 on the combined Trigat development programmes is £259 million at 1994–95 prices. Of this, £185 million has been spent on the long-range version and £74 million on the medium-range version.

SCOTLAND

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *242*, if he will name the local authorities which own the zoos listed. [15169]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The zoos are owned by the following authorities:

Zoos	*Authorities*
Calderglen Country Park Children's Zoo, East Kilbride	East Kilbride district council
Camperdown Wildlife Centre, Dundee	City of Dundee district council
Palacerigg Country Park, Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld and Kilsyth district council
Pittencrieff Park Animal Centre, Dunfermline	Dumferline district council
The Aviaries, Woodhead Park, Kirkintilloch	Strathkelvin district council

Water Authorities

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland from what date *(a)* the chairmen of the new water authorities in Scotland will be paid and *(b)* the offices for the new water authorities in Scotland will be available; and if he will make a statement. [15859]

Mr. Kynoch: The chairmen will be paid from the date of establishment of the new water authorities. In the meantime, they are being retained on a consultancy basis by the Scottish Office.

Temporary accommodation will be available to the new authorities within the Scottish Office in Edinburgh. It will be for the authorities, once established, to decide on their permanent locations and also on what use to make of local authority premises transferred to them on 1 April 1996.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money will be made available for expenses, incurred on water authority business, to be paid to members of the new Scottish water authorities in its first year of operation; and how much he estimates will actually be paid out. [15990]

Mr. Kynoch: Provision for the three new water authorities in Scotland in 1995–96 is shown in their respective grant in aid tables at chapter 4 of the Scottish Office departmental report, Cm 2814. No specific provision has been made for members' expenses, but the following amounts have been allocated for the salaries and expenses of the members and staff of the authorities.

Authority	£
North of Scotland Water Authority	800,000
East of Scotland Water Authority	800,000
West of Scotland Water Authority	900,000

No estimate has been made of the actual expenses likely to be paid to members.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what possible performance bonuses will be made available to the chief executives of each of the new water authorities in Scotland in the first year of operation. [15901]

Mr. Kynoch: The terms of chief executive appointments have not been finalised. It is unlikely that the maximum bonus attainable in the first year will exceed 10 per cent. of basic salary.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members he will appoint to *(a)* the North of Scotland water authority, *(b)* the East of Scotland water authority and *(c)* the West of Scotland water authority. [15902]

Mr. Kynoch: Schedule 7 to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 provides that each authority shall comprise between eight and 12 members, including the chairman and chief executive.

Water and Sewerage Committees

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many councillors, by region and island authority, serve on each of the water and sewerage committees in Scotland's councils. [13904]

Mr. Kynoch: This information is not held centrally.

Local Government Reforms

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow the shadow unitary authorities a say in the duration and value of any contracts awarded after 6 April by regional and district councils in Scotland. [15857]

Mr. Kynoch: Section 55 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 requires existing authorities from a date or dates to be specified by my right hon. Friend not to dispose of land for a consideration in excess of £250,000 or to enter into certain contracts without the consent of the relevant successor authority. Factors which will be taken into account by my right hon. Friend in determining the appropriate date or dates will be the need to ensure continuity of existing services, the legitimate interest of shadow authorities in matters which will have a possible bearing on future services, and the ability of the shadow authorities to respond expeditiously to issues described in section 55 on which they might be consulted.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what criteria three-year operators' licences are being awarded to LECs; and how many such licences have been granted. [16142]

Mr. Kynoch: Local enterprise companies contract annually with Scottish Enterprise or Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Neither body issues three-year operators' licences.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Scottish health boards alleging a shortage of speech therapists. [14538]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* None.

Health Care International

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he received the National Audit Office's report on its investigation into the public funding arrangements for Health Care International at Clydebank; if he will arrange for its publication; and if he will make a statement. [14704]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* I understand that the Comptroller and Auditor General, head of the National Audit Office, has not yet finalised his report on this subject. My Department and others will be consulted about the report, and I understand that the accounting officers involved have been invited to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee at a hearing scheduled for 3 May 1995. Any publication will be a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what circumstances patients can be de-registered by their dentist; what procedure governs this process; and for what reasons a patient would cease to be registered with a dentist. [15530]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* General dental practitioners are independent contractors who are free to choose whether to provide NHS treatment to individual patients. Dentists may decide to de-register patients for a variety of reasons, including debts owed by the patient, when the dentist leaves the practice, or when a dentist chooses to stop offering NHS treatment. Regulations lay down that a dentist who wishes to end a patient's registration prematurely without the patient's agreement must give three months' written notice and complete any outstanding treatment before the patient may be de-registered. A dentist may end a registration at less than three months' notice only with the agreement of the health board. A patient's registration lapses automatically if they do not visit their dentist within a set period of the previous visit—two years for adults and between one and two years for children.

Prisoners

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons were detained in *(a)* Her Majesty's prison, Greenock, *(b)* Cornton Vale prison and *(c)* other prisons in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 24 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question relating to the number of persons detained in HM Prison, Greenock, HM Prison Cornton Vale and other prisons in each of the past ten years.

Information on the total number of persons received to each of the establishments is not available over this period because information on first receptions (those people with no existing custodial sentence) was collected only from 1991. In addition, those people received on remand and as sentenced prisoners cannot be added together to produce a total number of "persons detained" because of the considerable overlap between these two categories. The table below therefore gives the average daily prison population.

Average daily prison population 1984–1993

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*[2]1994*
Cornton Vale	172	189	183	168	144	133	138	155	167	173
Greenock[1]	–	147	178	167	158	167	189	218	246	239
Other prisons	5,101	5,252	5,085	4,894	4,684	4,424	4,512	4,884	5,224	5,173
Total	5,273	5,588	5,446	5,229	4,986	4,724	4,839	5,257	5,637	5,585

[1] Greenock was a female establishment until 1975. From 1976 it was not in use until March 1986 when it reopened as a male establishment.

[2] Provisional.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for reducing suicides and attempted suicides amongst prisoners and those held on remand in prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 24 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about reducing suicides and attempted suicides by prisoners.

The Scottish Prison Service has commissioned Dr. Kevin Power and Dr. Joseph McIlroy of the Department of Psychology at the University of Stirling to undertake a comprehensive evaluation (currently in progress) of the operation of the SPS suicide prevention strategy. In addition, I have asked Professor John Gunn, Professor of Forensic Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, to consider the appropriateness of the current strategy against developments in the care of 'at risk' people in other jurisdictions. Professor Gunn is an internationally renowned figure in the care of the mentally disturbed offender in prison.

A new design of supervision cell was introduced at HMP Aberdeen last year and is being progressively introduced throughout the prison estate. Additionally, new forms of clothing and bedding for 'at risk' prisoners are in use and a rolling programme of training in dealing with such prisoners is underway for prison nursing staff.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study is made of the findings of fatal accident inquiries into self-inflicted deaths of prisoners and those held on remand in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [15667]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stewart to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 24 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service to reply to your Question about what study is made of the findings of fatal accident inquiries into self-inflicted deaths of prisoners and those held on remand in prisons. I am replying in his absence.

The Executive Steering Group, comprising senior prison management and representatives of psychiatric and psychological services, has responsibility for continuing oversight of the implementation of the Scottish Prison Service suicide prevention strategy. The Group considers all fatal accident findings on suicides in prisons with a view to determining whether any changes to the strategy are required and how best they may be implemented within operational constraints.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 March 1995

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Disability Discrimination Bill

Mr. Berry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) which Minister in his Department has responsibility for the Disability Discrimination Bill in respect of the provision of goods and services; [16366]

(2) what discussions he or his ministerial colleagues have held with Ministers in other Departments in respect of the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16364]

(3) what is his Department's policy in respect of the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16365]

(4) what consideration his Department has given to the effects of specific clauses of the Disability Discrimination Bill in respect of *(a)* small businesses, *(b)* medium-size businesses and *(c)* large businesses; [16363]

(5) if officials in his Department have at any point been involved in discussions concerning any aspect of the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16362]

(6) what future role he expects his Department to play in respect of the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16361]

(7) what discussions his Department has held with non-Government bodies in respect of the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16360]

(8) what role his Department played in the development of the cost compliance assessment for the Disability Discrimination Bill; [16359]

(9) what assessment his Department has made of the effects of the Disability Discrimination Bill on industry; [16358]

(10) what discussions his officials have held with other Departments in respect of the Disability Discrimination Bill. [16357]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. and noble Friend Earl Ferrers has responsibility for all aspects of consumer affairs. As well as my responsibility for corporate affairs, I have the responsibility, as deregulation Minister, for leading, under the authority of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, the Government's deregulation initiative, ensuring, across all Departments, that any proposals that may impose burdens on business are properly appraised. DTI Ministers and officials play and continue to play a full part in collective and bilateral discussion with their Government colleagues in developing the Government's policies in areas such as disability, consulting as necessary representative bodies, businesses and consumers on the affects such measures may have and their impact on business compliance costs.

The Government's assessment of the impact of the Disability Discrimination Bill on business is set out in the compliance cost assessment "Ending Discrimination against Disabled People", issued in January 1995 by the Department of Social Security, which has the policy lead in Government on disability issues. The role of the DTI deregulation unit in relation to CCAs is to monitor their quality, coverage of smaller firms, and ensure a consistent approach across Government. The unit provides guidance and acts as a source of advice to those requiring help with the preparation of CCAs.

Pembroke Power Station

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to hold a public inquiry into National Power's plans to burn orimulsion fuel in Pembroke; and if he will make a statement. [16631]

Mr. Page: National Power plc submitted an application on 5 January 1995 under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the President of the Board of Trade's consent to retrofit flue gas desulphurisation plant at the Pembroke power station in order to use emulsified hydrocarbons as the fuel.

Should a relevant planning authority object to the application, my right hon. Friend would be obliged to hold a public inquiry before reaching his decision on it.

If there is no objection from a relevant planning authority, my right hon. Friend may still call for a public inquiry to be held at his own discretion.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a list of the measures his Department has taken to encourage greater use of renewable energy following the Government's acceptance of the conclusions and recommendations of the United Nation conference on the environment and development. [15655]

Mr. Wallace: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department proposes to encourage greater use of renewable energy in pursuance of the Government's support for the declarations and undertakings made at the Rio climate summit in 1992. [15518]

Mr. Page: The Government are stimulating the development of new and renewable energy sources and industrial and market infrastructure through a market enablement strategy. The strategy was published as "Energy Paper 62" in March 1994.

The strategy's principal measure involves stimulating an initial market for electricity-producing technologies close to commercial competitiveness via renewables orders made under the non-fossil fuel obligation. Other measures are aimed at assessing and developing technology options, ensuring that the market is fully informed, removing inappropriate market barriers and encouraging internationally competitive industries to develop.

The first and the second renewables orders set an obligation of renewables-sourced electricity for approximately 600 MW. The Government announced a third renewables order, for 626.92 MW, in December 1994. They expect this to lead to a further 300 to 400 MW of new capacity.

The Government intend to work, through the NFFO, towards a figure of 1,500 MW of new renewable electricity generating capacity in the UK by the year 2000, thus contributing to the UK's international environmental commitment.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department is taking as a result of the declaration of Madrid "An Action Plan for Renewable Sources in Europe", 16 to 18 March 1994; and if his Department is taking part in the proposed EC discussions on renewable energy. [15966]

Mr. Page: A Department of Trade and Industry representative attended the conference on renewable energy in Madrid in March 1994 and my Department is monitoring developments with regard to the establishment of the EU's European Forum on Renewable Energies—EUFORES.

The Government are stimulating the development of new and renewable energy sources and industrial and market infrastructure through a market enablement strategy. The strategy was published as "Energy Paper 62" in March 1994.

The strategy's principal measure involves stimulating an initial market for electricity-producing technologies close to commercial competitiveness via renewables orders made under the non-fossil fuel obligation. Other measures are aimed at assessing and developing technology options, ensuring that the market is fully informed, removing inappropriate market barriers and encouraging internationally competitive industries to develop.

The first and the second renewables orders set an obligation of renewables-sourced electricity for approximately 600MW. The Government announced a third renewables order, for 626.92MW, in December 1994. They expect this to lead to a further 300 to 400MW of new capacity.

The Government intend to work, through the NFFO, towards a figure of 1,500MW of new renewable electricity generating capacity in the UK by the year 2000, thus contributing to the UK's international environmental commitment.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions have been held with Turkey about increasing trade and the customs union with the EU; and what links have been made to human rights abuse in Turkey. [16682]

Mr. Ian Taylor: We have a continuing dialogue with our Turkish partners on a wide range of trade issues; there is no direct linkage between customs union and Turkey's record on human rights. However, the Turks are well aware of the importance that we and our EU partners attach to a raising of standards to western norms.

Business Links

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the funding of Business Links and the progress they have made. [15184]

Mr. Heseltine: Business Links have been designed to increase the effectiveness and improve the quality of local business support services by bringing together their delivery and avoiding overlap and duplication.

Each Business Link is a private sector company which receives part of its funding from my Department, part from local partner organisations, and part from charging for its services. My Department is providing £38.5 million in 1995–96 towards the start-up costs of Business Links and is committed to providing on-going funding after the three-year start-up phase to contribute towards the cost the services offered by Business Links. In 1995–96 our contribution towards services will amount to around £50 million.

The Business Link programme continues to make good progress with 75 Business Links now open and over 50 more due to open by the end of April. The programme is well on course to reach its target for a national network of 200 Business Links by the end of 1995.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the bids for VSEL by GEC and British Aerospace; and how soon after the receipt of that report he will be in a position to announce the Government's decision. [16160]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has allowed a single extension of time, to 12 April 1995, for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to report on the bids for VSEL by GEC and British Aerospace. The Department aims to publish MMC merger reports, along with the decision of the President of the Board of Trade on any action which he considers necessary in the event of the MMC finding that a merger is against the public interest, within 20 working days of receipt.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment the Post Office has made of the impact of franchising of Crown post offices on the services offered to postal customers with particular reference to rural areas. [16308]

Mr. Page: The Post Office believe that the franchising of Crown post offices has a beneficial effect on the services offered to customers in rural areas. When a Crown post office is converted, it is located in the same general vicinity, if not in the same premises, and offers the same range of services. Additional facilities such as longer opening hours are often also provided. The lower costs to the Post Office of providing services through franchise offices assist in maintaining the network of rural post offices.

Companies (Complaints)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in how many cases in England in each year in the period 1984 until 1994 the official receiver has been unable to pursue an in-depth investigation into complaints against companies because of expenditure restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [15828]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not maintained centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lindane

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what prohibitions exist for companies that wish to export products containing lindane, gamma HCH, or gamma BHC to *(a)* Switzerland, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [15513]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Products containing lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC require an export licence, under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, only if the exporter knows or suspects that the goods might be used for purposes connected with weapons of mass destruction. If an export licence is required, it will be required for any destination including Switzerland, Germany or the United States of America.

Parliamentary Space Committee

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussion his Department has had with the parliamentary space committee; and if he envisages further consultations in the run-up to the European Space Agency ministerial conference. [16686]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I held a meeting with the parliamentary space committee on 16 March, at which we had a fruitful discussion of a range of issues, including Earth observation activities, satellite-based telecommunications and broadcasting, and satellite navigation. At the meeting, I announced additional Government funding of £2.612 million for the European Space Agency GNSS satellite navigation programme, £1.5 million for the ESA ARTES4 telecommunications technology programme and £1 million to cover the cost of delay to the launch of ESA's ERS2 remote sensing satellite. I would be glad to hold further consultation with the committee in the run-up to the ESA ministerial conference.

Fireworks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the effect of the revocation of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1986/1323 on the supply of fireworks to children under 16 years. [15818]

Mr. Ian Taylor: After revocation of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1986 it will remain illegal to supply fireworks to those aged under 16 as such supply would breach section 31 of the Explosives Act 1875, as amended by the Explosives (Age of Purchase) Act 1976. Breaches of this prohibition are triable by a magistrates court and currently may result in a fine of up to £5000. The 1986 regulations are being repealed as they reproduced the provisions of the 1875 Act as amended and also empowered the courts to impose a custodial sentence of up to six months for those convicted of the sale of fireworks to persons under 16. I understand the courts have neyer imposed a custodial sentence. Bearing in mind the scale of the fines which may now be imposed, the Government believe that it is no longer necessary to provide for a custodial sentence.

Post Office

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to give the Post Office the commercial freedom it seeks. [16379]

Mr. Eggar: The Post Office operates several businesses. We are actively engaged in widening the opportunities for Post Office Counters and are helping to automate its services.

We will announce any plans to change the present arrangements governing the remainder of the Post Office in due course.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15567]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: One of the principal aims of the Department is to work to reduce regulatory and administration burdens on business. Each Minister has to pursue this objective in the policy areas for which he or she is responsible. There is also a Minister with particular responsibility for promoting deregulation in the Department.

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15551]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Under the deregulation initiative, which is co-ordinated by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, over 1,000 regulations have been targeted by Departments for amendment or repeal to remove unnecessary burdens on business. Other prime targets are:

ensuring that new regulations, whether UK or EC, are introduced only if they are needed and have the minimum possible compliance costs;

making enforcement procedures more business friendly—one aim is to see 100 local business partnerships established by March 1996; and

promoting a deregulatory approach in the European Union.

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much funding his Department is giving to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in 1995–96; how much it would have been if the 1994–95 level had been fully increased to reflect the change in the cost of living; and what assessment he has made of the effect of this change in funding in real terms on the number of regional offices sustained by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. [14670]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Funding from my Department for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux for 1995–96 will be £11,916,000. Core funding for 1994–95 was also £11,916,000. Based on the adjusted gross domestic product deflator given in the Treasury Red Book, annexe A to chapter 6, this figure would have increased to £12,297,312. It is for the association to decide how best to use the resources which are available to it, and it would not be appropriate for the Department to intervene in operational decisions such as the number of regional offices which are sustained by the association.

Argentina

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the value of *(a)* exports to and *(b)* imports from, the Argentine in each of the past five years. [16232]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is published by the Central Statistical Office in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", available in the Library of the House.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Lord Present of the Council (1) if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department; [15569]

(2) what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15561]

Mr. Newton: The objectives in question are not applicable to the Privy Council Office, which does not itself generate regulations.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. Mohd Ashfaq

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if leave to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal has been granted to the Home Office in the case of Mr. Mohd Ashfaq, Ref: TH/1740/94;IMM/C2021. [L16629]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The application by the Home Office is currently being considered by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15620]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not currently employ any specialist advisers.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15621]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There have been no political advisers appointed to the Lord Chancellor's Department since May 1992.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992; [15637]

(2) what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, (e) sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15636]

The Attorney-General: There are and have been no such political or specialist advisers in any of the Departments for which I have been responsible since May 1992.

HEALTH

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of redundancy payments to national health service staff *(a)* in each of the regional health authorities, and *(b)* for the national health service as a whole for each of the last 10 years. [15366]

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library.

Private Practice

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates her Department has made as to the cost to public funds of providing private health care within the NHS including the costs of capital investment and training of medical staff. [15767]

(2) if her Department will commission an independent inquiry to establish the full costs of providing private health care within the NHS; including the costs of capital investment and training of medical staff. [15766]

Mr. Sackville: Private practice in the national health service results in further funds being made available to improve services for all patients and reduces the burden on public funds. Private patients are charged at a commercial rate. The availability of private practice in the NHS increases choice for patients. An independent inquiry would divert resources unnecessarily from patient care.

Nurses

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of all *(a)* C grade, *(b)* D grade, *(c)* E grade, *(d)* F grade and *(e)* G grade nursing posts remained vacant as at 1 April on each of the last 10 years for each regional health authority. [15769]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Figures on nursing vacancies collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics are available in the annual report of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. Copies of the review body's report are placed in the Library each year.

Dental Services

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct family health services to stop the practice of allowing dental contractors to take early retirement other than for genuine medical reasons. [16390]

Mr. Malone: Under the limited early retirement scheme agreed with the dental profession, decisions on which applicants to accept are taken centrally on the advice of a selection panel. Full account is taken of the need to maintain the accessibility of general dental services.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the long-term effects on health of exposure to fluoride; [16336]

(2) if she will indicate the ways she has considered of delivering fluoride to its target population other than through the main water supplies; and if she will make a statement; [16335]

(3) what has been the incidence of caries in *(a)* fluoridated areas and *(b)* unfluoridated areas, for each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [16337]

Mr. Malone: Information, by year, about the incidence of caries compared between fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas is not readily available. However, epidemiological evidence in general continues to support the Government's position on the positive benefits of fluoridation. Studies which have been carried out contrasting comparable fluoridated and non-fluoridated areas have consistently shown that the reduction in dental decay is between one third to one half greater in the fluoridated than in the comparable non-fluoridated area.

The long-term health effects of fluoride have been a widely considered aspect of this issue over the 50 years since water fluoridation began. No significant long-term ill effects have ever been found to exist as a result of domestic water fluoridation at the optimum level of one part per million.

There may be a number of alternative ways of delivering fluoride to the target population, and we are considering what these are, but it is generally held that fluoridation of domestic water is the most efficient means of delivery, and offers the best cost benefit.

The Government remain convinced that fluoridation of drinking water is a safe, effective and cost-effective public health measure and will continue to support the introduction of such schemes, particularly where the dental health of the population is known to be poor. In 1994 the Government agreed to help with the capital funding of seven schemes in the north of England which would bring fluoridation to 1.7 million more people.

Road Accident Victims

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will order the South Birmingham health trust to cease soliciting payments, under the Road Traffic Acts, from road accident victims. [16247]

Mr. Sackville: Health service hospitals are empowered to collect the emergency treatment fee under section 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The fee must be covered by motor vehicle insurance policies and is payable by vehicle users, in respect of each person given immediate treatment or examination arising from a road traffic accident.

Overseas Health Care Companies

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations her Department has received from health care firms from abroad seeking to expand into the United Kingdom health sector. [16889]

Mr. Sackville: Ministers and officials receive representations from health care firms from abroad on a regular basis. As such representations can take the form of visits, telephone calls or letters and can be made at ministerial or official level no figure on the number of representations is kept or can be estimated.

Lindane

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence or research is available from *(a)* within the United Kingdom, *(b)* the USA and *(c)* other countries in respect of any correlation between aplastic anaemia and bone marrow failure with the use of lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC; and if she will make a statement. [15497]

Mr. Sackville: In 1992 the Advisory Committee on Pesticides reviewed the substantial number of worldwide reports, published in the open literature as well as unpublished reports, on lindane exposure and aplastic anaemia. The ACP review focused particularly on cases of people in the United Kingdom who had been diagnosed as having aplastic anaemia and who had been exposed to lindane in pesticidal products. The committee concluded that the weight of evidence suggested that lindane does not cause aplastic anaemia in man. On the basis of the information available, the ACP recommended that no regulatory action on this aspect was justified.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has of skin complaints being caused by lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC; and if she will make a statement. [15496]

Mr. Sackville: In the United Kingdom lindane is used mainly as an agricultural pesticide. Its only other use in the UK is in some products licensed under the Medicines Act 1986 for the treatment of scabies and crablice, and available only from pharmacies. There are no veterinary uses of lindane in the UK.

The London poisons unit undertook a review of suspected cases of lindane poisoning reported to the unit between 1969 and 1988. The results were submitted to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides for evaluation during its review of lindane in 1991–92. Data were available on 110 cases, in six of which skin irritation was reported. Details of this review were published in December 1992 in the document "Evaluation on Gamma HCH (Lindane 2," copies of which are available in the Library.

Dermatoses can be caused by an allergic reaction to any chemical, whether naturally occurring or manufactured, and some people may be especially sensitive to ingredients of pesticides or medicines. Apart from these very rare cases, no adverse effects should be expected in the short, medium or long term if the product is used in strict accordance with the recommendations on the label and accompanying literature, which give dose and safety precautions.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence is available from the World Health Organisation regarding the rates of breast cancer in countries where the use of lindane or gamma hexachlorocyclohexane is banned or restricted. [15502]

Mr. Sackville: Lindane is used in many countries. In developed countries, the use of pesticides is regulated by the conditions of approval, and is to that extent restricted. Conditions of approval vary from country to country. Since 1984 lindane, or gamma hexachlorocyclohexane, has been withdrawn from use as a pesticide in Indonesia, Kuwait, Morocco, New Zealand, St. Lucia and two European Union countries, Sweden and Finland.

There are several known risk factors involved in the development of breast cancer but no convincing evidence that exposure to lindane is one. Breast cancer rates alone, in countries in which lindane is banned, give no indication of whether or not there might be a causal relationship.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the effect of exposure to lindane gamma HCH or gamma BHC on pregnant women and their foetuses. [15493]

Mr. Sackville: The information on humans is very limited. Adverse effects have been reported in spray operators or workers involved in the manufacture of gamma HCH. These include an increased incidence of spontaneous abortions and stillbirths. However, in all cases exposure to other pesticides or chemicals involved in the manufacture of gamma HCH occurred, therefore it is not possible to conclude that these effects are related to exposure to gamma HCH.

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides has reviewed both published and unpublished data on the effects of lindane on human and animal reproduction and fertility. It did not conclude that, used under the terms of approval, there is a risk from lindane to pregnant women or their foetus.

Full details were given in the document "Evaluation of Gamma HCH (Lindane 2)", December 1992, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which EU countries lindane, gamma HCH and gamma BHC are banned or restricted; and if she will make a statement [15506]

Mr. Sackville: The use of lindane is restricted in the United Kingdom and all other European Union countries. Approval for the use of lindane as a pesticide has been withdrawn in Sweden and Finland.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has that lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC causes or contributes to CHARGE syndrome; and if she will make a statement. [15494]

Mr. Sackville: In 1994 the subcommittee on pesticides reviewed data from the CHARGE Association family support group, and cases of CHARGE syndrome linked with pesticide exposure which had been reported to the Health and Safety Executive. The SCP agreed that no conclusions could be drawn from the reports available, but that the situation be reviewed on a periodic basis.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which products designed to kill lice on children contain lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC; and if she will make a statement. [15495]

Mr. Sackville: Medicines Control Agency records show that quellada application is the only product currently licensed in the United Kingdom containing lindane—alternatively known as gamma HCH or gamma BHC—which is indicated to kill lice on children.

The Medicines Control Agency ensures that all medicines on the UK market meet acceptable standards of safety, quality and efficacy.

Organochlorines

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has that organochlorines may be a contributory factor in the cause of breast cancer; and if she will make a statement. [15510]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health's independent expert advisory committee on the carcinogenicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment reviewed the available epidemiology data on breast cancer in women and levels of lindane in serum and breast fat tissue at its meeting on the 16 March 1995. The committee concluded that there was no clear evidence of an association between serum and fat levels of lindane and breast cancer at the present time, and recommended that the matter be kept under review.

Well Woman Centres

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list each well woman centre and indicate which are currently part-funded by individual health authorities.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given to fundholding general practitioners regarding purchasing from well woman centres. [15754]

Mr. Malone: None.

It is for national health service purchasers, both fundholding general practitioners and health authorities, to decide whether, and to what extent, they purchase services from well woman centres. Not all services which are provided by well woman centres are included in the fundholding scheme.

"Handle with Care" Leaflet

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what age of child is dealt with in the "Handle with Care" leaflet, sponsored by her Department. [15752]

Mr. Bowis: Babies and toddlers.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *41–42*, if the figures for clinical negligence include legal costs; and if she will itemise those costs. [15750]

Mr. Malone: All the figures include legal costs. The new method of estimating total costs of clinical negligence is not broken down between legal costs and damages paid.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which management consultants have been employed by her Department to assist in the assessment of applications for NHS units for trust status; how much each was paid; and how many assessments they undertook in each wave. [15846]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies the then Minister for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), gave him on 3 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *225*, and on 12 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *528*. The information for the fifth wave of national health service trusts is as shown.

Lead management consultants	*Number of assessments*	*Cost £*
BDO Consulting	17	15,139
KPMG Peat Marwick		52,139

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that her ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for her Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for her and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within her Department. [15564]

Mr. Sackville: The need to avoid unnecessary regulatory burdens on business and on others is identified as an objective in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement of aims, goals, priorities and key challenges for the Department of Health for 1994–95, and subsequent years, which was published on 18 April 1994 and placed in the Library. Each Minister has to pursue this objective in the policy areas for which he or she is responsible. There is also a Minister with particular responsibility for promoting deregulation in the Department.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets she has for withdrawing regulations within her Department. [15545]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs today.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in her Department. [15624]

Mr. Sackville: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, with certain limited exceptions. They have facilities appropriate to their duties.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to her Department since May 1992. [15625]

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not appointed a special adviser since May 1992.

Children's Homes (Lay Assessors)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure that appropriate police checks are undertaken in respect of lay assessors who have access to children's homes. [16043]

Mr. Bowis: Police checks are generally available for those who have substantial unsupervised access to children in children's homes. Lay assessors do not fall into this category. It is the responsibility of local authorities to satisfy themselves about the suitability of people they engage as lay assessors, for example by checking CVs and taking up references.

Hepatitis

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many died as a result of infection with the hepatitis C virus in the NHS for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, and *(c)* 1994. [16583]

Mr. Sackville: The current international classification of diseases, 9th revision, does not allow us separately to identify the hepatitis C virus.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people currently have the hepatitis C virus in the United Kingdom. [16585]

Mr. Sackville: There have been no large population seroprevalence studies in the United Kingdom which could give precise estimates of the numbers infected.

Small studies in transfusion centres at the time of introducing HCV testing estimated the prevalence in blood donors to be 0.06 per cent. This would be an underestimate of the numbers in the United Kingdom population as a whole because the group at most risk of infection, those who have injected drugs, are asked to self-defer from blood donation. There is evidence to suggest that perhaps between 50 and 80 per cent. of intravenous drug users have been infected with hepatitis C. Rates vary with geographical area.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with haemophilia died as a result of infection with the hepatitis C virus in the NHS in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994. [16630]

Mr. Sackville: We understand from the United Kingdom haemophilia directors that, of 119 haemophilia patients known to have died in 1992, 10 showed the cause of death as liver disease of which hepatitis C may have been the cause. In respect of the 1993 figures, I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 1 December 1994, column *830*. I understand that figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Haemophilia

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department carried out since 1989 on haemophilia; and if she will make a statement. [16582]

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not carried out any such research. The main agency that the Government support for biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current mortality rate for women with breast cancer in England, for each health authority. [16580]

Mr. Sackville: The latest available data on incidence to mortality ratios are published in table 15 of cancer statistics, registration, 1989, series MB1, No. 22, HMSO, 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have died from breast cancer in the United Kingdom in each year since 1989. [16581]

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Number of women who have died from breast cancer—ICD[1] 174—in the United Kingdom, 1989–1992.

1989: 15,667
1990: 15,179
1991: 15,403
1992: 15,221

[1] International classification of diseases, 9th revision.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many men were diagnosed with breast cancer in the NHS for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994 respectively; and if she will make a statement. [16579]

Mr. Sackville: The latest available data on male breast cancer registrations are published in table 2 of cancer statistics, registrations, 1989, series MB1 No. 22, HMSO, 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Asthma

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of asthma, and asthma-related disorders for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, and *(c)* 1994. [16584]

Mr. Sackville: The net ingredient cost of national health service prescriptions for asthma medication was £305.2 million in 1992, £348.6 million in 1993 and £381 million in 1994. The net ingredient cost is the basic price of a drug before discounts and the addition of dispensing costs or fees. Information on the cost of other NHS services for asthma is not available for the years requested. In 1989–90, excluding community health services, they cost an estimated £72 million.

Wakefield Health Authority

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role is played by the chair of the Yorkshire and Northern health region in the strategic planning of health care within the area covered by Wakefield health authority. [16350]

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities are directly accountable to regional health authorities. The regional health authority provides the strategic framework for regulating the relationship between purchasers and providers and ensures that local services are developed within the context of national guidelines. The authority also seeks to ensure that the most comprehensive and cost-effective balance of primary and secondary services is secured at a local level.

Strategic Decisions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist to resolve disagreements on strategic decisions at local level between purchasers and providers and community health councils. [16348]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities are expected to consult health care providers about local health strategies and to make every endeavour to resolve differences locally. Disagreement between health authorities and providers can be referred to the regional health authority for arbitration as set out in EL(91)11, "NHS Contracts: Guidance on Resolving Disputes." Health Authorities are required, under regulation 19 of the Community Health Council Regulations, as amended, to consult the community health council on proposals for substantial developments or variations in the provision of health services in the district. Copies of EL(91)11 are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the extent to which the strategic planning of health provision at local level may be affected by the decisions of private investors of capital. [16351]

Mr. Sackville: The strategic planning of health provision is undertaken by the national health service. It is not affected by the decisions of private investors of capital.

Chorionic Villus Sampling

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has on the link between chorionic villus sampling intrauterine tests and subsequent deformities in babies subjected to the test; [16341]

(2) if she will launch an investigation into the links between chorionic villus sampling and deformities in babies; [16343]

(3) what follow-up of mothers and babies who have been subjected to chorionic villus sampling tests her Department undertakes; [16342]

(4) how many cases of deformities in babies subjected to the chorionic villus sampling test her Department knows of. [16344]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 22 March, columns *207–208*.

A further article in *The Lancet* in 1994[1] considered the risks associated with chorionic villus sampling undertaken between 56 and 72 days' gestation.

The follow-up of mothers and babies is a matter for local clinical decision. The continuing surveillance and monitoring of babies' health to detect any deviation from normal health is accepted as good clinical practice in the national health service. The recent report of the Advisory Group on Congential Limb Reduction Defects published in February 1995 drew attention to the need for a hypothesis-driven study of the putative causal link between chorionic villus sampling and limb reduction deformity. The Department is awaiting the results of a major study carried out in the United States before taking this forward. It seems most likely that this study will address many of these questions.

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[1] Firth Boyd, Chamberlain, Mackenzie and Huson, analysis of limb reduction defects in babies exposed to chorionic villus sampling, *The Lancet*, Vol 343, 30 April 1994.

Newchurch and Company Database

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to the NHS executive of setting up the private finance database run by Newchurch and Company. [16522]

Ms Sackville: The cost to the Department of Health national health service executive of setting up the private finance database run by Newchurch and Company and operating it to date has been £70,000 plus £12,250 value added tax.

Internal Market

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what objective assessment of the operation of the internal market in health in any particular locality is undertaken on her behalf. [16352]

Mr. Sackville: The main way in which the operation of the internal market is assessed is through the monitoring of the performance of trusts and district health authorities against targets and objectives which are set to ensure the national health service delivers good-quality, responsive services in an efficient manner.

These include: performance against the patients charter standards which have recently been expanded; position on waiting times; extent of efficiency gains measured through the efficiency index; and progress towards achievement of "The Health of the Nation" targets. These are available at a district level.

Waiting Times

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has on requests by general practices to hospitals to delay to come in—TCI—dates for non-urgent patients until the commencement of the new financial year for financial reasons; [16680]

(2) what guidelines she has given to general practices concerning the information to be supplied to patients, whose non-urgent TCI dates have been delayed as the request of their general practice until the commencement of the new financial year for exclusively financial reasons; and if she will make a statement. [16676]

Mr. Malone: Fundholding general practitioners, like other national health service purchasers of health care, are required to assess the needs of their population and establish contracts for services accordingly. All emergency cases will be seen immediately and urgent cases are placed on a common waiting list. For non-urgent cases, national or local patients charter standards apply. The patients charter makes it clear that health authorities and general practitioners should give detailed information to patients on local health services, including quality standards and maximum waiting times.

Pinderfields Hospital

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to ensure that Pinderfields hospital, Wakefield, remains open as a district general hospital maintaining regional specialisms. [16349]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Greetham CBE, chairman of the authority, for details.

Local Health Provision

Mr. Hincliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors determine whether she would intervene in the proposals of an individual health authority with regard to future health provision at local level. [16347]

Mr. Malone: It is for health authorities to determine health provision for their area taking account of local needs. Normally, Ministers are involved only in cases where, following consultation by the health authority, plans to close or significantly change the use of health service facilities are contested by the community health council.

WALES

European Union Funding

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table giving the total amount of European Community money that has been awarded in grants for each financial year from 1986–87 to the present to *(a)* each local authority in Wales, *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(c)* other organisations, giving the total annually of all such EC grants to Wales. [15346]

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15602]

Mr. Redwood: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, with certain limited exceptions. They have facilities appropriate to their duties.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15548]

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15577]

Mr. Redwood: One of the most important objectives which I have set for my Department is the encouragement of the growth, efficiency and competitiveness of Welsh industry and agriculture. The removal of unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens, together with improved practice in enforcement and future legislation, is central to the achievement of this objective, which is naturally supported by my Welsh Office ministerial colleagues. Most regulations are United Kingdom or England and Wales regulations where the Welsh Office is not the lead department.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15603]

Mr. Redwood: The answer is:

Mr. Michael McManus

Mr. Hywel Williams

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which management consultants have been employed by his Department to assist in the assessment of applications for NHS units for trust status; how much each was paid; and how many assessments they undertook in each wave. [15845]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 1 November 1993 by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North, (Mr. Jones), *Official Report*, column *51*.

In addition, Secta Consulting Ltd. was appointed to assess five applications for NHS trust status from April 1995 at a cost of £17,625.

NHS Waiting Times

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to family health services authorities and fundholding general practices concerning information to be given to their non-urgent patients whose TCI—to come in—dates have been delayed until the commencement of the new financial year for exclusively financial reasons; and if he will make a statement. [16675]

Mr. Redwood: I have not issued any guidelines on this subject.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has regarding general practitioners' requests to hospitals to delay the TCI dates for non-urgent patients until the commencement of the new financial year for exclusively financial reasons. [16679]

Mr. Redwood: I have no details of any requests from general practitioners to hospitals to delay planned admissions until the new financial year.

Health Promotion Authority for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of States for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 22 March *Official Report*, column *258*, how many of the board members of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales whose terms are expiring on 31 March have been informed that they are not being reappointed. [16677]

Mr. Redwood: One.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been his Department's expenditure on TECs in 1994–95; and what are the plans for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [16338]

Mr. Redwood: Negotiations are continuing with TECs on their contracts for 1995–96. When these negotiations are completed I will write to the hon. Member.

Final outturn figures for 1994–95 will not be available until the appropriation accounts are approved. When I write to the hon. Member on TEC contracts, I will let him also have the latest provisional outturn figures available at the time.

Expenditure in 1996–97 will be dependent on TEC contract negotiations which will take place early in 1996.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date the publication by the Countryside Council for Wales's action plan for 1995–97 period will take place. [16678]

Mr. Redwood: I hope to publish the action plan shortly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Prescribed Disease D4

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *825*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper on prescribed disease D4, mucous membrane, prepared by a senior medical adviser of the Department of Social Security in January 1995. [15824]

Mr. Hague: A copy of the paper has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when David Towler of the Sunderland TUC unemployed centre may expect to receive a reply to his letter dated 6 February regarding the case of Mrs. Jackson and the training arrangements for medical boarding doctors addressed to Dr. S. M. Reed of the Benefits Agency medical section. [15825]

Mr. Hague: Following several telephone conversations with Mr. Towler, it was assumed that the matter had been dealt with. Dr. Reed wrote to Mr. Towler on 23 March to clarify the position.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to conduct research into the impact of the compensatory recovery unit on the lives of those who are obliged to pay back DSS benefits to the CRU. [15986]

Mr. Roger Evans: The compensation recovery unit recovers benefits attributable to an injury or disease from the compensator rather than the plaintiff. It performs this function effectively. We have no plans to mount the research to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the extent of the practice of awarding £2,500 to those seeking compensation as victims of illness, accident or disease so as to avoid claw back of benefit to the compensation recovery unit. [15987]

Mr. Roger Evans: The level of settlement is a matter for the plaintiff and defendant, so no such assessment has been conducted. I understand, however, that a study of the level of settlement in some 10,000 compensation awards was recently completed on behalf of the Association of British Insurers. This study was conducted in support of evidence recently given by the association on the subject of compensation recovery to the Social Security Select Committee. The study concluded that the incidence of awards of £2,500 was not disproportionate.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he keeps on the impact of the compensation recovery unit upon the lives of those who have to pay DSS benefits to the CRU. [15985]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department keeps such information as is necessary to discharge its responsibilities.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15610]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15553]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Corporate Affairs.

Income Support

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the level of *(a)* over-payments and *(b)* under-payments of income support in each year since its introduction; and what sums have been recovered. [15751]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables. Information is not collected on underpaid amounts. These are paid to claimants as soon as they are discovered.

Table 1—Losses due to irrecoverable and unrecovered overpayments of Income Support

Year	*Amount (£000s)*
1988–89	41,112
1989–90	40,211
1990–91	28,608
1991–92	32,974
1992–93	46,612
1993–94	55,820

Table 2—Recoveries of overpayment via Benefits Agency Districts

Year	*Amount (£000s)*
1988–89	15,348
1989–90	17,068
1990–91	15,483
1991–92	15,377
1992–93	19,431
1993–94	32,830

Note:

Information on the totals of recoverable overpayments is not collected centrally.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15573]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This Department's deregulation objectives are set out on pages 2, 47 and 48 of the 1995 departmental report, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995–96 to 1997–98", published on 9 March 1995. One of our key tasks for the next three years is to reduce the burdens on business wherever possible, particularly by dealing with the differences in national insurance and Inland Revenue procedures.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15611]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *891*.

Child Support

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances child maintenance payments can be obtained from service men posted abroad; what plans he has to review this issue; and if he will make a statement. [15544]

Mr. Burt: Child Support rules apply equally to service personnel and civilians. Where service men are posted abroad the Child Support Agency retains jurisdiction where it appears that the absent parent maintains sufficient links with the United Kingdom to be considered habitually resident here. This applies in the overwhelming majority of cases. There are no plans to review these arrangements.

Incapacity for Work Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the numbers and proportion of claimants of an incapacity benefit who have been assessed as capable of their usual occupation or an alternative who have lodged an appeal against this decision in each of the last four quarters. [16704]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested.

Available information is in the tables.

Table A—Outcome of claims referred to Benefits Agency Medical Services

Quarter ending	*Capable of normal occupation*	*Capable of alternative work*
September 1993	6,000	28,000
December 1993	5,000	25,000
March 1994	5,000	28,000
June 1994	4,000	25,000
September 1994	4,000	27,000

Notes:

1. Based on a 100 per cent. count of cases, rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. References are for Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance, but excludes those references where the National Insurance contribution conditions for Sickness/Invalidity Benefit have not been satisfied and benefit is payable because the person's incapacity is the result of an accident at work or a prescribed industrial disease.
3. Figures for June and September do not include references to Durham Medical Examination Centre. Figures for September do not include references to Swansea Reference Office.

Table B—Appeals lodged against decisions on Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance

Quarter ending	*Total number of appeals lodged*
September 1993	8,853
December 1993	9,982
March 1994	7,957
June 1994	8,821

Notes:

1. Figures taken from the Quarterly Social Security Appeal Tribunal Statistics and the Quarterly Medical Appeal Tribunal Statistics produced by the Government Statistical Service.
2. Figures are for all appeals, including those against decisions that the person is capable of work.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates will receive the £10 per week supplement to disability working allowance for those working more than 30 hours a week. [16705]

Mr. Hague: We estimate that around 2,000 of the current 4,752 disability working allowance recipients will benefit from the new £10 per week additional allowance.

Source: Disability Working Allowance monitoring statistics for the month ending February 1995.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of States for Social Security what are the numbers of people currently receiving attendance allowance by main disabling condition, broken down by *(a)* entitlement to the highest rate and *(b)* entitlement to the lowest rate of the allowance. [16703]

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table. This shows separately the disabling conditions that apply to at least 2 per cent. of the total recipients:

Disabling condition	*Higher rate*		*Lower rate*		*Total*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Arthritis	82,300	20.1	179,500	30.6	261,900	26.3
Frailty	54,400	13.3	95,500	16.3	149,900	15.1
Heart disease	18,300	4.5	38,800	6.6	57,100	5.7
Stroke related	53,000	13.0	52,400	8.9	105,500	10.6
Dementia	69,800	17.1	46,600	7.9	116,400	11.7
Chest disease	15,100	3.7	26,600	4.5	41,700	4.2
Blindness	10,300	2.5	32,000	5.5	42,300	4.2
Parkinson's disease	17,200	4.2	15,100	2.6	32,300	3.2
Muscle/joint/bone disease	7,800	1.9	13,200	2.2	21,000	2.1
Other	81,000	19.8	86,900	14.8	167,900	16.9
Total	409,200	100	586,700	100	995,900	100

Columns may not add due to rounding.

Source:

Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. extract

TREASURY

Taxation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the percentage of total income received by *(a)* the top 1 per cent., *(b)* the top 5 per cent., *(c)* the top 10 per cent., *(d)* the bottom 70 per cent. and *(e)* the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers in 1994–95; and what are the estimated figures for 1995–96; [15670]

(2) what was the percentage of the tax take in 1994–95 and the estimated take for 1995–96 from *(a)* the top 1 per cent., *(b)* the top 5 per cent., *(c)* the top 10 per cent., *(d)* the bottom 70 per cent. and *(e)* the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers; [15672]

(3) what was the tax take in the year 1994–95; and what is the estimate for 1995–96 for *(a)* the top 1 per cent. *(b)* the top 5 per cent., *(c)* the top 10 per cent., *(d)* thebottom 70 per cent., *(e)* the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers and *(f)* all taxpayers; [15669]

(4) what was the *(a)* total income and *(b)* average income earned in 1994–95 and estimated to be earned in 1995–96 of (i) the top 1 per cent., (ii) the top 5 per cent., (iii) the top 10 per cent., (iv) the bottom 70 per cent., (v) the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers and (vi) all taxpayers. [15671]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* Provisional estimates are given in the table.

Shares of gross income before tax (per cent.)
Group of Taxpayers

	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Bottom 70 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent.*
1994–95	8	20	29	43	3
1995–96	8	20	30	43	3

Amount of gross incomes before tax (£ billion)
Group of Taxpayers

	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Bottom 70 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent.*	*All taxpayers*
1994–95	31.8	78.3	117.5	172.7	12.3	398.5
1995–96	33.7	82.7	124.4	181.8	12.8	420.9

Average amount of gross income before tax (£ per year)
Group of Taxpayers

	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Bottom 70 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent.*	*All taxpayers*
1994–95	123,700	60,900	45,700	9,600	4,800	15,500
1995–96	128,700	63,200	47,500	9,900	4,900	16,100

[1] Less than 0.5 per cent.

Shares of total income tax liability (per cent.)
Group of Taxpayers

	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Bottom 70 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent.*
1994–95	16	33	44	29	[1]—
1995–96	15	32	44	29	[1]—

[1] Less than 0.5 per cent.

Amount of total income tax liability (£ billion)
Group of Taxpayers

	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Bottom 70 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent.*	*All taxpayers*
1994–95	10.7	22.6	30.4	19.8	0.3	69.0
1995–96	11.4	24.1	32.7	21.6	0.3	74.7

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimated levels of uncollected *(a)* income tax and *(b)* tax in general (i) in cash terms, (ii) in current values and (iii) as a percentage for each year since 1978–79. [15668]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The latest estimated level of uncollected income tax for each year since 1978–79 is as follows:

Year	*Amount in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total tax collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 terms*
1979	39,617	0.48	102,581
1980	45,091	0.45	95,912
1981	55,020	0.48	104,397
1982	70,143	0.49	121,754
1983	93,721	0.59	156,312
1984	126,905	0.73	201,386
1985	138,468	0.68	205,365
1986	187,088	0.77	269,238
1987	228,220	1.11	315,203
1988	385,025	1.59	511,668
1989	366,543	1.33	450,883
1990	364,862	1.27	410,069
1991	523,817	1.80	553,333
1992	1,090,223	4.32	1,104,361
1993	1,107,615	4.69	1,107,615
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

2 The latest estimated level of uncollected tax in general for each year since 1978–79 is as follows:

Year	*Amount in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total tax collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 terms*
1979	64,339	0.24	166,594
1980	90,590	0.28	192,692
1981	112,648	0.31	213,742
1982	200,785	0.47	348,523
1983	288,168	0.61	480,622
1984	422,896	0.80	671,097
1985	469,345	0.81	696,096
1986	479,142	0.73	689,533
1987	551,369	0.84	761,517
1988	856,832	1.16	1,138,663
1989	719,226	0.90	884,717
1990	789,303	0.94	887,098
1991	1,437,041	1.57	1,518,016
1992	2,519,290	2.84	2,551,961
1993	2,405,865	2.66	2,405,865
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

The figures in this table comprise all duties administered by the Inland Revenue, value added tax and all other duties administered by Customs and Excise.

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with the 1993 prices.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

Tax Planning and Avoidance

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he distinguishes between tax planning and tax avoidance. [15583]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* In broad terms, the Government regard tax planning as the organisation of a taxpayer's affairs to secure the mitigation of tax liabilities in a manner consistent with the intentions of Parliament. Tax avoidance centres around attempts to frustrate the wishes of Parliament, either by way of escaping tax on transactions, or obtaining tax relief, in circumstances other than those intended by Parliament.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, (e) sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15604]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Specialist advisers have the same access to facilities as other civil servants in the Treasury.

Privatisation Advertising

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on the advertising of privatisation sales, for each sale since 1979. [15355]

Sir George Young: The table shows the cost to the Government of adverting in each privatisation by floatation or secondary share sale since BT, 1984. Information on the advertising costs of earlier sales is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising costs in privatisations

Share offer	*Year*	*Costs (ex VAT) £ million*
BT (1)	1985	9.7
Britoil	1985	3.0
Cable and Wireless	1985	2.2
British Aerospace	1985	1.7
British Gas	1986	21.4
British Airways	1987	2.8
Rolls-Royce	1987	1.6
BAA	1987	4.9
BP	1987	18.3
British Steel	1988	4.9
Water	1989	5.3
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	14.2
Generating Companies (1)	1991	5.6
Scottish Electricity Companies	1991	5.3
BT (2)	1991	14.0
Northern Ireland Electricity	1993	1.1
BT (3)	1993	11.9
Generating Companies (2)	1995	8.1

Bank Lending

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total lending by *(a)* United Kingdom banks and *(b)* banks of Federal Germany to enterprises in Eastern Europe. [14420]

Mr. Nelson: According to the Bank for International Settlements, loans by UK banks to eastern Europe as at the end of June 1994, stood at $4,209 million. Of this, the Bank of England estimates that $796 million was lent to the non-bank private sector. Total lending by Germany to eastern Europe as at the end of June 1994 was $42,733 million. Neither the Bank of England nor the Treasury has access to information on the breakdown of this figure.

Construction Industry Review

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response his Department has made to the Latham review. [14432]

Mr. Nelson: The Government's response to the Latham review was contained in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Construction and Planning to the Latham conference on 25 July 1994. Her Majesty's Treasury has an interest in Sir Michael's recommendations in terms of value for money in public procurement and the efficient contribution of the construction of industry to the economy. The Treasury has therefore been involved in the follow-up work on the review.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much sterling has appreciated or depreciated against all the other currencies of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries since April 1992; and by how much sterling has been devalued in overall terms since that date. [15984]

Mr. Nelson: In April 1992 sterling's exchange rate index averaged 100.2 per cent. At close of business on March 23 1995 the ERI was 15 per cent. lower, at 85.2 movements in sterling's rate against other OECD currencies can be found in "International financial Statistics", published by the International Monetary Fund.

VAT (Camping and Temporary Caravans)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the rates of VAT charged on payments for sites for camping and temporary caravans in each of the member countries of the European Union. [15869]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The rates of VAT charged on payments for sites for camping and temporary caravans in each member country of the European Union are set out in the table:

	Per cent.
Austria	10
Belgium	6
Denmark	25
Finland	22
France	5.5
Germany	15
Ireland	12.5
Italy	9
Luxembourg	15
Netherlands	6
Portugal	5
Spain	7
Sweden	12
United Kingdom	17.5

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16557]

Mr. Nelson: Seven press officers are currently employed in the Treasury. Information for 1979 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Genome Research

38. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of his budget will be allocated to research into ethical, legal and social issues arising out of genome research. [14217]

Mr. Horam: The Medical Research Council expects to spend £15.5 million on the genome initiative in 1995–96. Ethical, social and legal issues will be one aspect of this research, but it is not possible to provide separate figures. The Economic and Social Research Council sponsors social research on the human genome worth around £200,000.

Magistrates

37. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of magistrates appointed to the bench in the County Palatine in the last 12 months is in full-time employment. [14216]

Mr. David Hunt: Seventy-eight per cent.

Engineering

39. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the Institute of Structural Engineers to discuss the role of engineering in Britain. [14219]

Mr. Horam: Although no formal meetings have taken place with the institute, Ministers have had several meetings with the Royal Academy of Engineering which works for and represents all engineering disciplines.

Regulatory Authorities

40. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the standard of service applied by regulatory authorities under the citizens charter procedures; and if he will make a statement. [14220]

Mr. David Hunt: I am satisfied that the regulatory authorities act in accordance with charter principles in prescribing standards of service for the organisations they regulate.

Science (Children)

41. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to encourage more children to develop an active interest in science; and if he will make a statement. [14221]

Mr. David Hunt: During the national week of science, engineering and technology, I announced a new competition to find the best primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom. Classes have been invited to submit by 31 July video films of up to five minutes duration, or photo-essays, saying why theirs is the best science school in the country. Each of the winning primary and secondary schools will receive £1,000 for new scientific and technological equipment. The winners and two runners-up in each category will receive a day trip to the museum or hands-on centre of their choice, sponsored by the Office of Science and Technology. I shall announce the results during the week of the British Association's science festival in September.

Select Committees

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new guidance his Department has issued to civil servants giving evidence to, or appearing before, Select Committees. [15970]

Mr. Horam: Updated guidance on "Departmental Evidence and Response to Select Committees" was issued to Departments in December of last year. As announced by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *712*, copies were sent to Chairmen of Select Committees and were also placed in the Library.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many press officers there are in the Central Office of Information. [16553]

Mr. Horam: One.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15641]

Mr. David Hunt: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, with certain limited exceptions. They have all the facilities listed in the question to the extent necessary for the performance of their duties.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15574]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend has no ministerial responsibility for regulation legislation.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15552]

Mr. Horam: The Departments for which my right hon. Friend is Minister are not responsible for regulation legislation.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15642]

Mr. David Hunt: The answer is:

	Date appointed
Mr. D. Rutley	January 1994
Mr. M. McManus	July 1994

I have also been asked to list the political advisers in the Chief Whip's Office as follows:

	Date appointed
Miss S McEwen	June 1992

Inquiry Lines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which telephone inquiry line services have been set up by the Government Departments as a result of the citizens charter. [16307]

Mr. Horam: Many public service organisations have set up their own telephone inquiry lines to ensure that their customers can make easy contact with them. OPSS does not hold central records of all these lines, or whether they result directly from the charter programme, but Government helplines are known to exist in the following areas.

Agriculture
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Helpline: 0645 335577. Local rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.

Customs and Excise
Customs and Excise Helpline: 071-202 4227. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.

Education
Department of Education: Inquiries 071-925 5555. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.

Employment
Dial a Job: 071-287 0100. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
Information Centre Helpline: 0742-892345. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.
HSE Autofax: 0742-892333. Standard rates. 24 hours a day.
Redundancy Payments Service Customer
Service Unit Helpline: 0800-848489. Free. 0900–1700 weekdays.
Work Permits Information Line: 071-273 5337. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.

Energy Efficiency
Energy Efficiency: 071-276 6200. Standard rates. 0900–1700 weekdays.
Energy Action Grants Agency (grants for improving energy efficiency): 0800-181667. Free. 0830–1730 weekdays.
Building Research Establishment Saving Money on Heating: 0923 664664. Standard rates. 0900–1630 weekdays.

Environment
National Rivers Authority Emergency Hotline for Environmental Incidents: 0800-807060. Free. 24 hours a day.
Air Quality Information: 0800-556677. Free. 24 hours a day.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Foreign Travel Advice Unit: 071-270 4129. Standard rates. 0930–1600 weekdays.

Health
Health Information Service (Information about health, local NHS services, waiting times, common diseases, conditions and treatments): 0800-665544. Free. 1000–1700 weekdays.
Aids Helpline: 0800-567123. Free. 24 hours a day.

Home Office
General Inquiries: 071-273 4599. Standard rates. 24 hours a day.
Nationality and Citizenship Inquiries: 051-236 4723. Standard rates. 0900–1600 weekdays.
Immigration Inquiries: 081-686 0688. Standard rates. 0900–1645 Mon-Thur. 0900–1630 Fri. 24 hour recorded information for visitors: 081-760 1600. Standard rates.

Students: 081-760 1622. Standard rates.

Work permit holders: 081-760 1644. Standard rates.

Au Pairs: 081-760 1666. Standard rates.

Home Office Publications Unit: 071-273 3072/2302. Standard rates. 0915–1700 weekdays.

Inland Revenue

Taxback Information Line: 0800-660800. Free. 24 hours a day.

Post Office

Post Office Counters Helpline: 0345-223344. Local rates. 0815–1800 weekdays. 0830–1300 Saturday.

Social Security Freeline:

English: 0800-666555. Free. 0830–1630 weekdays.

Urdu: 0800-289188. Free. 0900–1600 weekdays.

Chinese: 0800-252451. Free. 0900–1630 weekdays.

Punjabi: 0800-521360. Free. 0830–1630 weekdays.

Welsh: 0800-289011. Free. 0900–1630 weekdays.

Language line: Details available from Benefits Agency local offices.

Family Credit Helpline: 0253-500050. Standard rates. 0730–1830 weekdays.

Benefit Inquiry Line for People with Disabilities: 0800-882200. Free. 0830–1830 weekdays. 0900–1300 Saturday.

Minicom: 0800-243355. Free.

Disability Living Allowance Customer Care Helpline: 0345-123456. Local rates. 0730–1830 weekdays.

Child Support Agency Inquiries: 0345-133133. Local rates. 0830–1800 weekdays.

Social Security Advice Line for Employers: 0800-393539. Free. 0900–1630 Mon-Thur. 0900–1600 Friday.

War Pensions Agency Helpline: 0253-858858. Standard rates. 0815–1715 Mon-Thur. 0815–1630 Friday.

Minicom: 0253-859999. Standard rates.

Trade and Industry

General Inquiries: 071-215 5000. Standard rates. 0830–1730 weekdays. Answerphone at other times.

Innovation: 0800-442001. Free. 0830–1730 weekdays. Answerphone at other times.

Business in Europe Hotline: 0272-444888. Standard rates. 24 hours a day.

DTI Services for Businesses: 0800-500200. Free. 24 hours a day.

Transport

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency Customer Inquiry Unit (Drivers): 0792-772151. Standard rates. 0815–1630 weekdays.

Customer Inquiry Unit (Vehicles): 0792-772134. Standard rates. 0815–1630 weekdays.

Cones Hotline: 0345-504030. Local rates. 24 hours a day.

London Transport Travel Information: 071-222 1234. Standard rates. 24 hours a day.

The citizens charter unit has itself set up and run a number of telephone information lines which are directly related to the charter;

a) 0800 100101 sent out copies of guides to the citizens charter White Paper. Calls to this line were free. The service ran from 22 July 1991 until 16 March 1994.

b) 0345 300130 provided information about how to obtain copies of the follow-up charters produced by Departments and agencies. Calls to this line were charged at a local rate. The service ran from 25 November 1992 until 16 March 1994.

c) Charterline (0345 203040), a telephone information helpline service for local and national public services, was piloted in the east midlands from 19 May 1993 until 6 May 1994. Calls were charged at a local rate.

d) The citizens charter publications line on 0345 223242 was set up on 16 March 1994 to send out copies of the Guide to citizens charter White Papers; details of how to obtain the follow-up charters; the code of practice on access to government information; charter mark award scheme information; charter news; and complaints task force information. The service is still running; calls are charged at a local rate.

e) Public nomination lines for 1995 charter mark awards were set up on 13 March 1995. These include the following:

English: —0645 400 444

Gujerati:—0645 400 440

Urdu: —0645 400 441

Hindi:—0645 400 442

Punjabi: —10645 400 443

Bengali: —10645 400 445

Deaftext:—10645 400 447

These services will run until 31 May 1995. Calls are charged at the local rate.

f) Charter mark 1995 applicants helpline on 0171 270 6142 was set up on 14 March and will run until 14 July 1995. Calls are charged at normal rate.

EMPLOYMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15630]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15631]

Miss Widdecombe: The answer is:

Michael McManus: Appointed 28 May 1993

Alison Broom: Appointed 21 July 1994

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UK Military Training Scheme

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from how many countries students received training during 1994 that was wholly or partially paid for from the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme; and if he will name those countries. [16176.]

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

In the financial year 1993–94 students from 65 countries received training wholly or partially paid for from the United Kingdom military training scheme. The countries were Albania, Antigua, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Czech Republic, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Montserrat, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanaka, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Swaziland, Tanzania, Thailand, Trinidad, Uganda, Ukraine, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *210*, regarding the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review and extensions conference, if there are any indications that any participants do not share the UK aim of obtaining an indefinite and unconditional extension of the treaty. [15993]

Mr. David Davis: There is not yet a consensus of support for the indefinite and unconditional extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty at the review and extension conference beginning in April.We are lobbying hard at ministerial and official levels to convince state parties that the indefinite and unconditional extension of the treaty would best serve their security interests.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. [16532]

Mr. David Davis: The following states are not yet members of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty:

Andorra
Angola
Brazil
Chile
Comoros
Cook Islands
Cuba
Djibouti
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
India
Israel
Micronesia
Niue
Oman
Pakistan
Palau
United Arab Emirates
Vanuatu

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provisions govern the setting up of a European Commission investigation into the Lockerbie bombing. [15217]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The criminal investigation into the Lockerbie bombing is a matter for the Crown Office and Dumfries and Galloway constabulary, with assistance from the law enforcement authorities in other countries. It is not a matter for the European Commission, which has no competence in criminal matters.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations concerning Lockerbie Her Majesty's Government are making to the 103rd session of the council of the Arab League in Cairo in March. [15218]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will submit to the Security Commission any evidence pertaining to Lockerbie, available to Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the United States, enabling them to support a case against two accused Libyans, which was withheld from the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. [15219]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15559]

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *21–22*.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15543]

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs today.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to Ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15626]

Mr. Goodlad: I refer to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15627]

Mr. Goodlad: Mr. Michael Maclay was appointed to this Department as a special adviser on 19 July 1993. Mr. Maurice Fraser, the other special adviser, was reappointed to the Department on 13 April 1992.

Arms Exports

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will outline the ways in which the international behaviour of a buyer country would act as a deterrent to the export of arms from the United Kingdom, as stated in the common criteria for arms exports of the EC states, adopted by the heads of government of European Community countries in June 1991; [16528]

(2) if he will state the criteria which are used when deciding not to export arms to countries that abuse human rights, as stated in the common criteria for arms exports of the EC states, adopted by the heads of government of European Community countries in June 1991; [16527]

(3) if he will state the criteria which are used when deciding not to export arms where they might have a detrimental effect on the internal situation in the country of final destination, as stated in the common criteria for arms exports of the EC states, adopted by the heads of government of European Community countries in June 1991. [16529]

Mr. David Davis: Applications for export licences for defence equipment are considered case by case on the basis of agreed criteria which include the internal situation in the country of final destination.

United Nations Covenants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. [16536]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley has requested is contained in United Nations document—reference ST/HR/4/Rev.10. A copy will be placed in the Library. Since the publication of this document the following states, to our knowledge, have become party to the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights:

Kyrgyzstan
Namibia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the international covenant on civil and political rights. [16535]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley has requested is contained in a United Nations document—reference ST/HR/4/Rev.10. A copy will be placed in the Library. Since the publication of this document the following states, to our knowledge, have become party to the international covenant on civil and political rights:

Kyrgyzstan
Namibia

UN Weapons Conventions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the inhumane weapons convention. [16533]

Mr. David Davis: The 48 countries which have ratified the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention are:

Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium. Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Laos Republic's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Yugoslavia.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the chemical weapons convention. [16537]

Mr. David Davis: The following 132 countries have signed, but not yet ratified, the 1993 chemical weapons convention:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Fasso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia, Moldavia, Monaco, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russia, Rwanda, Samoa (Western), San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, Tanzania, Thailand, The Holy See, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

A further 31 countries have neither signed nor ratified the convention:

Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Egypt, Grenada, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kiribati, Lebanon, Libya, former Yugoslavia, Republic of Macedonia, Mozambique, North Korea, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Surinam, Syria, Taiwan, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will list those countries that have not ratified the biological and toxin weapons convention. [16531]

Mr. David Davis: The following 18 countries have signed, but not ratified, the 1972 bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons convention:

Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, Egypt, Gabon, Guyana, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Nepal, Somalia, Syria, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates.

A further 37 countries have neither signed nor ratified the convention.

Algeria, Andorra. Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bermuda, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Georgia, Guinea, The Holy See, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgizstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Moldova, Micronesia, Monaco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Palau, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Western Samoa, Zambia.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the human rights restrictions in Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [16681]

Mr. David Davis: Our concerns about human rights form a major part of our dialogue with Turkey, both bilaterally and with our EU partners. The Turkish Government have undertaken to make a number of reforms in this area. We look forward to seeing these put into effect.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he has taken to protest at Turkish military actions in Iraq. [16685]

Mr. David Davis: We have made it clear to the Turkish authorities in both London and ankara that we look to them to withdraw their troops at the earliest opportunity, and that the principle of territorial integrity should be upheld. We have also registered strongly our concern that non-combatants in the region should not be affected.

UN Mercenaries Convention

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to ratify the UN convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries. [16526]

Mr. David Davis: We have no plans to ratify the UN convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not ratified the international convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries. [16530]

Mr. David Davis: We have no plans to ratify the UN convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries. The latest information that we have on countries that have ratified the convention is from 31 December 1993. At that time no states except three, the Maldives, Suriname and Ukraine had ratified the convention.

UN Register of Conventional Arms

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that have not filed reports to the United Nations register of conventional arms. [16534]

Mr. David Davis: Those countries who have submitted returns to the United Nations register of conventional arms are contained in the Secretary-General's report A/49/352 of 1 September 1994. A list of those countries will be deposited in the Library of the House.

There is no list of countries who have not yet submitted returns.

Mr. Nicholas Ingram

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the state of Georgia, United States of America regarding the proposed electrocution of a British citizen, Mr. Nicholas Ingram, and if he will make a statement. [16674]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Due legal process has not yet been completed and it would not be appropriate for us to intervene at this stage. We continue to watch the case carefully.

Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whose name appears on the documentation approving the entry visa for Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi; [16428]

(2) who granted an entry visa to Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi, leader of the Sipah-i-Sahaba, Soldiers of Islam; [16426]

(3) which Minister was asked to approve the decision to grant an entry visa to Mr. Zia Rahman Farooqi. [16427]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 16 March, *Official Report,* column 657.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Pergau Dam

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means parliamentary authority was sought for the expenditure of £2.938 million on the Pergau dam project, listed in table 1 of class II, vote 5 of the estimates for 1992–93 as having been incurred in the years prior to 1992–93. [15524]

Mr. Goodlad: Parliamentary authority was sought through the supply procedure for 1991–92. The project became effective in July 1991.

Namibia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what concerns there are about the prospect of drought in Namibia; and what international plans there are to counteract this. [15537]

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* There has been considerable rainfall recently in the north. This has alleviated the drought situation but has led to some flooding. The Namibian Government have made provision for the purchase of grain to meet foreseeable needs for the next 15 months. The international community, through the Food and Agriculture Organisation and world food programme, continues to monitor the situation closely.

West Bank

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he has responded to the suggestion of the Foreign Secretary of Israel that Britain should fund one of the industrial parks to be set up on the green line on the west bank. [15528]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister noted the Israeli Government's proposal for the establishment of industrial parks, and expressed willingness to look at the idea. It will require careful consideration by the UK and our EU partners.

Slovakia

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what way the United Kingdom Government representative intends to vote on the proposed funding by the European bank for reconstruction and development and EURATOM for the completion of the Soviet designed nuclear power plant at Mochovce in Slovakia, at the meeting of the bank's board on 28 March. [16107]

Mr. Goodlad: At the request of the Slovak Government, the EBRD board of directors agreed on 22 March to postpone consideration of the Mochovce project.

ODA Funding

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Overseas Development Administration funding has been applied through the Swiss firm SGS Silviconsult. [16197]

Mr. Goodlad: Contracts to the value of £666,789 have been awarded to SGS Silviconsult Ltd of Mill Street, Oxford, a UK-registered company owned by the SGS Group.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will itemise the manner in which Overseas Development Administration funding applied through SGS Silviconsult has been spent; and if he will make a statement. [16198]

Mr. Goodlad: To date, the ODA has paid a total of £252,646 to SGS Silviconsult Ltd. on the following contracts:

Forestry Revenue Collection Study—Tanzania—March–June 1991—*£43,689.*

Cpatu Rainforest Silviculture Research Project—Brazil—October 1993 to date (5 year contract)—*£190,945.*

Forestry Economics—Nigeria—March–April 1994—*£18,012.*

The total value of these contracts is *£666,789.*

EDUCATION

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will ensure that her ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for her Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for her and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within her Department. [15565]

Mr. Forth: As designated departmental Minister with responsibility for deregulation, I am keen to keep the burden of regulation down. Indeed, an efficiency scrutiny is currently under way to review and make recommendations on the scope of minimising the administrative burden on schools.

Insecticide Sprays

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have been sprayed with lindane, gamma HCH or gamma BHC in the last year; and if she will make a statement. [15491]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Specialist Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in her Department. [15632]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, within certain limited exceptions. They have facilities appropriate to their duties.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to her Department since May 1992. [15633]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has had two political advisers since May 1992: Clifford Grantham, and presently Dr. Elizabeth Cottrell.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what targets she has for withdrawing regulations within her Department. [15546]

Mr. Forth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Capital Bids

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what capital bids in total have been granted for grant-maintained schools for 1995–96; to which schools they were granted; and how much was each grant. [16520]

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Liverpool Blue Coat School

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding has been made available to Liverpool Blue Coat school for the improvement of physical education and changing facilities; when the local education authority was asked to provide information about the project to her Department; when approval was given; and when the work must commence and be completed in order to qualify for funding. [16340]

Mr. Robin Squire: Liverpool LEA applied on 18 May 1994 for a supplementary credit approval of £150,000 to enable the Blue Coat school to rationalise its PE provision. This followed a letter from the then Secretary of State dated 19 April 1994 to the chairman of governors of the Blue Coat school explaining that if the LEA were unable to meet its liability from within existing resources, it was open to the LEA to apply for an SCA. The LEA was informed on 10 March 1995 that its application had been successful. The SCA may be used in respect of expenditure defrayed or credit arrangements entered into or varied during financial year 1994–95.

Students with Disabilities

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the review of further and higher education announced in the White paper "Ending Discrimination Against Disabled People".

Mr. Boswell: The Government introduced in 1992 as part of the Further and Higher Education Act comprehensive provisions covering students with disabilities in further and higher education. We shall be considering carefully the points raised in debates on the Disability Discrimination Bill. Additionally, as promised, we will be reviewing the effectiveness of education legislation in meeting the needs of these students.

This review builds on the achievements of colleges, universities and the funding councils in increasing provision for students with disabilities in further and higher education. It offers us a chance to work with the funding councils, representative bodies for higher education and organisations for the disabled to ensure that the legislative framework meets the needs of students with disabilities, and to consider appropriate proposals for practical action.

The review will be wide ranging including:

—in higher education, how the new flexibility in capital spending can be used to improve facilities for students with disabilities.

—ways in which the arrangements for increasing further education college staff's awareness of the needs of students with disabilities can be improved and whether inspections of the quality of provision for these students can be strengthened.

—considering whether any further funding incentives could be given to colleges to encourage the enrolment of students with disabilities and if any related guidance could be offered.

—the administration of the disabled student's allowances to see whether more needs to be done to raise awareness of their purpose and availability.

—the advice and information service provided by Skill—the National Bureau of Students with Disabilities.

—considering whether the charters for further and higher education can be improved in respect of availability of information to students with disabilities.

Copies of the review programme have been placed in the Library.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action she is taking to implement the findings of the Audit Commission report on special needs pupils. [16592]

Mr. Forth: The Audit Commission/HMI report "Getting in on the Act" was published in June 1992 and made several recommendations to enhance clarity and accountability in schools and LEAs to ensure better provision for pupils with special educational needs.

The recommendations have been the subject of revised legislation in part III of the Education Act 1993; and in guidance within several circulars covering the organisation of special educational provision, pupils with problems, and local management of schools. The Government have also issued a code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs, which came into force on 1 September 1994.

A subsequent Audit Commission report "The Act Moves On: Progress in Special Educational Needs" acknowledges that the code of practice has been warmly welcomed by almost all those involved in education and indicates that the Government have acted promptly to address those deficiencies in the national framework which were suggested by the 1992 report.

Sex Education

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to monitor the parental right of withdrawal in relation to sex education; and how this right is reflected in the revised version of the framework for the inspection of schools; [16088]

(2) if guidance for inspection of sex education policy and implementation in schools' programmes will be included in the revised version of the framework for inspection of schools; [16090]

(3) how many and which organisations have responded to the consultation carried out by Ofsted on the proposed revision of the framework for the inspection of schools; [16089]

(4) what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure the effectiveness of schools' governing bodies for health education and sex education; and how these are reflected in the revised version of the framework for inspection of schools. [16087]

Mr. Forth: The new statutory requirements for sex education, under the Education Act 1993, came into force on 1 September 1994. The Department's circular 5/94 offered guidance on the implementation of the new arrangements, including the role of school governors and the exercise of the parental right of withdrawal. We have no plans at present to monitor specifically the right of withdrawal.

Questions on the framework of inspection are a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the numbers of grant-maintained schools in each local education authority area and the political control of the authority when those schools voted to become grant maintained. [15996]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested on political control is not readily available. The following table shows the total number of GM schools in each LEA area and the current political control of that LEA.

Operating GM schools and political control of LEAs

LEA area	*Number of GM schools*	*Political control*
Avon	2	NOC—Largest party Labour
Barking	0	Labour
Barnet	12	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Barnsley	0	Labour
Bedfordshire	14	NOC—Largest party Labour
Berkshire	20	Labour/Liberal Democrats/Independent joint administration—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Bexley	8	NOC—Conservative minority administration—Equal largest parties Conservative and Labour
Birmingham	23	Labour

Operating GM schools and political control of LEAs

LEA area	Number of GM schools	Political control
Bolton	4	Labour
Bradford	13	Labour
Brent	14	Conservative minority administration—Largest party Conservative
Bromley	18	Conservative
Buckinghamshire	18	Conservative
Bury	1	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
Calderdale	14	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Cambridgeshire	22	Liberal Democrats/Labour joint administration—Largest party Conservative
Camden	2	Labour
Cheshire	7	Conservative/Liberal Democrats—Largest party Labour
Cleveland	0	Labour
Cornwall	0	Liberal Democrats
Corporation of London	0	Independent
Coventry	0	Labour
Croydon	12	Labour
Cumbria	37	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
Derbyshire	25	Labour
Devon	7	Liberal Democrats minority administration—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Doncaster	0	Labour
Dorset	11	Liberal Democrats
Dudley	7	Labour
Durham	0	Labour
Ealing	9	Labour
East Sussex	0	Liberal Democrats/Labour joint administration—Largest party Liberal/Democrats
Enfield	6	Labour
Essex	143	Labour/Liberal Democrats joint administration—Largest party Labour
Gateshead	0	Labour
Gloucestershire	47	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Greenwich	1	Labour
Hackney	1	Labour
Hammersmith	1	Labour
Hampshire	31	Liberal Democrats/ Labour/Independent joint administration—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Haringey	0	Labour
Harrow	1	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Havering	4	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
Hereford and Worcester	5	Labour/LiberalDemocrats joint administration—Largest party Conservative
Hertfordshire	39	NOC—Largest party Labour
Hillingdon	23	Labour
Hounslow	2	Labour
Humberside	3	Labour
Isle of Wight	0	Liberal Democrats
Isles of Scilly	0	Independent
Islington	0	Labour
Kensington and Chelsea	3	Conservative
Kent	87	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Kingston upon Thames	5	Liberal Democrats
Kirklees	2	Labour
Knowsley	1	Labour
Lambeth	15	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
Lancashire	11	Labour
Leeds	2	Labour
Leicestershire	5	NOC—Largest party Labour
Lewisham	1	Labour
Lincolnshire	54	Labour/Liberal Democrats joint administration—Largest party Conservative
Liverpool	4	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
Manchester	0	Labour
Merton	1	Labour
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	Labour
Newham	1	Labour
Norfolk	30	Labour minority administration—Largest party Conservative
North Tyneside	1	Labour
North Yorkshire	1	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Northamptonshire	23	Labour
Norhumberland	1	Labour
Nottinghamshire	3	Labour
Oldham	0	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Oxfordshire	1	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Redbridge	1	NOC—Largest party Labour
Richmond upon Thames	0	Liberal Democrats
Rochdale	8	Conservative/Liberal Democrats joint administration—Largest party Labour
Rotherham	0	Labour
Salford	1	Labour
Sandwell	2	Labour
Sefton	0	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Sheffield	11	Labour
Shropshire	9	Labour/Liberal Democrats joint administration—Largest party Conservative
Solihull	1	Conservative/Independent joint administration—Largest party Conservative
Somerset	5	Liberal Democrats
South Tyneside	0	Labour
Southwark	10	Labour
St. Helens	0	Labour
Staffordshire	8	Labour
Stockport	0	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Suffok	0	Labour/Liberal Democrats joint administration—Largest party Labour
Sunderland	0	Labour
Surrey	34	NOC—Largest party Conservative
Sutton	11	Liberal Democrats
Tameside	3	Labour
Tower Hamlets	1	Labour

Operating GM schools and political control of LEAs

LEA area	*Number of GM schools*	*Political control*
Trafford	4	Conservative
Wakefield	0	Labour
Walsall	9	NOC—Largest party Labour
Waltham Forest	3	NOC—Largest party Labour
Wandsworth	8	Conservative
Warwickshire	8	Labour minority administration—Largest party Labour
West Sussex	1	Liberal Democrats minority administration—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Westminster	0	Conservative
Wigan	0	Labour
Wiltshire	32	NOC—Largest party Liberal Democrats
Wirral	2	NOC—Largest party Labour
Wolverhampton	3	Labour

Note:
Political control of LEAs is correct as at 21 February 1994.
Key:
NOC—No overall control.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools she has been notified will be unable to meet the requirements of the national curriculum because they have been refused the necessary capital by the Funding Agency for Schools. [15525]

Mr. Robin Squire: A number of schools have expressed serious disappointment that, as a result of constraints on the total available for capital grants next year, they will not be able to develop their curriculum in the way they had hoped. However, my right hon. Friend has not received notification that any school will be unable to meet the minimum requirements of the national curriculum for this reason. Decisions on capital grants for individual schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools.

Teachers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction how many full-time teachers there were in secondary schools with *(a)* arts, *(b)* social science and *(c)* science qualifications in 1979, 1984 and 1994. [15062]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is available only for 1988 and 1992. In those years, the number of full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England with qualifications in the different subject areas was as follows:

Thousands

	1988	*1992*
Arts	97.5	84.7
Social Sciences	92.4	91.2
Sciences	96.0	91.2

Where teachers have qualifications in more than one category, they are included in all relevant categories. The total number of full-time teachers in 1988 and 1992 was 191,300 and 175,800 respectively.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Channel

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what statutory obligations there are upon cable companies relating to the provision of the Parliamentary Channel. [15403]

Mr. Newton: There is no statutory obligation on cable companies to carry the Parliamentary Channel.

The Parliamentary Channel is provided by United Artists. United Artists is a shareholder in PARBUL, the company which is responsible for providing all television coverage from the Chamber of the House of Commons, the Chamber of the House of Lords and Committees of both Houses. United Artists provides a service to cable companies which is available to almost all those homes connected to broadband cable as part of the basic package of services provided by the local cable operator. The service is free to schools which are connected to broadband cable.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report,* column 1033, what is the result of his reflection on law officers making statements at Lockerbie.

Mr. Newton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot disclose details of evidence in the Lockerbie case any more than he can in any other pending criminal case.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil List

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the total payment at 1994 prices under the civil list since 1965. [16516]

The Prime Minister: The total payment for the period 1965–94 adjusted to 1993–94 prices, is £188 million.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the validity of the position of the Government of Malta in relation to Lockerbie. [15220]

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Malta about Lockerbie. [15221]

The Prime Minister: None.

Libya (Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the legitimacy of UN sanctions against Libya. [15222]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Iraq (Turkish Military Activity)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Prime Minister when he was informed of the Turkish military activities in Iraq; and what actions he took. [16683]

The Prime Minister: We were informed of the Turkish military activities in northern Iraq on 20 March, after they began. We made clear to the Turks that we expected them to withdraw their troops at the earliest opportunity. We have also registered strongly our concern that non-combatants in the region should not be affected.

Mr. Graham Kirkham

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what incentives were offered by him to Mr. Graham Kirkham following the Prime Minister's recent visit to Doncaster. [16251]

The Prime Minister: None.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (Israel)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he raised the prospects of Israel joining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty with his Israeli counterpart or with other members of the Israeli Government during his recent visit to Israel. [15990]

The Prime Minister: I discussed a broad range of subjects. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty was briefly discussed with Foreign Minister Peres.

Security Service

Mr. Allason: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the publication of "A Perfect English Spy" by Tom Bower, with reference to the implications for the Official Secrets Act 1989 and his answer of 22 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *321*, regarding an officially authorised biography of the late Sir Dick White. [16060]

The Prime Minister: This book has only just been published. The Government will study the contents and consider what, if any, action needs to be taken.

Universities (Business Links)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to improve the relationship between business and higher education. [16383]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education on Monday 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *919*.

Specialist Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15614]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

SCOTLAND

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financial performance of the Registers of Scotland executive agency for each year since 1990; what profits have been generated; how much of such profits has been paid to the Treasury; and if it is his policy that the agency should continue to generate profits in this way. [15527]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Registers of Scotland agency. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. A.W. Ramage, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan W. Ramage to Mr. John Home Robertson, dated 27 March 1995:

I refer to your question about the financial performance of Registers of Scotland Executive Agency in each year since 1990.

The Agency is required by statute to cover all expenditure by fee income. Income in excess of expenditure, in terms of cash-based Vote accounting, is surrendered to Treasury at the end of each financial year. The information relating to the financial years from 1990–91 to 1993–94 is shown below.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Surplus/Deficit (£000s)	(276)	1,346	5,291	5,819

It may be helpful if I explain that the comparatively large surpluses in 1992–93 and 1993–94 arose from the processing and elimination of backlogs of work which had built up as a result of the very high level of activity in the Scottish property market during the preceding five years. Accounts prepared on an accruals basis reflect more accurately the Agency's trading position and show, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, trading surpluses of £2.823m and £0.149m respectively.

Projections of future property market activity allied to more flexible working systems indicate that it will be possible to match income more closely to expenditure in the years to 1997–98. The Agency's forecasts for 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 are that income will exceed expenditure by approximately £100,000 (or less than 0.5% of expenditure) in each of these years.

Quangos

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *338–39*, if he will list quangos which have been abolished since April 1993. [15801]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* Between 1 April 1993 and 1 April 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, one non-departmental public body was abolished. This was the Scottish Health Service Advisory Council, which ceased to exist in June 1993.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown by week of pregnancy of the number of abortions performed upon women in Scotland in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993 under the grounds of (i) risk to life of woman, (ii) to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman, (iii) substantial risk of child being born seriously handicapped, (iv) to save the life of woman and (v) to prevent grave permanent injury to physical or mental health of woman. [15961]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* The information is set out in the following tables:

1992	*Period of gestation (weeks)*	*Ground (i)*	*Ground (ii)*	*Ground (iii)*	*Ground (iv)*	*Ground (v)*
	05	0	1	0	0	0
	06	0	11	3	0	0
	07	0	30	3	0	0
	08	3	57	7	0	0
	09	3	24	3	0	0
	10	1	43	7	0	0
	11	1	12	3	0	0
	12	0	9	5	0	0
	13	0	2	6	0	0
	14	1	8	6	0	0
	15	0	1	5	0	0
	16	0	3	10	0	0
	17	0	0	12	0	0
	18	0	1	15	0	0
	19	0	0	23	0	0
	20	0	0	20	0	0
	21	0	2	6	0	0
	22	0	0	2	0	0
	23	0	0	4	0	0
	24	1	0	2	0	0
	25	1	0	0	0	0
	26	0	0	1	0	0
	27	0	0	1	0	0
Total		11	204	144	0	0

1993	*Period of Gestation (weeks)*	*Ground (i)*	*Ground (ii)*	*Ground (iii)*	*Ground (iv)*	*Ground (v)*
	06	0	3	3	0	0
	07	1	12	2	0	0
	08	1	40	3	0	0
	09	1	7	2	0	0
	10	1	22	1	0	0
	11	1	7	5	0	0
	12	0	1	8	0	0
	13	0	5	4	0	0
	14	1	2	4	0	0
	15	0	0	4	0	0
	16	3	1	9	0	0
	17	0	0	12	0	0
	18	0	1	22	0	1
	19	0	1	15	0	0
	20	0	0	11	0	0
	21	0	0	6	0	0
	22	0	0	8	0	0
	23	0	0	0	0	0
	24	0	0	0	0	0
	25	0	0	1	0	0
	26	0	0	1	0	0
	27	0	0	1	0	0
	28	0	0	1	0	0
Total		9	102	123	0	1

Management Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which management consultants have been employed by his Department to assist in the assessment of application for NHS units for trust status; how much each was paid; and how many assessments they undertook in each wave. [15844]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *123–24*.

In addition, KPMG Management Consulting was appointed to assist in the assessment of all eight applicants in the fourth wave of NHS trusts at a cost of £28,690, including VAT.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15613]

Mr. Lang: Since May 1992, my Department has appointed three persons as political advisers—Mr. Alan Young, Mr. Gregor Mackay and Mr. Mark Izatt. Only two have been in post at any one time. Mr. Young resigned in November 1994 and was replaced by Mr. Izatt.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Crown Office has sought to interview David Lovejoy about his advice to the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Beirut, Hussein Niknam, concerning the arrival of Charles McKee and Matthew Garnam in Beirut to obtain information on the locations of hostages. [16149]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authorities to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the number of (i) male and (ii) female employees, *(b)* the number of officials employed at each of the principal grades and the numbers and percentages of women employed at these grades and *(c)* the numbers of staff employed of administrative grades and the number of these staff that are women in his Department for each year since 1985. [16327]

Mr. Lang: The available information is shown in the following tables.

Staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies
All permanent staff[1]

	1985		*1986*	
Department	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
SO core and agencies (other than SPS)	4,389.0	2,642.0	4,242.5	2,551.0
SPS	2,653.0	227.5	2,794.0	230.0
Total	7,042.0	2,869.5	7,036.5	2,781.0

Note:

1. Data as at 1 April.

[1] Includes Industrials.

Department	1987 Male	1987 Female	1988 Male	1988 Female
SO core and agencies (other than SPS)	4,100.5	2,583.0	3,944.0	2,501.0
SPS	2,901.0	247.5	3,135.5	256.5
Total	7,001.5	2,830.5	7,079.5	2,757.5

Department	1989 Male	1989 Female	1990 Male	1990 Female
SO core and agencies (other than SPS)	3,833.5	2,439.5	3,795.5	2,479.5
SPS	3,527.0	276.5	3,711.0	288.5
Total	7,360.5	2,716.0	7,506.5	2,768.0

Department	1991 Male	1991 Female	1992 Male	1992 Female
SO core and agencies (other than SPS)	3,779.5	2,502.5	3,691.0	2,441.0
SPS	3,729.0	275.0	3,940.5	288.0
Total	7,508.5	2,777.5	7,631.5	2,729.0

Department	1993 Male	1993 Female	1994 Male	1994 Female
SO Core and Agencies (other than SPS)	3,635.5	2,462.5	3,597.0	2,438.0
SPS	4,197.0	428.0	4,096.5	438.0
Total	7,832.5	2,890.5	7,693.5	2,876.0

Staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies selected groups of staff

	1992					
	SO core and agencies (other than SPS)			SPS		
Grade	Male	Female	Per cent. Female	Male	Female	Per cent. Female
Unified G1	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G2	7.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G3	22.0	2.5	10.2	—	—	—
Unified G4	14.0	1.0	6.7	—	—	—
Unified G5	104.5	16.0	13.3	3.0	—	—
Unified G6	73.0	9.5	11.5	9.5	—	—
Unified G7	324.5	52.5	13.9	—	—	—
Sub total	546.0	81.5	13.0	12.5	0.0	0.0

	1993					
	SO core and agencies (other than SPS)			SPS		
Grade	Male	Female	Per cent. Female	Male	Female	Per cent. Female
Unified G1	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G2	7.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G3	20.0	2.5	11.1	1.0	—	—
Unified G4	12.0	3.0	20.0	1.0	—	—
Unified G5	111.5	13.5	10.8	4.0	—	—
Unified G6	71.5	10.5	12.8	12.0	—	—
Unified G7	339.0	65.0	16.1	12.0	2.0	14.3
Sub total	562.0	94.5	14.4	30.0	2.0	6.3

	1994					
	SO core and agencies (other than SPS)			SPS		
Grade	Male	Female	Per cent. Female	Male	Female	Per cent. Female
Unified G1	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G2	7.0	—	—	—	—	—
Unified G3	22.0	2.5	10.2	1.0	—	—
Unified G4	12.0	3.0	20.0	1.0	—	—
Unified G5	106.5	15.0	12.3	5.0	—	—
Unified G6	71.5	11.5	13.9	2.0	—	—
Unified G7	336.0	72.0	17.6	14.0	4.0	22.2
Sub total	556.0	104.0	15.8	23.0	4.0	14.8

	1992					
	SO Core and Agencies (other than SPS)			SPS		
Admin. staff	Male	Female	Per cent. Female	Male	Female	Per cent. Female
SEO	144.0	18.0	11.1	—	—	—
HEO	375.0	188.0	33.4	—	—	—
EO	276.0	343.0	55.4	—	—	—
AO	312.5	557.5	64.1	—	—	—
AA	223.0	396.0	64.0	—	—	—
Sub Total	1,330.5	1,502.5	53.0	—	—	—

1993

	SO Core and Agencies (other than SPS)			*SPS*		
Admin. staff	*Male*	*Female*	*Per cent. Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Per cent. Female*
SEO	149.0	23.5	13.6	5.0	2.0	28.6
HEO	387.5	191.5	33.1	18.0	5.0	21.7
EO	257.0	341.5	57.1	13.0	7.0	35.0
AO	312.0	521.0	62.5	16.0	2.0	11.1
AA	248.0	425.5	63.2	16.0	10.0	38.5
Sub Total	1,353.5	1,503.0	52.6	68.0	26.0	27.7

1994

	SO Core and Agencies (other than SPS)			*SPS*		
Admin. staff	*Male*	*Female*	*Per cent. Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Per cent. Female*
SEO	150.5	28.0	15.7	5.0	2.0	28.6
HEO	386.0	192.0	33.2	17.0	8.0	32.0
EO	289.0	348.0	54.6	14.0	11.0	44.0
AO	299.0	508.5	63.0	20.0	22.0	52.4
AA	227.5	426.5	65.2	11.0	4.0	26.7
Sub Total	1,352.0	1,503.0	52.6	67.0	47.0	41.2

Note:

1. Data as at 1 April.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the Scottish population is covered by private medical insurance. [16330]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of increases in the cost of private medical insurance in the last five years. [16331]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Department has not made any such assessment.

Dr. David Fieldhouse

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Scottish Office received a recorded letter DY/9586/1114/7GB, posted by Dr. David Fieldhouse in Bradford on 18 March, pertaining to oral question 2 to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 22 March; and when it was brought to his attention.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A letter dated 18 March to 1995 to the Secretary of State for Scotland from Dr. David Fieldhouse was received at St. Andrew's house in Edinburgh on 20 March 1995. This letter was brought to the attention of the Secretary of State on 21 March 1995.

Allowances

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the car mileage allowance payable to *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* members of quangos, agencies and trusts appointed by him, *(c)* employees of quangos, agencies and trusts which he funds, *(d)* employees of local authorities and *(e)* elected members of local authorities, giving details of each class of motor vehicle.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Information held centrally on car mileage allowances is as follows:

Organisation	*Car mileage allowance*
Scottish Office	32p per mile
Local authority members	Maximum rates are as follows: 500–999 cc—30.7p per mile 1000–1199 cc—35.0p per mile Over 1199 cc—42.1p per mile
Scottish New Town Development Corporations	Scottish Council for Local Authorities Services rates
Members and Staff of Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)	The majority of NDPBs apply the same rates as The Scottish Office. Those that do not use a wide variety of ranges ranging from a Public Transport Rate of 12.3p per mile to a full rate of 61.1p per mile.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the overnight allowance payable to *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* members of quangos, agencies and trusts appointed by him, *(c)* employees of quangos, agencies and trusts which he funds, *(d)* employees of local authorities and *(e)* elected members of local authorities, giving details of each category of claim, including (i) London, (ii) overseas or foreign trips and (iii) United Kingdom visits excluding London.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 March 1995]:* Information held centrally on overnight allowances is as follows:

Organisation	*Overnight allowance*
Scottish Office	£65.15 per night (London) £62.40 per night (elsewhere)
Staying with Friends	£25.00 per night
Overnight by train or boat	£21.00 per night (taxable)
Residential course allowance	£5.15 per night
Lodging allowance	£32.45 per night (London) £31.00 per night (elsewhere)
Overseas	Foreign and Commonwealth Office Worldwide subsistence rates

Organisation	*Overnight allowance*
Local Authority Members	£79.60 (London or Approved Conference) £69.80 (elsewhere)
Scottish New Town Development Corporations	Scottish Council for Local Authorities services rates
Members and staff of Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)	The majority of NDPBs apply the same rates as the Scottish Office. The rates of those that do not vary from £98.70 (London) to £48.85 (elsewhere)

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* This information could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Publicity campaigns and publications for my Department are commissioned through the Scottish Office information directorate. Expenditure by it on all forms of advertising for the period requested is:

	£
1994–95	2,225,000
1993–94	1,874,000
1992–93	1,648,000
1991–92	2,104,000
1990–91	1,911,000
1989–90	2,713,000
1988–89	1,470,000
1987–88	1,507,000
1986–87	1,228,000
1985–86	1,001,000
1984–85	1,102,000
1983–84	592,000
1982–83	664,000
1981–82	724,000
1980–81	744,00
1979–80	629,000

Expenditure on information publications through the information directorate is:

	£
1988–89	630,000
1989–90	920,000
1990–91	591,000
1991–92	824,000
1992–93	1,107,000
1993–94	816,000
1994–95	776,000

All figures expressed in 1994 prices.

Figures not available for information publications before 1988–89.

In addition to information publications, my Department has produced many hundreds of specialised publications each of interest to particular target groups. Information on these could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Details of publicity campaigns for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 are shown in the following table.

Campaign	*Nature*	*Total cost £*	*Purpose*
1993–94			
Children's Panels	Press	84,000	To recruit from all sections of the community, members to the Children's Panels.
Fire Prevention	Press/TV	169,000	To promote the installation of smoke alarms.
Open Door	Press	123,000	To publicise The Scottish Office Central Enquiry Unit, the service it provides and to encourage the public to use it.
Organ Donor	TV/Press/Print	116,000	To promote the carrying of donor cards and to advise card holders to let their next of kin know of their wishes.
Road Safety	TV/Metrobus	308,000	To promote road safety among school-age children.
Further and Higher Education Charter	Press/TV/Adshels/Radio/Print	136,000	To promote awareness of the new Charter to parents and students.
Right to Buy	Print/Press/TV	306,000	A campaign targeted at public sector tenants to make them aware of the Right to Buy and Rent to Mortgage Schemes.

Campaign	*Nature*	*Total cost £*	*Purpose*
1994–95			
Drugs and Solvents	Press/TV/Radio/Print	250,000	To make parents aware of drug and misuse solvent amongst children and offering booklets containing advice. Campaign ran in conjunction with Department of Health.
Domestic Violence	Press/TV/Print/Posters	482,000	Targeted at males who assault their partners, the campaign attempts to change attitudes while stating that domestic violence is a criminal offence.
Children's Panels	Press	86,000	Repeat of 1993–94 campaign.
Electoral Registration	Press/TV	99,000	A two part campaign: (i) to encourage householders to complete their electoral registration forms and (ii) to urge new voters, in particular, to check the draft electoral registers.
Organ Donors	Press/Print	145,000	A campaign requesting donor card holders to enrol in the national register.
Fire Prevention	TV	231,000	To promote the maintenance of household smoke alarms.
Road Safety	TV	232,000	Repeat of 1993–94 campaign.
Right to Buy	Print/Press/TV	220,000	Repeat of 1993–94 campaign.
Drugs and Solvents Misuse	TV/Radio	90,000	Repeat of 1993–94 campaign.
Water and Sewerage	Print	108,000	Producing a leaflet for distribution to every Scottish household to make householders aware of the annual costs of these services.
Local Government Reform	Print	139,000	Producing a leaflet for distribution to every Scottish household advising of the changes to the forthcoming restructuring of local government.

The planned publicity budget for my Department for 1995–96 is £2.5 million.

No records are held centrally regarding publicity campaigns and publications for agencies and public bodies. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Ombudsmen

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require the local government ombudsman to report annually on the nature of the cases referred to him or her in which he or she has decided to exercise discretion and conduct on investigation notwithstanding the existence of a remedy which could be pursued through the courts. [15066]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No; it is to the local authority associations that the local government ombudsmen report annually, and the content of their reports is a matter for them.

Corruption

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local councillors have been found guilty of corruption in each year since 1979; and what were their political affiliations. [15333]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received to date concerning possible unitary status for Blackpool and Blackburn. [15651]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received a small number of representations commenting on our decision, announced on 2 March, to direct the commission to look again at the case for giving the districts of Blackpool and Blackburn unitary status. Some have welcomed the decision; others have opposed it.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to obtain for his Department's library a copy of the recent DRI/McGraw-Hill report on carbon dioxide emissions across Europe. [15896]

Mr. Atkins: None.

Cats

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has formed of the impact to bird life from predation by domestic cats. [14900]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has advised that although hunting by domestic cats may have a detrimental effect on some local bird populations, there is no evidence that this is significantly affecting the conservation status of birds at the national level.

Lindane

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what inquiries the Government's Building Research Establishment has made into the use of lindane, gamma BHC or gamma HCH; and what were the results. [15498]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Building Research Establishment has for a number of years conducted research into many aspects of the behaviour, fate and efficacy of lindane when used as a wood preservative. The results of much of this research have been published, either in professional journals or in the research establishment's publications. Some information on the non-agricultural uses of lindane appeared in the review which was published in December 1992—"Evaluation on Gamma HCH (Lindane II; Evaluation No. 64)", a copy of which is lodged in the Library of the House.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the extent of pollution of the North sea by lindane, gamma HCH, gamma BHC or comparable pesticide products; and if he will make a statement. [15512]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the North sea distribution of organochlorines such as lindane—gamma HCH—is given in the 1993 "Quality Status Report on the North Sea", with more detailed information in six sub-regional reports produced by the UK. Copies of these reports are in the Library of the House. The highest concentrations of lindane in North sea waters were found in the southern North sea and German bight. Monitoring by UK fisheries departments, reflected in the quality status report, has found little indication of serious organochlorine contamination of fish tissue in our North sea estuaries. Similarly, concentrations of organochlorines in marine mammals stranded on the UK North sea coast are generally low.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the similarities between DDT and lindane or gamma hexachlorocyclohexane. [15511]

Sir Paul Beresford: Both lindane and DDT are organochlorine insecticides. However, lindane is less persistent than other organochlorine pesticides and, as it is excreted rapidly from mammals, has less potential to accumulate in man or wild animals.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* household, *(b)* garden, greenhouse or park and *(c)* pet care products in which lindane or gamma hexachlorocyclohexane are used. [15508]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is already in the public domain for all products containing lindane registered by the Health and Safety Executive or the pesticides safety directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and all these products must indicate that they contain lindane. For products registered up to October 1994, this information is listed in "Pesticides 1995, Reference Book 500"—the Blue Book—a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Any products containing lindane registered since then are listed in the monthly "Pesticides Register" which is produced by the Health and Safety Executive and pesticides safety directorate and published by HMSO. I understand that there are no pet care products containing lindane licensed in the UK at present.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ban the use of lindane, gamma HCH, and gamma BHC in wood preservatives. [15509]

Sir Paul Beresford: Under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, Ministers established an independent committee, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, to provide them with advice on the approval of pesticides. Current policy on the approval of lindane is based on the advice of this committee. In 1992, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides considered a substantial body of evidence on the toxicology and behaviour of lindane when it reviewed its use as a non-agricultural pesticide, including as a wood preservative. The advisory committee recommended that approvals should continue as there was no evidence of an unacceptable risk to human health from use of lindane as a wood preservative. The Ministers of the pesticide approving Departments accepted these recommendations.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice is issued by the Building Research Establishment in respect of the number of hours people should stay out of enclosed areas sprayed with lindane, gamma BHC or gamma HCH; what information he has to the comparable advice given to customers by the producers of this product; and if he will make a statement. [15503]

Sir Paul Beresford: Guidance on re-entry periods for occupants of buildings treated with wood preservatives appears on product labels. As such it is a statutory condition for the approval of use of a product, recommended by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and agreed by Ministers. In the case of lindane, unprotected persons and animals should not re-enter treated buildings for a minimum period of 48 hours and only then if the timber is dry.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he is giving to local authorities who use lindane fumers with insecticide smoke to clear houses of insects and other pests. [15504]

Sir Paul Beresford: Adequate requirements and advice are already in place. Work with lindane is covered by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994—COSHH. COSHH requires employers to inform, instruct and train their employees about: the nature of the substances they work with; the risks created by exposure to those substances and the precautions to be taken. Under the provisions of the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986, conditions of approval and instructions for use appear on lindane pesticide products.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the use of lindane in lofts inhabited by bats. [15505]

Sir Paul Beresford: Bats are protected animals under schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. All wood preservatives containing lindane carry the statement that: before treating any structure used by bats, English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage or the Country Council for Wales should be consulted. The conservation bodies have lists of products which are acceptable for use in roosts; products containing lindane are not recommended for this purpose.

DDT

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if DDT is soluble in body fat and tissue of *(a)* animals and *(b)* humans. [15514]

Sir Paul Beresford: DDT is soluble in the fatty tissue of man and other animals.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlie the banning of DDT. [15507]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the United Kingdom, concern over the environmental effects of DDT led to reductions in use from the 1960s culminating in a complete ban by 1986. Because of its properties and widespread use, DDT accumulated in the environment, exposing animals higher up the food chain to concentrations which produced various toxic effects. DDT was implicated in the decline in populations of a number of these animals, most notably birds of prey through egg-shell thinning.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15563]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs earlier today.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15570]

Sir Paul Beresford: The aims and objectives for the Department of the Environment are set through its management information system for Ministers—MINIS. The Department's commitment to the deregulation initiative is reflected in the aims and objectives for the relevant policy areas.

Empty Homes

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority area *(a)* the number of empty homes and *(b)* the proportion of empty homes in (i) the private sector, (ii) the local authority sector and (iii) the housing association sector. [15686]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities in England report the numbers of their own dwellings that are vacant at 1 April on their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—return. The latest figures for individual local authorities can be found in section A of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library; figures are given separately for vacant dwellings inside and outside the authority's area.

Housing associations report the numbers of their own dwellings vacant at 31 March on their annual HAR10/1 return. I have today placed in the Library a table giving the reported numbers of vacant housing association dwellings in each local authority area. The listed figures are incomplete as there are an estimated 700 vacant dwellings in England—3 per cent. of vacant dwellings—for which an analysis by district is not available.

In addition to providing information on those of their own dwellings that are vacant, local authorities are also asked to provide estimates of the number of private sector and other public sector vacant dwellings in their area on their annual HIP1 returns. The reported information for each local authority can also be found in section A of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print".

There are doubts about the quality of some of the estimates of these vacants provided by authorities. Information from the 1991 English house condition survey suggests that the England total for the private sector may be an over-estimate, and data from central Government Departments on their own vacant dwellings, for which no geographical breakdown is readily available, indicate that there is under-reporting of public sector vacant dwellings.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15628]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right. hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster earlier today.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers in his Department since May 1992. [15629]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is as follows:

Name	*Period*
Mr. Patrick Rock	Joined on 1 May 1992, left on 27 May 1993.
Mr. James Gray	Joined on 3 June 1992. Still with the Department.
Mr. Keith Adams	Joined on 28 May 1993. Still with the Department.

Housing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of newly built housing tenancies required to meet demand annually; and how this figure is calculated. [15919]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 1 February, *Official Report*, columns 685–86.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to fund housing associations in accordance with the 1992 autumn statement. [15920]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Housing Corporation funds housing associations under its approved development programme. My hon. Friend the Minister of S[illegible] for Housing announced the ADP allocations for 1995 [illegible]n 15 December 1994. Details were placed in the Library of the House. These allocations supersede those made following the 1992 autumn statement.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the housing and non-housing debt for the London boroughs of Lambeth, Hackney, Islington, Southwark, Newham, Haringey, Camden, Waltham Forest, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich; and if he will make a statement; [16346]

(2) what is the housing and non-housing debt for Birmingham, Leeds Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford and Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [16345]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave on 2 March 1995 to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East, (Mr. Congdon) *Official Report*, column 692.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the value of the housing and non-housing assets of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford and Sheffield; and if he will make a statement; [16356]

(2) what is the value of the housing and non-housing assets of the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Hackney, Islington, Southwark, Newham, Haringey, Camden, Waltham Forest, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich; and if he will make a statement. [16355]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This information is not collected by the Department.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much is owed in *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge and *(c)* council tax to the London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Southwark, Newham, Haringey, Camden, Waltham Forest, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich; and if he will make a statement; [16354]

(2) how much is owed in *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge and *(c)* council tax for Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford and Sheffield; and if he will make a statement. [16353]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on uncollected domestic rates and community charge for each local authority is not available centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publishes estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1994 are available in its "Revenue Collection Statistics 1993/94" publication, and are given in the table:

Arrears outstanding at 31 March 1994 for:

£(000)

	Domestic rates	*Community charge*	*Council tax*
Birmingham	9,615	[1]n/a	18,406
Leeds	4,061	[1]n/a	8,386
Liverpool	22,696	68,402	10,703
Manchester	[2]n/a	[2]n/a	[3]7,061
Newcastle	[2]n/a	[1]n/a	[3]4,116
Bradford	[2]n/a	[1]n/a	[3]4,378
Sheffield	4,095	24,907	7,995
Hackney	16,689	13,325	12,824
Islington	[2]n/a	[2]n/a	[3]10,270
Southwark	3,853	26,215	7,693
Newham	5,314	26,183	7,703
Haringey	5,559	35,426	10,917
Camden	55,616	21,301	8,742
Waltham Forest	9,683	20,352	7,043
Lewisham	[2]n/a	[2]n/a	[3]5,617
Tower Hamlets	8,657	7,190	2,639
Greenwich	3,953	13,735	5,055

[1] No information was published by CIPFA for these authorities at 31 March 1994. But CIPFA did publish estimates of their Community Charge arrears at 31 March 1993 and they were as in the following table.

[2] No information was published by CIPFA for these authorities and these figures are not available centrally.

[3] No information was published by CIPFA for these authorities: the figures shown are the Department's estimates on information provided in May 1994.

Community charge arrears

	£(000)
Birmingham	92,993
Leeds	37,966
Newcastle	24,005
Bradford	21,000

Housing Association Tenancies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what number of housing association tenancies were built in each year since 1988. [15918]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available figures are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for housebuilding by housing associations in England between 1988 and 1993 are in table 6.1(a) of the annual edition for 1983–93; table 7.1 shows corresponding figures for dwellings renovated. Figures for housebuilding in 1993 and 1994 were shown in table 1.2(a) of the December 1994 edition of part 1 of this publication. The figures for renovations during the first part of 1994 are shown in table 2.15 of the September 1994 edition of part 2 of this publication.

Copies of theses publications are in the Library.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for implementing Council directive 91/689/EEC on hazardous waste. [16872]

Mr. Atkins: My Department has today issued for public consultation draft special waste regulations and accompanying guidance, together with an assessment of compliance costs and a paper on charging proposals. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The existing regulations date from 1980, and set out additional controls over the most dangerous wastes designed to ensure that they are monitored and safely managed from "cradle to grave". The new proposals implement the 1991 hazardous waste directive, and the EC list of hazardous wastes adopted by the Council of Ministers in December. They also introduce other desirable changes. The key details are:

—A new definition of special waste which embraces both the EC List of hazardous waste and any other waste which is special under the current regulations. New technical guidance will be the subject of a separate consultation exercise later in the spring.

—Pre-notification to waste regulation authorities of waste movements will be simplified. Wasteholders will be able to prenotify a series of repetitive movements, and carriers will be able to prenotify collection rounds. Where movements cross authority boundaries, wasteholders need no longer notify both authorities. A redesigned consignment note should help wasteholders provide descriptions of their waste and its associated hazards so as to assist sound management.

—Fees will be payable when movements are pre-notified, as part of the policy of charging for local authority services, and in line with the "polluter pays" principle. The fees should recover authorities' supervisory costs.

—Restrictions are introduced on mixing by carriers and consignees, of different special wastes and of special with non-special wastes.

Subject to the outcome of public consultation, our aim is to introduce the new regulations and associated guidance this summer. The Government believe that the proposals will introduce a useful measure of deregulation, with no diminution of the controls which help to minimise the risk these wastes can pose to human health and the environment.

Neighbour Noise

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans are there to deal with neighbour noise. [16871]

Mr. Atkins: Inconsiderate noisy neighbours can cause extreme distress and suffering to many. My concern about the steeply rising complaints about domestic noise and the effectiveness of the current legislation to deal with these problems resulted in the formation last October of a working party to review the situation.

I am today placing in the Library of the House and publishing a consultation paper which sets out the conclusions and recommendations of the working party. The key recommendations are:

—Good practice guidance should be made available to local authorities on the management of noise services.

—Local authorities should be encouraged to provide information to residents about their authority's noise complaints service and to increase public awareness of neighbour noise issues. Government should consider supporting publicity initiatives to increase awareness of what constitutes unacceptable noise.

—Consideration should be given to issuing general guidance on the sorts of noise problems which might constitute a statutory nuisance.

—Local authorities should be encouraged to provide services which respond to complaints outside working hours wherever such services are required.

—Local authorities should be encouraged to establish streamlined local arrangements for obtaining warrants to enter domestic premises to temporarily confiscate noise-making equipment or silence intruder alarms.

—A code of good practice should be issued jointly by the professional representative bodies to police forces and local authorities to encourage effective local arrangements for dealing with noise complaints.

—A specific power of temporary confiscation of noise-making equipment—to provide a stronger legal base for existing practice—should be introduced, with the power for local authorities to levy an administration charge for its return.

—Local authorities should be encouraged to seek, where appropriate, deprivation orders for the permanent confiscation of noise-making equipment following prosecution.

—Consideration should be given to the creation of a criminal offence, separate to the statutory nuisance regime, to apply to night time neighbour noise disturbance.

The paper invites comments in particular on the options for creating a new criminal offence, including a direct noise offence based on the World Health Organisation guidelines of 35dB(A) for acceptable indoor night noise levels. Such an offence has the potential to provide a swifter remedy than the current statutory nuisance regime for some of the most disturbing neighbour noise problems.

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to all district, borough and island councils in England, Wales and Scotland, representative bodies for local authorities and the police, voluntary noise groups and a wide variety of other organisations. The consultation period lasts until 30 June.

Wherever possible, attempts should be made to resolve problems informally. However, it is vital that effective legislation is in place to deal with situations where a formal remedy is the correct course. I am grateful to the working party for producing what I believe is a worthwhile package of proposals which, if implemented, will strengthen current neighbour noise controls, improve the management of local authority noise services and improve liaison between local authorities and the police.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15622]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15558]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A reply by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, in response to a similar question today from my hon. Friend, sets out the targets across the Government. In the Home Office our targets for deregulation include the following:

Liquor licensing

Abolish the compulsory afternoon break in licensing hours on Sundays, Christmas day and Good Friday for both on-licensed and off-licensed premises and for registered clubs, and permit of-licensed sales from 10 am on these days, through the Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill;

abolition of "the long-pull offence" by the repeal of section 165 of the Licensing Act 1964;

amend the rules for special hours certificates so that discotheques and other places where public dancing takes place do not effectively have to close an hour early when the clock goes forward to British summer time in the spring.

Gambling

Issue a consultation paper on removing restrictions applying to casinos and bingo clubs;

extend the duration to three years, from one, and provide for simplified renewal procedure for bookmakers permits and betting office licences, contained in the Betting Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963;

relax existing controls over greyhound racing contained in the Betting Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963;

removal of certain restrictions on betting offices facilities under the Betting Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 concerning the supply of refreshments, displays of information and television screens;

increase the number of jackpot machines allowed in casinos, licensed bingo clubs and registered members clubs under section 31 of the Gaming Act 1968;

allow all-cash amusement-with-prizes machines in adult premises, including betting shops.

Charities

Following up proposals made by the charities and voluntary organisations task force.

Others

Abolition of the licence to kill game contained in the Game Act 1831 and 1860;

abolition of pedlars certificates by the repeal of the Pedlars Acts 1871 and 1881.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15623]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

Mr. P. Rock

Mr. D. Cameron

Miss R. Whetstone

Violent Offenders

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who are serving sentences for violent crime are former members of the armed services, with particular reference to those who were previously involved with active combative duties; and if these figures are equal in proportion with the percentage of the United kingdom non-prison population who are members of the armed services. [15764]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 27 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many prisoners who are serving sentences for violent crime are former members of the armed services, with particular reference to those who were previously involved with active combative duties; and if these figures are equal in proportion with the percentage of the United kingdom non-prison population who are members of the armed services.

I regret that the information requested is not available centrally.

Prison Escapees

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Morton Hall open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15460]

(2) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Leyhill open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15461]

(3) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Kirkham open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15462]

(4) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Askham Grange prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15463]

(5) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Drake Hall prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15464]

(6) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Spring Hill prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15465]

(7) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Ford open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15466]

(8) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from High Point open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15467]

(9) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from North Sea Camp in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15468]

(10) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Rudgate open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15469]

(11) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Standford Hill open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large; [15471]

(12) if he will collect information on how many prisoners escaped from Sudbury open prison in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994; how many have been

returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these are still at large. [15472]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 27 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking how many prisoners absconded from Askham Grange, Rudgate, Kirkham, Spring Hill, Standford Hill, High Point, Sudbury, Drake hall, Leyhill, Ford, Morton Hall and North Sea Camp prisons in each of the last three years; how many have been returned to prison; how many absconders were convicted of drug offences; and how many of these were still at large.

Information on the number of absconds and those convicted of drugs offences is shown in the attached tables, a copy of which will be placed in the Library at the House. I regret that information on the number of absconds who have been returned to prison or are still at large is not recorded centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Establishment	*Number of absconders*	*Number of absconders convicted of drug offences*
1992		
Askham Grange	39	3
Drake Hall	121	4
Ford	59	2
High Point	16	0
Kirkham	281	10
Leyhill	14	0
Morton Hall	72	0
North Sea Camp	62	0
Rudgate	91	2
Spring Hill	38	2
Standford Hill	66	4
Sudbury	106	2
1993		
Askham Grange	23	3
Drake Hall	55	3
Ford	39	2
High Point	N/A	N/A
Kirkham	349	13
Leyhill	25	0
Morton Hall	78	0
North Sea Camp	49	1
Rudgate	135	2
Spring Hill	61	1
Standford Hill	69	4
Sudbury	74	2
1994		
Askham Grange	36	5
Drake Hall	135	11
Ford	38	1
High Point	N/A	N/A
Kirkham	274	13
Leyhill	20	0
Morton Hall	51	0
North Sea Camp	56	2
Rudgate	125	0
Spring Hill	38	4
Standford Hill	85	7
Sudbury	55	2

There are no figures for Highpoint open prison for 1993 and 1994 because it closed on 18 November 1992.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications for asylum were outstanding at the date the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force; [15145]

(2) how many of the asylum applications outstanding at the date of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force were determined during the period 1 August 1993 to 31 December 1994; and of these how many were granted refugee status, how many were granted exceptional leave to remain, and how many were refused. [15146]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At the date the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force—26 July 1993—there were an estimated 42,500 applications for asylum outstanding.

During the period 1 August 1993 to 31 December 1994, 25,740 decisions were made on applications for asylum. Of these, 5,485 decisions were made on applications which were outstanding at the date the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force. Some 345 were grants of refugee status, 1,275 were grants of exceptional leave to remain and 3,865 were refusals of asylum and exceptional leave to remain.

Correspondence

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 23 February from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill concerning Mr. Levin Larkin and Mrs Marie Petit; and if he will make a statement. [16339]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State replied to the hon. Member on 24 March.

Prisoners Transfer

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to relocate prisoners convicted to terrorist offences from prisons in Great Britain to Prisons in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. [16635]

Mr. Howard: The Criminal Justice Act 1961 contains provision for prisoners sentenced to imprisonment in one United Kingdom jurisdiction to request transfer to another United Kingdom jurisdiction. Requests are considered on their individual merits against criteria announced to Parliament on 23 November 1992. There are no plans to change these provisions.

It is not possible for prisoners to transfer between United Kingdom jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland. The Republic has not joined the United Kingdom in ratifying the Council of Europe convention for the transfer of sentenced persons or otherwise sought an international agreement with the United Kingdom to provide for such transfers.

Whitemoor Prison

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the outcome of Sir David Yardley's disciplinary investigation following the escape of prisoners from Whitemoor prison on 9 December 1994. [17025]

Mr. Howard: Sir David Yardley has submitted the report of the investigation he conducted under the Prison Service code of conduct and discipline to the permanent under-secretary of state for the Home Office. He has recommended that no disciplinary charges should be laid against any individual member of staff. These recommendations have been accepted by those responsible for taking disciplinary decisions under the code. However, Sir David Yardley's report also identifies serious performance shortcomings on the part of a number of individuals in respect of whom appropriate management action will be taken. Final decisions on that action will be taken after those concerned have been given the opportunity to make representations. This action will be in addition to the extensive management action relating to staff, recommended in Sir John Woodcock's report, which is already in progress.

Refugees

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the concessionary policy which he operated until January 1994 applied to relatives other than spouses and minor children of Somali nationals with refugee status in the United Kingdom. [17026]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The terms in this concession were spelt out in a Home Office letter to interested parties dated 17 May 1990, and the relevant provisions remained unaltered throughout its lifetime. Our normal policy on family reunification for those recognised as refugees in the United Kingdom is to allow immediate reunion with spouse and minor children. When we announced the concession for Somali nationals we said that we would be willing to consider admitting others on a similar basis if they could show that they had been a dependent member of the refugee's immediate family unit before the refugee came to the United Kingdom and that there were exceptional circumstances. The concession was withdrawn in January 1994.

Prison Security

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what terms of reference or guidelines he has given to General Sir John Learmont for the inquiry he is conducting into prison security. [16571]

Mr. Howard: On 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *957–58*, I announced to the House that I was appointing General Sir John Learmont to review security throughout the Prison Service. The terms of reference for the review are:

> In the light of the report of the inquiry into the attempted escape from HM prison Whitemoor on 9 September 1994, to review physical security and security procedures in the Prison Service in England and Wales, and to make recommendations.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16575]

Mr. Howard: The Home Department's records do not contain a breakdown between press officers and paid publicity staff before 1983. There are currently 15 press officers, including the director and deputy director of information.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department has given to establishing special prisons for seriously mentally ill prisoners, staffed by personnel who are trained to deal with them. [15763]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 27 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what consideration has been given to establishing special prisons for seriously mentally ill prisoners, staffed by personnel who are trained to deal with them.

It is Government policy that mentally disordered offenders needing care and treatment should, wherever possible, receive it from the appropriate health and social services, rather than through the criminal justice system. Any prisoner suffering from a serious mental illness would be likely to fulfil the criteria for transfer to hospital set down in the Mental Health Act 1983.

Section 47 of that Act confers on the Secretary of State power to issue a warrant directing the transfer to hospital of any sentenced prisoner, if he is satisfied, by reports from two doctors, that the prisoner is suffering from mental illness, psychopathic disorder, mental impairment or severe mental impairment of a nature or degree which makes it appropriate for him/her to be detained in a hospital for medical treatment. In a case of psychopathic disorder or mental impairment, such treatment must be likely to alleviate or prevent a deterioration of the condition concerned.

Section 48 of the 1983 Act makes similar provision in respect of unsentenced and certain other categories of prisoners who are suffering from mental illness or severe mental impairment and in urgent need of treatment.

Such transfers are often to one of the three special hospitals or to NHS medium secure units.

It would be inappropriate for people in this group to be treated in prison, except on a voluntary basis pending imminent transfer. There has been a marked increase in the number of transfers from prison to hospital under sections 47 and 48 in recent years from 115 in 1983, through 206 in 1988, to 776 in 1993. At present the provisional total for 1994 is 746.

Mr. Roger Levitt

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours of community service Roger Levitt has served; and what tasks he has undertaken. [155601]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Mr. Levitt's 180-hour community service order was completed in September 1994. In his case, the unpaid work included carpentry, building work and site clearance.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Educational Broadcasts

17. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his future plans for broadcasts of educational value. [14195]

Mr. Dorrell: In our White Paper on the future of the BBC we said that the BBC should continue to broadcast educational programmes of all kinds. The Broadcasting Act 1[illegible]0 includes a number of provisions to ensure that the other terrestrial broadcasters provide educational programmes, for schools, adult education and general consumption.

Football Stadiums

18. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for further legislation to improve safety facilities in football stadiums which are already all-seater. [14196]

Mr. Sproat: None.

Cross-media Ownership

19. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to change the law on cross-media ownership. [14197]

Mr. Dorrell: The ownership rules are currently under review. I will make an announcement about the outcome once the Government have determined the way ahead.

Public Libraries

20. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met the Library Association to discuss the funding of public libraries. [14198]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend met the Library Association on 3 October last year. Discussions were wide ranging, around an agenda of topics provided by the Library Association itself. I met members of the association on 10 October, at the launch of London Libraries Week.

National Lottery

22. **Dr. Sprink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the consultation on priorities for distribution of funds from the national lottery. [14200]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department consulted on the arrangements for the distribution of national lottery proceeds to the arts, sport, the heritage and millennial projects in spring last year, when a number of representations were received from interested bodies. The National Lottery Charities Board is consulting on its funding strategy. Representations on the NLCB's consultation are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which organisations his Department has consulted since the commencement of the national lottery to discuss the impact of the lottery on charity donations and other existing fund raising schemes. [14201]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has carried out no such consultation since the commencement of the national lottery. The views of a number of charitable organisations were taken into account in the preparation of the national lottery legislation.

28. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to what extent he now calculates income from the national lottery in the first year of operation will exceed his first estimate. [14206]

Mr. Dorrell: Camelot's application for the section 5 licence to run the national lottery forecast that in the first full year of operation, to March 1996, around £750 million would be raised for the good causes. No formal forecast of the income to the national lottery distribution fund has subsequently been made, but it is widely accepted that the launch of the national lottery has been highly successful and that the proceeds to good causes have exceeded expectations. I am confident that the forecast of £750 million for good causes in the first full year of operation will be met.

British Hotels

24. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what encouragement he is giving to improve standards in the British hotel sector. [14202]

Mr. Sproat: On 1 March my Department published "Tourism—Competing with the Best" which sets out a number of measures aimed at revitalising the accommodation sector. The English tourist board has begun work to strengthen the Crown classification and grading scheme and my Department is working on a benchmarking initiative which will complement the work being done by the CBI.

Holidays

25. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to encourage more United Kingdom residents to take their holidays in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [14203]

Mr. Sproat: On 1 March my Department published "Tourism—Competing with the Best" which identifies short breaks and additional holidays in the UK as markets with particular potential for growth. The document sets out a work programme including action to improve the ease with which holidays in the UK can be booked and measures to help improve quality and value for money in the accommodation sector, which will be of benefit to all parts of the domestic market.

Hall i'th' Wood Museum

26. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will visit the Hall i'th' Wood museum when he next visits Bolton. [14204]

Mr. Dorrell: I shall bear in mind the invitation to visit Hall i'th' Wood museum for when I am next in the area.

Millennium Fund

27. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what he expects his major proposals for the use of the millennium fund to be; and if he will make a statement. [14205]

Mr. Dorrell: Decisions on the distribution of national lottery proceeds to projects which mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the new millennium will be made by the Millennium Commission on the basis of the merits of individual applications received. The commission expects to be able to make announcements about the first successful applicants in July this year.

Regional Offices

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many regional offices English Heritage has; what is the current total complement of staff employed; and if he will make a statement. [14190]

Mr. Dorrell: English Heritage has six main regional offices with a total 144 of staff and 13 sub-offices, which are bases for 34 regional technical and curatorial staff. In addition, English Heritage has 15 staff based in four regional offices administering historic properties restoration works operations. These figures exclude directly employed craftsmen and staff employed at English Heritage's historic properties.

Regional Orchestras

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what initiatives he will take to assist regional orchestras. [14199]

Mr. Dorrell: The Arts Council and the BBC are responsible for formulating policy on regional orchestras. The council has set up a new challenge fund of £450,000 for 1995–96. The fund will help secure the financial position of the regional orchestras and enhance musical provision around the country.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent discussions he has had, and with whom, about the future of Battersea power station; and if he will make a statement. [14188]

Mr. Dorrell: Discussions continue between Wandsworth council, English Heritage and the owners, Parkview International, on a master plan for the whole of the Battersea power station site. The Government are not party to the discussions, but hope that the future of this important historic building will be satisfactorily resolved with a minimum of further delay.

Chess

Mrs Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what administrative procedures are involved in the transfer of the responsibility for chess from the Department for Education to his Department;

(2) when he expects responsibility for chess to be transferred from the Department for Education to his Department.

Mr. Sproat: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education on 15 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *620*, on the current nature and extent of the Department for Education's interest in chess. I am currently considering whether it would be appropriate and practicable for my Department to take an interest in sponsoring chess.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government Reform

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary for Northern Ireland if he will list all proposals for reform of the government of Northern Ireland which have been publicly announced by the Government since 1979; and if he will place in the Library a summary of how each of these schemes of devolved government would have been financed. [14802]

Mr. Ancram: Since 1979, the Government have made the following proposals for reform of the government of Northern Ireland

The 1982 White Paper: Northern Ireland: A Framework for Devolution (Cmnd 8541 April 1982)

The Northern Ireland Act 1982

The "Frameworks for the Future" Document

A copy of the proposed financial arrangements have been placed in the Library as requested.

Publicity and Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible, for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation—-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14607]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* The detailed information requested for expenditure on all forms of publicity, publications and pamphlets within the NI Departments, the Northern Ireland Office, agencies and public bodies is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, details of publicity costs by public expenditure programme for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments are given in table 12.8 of the Northern Ireland departmental report, Cm 2816, a copy of which is available in the Library.

The information on publicity campaigns and publications costing more than £50,000 is listed in the following table.

Publicity campaign	*Nature*	*Purpose*
Drink Driving Speeding Seat Belts	Television, Radio, Newspapers and Promotional Material	Road Accident reduction through public awareness of dangers.
Help the Earth Week	Television, Radio, Newspapers and Promotional Material	Promote Energy Efficiency and impact on Environment.
Overseas Awareness Raising Programme	Promotional Material	Promote NI as investment location. IDB contact with investors.
Confidential Telephone	Television, Radio and Newspapers	Publicise the existence of the confidential telephone and to encourage usage of the system to combat terrorism.
Crime Prevention Awareness	Television and Promotional Material	Public awareness of methods to combat crime.
NIE Share Offer	Television, Newspapers and Posters	Increase Public Awareness/Interest in Share Offer.
Fire Service	Television Advertising	Fire Awareness and Prevention.

Publicity campaign	*Nature*	*Purpose*
Keep Warm, Keep Well Campaign	Television, Radio, Posters and other Promotional Material	To remind older people and carers of the need to keep warm in winter.
Agriculture in NI	(Monthly Journal)	Provide information about policy priorities and services.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations. [14507]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* A list of surveys carried out for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments by polling or public survey organisations during 1993–94 and 1994–95 has been placed in the Library.

Quality Management Initiatives

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will *(a)* list in detail the total quality management initiatives implemented by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland and *(b)* supply evidence of the success of these initiatives since their implementation. [15425]

Mr. Ancram: Initiatives introduced by the Department of Agriculture are based upon the citizens charter, including chartermark. There are early signs that these initiatives are beginning to achieve the desired results.

The Department of Agriculture, in association with local industry bodies, has been instrumental in implementing a range of quality assurance schemes. These, along with success criteria, as determined by the number of businesses and level of production covered by each, are as follows:

Initiative	*Launch Date*	*Businesses Approved*	*Quality assured Output as percentage of Total Output*
Farm QA Scheme (Beef)	April 1991	6,143	50
Farm QA Scheme (Lamb)	April 1992	2,000	27
Pig QA Scheme	October 1993	232	55

Schools

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by school *(a)* the amount in grants awarded, *(b)* the number of pupils attending each school and *(c)* the number of teachers employed at each school covered in table 4.21 of Northern Ireland expenditure plans and priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97. [15413]

Mr. Ancram: For information on pupil numbers and funding, I refer the hon. Member to the LMS budget statements for controlled and maintained schools published by the five education and library boards and to the financial statements for grant-maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools published by the Department of Education. Copies of these are available in the Library.

Information on the number of teachers employed at each school is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Agriculture Courses

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students are currently attending courses for each agricultural college *(a)* on a full-time basis and *(b)* on a part-time basis; and how many are employed at each of the colleges. [15430]

Mr. Ancram: The number of students currently attending courses at the three colleges operated by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, on a full-time and on a part-time basis, is as follows:

	Enniskillen	*Greenmount*	*Loughry*	*Total*
a) Full-time	51	315	295	661
b) Part-time	86	237	167	490

In addition, the colleges expect to deliver approximately 11,000 trainee days to people working in the Province's agri-food industry during the present academic year via short courses covering management and technical topics.

As well as providing education and training, the colleges are responsible for the Department's technology services and certain other aspects of agri-food industry development. The total number of staff engaged in providing all services are:

Enniskillen	*Greenmount*	*Loughry*	*Total*
31	146	125	302

These figures include support staff such as farm workers, cleaners, administration staff, in addition to the teaching staff and technologists.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students are currently pursuing courses at the faculty of agriculture and food science at Queen's university, Belfast at degree level and at postgraduate level; and how many of them have opted for modules within the courses which cover environmental issues. [15431]

Mr. Ancram: The number of students currently pursuing courses at the faculty of agriculture and food science, Belfast is 231 at degree level and 168 at postgraduate level.

All undergraduate students cover a range of environmental issues as integral parts of core modules within each of the degree courses. In addition, 21 undergraduate students and 30 postgraduate students are taking optional modules which specifically cover environmental issues.

European Regional Development Fund

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons there is a planned increase of £14 million in ERDF-Trade, Industry, Employment from 1995–96 to 1996–97 in Northern Ireland referred to in Northern Ireland expenditure plans and priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97, table 6.1. [1540[illegible]]

Mr. Ancram: The 1996–97 forecast represents the anticipated level of ERDF receipts based on the expenditure proposals submitted by Government to the European Commission in November 1993, in connection with the 1994 to 1999 round of European structural funds assistance. These figures have already been revised in our 1995 public expenditure plans to reflect the contents of the Northern Ireland single programme document, which was agreed with the European Commission on 29 July 1994.

Agriculture and Fishing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will describe the two schemes which provide grants for investments within agriculture and the fishing industry, as mentioned in Northern Ireland expenditure plans and priorities 1994–95 to 1996–97, section 5.21; and if he will give a breakdown of the 15 agricultural projects within which received aid from these schemes in 1993 and of the 11 projects within the fishing sector which received aid from these schemes. [15429]

Mr. Ancram: Grants for processing and marketing of agricultural products are made under European Commission Regulation No. 866/90, which is designed to improve the agricultural processing and marketing infrastructure in member states. Aid is given towards the cost of capital investments—new and refurbished buildings and new equipment. In Northern Ireland, the scheme provides grants at the rate of 35 per cent. of eligible expenditure, up to a limit of £1 million. The minimum eligible project size is £70,000 eligible costs.

The 15 projects awarded grants in 1993 are in the following list.

Beneficiary	*Project description*	£ *Amount of award*
Etherson Meats Ballymoney	Extensions and alterations to existing factory premises	104,505
Castlewood Farm Products Belfast	Refurbishment of new premises	286,171
Fred C. Robinson Ballyclare	Construction of chill, curing and processing facilities and purchasing of additional plant	470,882
Wm Sprott Ltd. Portadown	Rationalisation and upgrading of processing capabilities	460,243
Unipork Holdings Cookstown	Rationalisation of group killing and chilling facilities	900,000
Townsend Meats Cullybackey	Construction of new meat processing plant designed to conform to latest EC requirements	169,837
Lean and Easy Limavady	Processing and marketing of boneless lamb products	26,477
S and M Meats Castlewellan	Establishment of EC—approved meat processing plant	148,533
Fermanagh Creameries Lisnaskea	To increase competitiveness and expand production of speciality cheeses	379,400
Robert Clarke Ltd. Keady	Installation of egg grader and factory refurbishment	297,277
G. Bell and Sons Crossgar	Integrated cutting premises for poultry meat	112,174
North Down Grain Ltd. Ballywalter	Extension of cereal, oilseed and pulses drying, processing and storage facilities	86,792
J. J. Quinn Dungannon	Construction of new cold storage facilities	102,988
Pippin Foods Ltd. Portadown	Expansion of existing facilities; new plant and equipment	251,306
Kelly Flowers Ltd. Lisburn	Construction of a temperature-controlled flower and plant packaging and presentation unit	49,622

Grants to improve the processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products are made under European Council Regulation No. 4042/89. Like the agricultural scheme, aid is given toward the cost of capital investments—new and refurbished buildings and new equipment. In Northern Ireland, the scheme provides grants at the rate of up to 35 per cent. of eligible expenditure up to a limit of £900,000. Total project costs must not be less than £25,000 and not more than £6 million.

The 11 fisheries projects awarded grant in 1993 are in the following list.

Beneficiary	*Project description*	£ *Amount of award*
Quibros Exports	Provision of facilities for processing and packing of fresh and frozen fish at Cookstown, Co Tyrone	59,649
Newport Fish Co Ltd.	Expansion of existing processing facilities at Cookstown, Co Tyrone	38,354
Goldfish Ltd.	Improvements to processing facilities at Belfast	30,940

		£
Beneficiary	*Project description*	*Amount of award*
C and O Milligan	The modernisation and extension of fish processing facilities at Ardglass, Co Down	201,254
Byrne Fish	The construction of a new fish processing factory designed to conform to the latest EC regulations at Ballyhornan, Co Down	72,456
Middleton Seafoods	Modernisation of factory to increase efficiency and marketing opportunities and improve hygiene standards at Portavogie, Co Down	69,338
T H Nicholson	The construction of a new fish processing factory designed to conform to EC standards at Kilkeel, Co Down68,733	
J W Cochrane	Modernisation, refurbishment and extension of fish processing factory to bring about compliance with forthcoming EC legislation at Ardglass, Co Down	148,511
Kilkeep Kippering	The modernisation, upgrading and refurbishment of fish processing facilities to conform to the latest EC standards at Kilkeel, Co Down	79,946
George Milligan	Upgrading of processing facilities at Ardglass, Co Down	194,250
Kenneth Kennedy	New fish processing factory at Ardglass, Co Down	279,088

Farming Community (Suicides)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many suicides there have been in the Northern Irish farming community in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [14259]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* Deaths in the farming community caused by suicide are a cause for concern.

The number of deaths registered as suicides in relation to farmers and farm labourers in Northern Ireland in the five year period to 1993 are set out in the table. Deaths are recorded according to date of registration and not by date of occurrence.

1989: 2
1990: 3
1991: 8
1992: 3
1993: 10
1994: 6 (to September)

Specialist Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15616]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15616]

Mr. Ancram: Yes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland ensures that Northern Ireland Ministers seek to further the aims and objectives of the deregulation initiative in the areas for which they are responsible.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I appointed Mr. Jonathan Caine as my special adviser in June 1992.

Irish Language

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new plans he has to increase the numbers of parents who can choose Irish language tuition as a second language at all Irish schools. [16634]

Mr. Ancram: None. At present, any school may offer a course in the language, and pupils may choose Irish to fulfil their modern language requirements as part of the compulsory curriculum at post-primary level.

Most of the schools which currently offer Irish as part of their language studies provision have a tradition of doing so. However, as with any other course, schools planning to provide Irish will take into account factors such as demand for it from parents and pupils, the availability of qualified teachers and space for it within the timetable.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if all inspectors responsible for reporting in all Irish schools are fluent Irish speakers; and if he will make a statement. [16633]

Mr. Ancram: Generally, members of inspection teams who report on Irish medium schools are fluent in, or have a good working knowledge of, Irish.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made recently of the adequacy of the resources available for second language teaching of Irish in all schools and for teaching Irish in all Irish schools. [16636]

Mr. Ancram: It is a matter for individual schools within their delegated budgets to decide what resources they should devote to any aspect of the curriculum—including Irish. In addition to mainstream budgets, the Department of Education also makes available a grant of some £40,000 per annum to assist the Irish medium schools with production of curricular materials. The teaching of Irish in schools is assessed by the inspectorate on the same basis as any other subject.

Mr. Gerry Adams

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Mr. Gerry Adams is or has been in receipt of income support or any other social security benefit. [16367]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Toby Jessel, dated 23 March 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent question about Mr. Gerry Adams.

I should first explain that information on a person's entitlement to social security benefits, including whether or not they are claiming or getting benefit, is confidential. I am therefore unable to comment on individual cases. However, I can assure you that all claims to benefit are assessed and regularly reviewed by independent adjudication officers, strictly in accordance with social security law and payment is made only where there is a valid entitlement.

I hope this letter sets out the position for you.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies supervised by his Department have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration for this year and each of the past five years, in each case specifying what percentage of the respective total work force these employees constitute.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* The information has been placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sugar Beet

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in rank order the acreage under sugar beet in *(a)* each county and *(b)* each region. [15501]

Mr. Jack: The information requested has been compiled from the June 1994 agricultural census of England and Wales and is as follows:

June 1994 Agricultural Census Sugar Beet Coverage

County	*Area* *Hectares*	*Acres*
Norfolk	57,012.2	140,877.1
Lincolnshire	33,600.0	83,025.6
Suffolk	22,974.3	56,769.5
Cambridgeshire	22,878.4	56,532.5
Shropshire	10,103.8	24,966.5
Humberside	9,439.2	23,324.3
Nottinghamshire	8,281.1	20,462.6
North Yorkshire (Northallerton)	7,918.1	19,565.6
North Yorkshire (Beverley)	4,538.6	11,214.9
Hereford and Worcester	4,486.3	11,085.6
Essex	4,219.9	10,427.4
Staffordshire	2,335.6	5,771.3
South Yorkshire	1,770.1	4,373.9
Leicestershire	920.0	2,273.3
Bedfordshire	482.3	1,191.8
Northamptonshire	417.7	1,032.1
Somerset	411.5	1,016.8
West Yorkshire	405.2	1,001.2
Lancashire	337.5	834.0
Derbyshire	304.2	751.7
Merseyside	223.6	552.5
West Midlands	170.7	421.8
Hertfordshire	168.1	415.4
Cheshire	160.5	396.6
Gloucestershire	149.0	368.2
Warwickshire	148.1	366.0
Cornwall	142.4	351.9
Oxfordshire	120.1	296.8
Wiltshire	117.1	289.4
Clwyd	66.3	163.8
Dorset	63.2	156.2
Devon	52.5	129.7
Greater Manchester	41.0	101.3
Powys	17.4	43.0
Buckinghamshire	10.0	24.7
Dyfed	8.1	20.0
Gwynedd	5.3	13.1
South Glamorgan	3.3	8.2
Hampshire	1.0	2.5
Kent	0.4	1.0
Avon	0.0	0.0
Berkshire	0.0	0.0
Cleveland	0.0	0.0
Cumbria	0.0	0.0
Durham	0.0	0.0
East Sussex	0.0	0.0
Greater London (E)	0.0	0.0
Greater London (SE)	0.0	0.0
Gwent	0.0	0.0
Isle of Wight	0.0	0.0
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0
Mid Glamorgan	0.0	0.0
Northumberland	0.0	0.0
Surrey	0.0	0.0
Tyne and Wear	0.0	0.0
West Glamorgan	0.0	0.0
West Sussex	0.0	0.0
England	194,403.7	480,371.5
Wales	100.4	248.1
England and Wales	194,504.1	480.619.6

June 1994 Agricultural Census Sugar Beet Coverage (by Region)

Counties within Regions	*Area* *Hectares*	*Acres*
Cambridgeshire	22,878.4	56,532.5
Norfolk	57,012.2	140,877.1
Suffolk	22,974.3	56,769.5
East Anglia Region	102,864.9	254,179.2
Derbyshire	304.2	751.7

June 1994 Agricultural Census Sugar Beet Coverage (by Region)

Counties within Regions	*Area Hectares*	*Acres*
Leicestershire	920.0	2,273.3
Lincolnshire	33,600.0	83,025.6
Northamptonshire	417.7	1032.1
Nottinghamshire	8,281.1	20,462.6
East Midlands Region	43,523	107,545.3
Humberside	9,439.2	23,324.3
North Yorkshire (Beverley)	4,538.6	11,214.9
North Yorkshire (N'allerton)	7,918.1	19,565.6
South Yorkshire	1,770.1	4,373.9
West Yorkshire	405.2	1,001.2
Yorkshire/Humberside	24,071.2	59,479.9
Hereford and Worcester	4,486.3	11,085.6
Shropshire	10,103.8	24,966.5
Staffordshire	2,335.6	5,771.3
Warwickshire	148.1	366.0
West Midlands	170.7	421.8
West Midlands Region	17,244.5	42,611.2
Bedfordshire	482.3	1,191.8
Berkshire	0.0	0.0
Buckinghamshire	10.0	24.7
East Sussex	0.0	0.0
Essex	4,219.9	10,427.4
Greater London (E)	0.0	0.0
Greater London (SE)	0.0	0.0
Hampshire	1.0	2.5
Hertfordshire	168.1	415.4
Isle of Wight	0.0	0.0
Kent	0.4	1.0
Oxfordshire	120.1	296.8
Surrey	0.0	0.0
West Sussex	0.0	0.0
South East Region	5,001.8	12,359.4
Avon	0.0	0.0
Cornwall	142.4	351.9
Devon	52.5	129.7
Dorset	63.2	156.2
Gloucestershire	149.0	368.2
Isles of Scilly	0.0	0.0
Somerset	411.5	1,016.8
Wiltshire	117.1	289.4
South West Region	935.7	2,312.1
Cheshire	160.5	396.6
Lancashire	337.5	834.0
Merseyside	223.6	552.5
Greater Manchester	41.0	101.3
North West Region	762.6	1,884.4
Clwyd	66.3	163.8
Dyfed	8.1	20.0
Gwent	0.0	0.0
Gwynedd	5.3	13.1
Mid Glamorgan	0.0	0.0
Powys	17.4	43.0
South Glamorgan	3.3	8.2
West Glamorgan	0.0	0.0
Wales	100.4	248.1
Cleveland	0.0	0.0
Cumbria	0.0	0.0
Durham	0.0	0.0
Northumberland	0.0	0.0
Tyne and Wear	0.0	0.0
North Region	0.0	0.0

Notes:

1. County totals in acres may not add up to regional totals, this is due to rounding to 1 decimal place.

2. This data relates to main holdings only—minor holdings excluded.

Lindane

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if lindane or gamma hexachlorocyclohexane is used in agricultural production, with particular reference to crop spraying, and if he will make a statement. [15500]

Mrs. Browning: Lindane is approved for use on a number of crops. The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides is currently reviewing the agricultural uses of lindane. I expect the committee to report its conclusions later this year.

Farm and Food Prices

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by how much *(a)* farm prices and *(b)* food prices have increased in the United Kingdom since September 1993. [15822]

Mr. Jack: The index of producer prices of agricultural products increased by 8.6 per cent. between September 1993 and January 1995. Over the same period, the retail prices index for food increased by 2.4 per cent.

Common Agricultural Policies

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total budget of the common agricultural policy in each year since 1973; what proportion of the EC's total budget this accounts for; and what proportion of the common agricultural policy was allocated to the United Kingdom. [15790]

Mr. Jack: For the years 1973 to 1992, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 March 1994, *Official Report*; column *275*. The information in respect of 1993 and 1994 is as follows:

	Total CAP expenditure (EAGGF Guarantee) (mecu)	*As percentage of total EC expenditure*	*Total UK receipts as percentage of total EC CAP expenditure*
1993	35,088	55	8.2
1994	32,924	50	8.5

Sources:

1993 annual financial report of the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund and Commission working doc. VI/72/94—15.12.94

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest figure for *(a)* the total value of moneys illegally abstracted from the common agricultural policy's export refund and price support schemes and *(b)* how much the common agricultural policy has lost through the evasion of customs duties and farm levies; and if he will estimate the proportion of defrauded funds that are recouped. [15794]

Mr. Jack: The information is in table 2, page 40, of the Commission report titled "Protection of the Community's Financial Interests: The Fight Against Fraud—1993 Annual Report", which was published on 23 March 1994. A copy was placed in the library.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the proportion of common agricultural policy spending that does not go to farmers but is *(a)* paid to middlemen who store unwanted surplus food and *(b)* is used to subsidise this surplus for export onto world markets. [15795]

Mr. Jack: Information on EC expenditure up to 1993 on intervention storage and on export refunds in contained in annexe 9 and annexe 5, respectively, of the annual financial reports of the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund. These have been deposited in the Library of the House of Commons. For 1994, intervention storage accounted for 3.4 per cent. of total expenditure, and export refunds for 24.8 per cent. The corresponding figures for 1995, based on the draft supplementary and amending budget, are 3.5 per cent. and 19.6 per cent. respectively.

Cereal Farmers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cereal farmers in the United Kingdom last year received cash benefits in excess of £40,000 from the common agricultural policy; and what proportion received these benefits without growing anything. [15793]

Mr. Jack: Statistics on the distribution of payments under the arable area payments scheme are not yet available as the final oilseed payments are still being made. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures that he has requested are available.

EC Fresh Meat Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each member of the European Community the domestic legislation equivalent to the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992. [15640]

Mrs. Browning: I am placing the information in the Library.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15638]

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15554]

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15572]

Mr. Jack: One of the principal aims of the Department is to work to reduce regulatory and administrative burdens on business. Each Minister has to pursue this objective in the policy areas for which they are responsible. My noble Friend the Earl Howe has particular responsibility for promoting deregulation in the Department.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15639]

Mr. Waldegrave: Since May 1992, the following political advisers have been appointed to my Department:

	Dates
Mr. Keith Adams	April 1992 to May 1993
Dr. Elizabeth Cotterell	May 1993 to July 1994
Mr. David Rutley	July 1994 to date

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of BSE cases in cattle born in each year since 1979. [15907]

Mrs. Browning: The following is a table which gives the contribution of BSE cases by year of birth. The data includes only cases with known dates of birth, cases with estimated dates of birth are therefore excluded.

Year	*Number of cases*
1980	102
1981	256
1982	1,381
1983	4,446
1984	7,994
1985	10,856
1986	19,122
1987	34,640
1988	19,494
1989	6,859
1990	1,070
1991	22

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the proportion of cattle and BSE has changed by age, and if this follows his Department's projections. [15908]

Mrs. Browning: The table shows the age specific incidence of confirmed cases of BSE in herds with homebred cases. The figures are in line with the Government's projections, and clearly show the impact of the action taken to prevent recycling of infection through feed. The increasing incidence in animals six years of age and older is as expected as these were predominantly born before July 1988.

Age specific incidences of confirmed cases of BSE herds with homebred cases

	BSE affected herds: cases with a clinical onset in 1990			*BSE affected herds: cases with a clinical onset in 1991*			
Age years	*Numbers of animals at risk*	*Number of cases of BSE*	*Incidence (per cent.)*	*Numbers of Animals at risk*	*Number of cases of BSE*	*Incidence (per cent.)*	*Range of dates of birth*
1	0	0	0.00	0	0	0.00	
2	35,137	24	0.07	48,575	11	0.02	Born after 18 July 1988
3	65,317	863	1.32	90,284	1,687	1.87	
4	57,444	2,265	3.94	79,769	4,601	5.77	
5	48,888	1,696	3.47	67,138	2,641	3.93	[2]2 January 1988 —30 December 1989
6	39,497	785	1.99	53,589	1,065	1.99	2 January 1987 —30 December 1988
7	29,681	207	0.70	40,406	362	0.90	Born before 18 July 1988
8	21,004	40	0.19	28,565	99	0.35	
9	13,516	11	0.08	18,917	27	0.14	
10	7,826	4	0.05	11,288	8	0.07	
11	4,337	2	0.05	6,157	2	0.03	
12	3,247	2	0.06	4,602	2	0.04	

	BSE affected herds: cases with a clinical onset in 1992			*BSE affected herds: cases with a clinical onset in 1993*			
Age years	*Numbers of animals at risk*	*Number of cases of BSE*	*Incidence (per cent.)*	*Numbers of Animals at risk*	*Number of cases of BSE*	*Incidence (per cent.)*	*Range of dates of birth*
1	0	0	0.00	0	0	0.00	
2	56,705	12	0.02	53,051	8	0.02	Born after 18 July 1988
3	104,919	686	0.65	97,325	436	0.45	
4	92,327	6,178	6.69	84,494	2,781	3.29	
5	77,656	5,095	6.56	70,730	5,762	8.15	[2]2 January 1988 —30 December 1989
6	61,481	1,719	2.80	55,862	2,806	5.02	2 January 1987 —30 December 1988
7	45,971	474	1.03	41,530	694	1.67	Born before 18 July 1988
8	32,340	195	0.60	29,132	211	0.72	
9	21,137	60	0.28	18,986	80	0.42	
10	12,489	10	0.08	11,212	39	0.35	
11	6,733	4	0.06	6,273	10	0.16	
12	5,582	5	0.09	4,992	3	0.06	

	BSE affected herds: cases with a clinical onset in 1994[1]			
Age years	*Number of Animals at risk*	*Number of cases of BSE*	*Incidence per cent.*	*Range of dates of birth*
1	0	0	0.00	
2	36,825	1	0.00	Born after 18 July 1988
3	68,093	125	0.18	
4	58,425	1,271	2.18	
5	48,184	1,996	4.14	[2]2 January 1988–30 December 1989
6	37,933	2,177	5.74	2 January 1987–30 December 1988
7	27,646	719	2.60	Born before 18 July 1988
8	19,561	199	1.02	
9	13,076	61	0.47	
10	7,707	37	0.48	
11	4,265	11	0.26	
12	3,464	4	0.12	

[1] Herds with cases accumulateed by 5 January 1995.

[2] Partly influenced by feed ban.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the peak age of BSE detection in cattle born after the feed ban. [15909]

Mrs. Browning: The peak age of onset of BSE in cattle born after the ban is four years of age.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has to show the likelihood of a herd with a BSE case in one year developing another case the year after compared with herds unaffected by BSE. [15910]

Mrs. Browning: In 1993 17,201 herds had one or more cases of BSE confirmed of which 8,102 of these herds also had one or more cases confirmed in 1994. The likelihood of a herd with a BSE case one year developing another case the year after was therefore less than 50 per cent.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of *(a)* reported and *(b)* confirmed BSE cases by age group for 1994. [15911]

Mrs. Browning: The distribution of cases restricted and subsequently confirmed, by age at clinical onset is:

Age	*Reported*	*Confirmed*
0–1	3	0
1–2	43	0
2–3	274	12
3–4	984	429
4–5	4,256	3,502
5–6	7,093	6,150
6–7	9,922	8,418
7–8	3,946	3,030
8–9	1,188	799
9–10	485	274
10–11	238	126
11–12	105	44
12–13	52	11
13–14	27	6
14–15	15	2
15–16	1	0
16–17	3	1
17–18	0	0
18–19	1	0

The data include only cases with known dates of birth, cases with estimated dates are therefore excluded.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of British cattle, by age group, were tested for BSE in 1994; and what proportion of each herd were tested in 1994 for BSE. [15912]

Mrs. Browning: No cattle were tested for BSE in 1994. No test is yet available to identify BSE in the live animal.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of reported cases of BSE, the number of reported cases tested and the number of cases confirmed for each month from June 1988. [15913]

Mrs. Browning: It is not possible without incurring disproportionate costs to detail the number of reported cases of BSE and the number of confirmed cases of BSE for each month from June 1988. Information on the number of suspect cases reported and placed under restriction each week since the disease was made notifiable until 28 September 1994 is, however, contained in table 2 of the Government's latest BSE progress report.

No reported cases were tested during this period as no test is yet available to detect BSE in the live animal.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of compensation per bovine reported with BSE for each year since 1988. [15923]

Mrs. Browning: BSE compensation is not paid in respect of bovines reported with BSE. Compensation is paid in respect of animals suspected of being infected with BSE and which are compulsorily slaughtered under the Animal Health Act 1981 which requires the Government to compensate farmers for animals slaughtered at their behest.

It is not possible, without incurring disproportionate costs, to provide the level of compensation for each BSE suspect compulsorily slaughtered. However, the total amount of compensation paid in respect of BSE suspects slaughtered since 1988 is:

1988: £527,142
1989: £2,826,788
1990: £9,030,752
1991: £15,741,463
1992: £28,205,613
1993: £36,290,273
1994: £22,546,902

When a BSE suspect is compulsorily slaughtered the amount payable is an amount equal to the lower of either the market value of the animal or the appropriate monthly indicative market price.

The figures given do not include ex-gratia payments.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of herds, in each year since 1988, had reported cases of BSE in cattle aged *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* three, *(d)* four and *(e)* five years. [15925]

Mrs. Browning: It is not possible without incurring disproportionate costs to detail the percentage of herds in each year since 1988 which had reported cases of BSE in cattle aged one to five.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evaluation he has made of the incidence of BSE in siblings of infected cattle compared with siblings of uninfected cattle. [15915]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *142*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has to identify BSE occurrence in cattle exported from the United Kingdom to Portugal. [15915]

Mrs. Browning: Portugal has reported six cases of BSE in cattle imported from the United Kingdom. Most of the Portuguese cases were born in that country.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of BSE cases in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, and *(c)* 1994; and what were his Department's projections for this period. [15916]

Mrs. Browning: Of the cases reported and placed under restriction in the calendar years 1992 and 1993, 36,680 and 34,371 cases respectively were confirmed. So far for 1994, 23,661 cases of BSE have been confirmed; there are, however, still some cases outstanding.

We do not make projections on the likely number of confirmed BSE cases. Projections are, however, made, for financial purposes only, on the number of BSE suspects that are likely to be slaughtered. The projections made for the financial years in question are:

Financial year	Estimated slaughterings	Actually placed under restriction	Of which slaughtered	Of which confirmed
1992–93	37,889	45,569	43,814	37,115
1993–94	40,000	40,501	38,589	32,050
1994–95	33,475	[1]25,119	[1]24,024	[1]17,586

[1] As at 23 March 1995. There will be further cases in all categories.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what comparisons his Department has made between the tissue distribution of spongiform encephalopathy in cattle and spongiform encephalopathy in sheep. [15922]

Mrs. Browning: The comparative distribution of infectivity in the tissues of cattle with BSE and sheep with scrapie is covered in detail in chapter 5, and specifically in table 5.2, of the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee's September 1994 report "Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies—A Summary of Present Knowledge and Research", HMSO London, ISBN 011 242 9874. A copy of this report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his projection for the number of cattle detected with BSE at age five years in 1997. [15924]

Mrs. Browning: Estimates of the future number of cases are made for submission to the public expenditure survey to secure the necessary budget for compensation payments and the incineration of carcases. It is not possible to predict the occurrence of cases in birth cohorts which have not yet been affected, or to produce precise estimates of the details of future cases born in years such as 1991 for which there have been only a small number of cases. However, because BSE has already been confirmed in some animals born in 1991, it is likely that more 1991 born animals will succumb at five years of age during 1997.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the in-herd BSE rate and the national rate; and if he will make a statement. [15926]

Mrs. Browning: The national rate of BSE compared with the in-herd rate since 1988 is:

Year	National Percentage	Within herd Percentage
1988	0.08	1.78
1989	0.18	1.91
1990	0.35	2.16
1991	0.63	2.44
1992	0.92	2.72
1993	0.86	2.43
1994	0.59	2.05

Figures are not available for years prior to 1988.

The decline in incidence since 1993 reflects the effect the ruminant feed ban is having on the BSE epidemic. The absence of a rise in the in-herd incidence is a further indicator that horizontal transmission is not playing a significant role in the epidemic.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what comparison he has made of the incidence of *(a)* scrapie information in sheep and *(b)* BSE in cattle between 1979 and 1994. [15928]

Mrs. Browning: None. There is no direct link between scrapie infection in sheep and BSE in cattle.

BSE and scrapie were made notifiable in 1988 and 1993 respectively. Prior to this date, data on the incidences of these diseases were either not available or incomplete and cannot therefore be compared. By the time scrapie was made notifiable in 1993, the incidence of BSE was declining in response to the ruminant food ban which also applies to sheep. Any comparison of the subsequent incidences of the disease is, therefore, meaningless.

Epidemiological investigations into BSE did take into account the presence or absence of sheep on the farm, and indeed whether scrapie was present in any sheep flocks with which cattle came into contact either directly or indirectly. There was no evidence of a direct association between scrapie in sheep and BSE in cattle on the same farm.

Ruminant Protein Feed Ban

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has to quantify the amount of food banned to cattle which was previously fed to sheep. [15927]

Mrs. Browning: The ruminant protein feed ban prohibited the use of both bovine and ovine protein in feeds intended for bovines, ovines and other ruminants at the same time. The Government have no data on the amount of ant protein fed to sheep prior to the introduction of the ban. However, the industry has estimated that the amount of concentrated feed containing ruminant protein which was fed to sheep prior to the ban was in the region of 410,000 tonnes per annum. Meat and bone meal was included far less frequently in sheep rations than in feed intended for cattle.

MV Caroline

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what time the MV Caroline arrived at Brightlingsea port on 3 March; what time it docked and what time it was due to dock; what happened to the livestock whilst they were waiting for the MV Caroline to dock; if the animals were unloaded from the lorries, fed watered and rested in this period; if the 15-hour journey rule was adhered to; and if he will make a statement. [16002]

Mrs. Browning: On 3 March, the Caroline berthed at Brighlingsea at 23.10 hours. The animals—four truckloads of sheep and one of calves—had been conveyed to the port earlier because the police had been informed, incorrectly as it turned out, that the vessel would arrive on the previous tide.

The animals could not be returned to lairage, as the police could not guarantee safe passage through the crowd of protesters. Feeding of the lorryload of calves was successfully accomplished on the lorry. The attempt was made to unload the four truckloads of sheep, truck by truck, into a bunker area where they could be offered hay and water. However, this attempt had to be abandoned after reloading of the first lorry—completed at 19.30—because of the severe stress being caused to the sheep by their proximity to the noisy crowd of protesters who had broken through the outer gate.

The sheep were loaded into pens on board the Caroline, where hay and water was immediately available to them, between 23.45 and 01.20 hours. The 15-hour period since they had previously been fed and watered expired at 22.00 hours.

DEFENCE

Disposal Sales Agency

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1197*, if he will make a statement on the progress of the Disposal Sales Agency towards the meeting of its targets. [15810]

Mr. Freeman: The Disposal Sales Agency is progressing well in meeting its targets. The agency's achievements will be published in its 1994–95 annual report, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the publications produced by his Department or the Disposal Sales Agency to assist in the sale of surplus equipment; and if he will place a copy of these in the Library. [15785]

Mr. Freeman: Brochures for specific items, usually describing a particular ship, produced by the Disposal Sales Agency are classified and cannot, therefore, be placed in the Library. General brochures, which publicise the availability of various commodities coming up for sale in the near future, are unclassified; I will be arranging for copies of these to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the number and location of staff serving the Disposal Sales Agency; if he will give the staff budget for the current financial year; and if he will express the staff costs as a percentage of the operating costs. [15807]

Mr. Freeman: At the end of financial year 1994–95, the number of staff serving in the Disposal Sales Agency will be 65 in the UK and 30 in Germany. The sales function in Germany has recently been contractorised, and staff numbers will reduce to 12 by 30 September 1995.

The staff budget for the current financial year is £2.94 million; staff costs amount to 50 per cent. of the operating costs.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were *(a)* the costs expended and *(b)* the receipts accrued by the Disposal Sales Agency from the start of the 1994 financial year to the last month for which figures are available. [15783]

Mr. Freeman: The answers are:

Costs expended 1 April 1994 to 28 March 1995: £3.3 million

Receipts accrued 1 April 1998 to 28 February 1995: £63.5 million

Surplus Equipment Sales

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the procedures for the sale of surplus Ministry of Defence equipment through auctioneers, term contractors and joint venture partners; and if he will give a statement. [15809]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, report 557—"Disposal by Sale of Defence Surplus Equipment and Stores", and to the minutes of evidence taken before the Committee of Public Accounts on 26 January 1994.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list, by volume and type, the surplus *(a)* furniture or household items, *(b)* clothing, *(c)* plant, machinery or tools, *(d)* electrical goods, *(e)* electronic goods, *(f)* computer equipment, *(g)* ships, *(h)* aircraft, *(i)* tanks and *(j)* vehicles sold to preservation groups in the last year for which information is available; if he will identify the groups involved; and if he will give the total receipts for each category of item; [15805]

(2) if he will list, by volume and type, the surplus *(a)* furniture or household items, *(b)* clothing, *(c)* plant, machinery or tools, *(d)* electrical goods, *(e)* electronic goods, *(f)* computer equipment, *(g)* ships, *(h)* aircraft, *(i)* tanks, *(j)* vehicles and *(k)* other items sold to commercial companies in the last year for which information is available; if he will identify the companies involved; and if he will give the total receipts for each category of item; [15804]

(3) if he will list, by volume and type, the surplus *(a)* furniture or household items, *(b)* clothing, *(c)* plant, machinery or tools, *(d)* electrical goods, *(e)* electronic goods, *(f)* computer equipment, *(g)* ships, *(h)* aircraft, *(i)* tanks, *(j)* vehicles and *(k)* other items sold to private individuals in the last year for which information is available; if he will identify the companies involved; and if he will give the total receipts for each category of item. [15806]

Mr. Freeman: The Disposal Sales Agency currently has around 4,000 interested parties on its trades lists, covering 51 main commodity ranges further segmented into commodity types. In addition, several thousand customers attend auction sales throughout the country where approximately 40,000 lots are sold annually.

To break this information down by volume and type, to identify the purchasers and to give total receipts for each category of item would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the auctioneers, term contractors and joint venture partners currently involved in the sale of surplus Ministry of Defence equipment. [15808]

Mr. Freeman: The list is as follows:

Miscellaneous Auctioneers
Midland Marts
Harrison and Hetherington Ltd.
Russell Baldwin and Bright
Fuller Peiser Ltd. (from 1 April 1995)
Edward Symonds and Partners (from 1 April 1995)
John Law
Phillips
Sothebys
Savills Walker Walton Hanson (from 1 April 1995)

Vehicle Auctioneers
ADT Ltd.
Central Motor Auctions
Hartfield Auctions
Term Contractors
William Tracey
M. Hanratty
J. Graham

Birds Commercial Metal
J. Wells and Son
Wisbech Metal
Stone Bros.
N. Spurr
Bridge Supply
J. Hurst and Sons
J. W. Ransome
A. V. Smith
Southern Industrial
Thomas Muir
Mountelm
Fordpad
G and P Batteries
Reliance Scrap
James Rollason
M. R. J. Phillips
Hanningfield Metals
Barnstable Metals
Kirton Motor Spares
G and I Dargie
F. Watson and Sons
Skipbridge Processors
S. Calvert and Sons
Robert Gibbs
Pounds Marine
Geo Johnson
Henderson Kerr
Clonteen Ltd.
L. C. Hughes
Sheppard Group
J. K. Miller
James W. Cory
Silver Lining Industries Ltd.
Silvo Chem Ltd.
D. Charlett
Tenrich Tyres
Mr. Cook
Woods Tyres
Tyre Depot (Sandy)
D. McFarlane and Sons
Dundee Tyres
Western Tyres
Creigiau Tyres
Associated Fuels Ltd.
Hunting Secon Ltd.
Waste Oil Ltd.
Ailsa Industrial Svcs Ltd.
Norver Paints Ltd.
Boots (Northern Ireland)
Avesta Sheffield

Joint Venture Partners
Leafield Logistics and Technical Services
Military Aircraft Spares
Royal Ordnance plc
Hall and Watts
MSI Defence Systems Ltd.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by type and number, the items of surplus Ministry of Defence equipment held for *(a)* two years, *(b)* five years and *(c)* 10 years awaiting sale. [15784]

Mr. Freeman: The answer is as follows.

Items held for two years
1 Destroyer
2 Frigates
76 120mm Wombats
32 105mm Howitzers
46 Phantom Spey Engines

Items held for five years
Nil

Items held for 10 years
Nil

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage share of the world market for surplus military equipment enjoyed by the United Kingdom; and if he will publish a table showing, in order, the top 10 nations that export surplus military equipment. [15812]

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom enjoyed a 4 per cent. share of the world market for surplus military equipment over the five years 1990–94.

Top ten exports of surplus military equipment

1990–94	*Percentage*
United States	61
Germany	12
United Kingdom	4
Netherlands	4
Iran	2
Bulgaria	2
Moldavia	1
Romania	1
North Korea	1
Qatar	1
Others	11

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *285–86*, if he will list the location of overseas staff employed by the Defence Export Services Organisation; if he will list the number employed in each country; what is the total annual cost of keeping staff overseas; and if he will make a statement. [15786]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Staff numbers*	*Estimated cost 1994–95 £'000*
Riyadh	2	138
Kuwait	3	102
New Delhi	6	86
Kuala Lumpur	5	197
Seoul	3	110
Canberra	2	88
Jakarta	3	167
Bangkok	3	101
Ankara	2	78

In addition, there are 54 Disposal Sales Agency staff based in Germany, whose costs are not separately identified from UK-based DSA staff, and 83 project management staff whose costs are paid by the overseas customer on whose behalf the project management work is undertaken.

Army Base Repair Organisation Ashford

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the future of ABRO, Ashford; and if he will make a statement. [15756]

Mr. Freeman: The decision on the future of support from ABRO facilities has been delayed due to the complex nature of the issue it raises and to allow for a very full consultation process. I hope to announce a decision shortly.

Specialist Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15634]

Mr. Soames: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules and conduct as other civil servants, with certain limited exceptions. They have facilities appropriate to their duties.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15635]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given below:

Perry Miller (already in post May 1992)
Crispin Blunt (appointed February 1993)

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15562]

Mr. Freeman: The MOD does not have any targets for withdrawing regulations because it is not a regulator of business or responsible for any primary or secondary legislation under which regulations are made with a significant impact on business.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15568]

Mr. Freeman: The MOD is not a regulatory department but is playing a full part in the Government's deregulation initiative, principally by simplifying its dealing with industry wherever possible. The MOD's departmental report contains a standing objective to meet Government requirements, such as deregulation.

Official Service Residences

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the findings of Sir Peter Cazalet's investigation into official service residences. [15962]

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter's Cazalet's report on "Representational Entertainment in the Forces" is expected to be submitted to the Ministry of Defence shortly after Easter. I shall make a further statement when it has been received and my Department has had an opportunity to consider it.

Service Personnel (Suicide)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *522* to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), what consideration he gave to including in his answer a reference to Sergeant Robin Feddon, as raised in his statement on 26 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *976-80*; and if he will reconsider his Answer in respect of other claimed cases of suicide of Gulf war veterans serving in Germany. [14933]

Mr. Soames: My answer of 14 March about the number of Gulf war veterans who have committed suicide was unfortunately incorrect since it did not take account of the suicide of Sergeant Feddon. Our records are being checked and my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) as soon as possible to set the record straight.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom forces or logistical back-up have been made available to Turkey to support *(a)* internal and *(b)* external military operations; and if he will make a statement. [16684]

Mr. Soames: Turkey is a NATO ally. Along with other allies, the UK gives support in a number of ways, including through NATO collective funds which support a range of military facilities in all NATO nations to meet NATO operational requirements.

Ballistic Missile Defence

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the pre-feasibility study on ballistic missile defence; and when he expects to receive a copy of the report. [16539]

Mr. Freeman: Work progresses on the pre-feasibility study for ballistic missile defence. A report will be made available to Ministers in the autumn of 1996 and will include the results of the pre-feasibility and associated studies.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procurement plans he has for ballistic missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [16538]

Mr. Freeman: It is too early to make a statement on procurement plans for BMD. However, the results of the BMD pre-feasibility study programme will inform UK BMD policy and thus UK procurement plans. Announcements will be made as data become available and the options for BMD become clearer.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total sum refunded by British Rail following claims under the citizens charter.

Mr. Watts: The latest BR figures show that, up to 12 November 1994, £8.6 million has been paid to passengers claiming compensation under BR's passengers charter.

M25

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what explanation he has received from the Highways Agency for its delay in submitting a scheme for motorway link roads between the Chertsey and Wisley junctions on the M25. [14901]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency is looking at a range of options for providing additional capacity between junctions 10 and 12 of the M25 motorway. It will submit its recommendations on the scheme following completion of this work.

Rail Modernisation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold discussions with Railtrack about the time remaining before modernisation; and how the Government can help in the process. [15683]

Mr. Watts: I meet Railtrack regularly to discuss west coast main line modernisation and other important projects. On 21 March 1995 I announced approval for the letting of a contract for the development of the signalling system for the WCML project.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost of Railtrack's feasibility study team analysis of whether to modernise the rail network; when the work began; what studies have been completed in this time; and what factors governed the time scale of the inquiry. [15682]

Mr. Watts: The feasibility study for the modernisation of the west coast main line was started on 24 March 1994. This study was completed, on time, in December 1994. The time scale for the study was driven by the scale of the task involved. The cost of the study is a commercial issue for Railtrack.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what factors led to the granting to Railtrack of permission to study the west coast main line; what consideration was given to asking an independent body to undertake the study; to what supervision Railtrack is subjected in the course of the study; and what independent study will be carried out before the franchising director adopts Railtrack's recommendation; [15685]

(2) what has been the involvement of *(a)* the franchising director and *(b)* the Secretary of State in Railtrack's recent study of rail modernisation. [15684]

Mr. Watts: The project was awarded to a consortium of private sector organisations following a competition. Ministers and the franchising director have been kept closely in touch with progress on the study. The franchising director is currently discussing its conclusions with prospective franchisees.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at interdepartmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15606]

Dr. Mawhinney: Special advisers are members of the civil service, have the same conditions of service as civil servants and are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, with certain limited exceptions. They have facilities appropriate to their duties.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15576]

Dr. Mawhinney: One of the aims of this Department is to work to reduce the burden of unnecessary regulation. Each Minister has to pursue this objective in the policy areas for which he is responsible. There is also a Minister with particular responsibility for promoting deregulation in the Department.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15549]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Road Tunnels

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the location, length in metres and cost of all road tunnels *(a)* constructed by his Department in each of the past 10 years and *(b)* proposed for construction in future with estimated cost. [15681]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Robert Key, dated 27 March 1995:

As you know, Mr. John Watts, the Minister for Railways and Roads has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the location, length in metres and cost of all road tunnels (a) constructed by his Department in each of the past 10 years and (b) proposed for construction in future with estimated cost. This is attached.

You will understand that any simple cost comparisons, based on tunnel length, could be very misleading given the many differing factors which will apply in each case—tunnel location (urban/rural region), geological and groundwater conditions, total lane width and construction method (bored NATM or cut and cover etc).

Schemes with Tunnels

Location	*Length (in metres)*	*Actual cost (£m)*	*Date opened*
[1] Tunnels opened since 1985			
Hatfield tunnel (A1(M) Hertfordshire	1,150	23.6	12/86
Round Hill tunnel (A20 Kent)	390	13.2	11/93
[2] Tunnel schemes under construction			
Green Man Hackney—M11 (East London)	174	7.04	—
George Green Hackney—M11 (East London)	300	8.43	—

Schemes with Tunnels

Location	*Length (in metres)*	*Actual cost (£m)*	*Date opened*
Southwick (A27 Sussex)	490	14.9	—
[3] Tunnel schemes about to start construction			
Fore Street tunnel (A406 North London)	310	17.0	—
Meir tunnel (A50 Staffordshire)	284	6.01	—
[4] Tunnel schemes in planning	—	[1]—	—
Western Circus tunnel (A40 West London)	187	8.0	—
Regents Park Road tunnel (A406 North London)	830	30.5	—
Ealing Common tunnel (A406 West London)	520	21.7	—
Wilmer Way tunnel (A406 North London)	298	12.7	—
Bounds Green—Green Lanes tunnel (A406 North London)	198	7.6	—
Hindhead tunnel (A3 Surrey)	1,720	35.0	—
Worthing Bypass tunnels (A27 Sussex)	580	25.0	—
River Rother tunnel (A259 Sussex)	300	19.0	—
Saltaire Relief Road tunnel (A650 Yorkshire)	2,500	135.0	—
Wychbury tunnel (A456 Worcestershire)	330	9.74	—

[1] *Estimated cost (£m)* RCPI 95

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15607]

Dr. Mawhinney: Mrs. E. F. Laing was appointed as political adviser from 13 April 1992 to 20 July 1994. Mr. M. G. E. Simmonds has been appointed as political adviser since 24 October 1994.

Delayed Rail Journeys

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions during each of the last four years rail journeys have been delayed as a result of either poor weather or criminal activity affecting overhead electrical power supply. [15749]

Mr. Watts: The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

A303

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a round table conference to consider improvements to the A303 at Stonehenge; and if he will make a statement. [15929]

Mr. Watts: I hope to do so and will announce the arrangements later in the year.

Ship Loading Hours

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many hours a day it is *(a)* possible and *(b)* permissible for a ship the size of the MV Caroline to be loaded with goods brought in by heavy lorries at Brightlingsea docks. [16001]

Mr. Norris: The statutory powers of the Brightlingsea harbour commission do not specify hours within which vessels have to be loaded with goods.

Bilateral Aviation Agreements

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made on UK/USA bilateral aviation agreements; and if he will make a statement. [16673]

Mr. Norris: Formal UK/USA aviation talks took place in London from 22 to 24 March. Various proposals designed to increase competition in air services between the two countries were discussed. The talks are due to continue in Washington on 10 April.

British Transport Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the Home Office on extending the powers and jurisdiction of the British Transport police; and if he will make a statement. [16301]

Mr. Watts: None.

Scottish Rail Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of representations which he has received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise in respect of the highlands to London sleeper and Motorail services; if he will place in the Library a copy of the economic assessment which he has made of the impact of the withdrawal of such services; and if he will make a statement. [15142]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has recently received a letter from the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. A copy of that letter has been placed in the Library.

The withdrawal of the London-Fort William sleeper and Motorail service with effect from 28 May is a commercial decision by the British Railways Board. The franchising director will take account of any representations on the economic impact of the withdrawal of this service within the context of his consultation with the Scottish regional councils and the rail users consultative council on the draft passenger service requirement for ScotRail later this year.

Roads (Co-ordination)

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who is responsible for co-ordinating road openings by local authorities, utilities and the Highways Agency. [15510]

Mr. Watts: The duty of co-ordination, under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, falls on the relevant street authority—the Highways Agency, on behalf of the Secretary of State, for motorways and trunk roads, the local highway authority for all other roads maintainable at public expense, and the street managers for private streets. The duty extends to co-ordination with other street authorities when the works affect roads for which those authorities are responsible.

Southend Lane, London

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will approve the funding for the bridge works at Southend lane, London SE26, and when he expects the road improvement scheme to commence and finish. [16175]

Mr. Norris: A scheme including the reconstruction of the bridge was not successful in Lewisham's transport policies and programme bid for 1995–96. The Government office for London is discussing with Lewisham how the proposals might be modified for consideration in next year's submission. Nothing definite can be said at present about the funding or timing of the scheme.

Trans-European Road Network

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if United Kingdom roads designated trans-European road network roads may benefit from EU funding. [15977]

Mr. Watts: Schemes to upgrade existing UK roads or construct missing links designated part of the trans-European road network may benefit from EU funding under the trans-European networks budget line, when the draft financial regulation currently under discussionis adopted. The draft regulation provides for support up to a maximum of 10 per cent. of total investment costs.

Roads (Recycled Materials)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what use is made in new road building of recycled material from old roads. [15890]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 27 March 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for the Environment, what use is made in new road building of recycled material from old roads.

It is government policy to encourage conservation and facilitate the use of reclaimed materials to reduce pressure on sources of primary aggregates and obtain environmental benefits. Wherever practical the Highways Agency provides the opportunity in trunk road contracts for including recycled materials from old roads in new road construction. Our requirements for materials are set out in the Specification for Highway Works published by HMSO. material from old roads can be used in a variety of ways. it can be incorporated within road foundations as a fill material, be used as an aggregate within either bituminous or cement bound layers, or as in the case of bituminous planings be mixed with new bitumen and aggregate for use in road construction or maintenance.

Since 1992 up to 10% of new surfacing can be drawn from reclaimed bituminous material such as planings from old roads. Following the results of further research, this summer we are raising the percentage allowable to 30% for certain bituminous materials,. We also permit a wide range of options for reuse and recycling of old concrete roads, indeed crushed concrete is highly valued as an aggregate by the construction industry. The Highways Agency is shortly to publish new advice on the conservation and use of reclaimed materials in road construction and maintenance which highlights the scope for reuse and recycling and is aimed at encouraging a greater awareness of the opportunities available.

No central records are kept of actual quantities of old road material used in new roads. However, the DOE's Mineral Planning Guidance MPG6, published in April 1994, indicated that 80% of road planings, for example,were recycled in some form. Not all of this will be in roads as planings are in great demand for use on parking areas, footpaths and farm accesses. Estimates suggest that there are around 7–8 million tonnes of bituminous road planings produced each year.

Marchioness

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a public inquiry into the sinking of the Marchioness in order to resolve issues of public importance which have not been settled either by criminal or civil proceedings or by inquest procedures. [15906]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* We do not believe that it would be appropriate or necessary to set up a public inquiry into the loss of the Marchioness. The marine accident investigation branch has carried out a full and thorough investigation into the disaster and its report has been published. The inquest into the deaths of those who died in the disaster has not yet been concluded.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to act upon excessive speeds of commercial vehicles reported under section 11 of his "Road Traffic Statistics Great Britain 1994". [16250]

Mr. Norris: Speed limiters will be fitted to coaches and new heavy goods vehicles by 1 January 1996.

Insurance Policy Discs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require all vehicles to display a current insurance policy disc on the windscreen in addition to tax discs. [16270]

Mr. Norris: As explained in answers given by my predecessor on 23 June 1993, *Official Report, columns 171–72,* and 1 February 1994, *Official Report, column 628,* there would be practical problems associated with a windscreen insurance disc system. However, we continue to take the problem of uninsured driving very seriously and are discussing with the industry various possible measures, including windscreen discs which might reduce the level of evasion of insurance requirements.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if people living near Stansted airport can continue to rely on the assurances given in the 1985 White Paper that a second main runway would not be constructed. [16381]

Dr. Mawhinney: The 1985 White Paper stated that, on demand forecasts at the time, it was not possible to justify such a runway in the foreseeable future. On current demand forecasts, I do not see a second runway as a realistic prospect and that is why my response to the runway capacity in the south-east group made no reference to it.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16548]

Mr. Norris: The number of press officers in the Department is currently 11. This compares with 10 in 1984. Before that date the information division was a common service of the Department of Transport, Department of Environment and Property Services Agency. Figures prior to 1984 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 March 1995

TREASURY

Russia (Loans)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the sizes of current and projected International Monetary Fund loans to Russia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Special drawing rights 719 million was drawn under a first credit tranche stand-by arrangements approved in August 1992. Loans totalling SDR 2,156 billion were made in the form of purchases under the systemic transformation facility in July 1993 and April 1994.

The IMF board will shortly be considering a request from the Russian Federation for a stand-by arrangement equivalent to SDR 4,313.1 million.

Schedule D

Mr. Berry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the yearly gross taxation revenue, and net tax yield after allowance under schedule D from 714s and SC60s over the last five years. [16394]

Sir George Young: It is impossible to provide details of the tax revenue, gross or net, from 714-holding subcontractors. But deductions made by contractors from payment to subcontractors, on account of tax and national insurance contributions, which are paid over to the Revenue under the SC60 system have been running at about £1 billion per annum over the last five years. Part of this will be repayable to the subcontractors, although the amount is unquantifiable.

South Thames TEC

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue proposes to petition for the compulsory winding-up of South Thames training and enterprise council. [16298]

Sir George Young: The normal rules of Inland Revenue confidentiality preclude provision of information about the affairs of named individuals and entities.

Bank of England

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what part is played by the Bank of England in determining monetary policy; and if he will make a statement; [16987]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that public pronouncements by officials of the Bank of England purporting to state or interpret Government policy are submitted to his office for prior approval. [16989]

Mr. Nelson: The Bank of England is an important source of advice to the Government on monetary policy. The advice the Governor gives at his monthly meeting with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is now open to parliamentary and public scrutiny through publication of the minutes. The bank also publishes its own independent inflation report. However, all monetary policy decisions are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions Her Majesty's Customs and Excise investigated the importation of obscene material in the five years prior to 1993–94; and in how many of these cases prosecutions resulted. [16798]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is not available in that form. Centrally collated statistics for the period prior to 1991–92 do not distinguish between cases detected and cases where, following a detection, a full investigation was undertaken. In many cases when the detection involved only very small quantities of prohibited material a full investigation would not be justified and offence action is confined to the seizure of the offending goods.

Between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1993 the following numbers of individuals were prosecuted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in connection with importation of indecent or obscene material:

April 1988—March 1989: 105
April 1989—March 1990: 98
April 1990—March 1991: 88
April 1991—March 1992: 52
April 1992—March 1993: 48

From 1 April 1991 records have been kept centrally on the numbers of full investigations which have followed from Customs detections and the following information is available. Between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1993 Customs launched full investigations in the following numbers of cases of importation of obscene or indecent material:

April 1991—March 1992: 106
April 1992—March 1993: 94

National Fund

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present value and status of the national fund; and what was the effect of the recent collapse of Barings on the valuation of the fund. [16802]

Mr. Nelson: The value of the national fund at 16 March 1995 was £114 million. The trustees of the fund are Baring Brothers and Co Ltd. The valuation of the fund has not been affected by the recent collapse of Barings.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the last White Paper was produced which covered the latest position of the national fund. [16804]

Mr. Nelson: The last White Paper which covered the latest position of the national fund was produced in December 1984, giving a statement of the progress of the fund during the years ended 31 March 1982 and 31 March 1983.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fee or other monetary benefit is obtained periodically by the trustees of the national fund. [16806]

Mr. Nelson: A management fee is paid annually to the trustees. In the financial year 1992–93 the fee amounted to £118,719.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the trustees of the national fund, following the takeover of Barings by ING Bank of the Netherlands. [16801]

Mr. Nelson: The Chancellor has no powers to change the trustees of the national fund. The trustees were chosen by the original donor who provided anonymously the gift which established the fund in 1927.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Pope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Inland Revenue staff are currently employed in the prevention of tax fraud; and what was the financial benefit of such work in the last financial year for which figures are available. [16824]

Sir George Young: It is not possible to identify the number of Inland Revenue staff engaged purely in the prevention of tax fraud. But about 4,500 staff were involved in counter-evasion work—including the investigation of suspected fraud—during the year 1993–94. The total yield from this work was approximately £1.5 billion.

Smuggled Drugs

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of smuggled drugs seized by Customs officers in Wales in each of the last three years. [16843]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Customs officers operate within geographically-based Executive units called collections. Wales is covered by two collections: South Wales and Borders; and Liverpool. It is therefore difficult to give accurate statistics for Wales as a whole. However, the street level value of seized drugs for the Welsh locations in these collections for each of the past three years is:

Year	*1992* £	*1993* £	*1994* £
Value	768,261	15,385,870	38,926,638

National Debt

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the value of the national debt for each year since 1965. [16805]

Mr. Aitken: The table shows the national debt, in nominal terms and as a percentage of GDP, at the end of each financial year since 1965.

National Debt

End March	*£ billion*	*Percentage of GDP*[1]
1965	30.441	87.42
1966	31.341	84.31
1967	31.986	81.58
1968	34.194	81.47
1969	33.984	74.66
1970	33.079	66.85
1971	33.442	60.59
1972	35.840	58.29
1973	36.885	52.05
1974	40.125	50.83
1975	45.925	46.65
1976	56.572	47.93
1977	67.166	48.54
1978	79.180	49.49
1979	86.885	46.83
1980	95.314	43.15
1981	113.036	46.23
1982	118.390	44.13
1983	127.927	43.71
1984	142.884	45.36
1985	158.029	46.11
1986	171.367	46.20
1987	185.814	45.85
1988	197.430	43.88
1989	197.320	39.66
1990	192.981	35.68
1991	198.703	35.00
1992	214.528	36.20
1993	248.781	40.11
1994	306.897	46.62

[1] GDP adjusted for the abolition of domestic rates, centred on end-March.

Trusts

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend the Trustee Investments Act 1961 to relax the proportion of wider to narrower range investments for all trusts in line with the change announced for charities. [17105]

Mr. Nelson: I am able to announce that the Government intend to undertake a consultation exercise to establish the views of trustees, and other interested parties, on the proposal to amend the Trustee Investments Act 1961 to increase the proportion of wider to narrower range investments from 50:50 to 75:25 for all trusts. A consultation document has been issued for this purpose.

Bank of England Deputy Governor

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he intends to consult with members of the official Opposition on the appointment of a replacement deputy governor of the Bank of England; [16302]

(2) what account is taken of conflicts of interest in appointing a replacement deputy governor to the Bank of England; [16304]

(3) if the contract for the appointment of a replacement deputy governor of the Bank of England will preclude severance, redundancy, or ex-gratia payments for termination of appointment for loss of earnings during any remaining contract period after the next general election; [16303]

(4) if he will publish the terms and conditions of the contract in the case of the appointment and employment of the replacement deputy governor of the Bank of England. [16305]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The appointment and employment of the deputy governor is covered by the Bank of England Act 1946 and the bank's charter. The deputy governor is required to give his exclusive services to the bank. The terms and conditions of employment of the deputy governor are matters for the bank's court of directors who act on the advice of the remuneration committee of non-executive directors. It is not the bank's practice to publish details beyond what is included on remuneration in the bank's annual reports and accounts.

It is not the practice to consult members of the official Opposition about appointments of deputy governors of the Bank of England.

Advice Centres

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report,* column *240,* what factors led him to decide against considering relief on VAT on fuel for advice centres. [16637]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* As a general principle, selective reliefs from VAT, such as that suggested for advice centres, would complicate the operation and administration of the VAT system; create borderlines which would be difficult to define and so become matters of ambiguity and dispute; and cause inequity of treatment. Selective reliefs of this sort are therefore an unwelcome feature of any tax system.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15560]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Inland Revenue's and Customs and Excise's current management plans give the Department's deregulation objectives which are also reflected at all planning levels within each department. Copies are available in the Library.

The Treasury's latest departmental report—Cm 2817—sets out the department's mission and strategic objectives. These include strengthening the long-term performance of the economy by improving the use of resources and the efficiency of markets. Deregulation is a key ingredient.

Each Treasury Minister pursues deregulation in the policy areas for which he is responsible. I am the Minister with special responsibility for promoting deregulation across all the Chancellor's Departments.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15557]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 27 March 1995, *Official Report,* column *435,* by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press officers there are in *(a)* his Department, excluding the Overseas Development Administration, and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration currently; and what the figures were in 1979. [16562]

Mr. Goodlad: There are currently nine press officers employed in the FCO news department compared with 11 in 1979.

The comparable figures for the ODA press office are three and three.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16292]

Mr. Goodlad: The FCO diplomatic wing spent £17.6 million in 1993–94 on various forms of publicity about Britain, almost entirely for use overseas. Virtually all this sum was for products and services supplied either by the Central Office of Information or the private sector.

Only £390,000 was for publicity material intended primarily for distribution in the United Kingdom, of which consular advice and information accounted for £295,000. Contracts with the private sector were for the printing and production of booklets ad leaflets.

The ODA spent £448,000 in 1993–94 on editorial work, publications and exhibitions. £105,000 of this was for private sector contract for set-up costs and organisation of the mobile exhibition as part of a regional campaign to promote awareness of overseas development issues.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16273]

Mr. Goodlad: This Department has not issued guidance in respect of the employment of public relations companies.

The FCO diplomatic wing's agency—the Wilton Park conference centre—uses the FCO's standard guidance on purchasing and supply and its senior staff have participated in relevant FCO training courses. The aid wing's agency—the National Resource Institute, uses similar guidance from the Overseas Development Administration. The FCO has not provided its public bodies with guidance on tendering.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Indonesia since 1 January 1990 *(a)* naming the Ministers and *(b)* the reason for the visit in each case. [16508]

Mr. Goodlad: As part of our efforts to promote good bilateral relations with the Governments of south east Asia, Foreign Office Ministers visited Indonesia from 14 to 18 June 1990—Lord Brabazon—28 April to 2 May 1991—Lord Caithness—12 to 15 October 1992—Mr. Goodlad—3 to 5 April 1993—Secretary of State—and 6 to 7 April 1994—Mr. Goodlad.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia about the arrest of three non-Governmental organisations activists from the Alliance of Independent Journalists and one from PIJAR, between 10 March and 17 March in Jakarta; and when he next intends to raise these cases with the Government of Indonesia. [16504]

Mr. Goodlad: Our embassy staff in Jakarta are following developments in these cases closely. Once we are fully aware of the facts, we will decide, in consultation with EU partners, whether an approach to the Indonesian authorities would be appropriate.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had on the issue of the human rights record of Indonesia, with particular reference to East Timor when he last met Senator Gareth Evans, Foreign Secretary of the Federal Government of Australia. [16416]

Mr. Goodlad: It is not our practice to disclose details of such discussions.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the judges for the international tribunal for Rwanda are to be selected; and what United Kingdom involvement there will be at *(a)* the judicial and *(b)* any other level. [16602]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary General has invited states to nominate candidates as judges of the trial chambers of the international criminal court for Rwanda. Nominations will be forwarded to the Security Council which will draw up a shortlist of between 12 and 18 candidates. From that list the General Assembly will elect six judges.

We are currently seeking to identify a candidate for a judge's position. We are also looking for personnel to work within the prosecutor's office.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which states have indicated their willingness to accept responsibility for the custody of convicted persons from the Rwanda genocide tribunal. [16600]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The statute of the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda states:

> "Imprisonment shall be served in Rwanda or any of the States on a list of States which have indicated to the Security Council their willingness to accept convicted persons, as designated by the International Tribunal for Rwanda."

States have not yet been called upon to indicate whether they are willing to detain convicted persons.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the UN authorities to prevent the training of Hutu militiamen in or near Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire. [16599]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is working in partnership with the Government of Zaire to ensure security in the camps. We have contributed £0.5 million towards the costs of the international liaison group established to oversee the agreement. The United Nations has no mandate to take further action within Zaire as the Government of Zaire are responsible for the governance of their own territory.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Governments have made contributions to the trust fund for the international tribunal for Rwanda. [16601]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Contributions to the trust fund for the international tribunal for Rwanda have been pledged or contributed by Switzerland, New Zealand, Chile, Norway, the USA, Israel and Lebanon.

The United Kingdom has pledged £200,000 towards the cost of seconding British personnel to the tribunal.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16646]

Mr. Goodlad: Publication and marketing of the FCO's—including the ODA—1995 departmental report, cover price £16.70, are the responsibility of HMSO.

Some 2,000 copies of the report were distributed directly by the FCO to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, key contacts within Government and aid organisations overseas, the media and members of staff. The FCO and ODA spent £33,023 on art work for the 1995 report.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16647]

Mr. Goodlad: Publication and marketing of the FCO's—including the Overseas Development Administration—Departmental report are the responsibility of HMSO.

Departmental Reports were published for the first time in 1991. The cost in real terms of art work for the last three years of publication was as follows:

1993: £17,524
1994: £26,333
1995: £33,023

Figures for previous years are not available.

Iraq

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress the Government of Iraq has made in identifying the fate of Kuwaitis missing since the Gulf war. [16607]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Iraq has submitted its initial findings on a number of the 607 International Committee of the Red Cross case files on the detainees passed to Iraq over two years ago. The response has not been sufficient to enable any of the files to be closed. We have made clear to the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister that the lack of progress to date is unacceptable. The United Kingdom will continue to play a role in the tripartite commission and its technical sub-committee set up last December to speed up the review of ICRC case files.

Stability Pact

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU conference on regional stability held in Paris. [15687]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The stability pact concluding conference which took place in Paris on 20–21 March was attended by all participating States of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Pact's aim has been to help nine prospective members of the EU—Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—resolve problems, especially concerning frontiers and minorities, before enlargement, by promoting good neighbourliness on the basis of OSCE principles. The conference adopted the stability pact and transferred it to the OSCE which is entrusted with its implementation. The EU joint action under the common foreign and security policy has now been successfully completed.

Mr. Stephen Crouch

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 February what was the nature of the discussions which took place with Mr. Stephen Crouch at the British Embassy in Amman in September 1994. [16722]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No discussions were held at the British embassy, Amman in September 1994 between officials and Mr. Stephen Crouch. A member of the embassy staff encountered Mr. Crouch at a reception in honour of Qatar's national day. No issues of substance were discussed.

Foreign Affairs Council

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held in Brussels on 6 March 1995. [17205]

Mr. David Davis: The chairman of the Consultative Commission on Racism and Xenophobia—established by the Corfu European Council in June 1994—briefed the Council on proposals for a racism-xenophobia observatory and for education support targeted on urban areas.

On openness and transparency, Danish proposals were remitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further work.

The Commission described the state of play in negotiations with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia, and the presidency briefed the Council on preparations for the forthcoming Euro-Mediteranean conference.

The Council discussed relations with Russia, and in particular preparations for the visit to Moscow on 9 March by Foreign Ministers of the Troika.

The Council discussed the situation in former Yugoslavia and agreed a negotiating mandate for a trade and co-operation agreement with Croatia.

The Commission presented a report on economic reform in Malta.

On Ukraine, the Council discussed progress in implementing the action plan on energy sector reform which was launched at the G7 summit in Naples in July 1994.

The presidency reported to the Council on the Troika ministerial visit to the middle east from 7 to 10 February.

There was a discussion on candidates for the position of executive director of UNICEF.

A partnership and co-operation agreement between the EU and Belarus was signed.

A Co-operation Council with Lebanon was held, at which it was agreed to open negotiations for a new EU/Lebanon agreement.

The presidency and the Commission discussed the preparations for the concluding conference to adopt the stability pact, which will take place in Paris on 20 to 21 March.

There was a further discussion of EDF VIII. No agreement was reached.

Agreement was reached on the abolition of quotas for ACP light rum and rum from the overseas countries and territories—OCT. A reduction of excise tax was also approved for exports of rum from the French overseas departments to metropolitan France. A quota on ACP traditional rum was set at 58,000 hectolitres, rising by 3,000 hectolitres each year before abolition in the year 2000. A declaration proposing support for Spanish sugar producers was remitted to COREPER for further discussion.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with only Spain voting against, to increase the Community quotas on imports from China, to take account of the Community's enlargement. Some of the quotas were redefined, to exclude products not made in the Community such as work gloves and certain sports footwear. The quotas on toys were further increased as originally proposed by the Commission in July 1994.

The Council confirmed its support for Signor Renato Ruggiero's candidature for the director-generalship of the World Trade Organisation, and issued a declaration urging others to support him in the current round of consultations in Geneva.

Sir Leon Brittan introduced a Commission paper on trade and investment. The paper examines how best to liberalise investment flows world-wide. It will be discussed at the April meeting of the Council.

There was unanimous agreement on a Council statement rejecting the Canadian demand for a 60-day moratorium on the disputed Greenland halibut fishery pending bilateral discussions, and condemning the extension of Canadian enforcement powers on Spanish and Portuguese fishing vessels beyond their 200-mile limit.

The presidency noted agreement on the importance of securing a successful outcome to the forthcoming non-proliferation treaty review conference.

The presidency noted the Council's agreement that the Political Committee should examine the Council of Europe additional protocol on the cultural rights of minorities.

The Council agreed a negotiating mandate for a European agreement with Slovenia.

The Council agreed on the terms of Customs Union with Turkey, together with the resumption of EU financial assistance. An Association Council with Turkey was held, attended by the Turkish Prime Minister.

The A points listed in Commission document 5342–95 were agreed unanimously, with the exception of number 22 which was withdrawn. A copy of this document is available in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) of 17 March, *Official Report,* column *726*, relating to legal aid provision, how the merits of the case are assessed; and in what ways and by what process the relevant guidelines can be modified. [16797]

Mr. John M. Taylor: An applicant for civil legal aid must satisfy the board that he has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to the proceedings. It must also be reasonable in all the circumstances of the case for legal aid to be granted. This second test permits legal aid to be refused if, for example, the potential financial benefits of litigation seem unlikely to outweigh the probable cost to public funds. The basic merits test is set out in section 15 of the Legal Aid Act 1988, supplemented by the Civil Legal Aid (General) Regulations 1989. In addition, the Legal Aid Board issues guidance on the merits test which is published in the "Legal Aid Handbook". The guidance is amended by the Legal Aid Board when this seems appropriate.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money has been paid in legal aid for persons whose cases *(a)* are being considered and *(b)* are in the stages prior to being considered by (i) the European Court of Justice and (ii) the European Court of Human Rights; and if he will list the number of (1) cases and (2) people involved. [16809]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the amount of legal aid paid to Mr. Gordon Foxley. [15448]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total amount of legal aid paid to lawyers acting on behalf of Mr. Gordon Foxley was £160,228, including VAT. This amount also includes disbursements and other expenses necessarily incurred by the solicitors acting in this case.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Mr. Gordon Foxley disclosed assets held overseas in his aplication for legal aid. [15449]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Applications for legal aid in criminal proceedings are considered by the court. Section 38 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 prevents the disclosure by the court of any information given to it in connection with a legal aid application.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Financial Statistics

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost to the benevolent fund of donations for charitable purposes in *(a)* England and *(b)* Great Britain in the last 10 years. [16905]

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

1985: £31,554
1986: £46,088
1987: £61,063
1988: £81,122
1989: £99,805
1990: £119,124
1991: £129,653
1992: £161,318
1993: £149,436
1994: £168,293 (subject to audit)

Payments were made to charitable causes in Lancashire, Greater Manchester or Merseyside or those with Duchy connections in the remainder in England. The figures for Great Britain are the same.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what deductions were made to cover the Duchy's Palatinate and special costs from the total sums paid to the Duchy of Lancaster in the last four years. [16903]

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

1991: £406,882
1992: £474,933
1993: £564,367
1994: £580,322

The Duchy solicitors costs of administering devolutions were included in the costs of Palatinate administration and historical obligations in the figures in the parliamentary accounts in 1991 and 1992. In 1993 and 1994 they were shown separately and have therefore been added to the costs for those years.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the income to the Duchy of Lancaster from devolutions in the last four years. [16902]

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

1991: £938,597
1992: £1,053,121
1993: £1,069,028
1994: £960,295

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the total amounts transferred to the benevolent fund in each of the last four years. [16906]

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

1991: £531,715
1992: £578,188
1993: £504,661
1994: £379,973

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost to the benevolent fund of donations for charitable purposes in Lancashire in the last 10 years. [16904]

Mr. David Hunt: To calculate figures for the county of Lancashire for the last 10 years would involve disproportionate cost. However, figures for the Counties of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside—the Duchy area—are as follows:

1985: £21,500
1986: £29,000
1987: £47,180
1988: £59,180
1989: £75,656
1990: £88,518
1991: £93,607
1992: £121,944
1993: £127,225
1994: £148,819 (subject to audit)

Central Office of Information

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the expenditure on behalf of Government Departments and agencies by the Central Office of Information for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices; and whether he will provide a breakdown to show the division between *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* all other advertising and publicity. [16725]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure by the Central Office of Information on behalf of Government Departments and agencies is set out in the following table. An analysis of expenditure in the form requested is not available for years prior to 1984–85.

COI Expenditure: 1994 Prices

£000

Year	*Television advertising*	*Radio advertising*	*Press advertising*	*Other*	*Total*
1984–85	10,353	702	21,275	72,310	104,640
1985–86	11,471	1,379	21,005	69,165	103,020
1986–87	67,141	4,835	48,925	88,322	209,223
1987–88	63,961	2,208	46,254	84,512	196,935
1988–89	46,435	2,108	55,277	88,403	192,223
1989–90	56,533	3,445	50,837	91,984	202,799
1990–91	57,596	1,839	42,805	85,659	187,899
1991–92	44,694	2,058	33,741	82,569	163,062
1992–93	21,199	1,784	22,822	73,945	119,750
1993–94	29,451	1,986	27,888	68,350	127,675

All figures exclusive of VAT.

Government Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the deterrent effects of reported charges by Government Departments or other public bodies in respect of applications for the release of information under the code of practice on access to Government information. [15991]

Mr. David Hunt: The great majority of requests for information under the code of practice have been answered without charge. Charges have been made only where requests have required significant additional work. These arrangements reflect the principle that charges should strike an appropriate balance between the interests of the applicant and those of the taxpayer.

The explanatory leaflet on the code of practice makes clear that charges will not be made without the applicant's being notified in advance and asked if they wish to proceed.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16554]

Mr. Horam: There are currently 10 press officers in my Department. This figure does not include press officers within the Central Office of Information.

My Department did not exist in any comparable format before May 1992 and figures for 1979 are, therefore, not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Astra plc

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of his officials, including Ministers, who have been in contact with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the attempt by directors to obtain their own copies of documents relating to Astra plc; and if he will list those Ministry of Defence Ministers or officials contacted. [16997]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I am not aware of any contact in this respect between Minister and officials in my Department and Ministers and officials in my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's Department.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has received of former directors of Astra plc being denied access of their own copies of the board minutes of the Astra Group of companies during the course of his inspectors inquiry. [16996]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None.

Company Directors' Documents

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy of his Department in relation to the availability to directors of companies who are subject to a DTI inspectors investigation of their own personal copies of the board minutes and related documents; and if he will make a statement. [16995]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Inspectors appointed under the Companies Act 1985 are primarily concerned with company records. Where documents are referred to in the questioning by the inspectors of directors or others, the usual practice is for the inspectors to provide copies or allow sight of such documents. The inspectors might ask to see personal papers of directors if, for example, the company's records are incomplete or if they are considered otherwise relevant.

Deregulation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what potential he sees for the use of the order making power as set out in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to reduce the burden on small businesses. [16672]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government recognise that small businesses are particularly vulnerable to over-regulation, whether arising from legislative provisions, administrative requirements or enforcement. The deregulation order-making power provides a useful new means of reducing burdens arising form primary legislation.

A list of potential candidates for the use of the power was included in the publication "Cutting Red Tape", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. We would welcome any suggestions for further ways in which the power could be used to reduce burdens on business—and particularly small business—arising from primary legislation.

Rugby Radio Station

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many persons who have been employed at Rugby radio station are known to have developed cancer.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This is a matter for the board of British Telecommunications.

Classified Directory Advertising

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will consider referring "Thomsons Yellow Pages" and the market in directory advertising to the Director General of Fair Trading; [16484]

(2) what assessments he has made of the competitiveness of the market in directory advertising for small businesses; [16483]

(3) if he will insist on the introduction of compensation schemes for small businesses whose entries in advertising directories are published inaccurately. [16485]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The market for the supply of classified directory advertising services was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission by the Director General of Fair Trading on 1 March. The MMC is due to report to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade by 29 December. It would be inappropriate for me to comment until the MMC has reported its findings. However, the hon. Member should bring any concerns to the attention of the MMC so that they may be taken into account during the inquiry.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons the chemical weapons convention has not yet been ratified. [14654]

Mr. Rooney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ratify the chemical weapons convention. [14649]

Mr. Heseltine: Legislation is required before the UK can ratify the chemical weapons convention. This will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and the Government's other legislative priorities permit.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of regional selective assistance grants made in each assisted area since 1992 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* constant 1994 prices. [16404]

Mr. Eggar: Information on the amount of regional selective assistance paid is published in the "Annual Report of the Industrial Development Act 1982". GDP deflators to convert expenditure to constant prices are published in the public expenditure statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Defence Diversification

Mr. McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish details of his Department's research into defence industries diversification and the sums of money spent on diversification research projects in each of the last 10 years and in total. [14639]

Mr. Eggar: The Department of Trade and Industry has undertaken no formal research into defence industries diversification during the last 10 years. It will, however, be participating in a NATO advanced studies institute on defence diversification to be held in Scotland in July this year, to which it is contributing £5,662 in support of costs.

Post Offices, London

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he or anyone in his Department has had on the future of *(a)* Crouch End and *(b)* Wood Green post offices with Post Office Counters Ltd. [16200]

Mr. Page: Decisions about the location and organisation of individual post offices are the responsibility of Post Office management, not the Government. Therefore, neither my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade nor any member of my Department has had any discussions with Post Office Counters Ltd. on the future of Crouch End and Wood Green post offices.

Accounts Service Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the costs, in total, to his Department in relation to the contractorisation of the Accounts Service Agency; what is the breakdown of these costs between *(a)* the annual cost of the CSL Group Holdings Ltd. contract, *(b)* the annual cost of the contract monitoring unit, *(c)* the annual cost of the policy work transferred from the ASA to the finance and resource management division, *(d)* the annual cost of any other department overheads previously borne by the ASA and *(e)* the cost of the contracting-out process, written off over the contract period in respect of (i) redundancy or early retirement, (ii) solicitors' advice, (iii) consultancy fees and (iv) departmental costs. [15211]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The process of contracting out the services provided by the Accounts Services Agency has yet to be completed. At this stage therefore many of the associated financial details can only be estimated. Estimates for the various elements are:

a) the annual cost of the contract with CSL Group Ltd. cannot be determined in advance. It will be a volume contract where the price paid will be determined by the level of services demanded. The schedule of rates cannot be revealed because it is commercially confidential;

b) and c) the policy work to be transferred from ASA to the finance and resource management division of DTI will be undertaken by the accounts services management unit which will also manage the contract. The annual cost of ASMU, including overheads, will be £307,500 falling to £256,500 after the first year;

d) as a result of the contracting out of the Department's overhead attributed to accounts services will fall from £99,000 to £45,000 per annum; and

e) a breakdown of the costs of the contracting-out process could reveal information of a confidential nature, both commercial and personal. The estimated annualised total cost of the items requested is £163,000.

Defence Export Licences

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the items of surplus Ministry of Defence equipment for which an export licence was granted in the last year for which information is available, giving the total number of items involved and the recipient of the export licences in each case. [15811]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* It has been the policy of successive Administrations not to disclose details about export licences that have been issued. In any event, it would not be possible to identify all such equipment from records.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Hobday to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 21 March 1995:

I refer to your recent question to the President of the Board of Trade concerning the loss of jobs in the Department of Trade and Industry over the past two years as a result of their being taken over by contractors and subsequently disappearing.

No jobs have been lost for this reason in the Accounts Services Agency.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question regarding the loss of jobs in agencies over the past two year as a result of contracting out of work.

In Companies House over the past two years there have been no jobs lost due to the employment of contractors.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about jobs which have been lost in The Insolvency Service in the past two years.

One post has been lost as a result of work being taken over by a contractor. Forty five posts have been saved through the introduction of a computerised local office information system in The Service's Official Receivers' offices (with a further forty five posts to be saved in 1995–96). Adjustments have been made in the grading of a small number of posts to reflect changing requirements of The Service's work.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply for the Laboratory of the Government Chemist to your question about jobs lost at Agencies in the DTI during the last two years.

The number of posts in LGC has reduced by 42 since 1 April 1993, of which less than half can be attributed to having been lost due to market tests by customers in Government. During this period, however, LGC has been successful in winning work in other areas.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

I would refer to your Parliamentary Question to the President to the Board of Trade concerning the number of jobs in this agency in the past two years which have been taken over by contractors or have disappeared. The only jobs which have been taken over by contractors are those associated with the reprographics unit, this resulted in the loss of 4 jobs. During the period from 1 April 1993 to the present time the reduction in staff numbers, in addition to those lost in the reprographic section has been 126. These staff reductions were found to be necessary to tailor the size of the organisation to match the market demand for our services.

Letter from Dr. Peter Clapham to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about jobs lost to agencies in DTI in the past two years. This reply concerns my Agency, the National Physical Laboratory (NPL).

The number of staff in NPL has reduced from 786 on 1 March 1993 to 666 on 1 March 1995. Over the same period the number of casual employees has increased from 18 to 54 and the Laboratory also currently uses 29 agency or other staff whereas the number was about 10 two years ago. Therefore some 65 posts have been lost in the last two years.

I trust this provides the information you require.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about jobs lost to Agencies in DTI during the last two years.

No job in this Agency has been taken over by contractors in this period, although the number of posts in NWML has been reduced from 48 on 1 April 1993 to 46 on the same date this year.

Letter from P.R.S. Harntack to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

I have been asked to reply (with respect to the Patent Office) to a question—number 94—which you recently tabled in The House.

Overall numbers in the Patent Office declined from 1,073 end of February 1993 to 964 at end February this year, so 109 posts have disappeared. These totals include staff not directly employed by the Office, but provided through clerical and IT manpower agencies. Their numbers increased from 53 to 76, so an additional 23 jobs have been 'contracted out'.

No other work has been taken over by contractors during this period.

I hope that this is helpful.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 28 March 1995:

As you know, I have been asked to answer, in relation to the Radiocommunications Agency, your question to the President of the Board of Trade about jobs lost to agencies in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared.

On 31 March 1993, the Agency had a complement of 565 with 524.5 staff in post. The comparable figures on 31 March 1994 were 580 and 534 respectively. At the present time, RA has a complement of 582 and 552.5 staff in post. During the period, following market testing, ships' radio licensing is being contracted out with effect from 1 April 1995 with the loss of 6 Agency posts.

I should emphasise that the Agency has succeeded in meeting demanding efficiency targets set by Ministers in each of the years in question. The figures reflect strongly growing demand for all the Agency's services and also delegations of management, IT and personnel functions from the Department.

Within the overall totals, posts have been moved in the Agency in response to changes in patterns of workload and in the interests of efficiency and customer service. For example, the licensing of private mobile radio has been decentralised from the Agency's headquarters to its local offices, which has improved service and been much appreciated by customers.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to East Dorset Schools Art to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [16932]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 26 June to Friday 30 June 1995.

IT Training

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report,* column *283,* whether on-site IT training for hon. Members will be provided by *(a)* employees of the House or *(b)* outside trainers brought in by hon. Members for non-PDVN training.

Mr. Waller: Details of the training have not yet been finalised. It is not expected that hon. Members will need to engage their own training staff, although it will be open to them—as now—to do so, using their office costs allowance.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report,* column *50,* if he will place in the Library a copy of the 1994 survey of energy efficiency.

Mr. Ray Powell. : A copy of the report by the Director of Works entitled "Energy Conservation on the Parliamentary Estate" dated 20 June 1994 is available in the Library.

Media (Office Space)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) if he will make an assessment of the relationship between office space in the Palace and the direct reporting of parliamentary speeches and answers; [16992]

(2) if he will estimate the office space available to the media in the Palace in 1975, 1985 and 1995; and what policy considerations underlie this allocation; [16991]

(3) if he will arrange for the Committee to review the need for office space for the media and recommend whether the amount should be decreased. [16993]

Mr. Ray Powell: Office space currently available to the media in the Palace of Westminster is estimated to total some 700 sq m. Comparable figures for 1975 and 1985 are unavailable, but I do not believe that the amount of space occupied has changed markedly in recent years. The Committee currently has no plans specifically to review the requirements of the media, but a study is currently being prepared on the utilisation of space on the parliamentary estate to the end of the century. The offices occupied by the media will be included in that study, which will be considered by the Committee in due course.

Audio-visual Resources

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 9 March, *Official Report,* column *284,* if he will list the interested parties who are discussing the multi-media presentation of Parliament and British democracy.

Mr. Waller: I have been asked to reply. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it would not be appropriate to list the companies involved. I shall write to the hon. Member.

TRANSPORT

Trespass (Railway Lines)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions have been commenced during each of the past four years in cases of trespass on railway lines. [15757]

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

Year	*Prosecutions commenced*
1991	1,513
1992	788
1993	716
1994	691

Rail Users Consultative Committee

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the remit of the rail users' consultative committees in respect of the right to call public inquiries into the proposed withdrawal of any ferry service; and if he will make a statement. [16721]

Mr. Watts: The statutory powers of the central rail users consultative committee and the rail users' consultative committees in respect of ferry services are set out in sections 76 to 79 of the Railways Act 1993.

Uninsured Drivers

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the policy options he has *(a)* considered and *(b)* pursued to tackle the problem of uninsured drivers.

Mr. Norris: We are considering various options with colleagues in other Government Departments, the insurance industry and the police; these include the suggestion that drivers should be required to display a windscreen insurance disc. The changes we propose to the vehicle registration and licensing system will provide for a more effective regular check on vehicles and their owners. As well as other benefits they will contribute significantly to combating the problem of motor insurance evasion.

Impact Resistance (Cars)

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action Her Majesty's Government is taking to ensure that the recommendations of the European experimental vehicles committee are included in the European Commission's directive on the front and side impact resistance of cars. [16907]

Mr. Norris: We have taken every possible action to persuade the Commission to propose, and other European Union member states to support, the quickest practical implementation of the recommendations of the EEVC. To that end, we have carried out extensive research programmes and shared all the results with our European partners.

Continuous Agency

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects the consultation exercise on continuous licensing to be completed. [16794]

Mr. Norris: I will be issuing consultation documents tomorrow, 29 March, outlining changes to the vehicle licensing and registration system. Copies will be placed in the Library and the Vote Office.

Bridge Works

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will approve the funding for the bridge works at Southend lane, London SE26, and when he expects the road improvement scheme to commence and finish. [16175]

Mr. Norris: A scheme including the reconstruction of the bridge was not successful in Lewisham's transport policies and programme bid for 1995–96. The Government office for London are discussing with Lewisham how the proposals might be modified for consideration in next year's submission. Nothing definite can be said at present about the funding or timing of the scheme.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms; [16610]

(2) what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16609]

Mr. Norris: Departmental reports were first published in 1991. From 1994, the Department of Transport has published its report in conjunction with the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator. The cost to the Department of publication by HMSO is as follows:

	1993–94 prices £
1991	2,388
1992	3,214
1993	5,554
1994	5,354

Costs for 1995 have yet to be finalised. Figures do not include costs of circulation and other internal costs, which are not recorded separately.

There were 2,100 copies of the 1995 transport report—Cm2806, published 7 March—printed. Some 1,300 copies were produced for sale by HMSO at a price of £13.20. The remainder were circulated to Parliament and other Government Departments, and internally to staff within the Department, including its agencies.

Driving Tests

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on theory testing within driving tests with particular reference to motorway driving. [16502]

Mr. Norris: Questions on motorway driving can be included in the session at the end of the current driving test, and will also be among the topics covered by the theory test required by the second EC directive on driver licensing. An announcement on our proposals for the new theory test will be made shortly.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of drivers passing their test now take voluntary motorway driving tuition; and if he will make a statement. [16503]

Mr. Norris: Information is not held centrally on the percentage of newly qualified drivers who take motorway tuition. However, motorway driving is one of the elements included in the post-test driver training scheme, "Pass Plus". That scheme was introduced on 6 February and already over 500 certificates of completion have been issued.

Airlines (Overbooking)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action he intends to take to discourage airlines from overbooking passengers on flights; [16505]

(2) if he will discuss with British Airways its practice of overbooking passengers on flights. [16506]

Mr. Norris: It is for each airline, including British Airways, to determine its own policy on booking, according to its commercial judgment. A Council regulation provides for compulsory minimum levels of compensation to be paid to passengers with a valid ticket and a confirmed reservation on a scheduled flight departing from a Community airport who are denied boarding because the flight is overbooked.

Joint Aviation Authority

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the implications for the United Kingdom of adopting joint aviation authority requirements not embodied in present United Kingdom legislation through air navigation orders or other statutory instruments; [16294]

(2) what assessment he has made of the legal implications of the Civil Aviation Authority's proposals to adopt joint aviation authority regulations. [16293]

Mr. Norris: The joint aviation authorities are recognised by both the United Kingdom and the European Union as the appropriate body to harmonise European aviation safety requirements. The Civil Aviation Authority participates fully in the development of all joint aviation requirements and makes a thorough assessment of their implications. The UK will not approve a JAR unless the CAA is satisfied that it would enable the UK to maintain its very high level of aviation safety.

First Aid

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will consider legislation to require all cars to carry a first aid box; [16868]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to require all first-time applicants for driving licences to have a basic knowledge of first aid before being passed for a driving licence. [16867]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to make compulsory either first aid training for drivers or the carrying of first aid kits in cars. The "Highway Code" contains basic advice on what to do in emergencies and encourages drivers to learn about first aid from voluntary organisations and to carry first aid kits. However, basic training and equipment are of limited use for dealing with injuries in road traffic accidents and the best course of action is to summon skilled medical help as quickly as possible.

WALES

Family Services Grant Awards

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the grant awards for 1995–96 made under the child and family services grant scheme; what were the figures for 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [17149]

Mr. Richards: I am pleased to announce that grant offers totalling £2.635 million have been made for 1995–96. This compares with an equivalent figure of £2.1 million in the current financial year. This represents a 25 per cent. increase and reflects the Government's commitment to family life and values. Details of the 84 grant awards have been placed in the Library of the House.

Senior Management Review

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the senior management review of the Welsh Office will be completed. [17150]

Mr. Redwood: The review is now complete. The review report is being made available to Welsh Office staff today and I have placed copies in the Library of the House.

Historic Buildings Council for Wales

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to present to Parliament the next report of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales. [17182]

Mr. Richards: The 38th report of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales has been presented to Parliament today. The report covers the financial year 1993–94 and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Polling and Public Survey Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the employment of polling or public survey organisations by his Department during the current and previous financial years, on the organisations employed by his Department, on the values of individual contracts for these services, on the total amounts of money spent and on the purposes of the research undertaken by these organisations.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Welsh Office 1993–94 Cost: £1,292.50—collection of data for inclusion in 1993 "Digest of Welsh Statistics".

Research and Marketing Ltd., contracted by Welsh Office 1993–94 Cost: £72,000[1]—to undertake the 1992 Welsh Social Survey.

Niace Cymru, contracted by Welsh Office 1993–94 Cost: £5,000—study of adult learning routes in Taff Ely district, Mid Glamorgan.

ERES/Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Welsh Office 1993–94 Cost: £39,921—examined the nature of higher than average levels of economic inactivity in Wales.

Durdle Davies Business Research, contracted by Welsh Office February 1994 Cost: £5,000—measured public awareness of the 1991 patients charter for Wales and sought views on how the 1994 edition could be improved.

Development Unit Community Health Councils Wales, contracted by Welsh Office January 1995 Cost: £5,000—measured public impressions of the 1994 patients charter for Wales and sought views on frequency of updating and communicating contents.

Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Welsh Office 1994–95 Cost: £1,292.50—collection of data for inclusion in 1994 "Digest of Welsh Statistics".

Office of Population Census and Surveys, contracted by Welsh Office 1994–95 Cost: £149,000[2]—extension of labour force survey to provide data at TEC level on progress of national targets for education and training.

Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Cadw 1993–94 Cost: £11,392 Cadw visitor survey—the third year of a three year project.

Hall Harrison Cowley, contracted by Cadw 1994–95 Cost: £8,800 Cadw visitor profile research—the purpose of both contracts was to establish more information about the requirements of visitors to Cadw monuments.

Surveys are also undertaken as part of the Department's value-for-money evaluation of publicity campaigns. The following evaluation studies have been undertaken since 1 April 1993:

Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Central Office of Information 24–26 November 1994 Cost: £6,991—measured the effectiveness of the parents charter booklet in Wales.

Beaufort Research Ltd., contracted by Central Office of Information 14 February 1994–30 March 1995 Cost: £12,700—measured the effectiveness of Welsh and English language road safety advertising on bus backs in Wales.

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[1] The total cost of employing Research and Marketing Ltd. was £375,000 but £303,000 was invoiced in the 1992–93 financial year. The Welsh training and enterprise councils made a financial contribution.

[2] Welsh training and enterprise councils and the Welsh Development Agency contributed £35,100.

Motorway Construction

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of motorway have been completely constructed in Wales since 1979; and at what cost. [14869]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Nearly 23 miles of motorway have been completed at a cost of some £220 million.

Crime Prevention Expenditure

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on a crime prevention scheme by his Department and the Home Office in the latest year for which figures are available. [15826]

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office has no formal policy responsibility for crime prevention, although some expenditure within the strategic development scheme is for crime prevention activity. In 1994–95, this amounted to £817,594.

There are also some schemes funded by the Welsh Office which include elements of crime prevention, but it is impossible to quantify the amount specific to it. These include grants to combat drug and alcohol misuse, and expenditure on the estates partnership scheme.

The level of crime prevention expenditure by the Home Office is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a grant to the citizens advice bureaux in Wales in respect of the North Wales regional office at Prestatyn. [15982]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The North Wales regional office at Prestatyn is the area office for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Government funding of the association, provided by the Department of Trade and Industry, was £11,916,000 in 1994–95. The same amount of Government funding will be made available in 1995–96. It is for the association to determine the allocation of funds to individual area offices.

Railway Lines (Road Bridges)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional finances he proposes to make available to county highway authorities in Wales to meet the cost of upgrading road bridges over railway lines; and if he will make a statement. [15892]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is open to Welsh local authority associations to identify any additional costs falling on Welsh authorities in their annual assessment of need to spend on local authority services. This will be taken into account, together with all other relevant factors, in determining future funding for local authorities.

Education Grants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total sum per annum being made available through his Department's grants for education support and training to help governors, headteachers and senior teachers develop effectiveness skills for the management of schools; and what criteria will be used in deciding how such GEST resources are distributed. [15946]

Mr. Richards: Planned expenditure in 1995–96 is £1.19 million. Allocations are made by reference to a formula which has been drawn up in consultation with LEAs in Wales.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what review procedures he has put in place to ensure that TECs in Wales demonstrate how their activities will mesh with developments plans established by local authorities, as set out under the aims and responsibilities sector of this departmental report, on an agenda for action in Wales, are met. [15989]

Mr. Richards: TECs are being asked to discuss with local authorities and others how the action plan "People and Prosperity; an Agenda for Action in Wales" can be taken forward to meet local circumstances. The Welsh Office reviews TEC performance regularly.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms; [16616]

(2) what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and what price. [16615]

Mr. Redwood: The first Welsh Office departmental report was issued in February 1991. That and subsequent reports have been published as Command Papers by HMSO which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from the sales revenue.

The report is produced bilingually in English and Welsh and the Welsh Office has made the following contributions towards the additional costs involved, expressed in 1994–95 prices:

1991: £7,046
1992: £5,831
1993: £5,220
1994: £4,497
1995: £3,500

Some 1,600 copies of the 1995 report, Cm 2815 were printed and published. In addition to those copies required by Parliament, Government Departments and agencies, just over 900 were produced to satisfy other sales at a price of £15.40 net.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16279]

Mr. Redwood: My Department bought in no public relations services from the private sector. The cost of running my information division in 1993–94 was £616,085, excluding the cost of purchasing media advertising and promotional material.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average delay between the initial request by parents for a statement of special educational needs for their child and its delivery in each of the counties in Wales in the latest available year. [16838]

Mr. Richards: The information is not collected centrally. The responsibility for the assessment of special educational needs and the preparation of statements rests with local education authorities; regulations made under the Education Act 1993 set out time limits for this process.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to point 7 of his letter of strategic guidance to the Welsh Development Agency dated 23 February, what representations he has had concerning the per diem consultancy fee paid to Mr. Stuart Ruben of KLR and Co. for his term was temporary chief finance officer of the agency; and if he will make a statement. [16911]

Mr. Redwood: None.

Geriatric Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *906*, what procedures exist for further intervention by his medical officer for complaints where additional complaints concerning sub-standard levels of care are made shortly after the completion of the six months probationary period for the implementation of any changes pursuant to an independent professional review. [16852]

Mr. Redwood: Additional complaints would be investigated in the normal way. The medical officer for complaints is independent from the Department and would be consulted only if the complaint was not resolved locally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *906*, (1) what information he has received from the director of public health medicine of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the implementation of changes in the standard of geriatric care on ward B6 at the University hospital of Wales; and if he will make a statement; [16851]

(2) what representations the medical officer for complaints in Wales has made to the director of public health medicines of the South Glamorgan health authority in relation to the follow-up action required by that authority pursuant to the independent professional review carried out on 6 October 1994 in relation to complaints about ward B6 and the standard of geriatric care at the University hospital of Wales. [16853]

Mr. Redwood: In the first instance, it is for the health authority to consider and implement any changes that may be necessary in the light of the findings of the medical officer for complaints. The director of public health medicine will be asked by the Department's chief medical officer, what measures have been undertaken six months after the issue of the MO(C) report.

Education Spending

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much is currently spent on education in each local education authority; and to what extent this has changed in relation to last year's figures in *(a)* real and *(b)* percentage terms. [16791]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is given in the following table.

Net current expenditure on education
(excluding school meals and milk)[1]

		Percentage increase between[3] *1993–94 and 1994–95*	
	1994–95[2] *(£ million)*	*Real terms Per cent.*	*Cash Per cent.*
Clwyd	169.1	–1	1
Dyfed	161.9	–0	2
Gwent	198.8	–1	1
Gwynedd	100.3	0	2
Mid Glamorgan	253.1	–1	1
Powys	55.3	–1	1
South Glamorgan	168.2	2	4
West Glamorgan	157.7	–3	–1
Total Wales	1,264.4	–1	1

[1] Includes residual expenditure on further and higher education and LEA payments in respect of grant-maintained schools.

[2] Budgets.

[3] Increase in 1994–95 budgets over 1993–94 revised estimates.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will specify the arrangements by which a part of his annual grant-in-aid to the Cardiff Bay development corporation is allocated for grant-aiding of the Cardiff Bay opera house trust by the corporation; if that part of the grant in aid is ring-fenced; what is the amount passed on to the trust; and in which financial years it occurred; [16908]

(2) if he will specify the arrangements for the grant aiding of the Cardiff Bay opera house trust by the Cardiff Bay development corporation on a matched basis with grants from Associated British Ports; and if he will make a statement. [16912]

Mr. Redwood: The corporation's detailed funding arrangements for the opera house trust is an operational matter. From its annual grant in-aid allocation, the corporation has financed the administration of the trust and the opera house design competition as follows:

	1992–93 £000s	*1993–94 £000s*	*1994–95 £000s*	*1995–96 (Planned) £000s*
Administration	—	200	840	200
Design Competition	85	109	105	—
Total	85	309	946	200

In addition, the corporation is planning to match an £80,000 funding contribution from Associated British Ports towards the trust's campaign to secure capital funding from the private sector.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Social Marketing

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and which non-governmental organisations are being funded to carry out social marketing programmes; in which countries they are based; what is the amount of funding granted; and for what length of time. [16086]

Mr. Baldry: ODA is currently funding three non-governmental organisations to carry out social marketing programmes. Details of which countries, the level and period of funding are given in the table:

NGO Social Marketing Programmes Funded By ODA

NGO	*Country*	*Period*	*Total commitment (£ million)*
Population services international (PSI)	Cambodia	1994–95	0.150
PSI	India	1995–98	1.020
PSI/Society for family health	Nigeria	1995–97	3.300
Marie Stopes international (MSI)	India	1989–95	0.519
MSI	Ethiopia	1991–95	0.207
Total commitment			5.196

Family Planning

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on social marketing of contraceptives in family planning programmes overseas. [16098]

Mr. Baldry: ODA supports the social marketing of contraceptives as an effective strategy to improve access to contraception and thereby promote "Children by Choice, Not Chance."

Currency Speculation

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the proposal put forward by President Mitterrand at the world summit for social development for an international tax on currency speculation to fund assistance to developing countries for the eradication of poverty. [14928]

Mr. Baldry: We support the summit's conclusion that this type of taxation should not be promoted as a way of assisting developing countries. Taxation on international transactions essentially amounts to a barrier to trade which reduces global economic welfare.

The best way to help poorer countries develop is to allow them to trade freely. That is why my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development made clear in her address to the summit that full implementation of the general agreement on tariffs and trade is likely to generate more jobs worldwide than any other single international development.

Slovakia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the United Kingdom's financial or contractual responsibilities for investments made in nuclear power installations by the European bank for reconstruction and development in the event of future accidents. [16846]

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom Government would not assume any financial liability in the event of an accident at the Mochovce nuclear power station in the Slovak Republic, the only proposed EBRD investment in nuclear energy. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 21 February at column *129*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions the United Kingdom made in resources or policy creation in the decision of the European bank for reconstruction and Development funding of the Mochovce nuclear plant in Slovakia. [16847]

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom know-how fund has financed EBRD's engagement of consultants (i) to provide financial advisory services; (ii) to undertake an environmental impact assessment and (iii) to audit the public participation programme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what calculation was made in assessing the 10 per cent. predicted decommissioning costs for the Mochovce nuclear installation made by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [16845]

Mr. Baldry: The cost estimates for Mochovce include an allowance of US$337 million for fuel storage and decommissioning. The Slovak Parliament passed a law in August 1994 whereby 10 per cent. of the revenues derived from the sale of nuclear power are to be transferred to a state fund. This fund is intended to finance all expenses relating to nuclear waste management, final waste and spent fuel disposal and decommissioning of all nuclear plants.

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Indonesian public officials trained under the United Kingdom aid programme who have subsequently served in East Timor. [16796]

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the advice and training given to the Indonesian national police under the Overseas Development Agency's police management training project has been used in policing East Timor; and to what extent such advice and training related to crowd control techniques. [16727]

Mr. Baldry: The police management training project strengthens the central capacity of the Indonesian national police to respond more effectively to a wide range of management and public service issues. It has not dealt with crowd control techniques. The project has helped the INP to establish a consultancy unit which engages in active problem solving. Advice or assistance from the unit is available to all branches of the INP. The East Timor police authorities have not sought advice directly from the unit.

PRIME MINISTER

Astra plc

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Government Departments which have been in contact with Mr. C. Barlow of Coopers and Lybrand or his colleagues in relation to Astra plc documents. [16999]

The Prime Minister: Officials of the inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and officers from the Ministry of Defence police CID have been in contact with Mr. C. Barlow of Coopers and Lybrand in relation to Astra plc documents.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Government Departments which have been contacted by Mr. J. Ramasahoye of S. J. Berwin and Co., solicitors, or his superiors, in relation to Astra plc documents; and if he will list those Government Departments who have contacted Mr. Ramasahoye or S. J. Berwin in relation to Astra plc documents. [16998]

The Prime Minister: Officials at the investigations division of the DTI responsible for monitoring the inspection of Astra Holdings plc under the Companies Act 1985, have been in correspondence with S. J. Berwin over the production of copy documents from the inspectors.

Pepper *v.* Hart

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the report on the implications of the House of Lords ruling on the 1992 Pepper *v.* Hart case. [16825]

The Prime Minister: The report referred to is an internal document containing recommendations from officials to Ministers. In line with the practice of successive Administrations regarding such documents I do not propose to publish it.

Terrorism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 1022, referring to concrete evidence being brought forward and being fully investigated and, pursuant to the Leader of the Houses's oral answers of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 1033, alluding to reflection on concrete evidence, what assessment he has made of the telex, a copy of which has been sent to him, involving the special action group of the CIA, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the agency at 48 Westminster Bridge road involving No Home Runs, Pirates and Senators and the Major Charles McKee. [16910]

The Prime Minister: I have asked the relevant authorities to look into this matter. I will reply to the hon. Member's letter shortly.

Pornography

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister what inter-departmental committees are considering pornography; what are their terms of reference; and if he will make a statement. [16799]

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's concern about pornography, and as part of the on-going monitoring and review of controls in this area the Government have established an inter-departmental working group on obscenity. The group will monitor developments in the area of obscenity, with particular reference to emerging trends in child and computer pornography, and will identify any actual or potential difficulties in enforcement or weakness in the relevant law and consider possible ways of overcoming them.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 March 1995. [14934]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Prime Minister how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what was the figure in 1979. [16563]

The Prime Minister: There are currently six press officers in No.10. Detailed records are not available for 1979. The earliest date for which figures are available is 1983 when the number of press officers was five.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police Committee

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, columns *138-39* from which vote the funding for the Metropolitan police committee will be taken. [16691]

Mr. Maclean: From 1 April 1995 funding for the Metropolitan police committee will be provided from the metropolitan police fund. The relevant vote is class VII, vote 1, Subhead P1, which is Home Office grant towards expenditure incurred by police authorities, including the receiver for the Metropolitan police district.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if members of the police committee receive payment for their work. [16693]

Mr. Maclean: Members will be entitled to claim reimbursement of reasonable travelling costs, plus an allowance of £15 for each hour spent in attendance on committee business.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Minister or Ministers will decide whether to act on the advice of the Metropolitan police committee. [16692]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend and other Home Office Ministers.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his responsibilities in relation to extradition relations with Libya. [16909]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The United Kingdom Government do not have extradition arrangements with Libya.

European Frontiers Convention

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what parliamentary proceedings will occur in respect of the European frontiers convention prior to the Government signifying their agreement to the instrument. [16808]

Mr. Howard: As I indicated in standing Committee B on 22 March at column *23* the Government will bring the final text of the external frontiers convention before Parliament before it is signed. If the convention is signed, the Government will not ratify it before the necessary legislation has been enacted by Parliament in accordance with the normal procedures.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding remains available for allocation to safer cities projects; and how much funding has been transferred to the single regeneration budget at the Department of the Environment. [16844]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office transferred to the single regeneration budget £3,760,000 for 1994–95, £6,335,000 for 1995–96 and £6,996,000 for 1996–97 for the continuation of the safer cities programme. The estimated outturn of the Department of Environment safer cities projects for 1994–95 is £2 million. The Home Office retained sufficient funds to provide for the four remaining phase 1 projects until they cease to receive Government funding in September 1995, and three projects being set up in Wales. Home Office provision for 1995–96 is £749,000.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost *(a)* to his Department and *(b)* to each police force in England and Wales of investigating miscarriages of justice at the request of his Department in each of the last 10 years. [16945]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information about the staff costs of the section in the Home Office which considers and investigates possible miscarriages of justice is set out in the following table.

	Staff costs *£ million*
1990	0.31
1991	0.35
1992	0.44
1993	0.53
1994	0.56

The Home Office also incurs other miscellaneous costs including those of transcripts obtained and scientific tests carried out at its request, but no firm figures for these costs are available.

Information about the costs of investigations carried out by police forces is not available in a form which enables miscarriage of justice inquiries to be distinguished from other investigations.

Closed Circuit Television

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the recipients of closed circuit television challenge funding. [16795]

Mr. Maclean: One hundred and six winners sharing £5 million Government funding were announced on 27 March. The successful bids, by region, were as follows:

North-east:

Whitley Bay town centre, Gateshead Team Valley industrial estate and Gateshead town centre; Chester le Street town centre; Bishop Auckland town centre; Skippers Lane industrial estate, Cleveland; and Mill Lane primary school and community centre, Stockton.

North-west and Merseyside:

Blackpool town centre; Penrith town centre; Tameside town centre and Tameside business development centre; Rochdale town centre; Chester; Wigan town centre; Carlisle town centre; Clitheroe town centre; Neston town centre; Bury town centre; Lancaster town centre; Morecambe town centre; and Kirkby railway station, Merseyside.

Yorkshire and Humberside:

Harrogate town centre; Outwood Grange school, Wakefield; Balby Street school, Doncaster Lower Don Valley industrial estate, Sheffield; Scawsby community centre and playfield, Doncaster; Driffield town centre, Humberside; Keighley town centre; Scarborough town centre; Suttonfields industrial estate; York city centre; Boroughbridge town centre, North Yorkshire; and Brigg town centre, Humberside.

London:

Harrow town centre, Hillingdon; Sunbury Cross shopping centre and car park; Islington: Hounslow town centre, Erith town centre (Kent); North Walthamsow industrial estates; and Richmond town centre.

South-east:

Newhaven town centre; Egham town centre, Surrey; Eastbourne town centre, Sussex; Sandwick town centre, Kent; Rochester industrial business estate; Dartford town centre; Tonbridge and West Malling town centre; Addlestone town centre; Banbury centre; Wokingham town centre; Basingstoke town centre; Chesham town centre; Fawcett Road shopping area, Portsmouth; Ashford town centre; Dover and Deal business and town centres; Folkestone town and residential areas; Maidstone town centre; Havant town centre; and High Wycombe town centre.

West Midlands:

Rugby town centre; Hereford shopping and business areas; Solihull town centre and car parks; Lichfield car parks and town centre; Ledbury high street, Worcestershire; Worcester town centre; Shrewsbury town centre; Tamworth town centre; and Stratford upon Avon town centre.

Eastern Region:

Chelmsford town centre; Ely town centre, Cambridgeshire; Peterborough town centre; Stevenage town centre and car parks; Hitchin town centre and Letchworth business centre; Harlow town centre; Thetford, Breckland; and Hadleigh and Sudbury town centres.

East Midlands:

Boston town centre, Lincolnshire; Kirton (nr Boston) town centre; Illkeston town centre; Moira town centre; Donington town centre; Loughborough town centre; Mansfield shopping centre; Market Harborough town centre; Gainsborough industrial estates; and Kettering town centre.

South-west:

Bodmin town centre; Cirencester market place, car parks and bus station; Falmouth town centre; Newquay tourism areas; Truro town centre; Salisbury town centre; Torquay town centre; West Wiltshire mobile system; Gloucester city centre; Tiverton business park and town centre; Crown Glass centre, Nailsea, Bristol; Boscombe town centre; and Clifton, Bristol car parks and shopping centre.

Wales:

Colwyn Bay town centre; Cwmbran town centre; West Glamorgan mobile CCTV; Rhondda residential area; and Haverford West town centre.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16290]

Mr. Howard: My Department did not employ any public relations agencies in 1993–94. The publicity budget was used to fund public interest advertising campaigns and a range of support material. These campaigns were listed in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 16 February 1994 at columns *801–3*.

Police Committees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the rate of remuneration for members of police committees. [16257]

Mr. Maclean: Councillor and independent members of new police authorities may claim a member allowance of £15 per hour for time spent on police authority business, up to a limit of £120 a day and £3,000 per year—£6,000 per year in the case of the chairman of the authority.

Magistrate members of new police authorities will, as at present, be able to claim financial loss allowance at the rates payable to them as magistrates. That is:

£24.72 (£32.96 for the self employed) for up to 4 hours.

£49.44 (£65.92 for the self employed) for over 4 hours and up to 24 hours.

Full details of the allowances regime for members of new police authorities are set out in the Home Office circular letter dated 5 August 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Police, Hampshire

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional police constables the new financial arrangements will allow for in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. [15852]

Mr. Maclean: The spending power of Hampshire police authority will increase by £16 million in 1995–96. It is for the chief constable and the police authority to decide on how to allocate available resources between priorities, and to decide to what extent money should be spent on extra constables. The average full cost of a police officer in provincial forces in England and Wales is £42,000.

Defendants' Property

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirement there is for the police to return property to a defendant where that property is held as possible evidence. [16101]

Mr. Maclean: Code of practice B issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides that anything lawfully seized by a police officer may be retained only for as long as is necessary in the circumstances. It may be retained, among other purposes, for use as evidence at a trial. Property must not be retained where a photograph or copy of the item would suffice.

A person seeking return of property seized by the police may make application to a magistrates' court under the Police (Property) Act 1897 for its possession.

Speeding Fines

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much revenue has been collected for each year since 1990 through fines resulting form *(a)* speeding offences detected by automatic speed cameras and *(b)* all other speeding offences. [15662]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

However, information available to me suggests that some £13.3 million was ordered to be paid in fines for speeding offences in England and Wales in 1991, £12.7 million in 1992 and £12.5 million in 1993.

Veal Calves

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of costs resulting from the policing of protests related to the export of veal calves from the United Kingdom. [15921]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 24 March at column *374*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Green Housekeeping

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide results of the success of the green housekeeping action plan and the other schemes in *(a)* the Northern Ireland Office and *(b)* each of the other Government departments in Northern Ireland. [15422]

Mr. Moss: All Government Departments in Northern Ireland have adopted the green housekeeping approach and many measures have been implemented successfully.

Significant success has been achieved in the areas of energy efficiency and recycling.

Over the first three years of the UK-wide energy efficiency campaign to reduce energy consumption within the public sector by 15 per cent., Northern Ireland achieved an 8.12 per cent. improvement in energy performance £/m^2. Work will continue to implement fully the strategy for the public sector campaign.

Paper recycling has been introduced throughout the entire Northern Ireland civil service, with most offices now having introduced schemes for the recycling of normal "basket" waste paper and a single tender has been awarded for the shredding and pulping of classified material.

Other recycling schemes include the letting of a contract for the collection and recycling of ink/toner cartridges from personal computers.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out the cost of implementing the green housekeeping action plan and similar environmental schemes in *(a)* the Northern Ireland Office and *(b)* each of the other Government Departments in Northern Ireland. [15421]

Mr. Moss: There are no separate budgets assigned to green housekeeping activities within the Northern Ireland Office and other Government Departments as these, to a large extent, formalise good management practice. Costs are absorbed within existing budgets for buildings repair and maintenance, and the purchase of equipment etc.

Green housekeeping measures do not always incur a cost since for example, the shredding and pulping of waste paper instead of incineration provides both financial savings and environmental improvements.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a list *(a)* of the Property owned by the Northern Ireland Office and leased out and *(b)* of the property leased by the Northern Ireland Office. [15419]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office either leases or owns various properties, most of which are used for official business but there are a number of residential properties.

The Northern Ireland Office does not lease out any of the property owned by the department.

Disclosure of the details of the properties is not considered advisable on grounds of personal security.

Residential Care

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what is the fully allocated cost for the provision of a continuing care bed for *(a)* a frail elderly person and *(b)* an elderly dementia sufferer in (i) an NHS hospital and (ii) a residential bed provided by social services. [15126]

Mr. Moss: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of goat pox were reported in each year since 1985. [15981]

Mr. Ancram: None. There has never been a case of goat pox in Northern Ireland.

Water and Sewerage Charges

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *63*, regarding water and sewerage charges paid by his Department, if he will define disproportionate cost. [15931]

Mr. Moss: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury on 18 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns *313-14* to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns).

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which management consultants have been employed by his Department to assist in the assessment of applications by NHS units for trust status; how much each was paid; and how many assessments they undertook in each wave. [15847]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 19 July 1994 by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) *Official Report*, column *194*. There has since been a fourth wave of applications for health and social services trust status.

Two assessments were made by IHSM Consultants in the fourth wave, for which they were paid a total of £12,470.69. This includes fees and expenses.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Events (Ministerial Attendance)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the *(a)* stage plays, *(b)* concerts, *(c)* operas, *(d)* films and *(e)* dance performances he has seen since 1 January, together with dates. [16183]

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1 January 1995, I have seen:

a) "An Inspector Calls" Aldwych Theatre, London, 16 January 1995
"The Knocky" Royal Court Theatre, London, 27 February 1995
"A Christmas Carol" Barbican Theatre, London, 2 March 1995.

b) none.

c) "Otello" Royal Opera House, London, 1 February 1995
"Cunning Little Vixen" Coliseum, London, 13 March 1995

d) "The Madness of King George" Lumiere Cinema, London, 19 March 1995.

e) none.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the *(a)* museums, *(b)* galleries, *(c)* theatres, *(d)* arts centres and *(e)* public libraries he has visited since 1 January, together with dates.

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1 January 1995, I have visited:

a) Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 11 January 1995 and 24 January 1995
Loughborough Carillon Museum, 4 February 1995
The Exploratory, Bristol, 6 February 1995
Quarry Bank Mill Trust Ltd. Museum, Cheshire, 10 March 1995
Science Museum, London, 16 March 1995 and 21 March 1995
Royal Observatory, Greenwich, 21 March 1995
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 21 March 1995

b) Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, 8 February 1995
  Tate Gallery, London, 21 February 1995
  RSA, London, 23 February 1995

c) Aldwych Theatre, London, 16 January 1995
  Royal Opera House, London, 1 February 1995 and 22 February 1995
  Theatre Royal, Bristol, 6 February 1995
  West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, 8 February 1995
  Royal National Theatre, London, 20 February 1995 and 21 February 1995
  Royal Court Theatre, London, 27 February 1995
  Barbican Theatre, London, 2 March 1995
  Blackpool Grand Theatre, 10 March 1995
  Coliseum, London, 23 March 1995
  Royal Albert Hall, London, 23 March 1995

d) Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 8 February 1995
  Charnwood Arts, Loughborough, 4 February 1995

e) Belgrave Library, Leicester, 6 March 1995
  Leicester Central Libraries, 6 March 1995

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the arts organisations with whom he has met since 1 January, together with dates. [16181]

Mr. Dorrell: I meet representatives of arts organisations very frequently. The specific information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

National Lottery

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what sum has accrued to Camelot Group plc in respect of its operation of the national lottery, arising from its percentage income agreed under its contract; [15653]

(2) what has been the initial outlay of Camelot Group plc on the establishment, administration and promotion of the national lottery since the date of the award of the contract; [15652]

(3) what was the total number of staff employed at the Office of the National Lottery; and what is the total annual cost to the Exchequer of the Office of the National Lottery. [15654]

Mr. Dorrell: The administration costs of the Office of the National Lottery are met from the national lottery distribution fund. The net cost to the Exchequer is therefore nil. I have asked the Director-General to write to the hon. Member on the other matters raised, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will state Mr. Peter Gummer's term of office and salary as head of the Arts Council lottery committee; and what provision has been made for severence pay in the case of early termination of office. [16252]

Mr. Dorrell: Mr. Gummer has been reappointed as a member of the Arts Council of England for a three-year period from 1 April 1995. One of his responsibilities as a member of the Council is to chair the Arts Council's national lottery advisory board. No remuneration is attached to membership of the Arts Council or its advisory committees.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will require Messrs Camelot to publish, on a weekly basis, a statement of revenue, distribution, expenses and retained profit. [15862]

Mr. Dorrell: Camelot Group plc is subject to the provisions of the Companies Acts and is required to lodge accounts with Companies House annually. I have no powers to require Camelot to publish information regarding retained profit on any other basis.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the percentage of receipts from the national lottery being held by Camelot plc each week. [16193]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* This is a matter for the director-general of the national lottery. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House.

Mr Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to whom each of the five lottery distributing bodies are accountable. [16670]

Mr. Dorrell: The 11 national lottery distributing bodies—including the four national arts councils and the four national sports councils—are accountable to Parliament and will be preparing annual reports and accounts which will be laid before Parliament as soon as possible after the end of the financial year.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the average period between national lottery competitions held so far and the payment of lottery duty to the Treasury. [15860]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

To date, there have been 15 national lottery competitions for which payment has been received. The average period between the date of the competition and the payment of lottery duty to the Treasury was 27 days.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will calculate the additional amount of revenue which would have accrued to the Treasury in interest if payments of lottery duty had been made within 10 days of each competition since the inception of the national lottery. [15861]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

To date, there have been 15 national lottery competitions for which payment has been received. If the lottery duty due on these competitions had been paid 10 days after the date of the competition the additional interest which would have accrued to the Treasury is approximately £200,000.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1992. [16547]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department currently employs seven press officers; the same number was employed in 1992.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16277]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department's public relations requirements are normally met in-house. During 1993–94, a public relations company was contracted to assist with a programme of events marking the 50th anniversary of D-day. The contract, which was in line with central Government guidelines, cost £62,500.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16211]

Mr. Dorrell: Central Government conventions for the use of public relations companies are set out in "A Working Guide For Government Information Officers", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Albert Memorial

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage from what part of his Department's budget the additional funding for the restoration of the Albert Memorial announced on 22 March came. [16669]

Mr. Dorrell: My predecessor announced on 30 November 1993 that funding of £2 million a year is planned in 1995–96 and 1996–97. No allocations have yet been made beyond then, but it is my hope that I shall be able to make £2 million available in the two subsequent years.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15026]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

BBC

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the annual analysis of hours and range of output made in different parts of the United Kingdom will include programme expenditure across the range of output; and if he will make statement. [15903]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* The BBC's "Statement of Promises to Audiences" will include quantifiable targets underpinning the undertakings in the new agreement regarding regional programme-making. In addition, we will expect the BBC to provide sufficient information in its annual report to allow Parliament and the public to assess how well the BBC has performed against these targets. We are discussing the details with the BBC.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefits

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* severe disability allowance, *(b)* income support and *(c)* incapacity benefit who will be assessed as capable of work he estimates will appeal against this decision in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [16125]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested, as estimates are not made for the individual benefits listed. Current planning assumptions are that the number of appeals which will be lodged on the question of incapacity for work will be in the region of 140,000 in 1995–96, 190,000 in 1996–97 and 90,000 in 1997–98.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date he will be sending guidance about the assessment of the all-work test for incapacity benefits to *(a)* adjudication officers and *(b)* the Benefits Agency medical service. [16124]

Mr. Hague: The independent central adjudication service, which has responsibility for adjudication matters, has produced guidance on the application of the all-work test for incapacity benefits. The guidance was delivered to adjudication officers in the week commencing 20 March.

A programme of detailed and comprehensive training on the all-work test for Benefits Agency medical service doctors has been under way since January. Procedural guidance to supplement this training will be received by all those involved in the application of the test before it comes into force on 13 April.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates will move from *(a)* severe disability allowance, *(b)* income support and *(c)* incapacity benefit in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98 to sign on as available for work. [16122]

Mr. Hague: No estimates have been made of the number of people leaving severe disablement allowance. The estimated number of people who will move from incapacity benefit and income support with the disability premium to sign on as unemployed earlier than would otherwise have been the case, as a result of the new medical test, is in the table.

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
From incapacity benefit to unemployment	160,000	120,000	60,000
From income support with disability premium to unemployment	50,000	30,000	10,000

Note:

Estimates rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates will fail to qualify for *(a)* severe disablement allowance, *(b)* income support and *(c)* incapacity benefit in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98 as a result of being assessed as capable of all work. [16118]

Mr. Hague: No estimates have been made of the number of severe disablement allowance claimants being found capable of all work. The estimated numbers of new and existing claimants of income support and incapacity benefit who will be found capable of work are in the tables.

New claimants found capable of work under the new medical test (Table shows the estimated number of people leaving benefit earlier than they would have done under current arrangements)

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*Total over 3 years*
Incapacity benefit[1]	45,000	55,000	55,000	160,000
Income support with disability premium[2]	10,000	10,000	10,000	35,000
Total—invalidity benefit and income support[2]	55,000	70,000	70,000	195,000

Existing claimants found capable of work under the new medical test (Table shows the estimated number of people leaving benefit earlier than they would have done under current arrangements)

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*Total over 3 years*
Invalidity benefit	140,000	80,000	20,000	240,000
Income support with disability premium[2]	50,000	30,000	5,000	85,000
Total—invalidity benefit and income support[2]	190,000	110,000	25,000	325,000

Notes:

[1] Figures for incapacity benefit relate to those who would have qualified for invalidity benefit under the current arrangements.

[2] Figures for income support do not include those also receiving invalidity benefit/incapacity benefit.

1. All estimates rounded to the nearest 5,000; totals may not sum due to rounding.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* severe disability allowance, *(b)* income support and *(c)* incapacity benefit he estimates will be examined by the Benefits Agency Medical Service in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [16126]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested, as estimates are not made for the individual benefits listed. Current planning assumptions are that the number of medical examinations relating to incapacity for work will be in the region of 625,000 in 1995–96, 660,000 in 1996–97 and 375,000 in 1997–98.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who will move off incapacity benefits during 1996–97 he estimates will fail to qualify for contributory jobseeker's allowance. [16120]

Mr. Hague: Around 70,000.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates will qualify for *(a)* severe disability allowance, *(b)* income support and *(c)* incapacity benefit in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98 because they fall within one of the groups exempt from the all-work test. [16123]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. Estimates have not been made of the number of severe disablement allowance and income support claimants who will be exempt from the all-work test. It is estimated that around 50,000 new incapacity benefit claimants per year will be exempt from the test and that around 900,000 existing invalidity benefit claimants will be exempt.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will qualify for unemployment benefit or jobseeker's allowance he expects will need to claim an incapacity benefit on the basis that they are unable to work, in each of the years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [16119]

Mr. Hague: It is not possible to make the estimate specified in the question, as data are not held on benefits received by claimants at the point of a claim for an incapacity benefit.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who will move off incapacity benefits during 1995–96 he estimates will qualify for unemployment benefit. [16121]

Mr. Hague: Around 95,000.

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out full details of the procedures to be used under the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 by the Benefits Agency medical service agency in the assessment of severe mental health problems, and the criteria by which the Benefits Agency medical service doctors will assess each individual to decide who is, and who is not, to be exempt by reason of mental illness from the all-work test. [17011]

Mr. Hague: Before the all-work test is applied to any claimant with a diagnosis of mental health problems, a Benefits Agency medical services doctor will consider whether the claimant's mental health problem is a severe one. This consideration will be based on medical evidence already held and on further information from the Claimant's GP or other medical practitioner, which may be sought specifically to inform the decision. Where a claimant is certified by the Benefits Agency medical service doctor as suffering from severe mental illness, he will be found incapable for work automatically, without having to undergo the test.

The guidance for Benefits Agency medical service doctors in assessing severe mental health problems is as follows:

> Severe mental health problems are characterised by the presence of mental illness so adversely affecting a person's mood, behaviour or social or environmental awareness, including interpersonal relationships, that continued psychiatric care is essential. This care could include:
>
> sheltered residential facilities where the person receives regular medical or nursing supervision; or
>
> day care at least one day a week in a centre where qualified nursing care is available; and/or
>
> long-term medication with anti-psychotic preparations including depot neuroleptics or mood-modifying drugs.

Family Credit

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims for family credit have been made in the period 1 April 1994 to 30 September 1994; [15947]

(2) how many claims for family credit and child care disregard there were for *(a)* one-parent and *(b)* two-parent families in the period 1 April 1994 to 30 September 1994;

(3) how many claims for family credit had a request for child care costs to be disregarded in the period 1 April 1994 to 30 September 1994. [15948]

Mr. Roger Evans: In the six-month period from 1 April to 30 September 1994, there were a total of 677,000 claims for family credit.

Child care charges were not a relevant factor in the determination of family credit entitlement until October 1994. Consequently, the family credit claim form did not ask for details of child care charges before that date. No information is available about any family credit claimant who may, nevertheless, have made a request for child care charges to be taken into consideration.

Ilford Park Polish Home

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received from the residents in the Ilford Park Polish home near Newton Abbot, Devon, about the market-testing exercise being mounted by his Department in relation to the home; [16172]

(2) when he expects to reach a decision about the operation of the Ilford Park Polish home and the market-testing exercise currently in operation there. [16161]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have received a number of written representations from the residents of Ilford Park Polish home. In addition, on 20 December 1994, my noble Friend the Minister of State also met with the residents' committee on his visit to the home.

The information necessary for us to make a decision on the award of the market-testing contract is to be presented by the end of September 1995.

Unemployment Benefit (Local Councillors)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reconsider the regulations which prevent serving local councillors from receiving unemployment benefit by virtue of being regarded as unavailable for work; and if he will make a statement. [15945]

Mr. Roger Evans: Availability for work is a long-standing and basic condition for the receipt of unemployment benefit. There are no plans to remove this condition in respect of local authority councillors.

Social Fund

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what gross budget will be set for the discretionary social fund in 1995–96. [17184]

Mr. Roger Evans: The social fund gross discretionary budget for 1995–96 will be £406 million. Some £97 million will be allocated to grants and £309 million to loans. The new allocations represent an increase of £38 million over the total gross budget for 1994–95.

At a time when we need to look very carefully at every aspect of public expenditure, I am pleased that we are once again able to sustain our record in increasing the social fund budget each year since it began.

The recycling of loans means that we are able to give more help to more people. The loans system is being widely used; between 1 April 1994 and 28 February 1995 well over 1.8 million non-repayable grants and interest-free loans were made. This is 100,000 more than during the same period last year—an increase of 6 per cent. The increase from April 1995 will allow even more people to be helped.

Details of individual district budget allocations have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of applications for budgeting loans, *(b)* the number of applications for crisis loans, *(c)* the number of successful applications for budgeting loans and the percentage success rate expressed against the total number of applications, *(d)* the number of successful applications for crisis loans and the percentage success rate expressed against the total number of applications, *(e)* the total budget allowed for (i) budgeting and (ii) crisis loans and *(f)* the total amounts awarded for (iii) budgeting and (iv) crisis loans for each Benefits Agency district within Scotland for each of the financial years since their introduction. [16306]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 27 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Social Fund in Scotland.

The information you have requested is at Annex A and a copy has been placed in the Library. There is no separate budgeting and crisis loans budget, but each district has an overall loans budget. Information has therefore been provided for the total loans allocations for each district.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Statutory Sick Pay

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to allow employers to opt out of the statutory sick pay scheme and what progress has been made towards simplifying the rules. [17205]

Mr. Lilley: I am issuing a consultation paper today which seeks views on allowing employers to opt out of the statutory sick pay scheme where their occupational sick pay schemes meet certain requirements. It would be in everyone's interest for sick pay arrangements to operate as simply and smoothly as possible.

Research carried out for the Department of Social Security in recent years shows that around 85 per cent. of employers make some form of short-term provision for sickness.

One of the main advantages for employers in opting out of SSP would be a reduction in the amount of records they are required to keep at present. They would no longer have to operate SSP rules and could keep simpler records of sickness absence, payments made to employees and transfers to state incapacity benefits.

Record keeping can be an administrative burden for every employer, not just for those with occupational sick pay schemes, so I am also seeking views on a significant reduction in the amount of mandatory records to be kept by all employers.

The proposals have been made by a working group of employers and payroll organisations which I set up to examine ways for cutting red tape in the SSP scheme.

The group has also identified a number of changes that would make the scheme simpler to understand and operate. It is now important to seek wider views including those of employee's representatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the group for the time they have given and the commitment they have shown in undertaking such a thorough review.

Copies of the consultation paper with the working group's report have been placed in the Library. Comments are sought by 30 June.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State of Social Security if he will list for each of the past five years, *(a)* how many people claimed housing benefit, *(b)* how much was paid in housing benefit, *(c)* how many claimants have had their housing benefit reduced due to the presence of a non-dependent adult in the household, *(d)* by how much the total housing benefit bill has been reduced due to the provisions on non-dependent lodgers, *(e)* by how much the housing benefit bill would be reduced if all single householders with spare bedrooms were assumed to be providing lodgings to a second non-dependent adult. [14926]

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest available information is set out in the table:

Thousands

	All housing benefit recipients	*Estimate of number of housing benefit cases with a non-dependant in the household*
May 1989	3,926	n/a
May 1990	3,979	323
May 1991	4,021	333
May 1992	4,320	297
May 1993	4,521	311

Source:
Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries taken at the end of May each year.

Total housing benefit expenditure

	£ million
1989–90	4,299
1990–91	5,100
1991–92	6,375
1992–93	7,793
1993–94	9,193

Source:
Departmental report 1995.

The amount by which the housing benefit bill is reduced due to the provisions on income from lodgers, part (d), cannot be calculated because information is not collected centrally.

Information on the size of accommodation, part (e), is not collected centrally.

War Pensions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what actions he has taken in the last three years to encourage eligible persons to claim a war pension. [15917]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 27 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about actions taken in the last three years to encourage eligible persons to claim a war pension.

The Agency, previously the War Pensions Directorate under the Benefits Agency, has actively publicised War Pensions through our own Welfare Service which has 29 offices located throughout the country; the War Pensions Committees which are also regionally based; the various ex-Service organisations with whom we have close and frequent dialogue, and with the Press.

Claims have risen in the last 10 years from 15,000 to an expected 120,000 for this year, and it is our aim to continue to raise awareness of the War Pensions Agency, the War Pensions Scheme and the service we provide, so that those with potential entitlement know of their right to claim.

Activities over the last 3 years include:

attending many exhibitions and, through our Welfare Service, providing seminars and advice days throughout the country which are advertised through the appropriate local press;

ensuring that welfare outlets and organisations (doctors hospitals etc) and advice centres (NACAB, Age Concern etc) know of our service, and to target places our potential customers are likely to visit;

poster campaigns (a new one has just started);

providing information and factual articles for newspapers, magazines, television and radio programmes. We ensure wherever possible that the War Pensions Agency Helpline telephone number (01253 858858) is quoted which is proving successful, with calls to the Helpline now averaging over 9,500 per week;

British Telecom telephone directories now prominently mention War Pensions Agency in the form of a ½ column entry;

following successful trials last year of a mobile office, we will continue this service;

establishing contact with new areas such as ex-service magazines and Regimental museums to discuss WPA publicity material and areas of common interest such as VE/VJ day;

providing information for servicemen on discharge for inclusion in a Benefits Agency pack;

the Agency will shortly be appearing on Charter Television which is aimed at hospital waiting areas.

I hope you find my reply useful.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the numbers of people requesting the DS2 claim pack for attendance allowance but failing to return it. [16072]

Mr. Hague: The administration of attendance allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 27 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about claims for Attendance Allowance (AA).

The claim pack DS2 is exclusively for use in AA claims. In the period April 1992 to January 1995 some 2,300,000 DS2 claim packs have been issued to Benefits Agency outlets. Though the vast majority of these have gone to customers, information is not available in respect of the number still held in stock.

Additionally, DS2A packs are issued to organisations such as Welfare Rights and Citizen's Advice Bureaux. Although 1,500,000 DS2A packs have been issued in the period April 1992 to January 1995 information is not available in respect of the number still held in stock.

DS2 packs, supplied to customers direct from BA offices, provide an opportunity for a customer to complete and return their claim within a 6 week period whilst maintaining their original date of claim.

The total number of AA claims received for the period April 1992 to January 1995 is 1,400,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

HEALTH

NHS Doctors

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the percentage of doctors still working in the NHS in each of the first 10 years after qualifying; and what were the figures for each of the last 10 years. [15770]

Mr. Malone: Data are not available in the form requested.

Evidence on doctors leaving the profession prematurely is based in studies published in 1991 by Professor James Parkhouse. These studies suggest that about 20 per cent. of doctors are not practising in the national health service five years after qualification. The majority of these however, are not lost permanently to medicine. Many are working in short-term postings overseas, to develop their skills further, while others are working in United Kingdom medical work outside the NHS, or taking short career breaks. The Department has commissioned further cohort studies to provide up to date estimates of wastage from the medical profession.

A recent study by Isobel Allen containing more up-to-date information, based on a sample of 200 doctors qualifying in 1986, found that very few young doctors had left medicine altogether six years after qualification.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities in each regional health authority area have a policy on mixed-sex wards; and how many do not. [16100]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Clinical Outcome Indicators

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to publish health service clinical outcome indicators similar to those published in December 1994 by the Secretary of State for Scotland in respect of individual *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts in England; and what timetable is envisaged. [15866]

Mr. Sackville: Many of the indicators published in Scotland were published for individual health authorities in England in 1993. Existing indicators will henceforth be published annually as part of the public health common data set. Some of the indicators published in Scotland are dependent on linking patient records and this is not yet possible in England. As part of our longer-term plans we are currently working with the clinical professions on a programme to develop new outcome indicators.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make an urgent response to the consultations concluded on 30 November 1994 on the Green Paper, "Improving NHS Dentistry". [15983]

Mr. Malone: The Government are considering carefully all the contributions received during the consultation. An announcement will be made shortly.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *400*, how many letters from the public mentioned concern with problems of gaining access to NHS dental services en passant; and how many letters from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* community health councils, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* professional organisations and *(e)* patient groups have been received. [16400]

Mr. Malone: Since January 1994 some 209 letters in which the main point has been availability of general dental services have been received from hon. and right hon. Members. Additionally, two letters have been received direct from patient groups and one letter direct from a professional group.

Family health services authorities consistently report that they can help patients to find national health service dentists.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family health services authorities have been unable to provide emergency dental services in each month since April 1991. [16402]

Mr. Malone: General dental practitioners have an obligation under their terms of service to provide emergency cover to their registered patients. They may also offer emergency treatment to non-registered patients. Family health services authorities can make arrangements for emergency treatment for those patients who are not registered and are able to assist all those who inquire about emergency treatment.

Where there are already adequate emergency services available from general dental practitioners, or the community or hospital dental services, there is no need for FHSAs themselves to make arrangements.

Information on provision of emergency dental services by family health services authorities is available only for the period from July 1992 to July 1994. Data were received on a weekly rather than a monthly basis and are shown weekly in the table. Since 1 August 1994 more detailed data have been collected weekly on the number of patients referred to the emergency dental service, the community dental service, hospital dental service and salaried dentists instead.

General dental service: Total number of family health services authorities reporting that they were not providing emergency dental services in each week from 3 July 1992 to 29 July 1994[1, 3]

Week ending	*FHSAs*
England	
3 July 1992	13
10 July 1992	7
17 July 1992	8
24 July 1992	7
31 July 1992	8
7 August 1992	8
14 August 1992	7
21 August 1992	7
28 August 1992	8

General dental service: Total number of family health services authorities reporting that they were not providing emergency dental services in each week from 3 July 1992 to 29 July 1994[1][3]

Week ending	*FHSAs*
4 September 1992	8
11 September 1992	8
18 September 1992	8
25 September 1992	8
2 October 1992	8
9 October 1992	8
16 October 1992	8
23 October 1992	8
30 October 1992	8
6 November 1992	8
13 November 1992	7
20 November 1992	7
27 November 1992	7
4 December 1992	6
11 December 1992	6
18 December 1992	6
25 December 1992	—
1 January 1993	—
8 January 1993	6
15 January 1993	6
22 January 1993	6
29 January 1993	6
5 February 1993	6
12 February 1993	6
19 February 1993	6
26 February 1993	4
5 March 1993	7
12 March 1993	5
19 March 1993	5
26 March 1993	6
2 April 1993	6
9 April 1993	5
16 April 1993	5
23 April 1993	7
30 April 1993	5
7 May 1993	6
14 May 1993	6
21 May 1993	5
28 May 1993	6
4 June 1993	7
11 June 1993	6
18 June 1993	5
25 June 1993	5
2 July 1993	6
9 July 1993	5
16 July 1993	5
23 July 1993	5
30 July 1993	6
6 August 1993	5
13 August 1993	6
20 August 1993	6
27 August 1993	6
3 September 1993	5
10 September 1993	5
17 September 1993	5
24 September 1993	5
1 October 1993	5
08 October 1993	5
15 October 1993	5
22 October 1993	8
29 October 1993	7
5 November 1993	8
12 November 1993	6
19 November 1993	5
26 November 1993	6
3 December 1993	6
10 December 1993	6
17 December 1993	5
24 December 1993	—
31 December 1993	—
7 January 1994	6
14 January 1994	6
21 January 1994	7
28 January 1994	5
4 February 1994	6
11 February 1994	6
28 February 1994	5
25 February 1994	7
4 March 1994	6
11 March 1994	5
18 March 1994	5
25 March 1994	5
1 April 1994	6
8 April 1994	[2]—
15 April 1994	8
22 April 1994	8
29 April 1994	6
6 May 1994	5
13 May 1994	5
20 May 1994	5
27 May 1994	5
3 June 1994	7
10 June 1994	4
17 June 1994	4
24 June 1994	4
1 July 1994	4
8 July 1994	4
15 July 1994	4
22 July 1994	4
29 July 1994	6

General dental service: Total number of family health services authorities reporting that they were not providing emergency dental services in each week from 3 July 1992 to 29 July 1994[1][3]

Notes:

[1] Data was not collected during the Christmas and new year periods.

[2] Data received for the week ending 8 April 1994 are not compatible to the other data.

[3] From the 1 August 1994 the data is not available.

Source:

Department of Health.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts regularly employ general practitioners to work in accident and emergency units; and what has been the effect on waiting times. [16099]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Paramedics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *498*, if she will advise ambulance NHS trusts that they should not charge paramedics for their training. [16271]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for individual ambulance trusts.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on plans to privatise the NHS Pensions Agency; and how pensioners will be protected. [16205]

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to privatise the national health service pensions scheme. A "prior options" review of the NHS Pensions Agency is currently under way which examines in the usual way the future of all of the agency's various functions of administering the NHS pensions and injury benefit schemes. We shall announce our conclusions on the agency's future in due course.

General Practitioners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received regarding general practitioners and their out-of-hours work commitment. [16425]

Mr. Malone: We are continuing to have regular discussions with representatives of the medical profession.

Hospital Security

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to improve hospital security. [15643]

Mr. Sackville: Hospital security is a matter for local management. The Government place great importance on the creation of a safe and secure environment in hospitals as part of quality health care. Guidance has been made available to hospitals by the National Health Service Executive.

Correspondence

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters have been received from *(a)* the public and *(b)* hon. Members in each of the last five years concerning (i) London's health service, (ii) hospital closures, (iii) long-term care of the elderly, (iv) mental health services, (v) increasing bureaucracy and (vi) in total on all NHS matters either exclusively or en passant. [16401]

Mr. Sackville: Detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The total number of letters replied to by the Department of Health in the last five years is as shown in the table:

Year	*Letters replied to* [1]*By ministers*	[2]*By officials*
1990	28,100	[3]34,000
1991	18,001	30,132
1992	19,704	48,543
1993	25,559	58,598
1994	22,341	44,518

[1] Letters received mainly from hon. and right hon. Members.

[2] Letters received mainly from the public.

[3] Estimated.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by her Department or its predecessors since 1965. [16097]

Mr. Sackville: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965, for any references of the type requested, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state and occasional general references are made to persons who are Members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Market Testing

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *702-3*, if she will list *(a)* the location and *(b)* the specific clinical or clinical support service for which there are 20 local plans to market test. [16403]

Mr. Sackville: The notified list of local plans to market test clinical support services with other national health service or independent provider units will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will define the role of hospital doctors before and after the reforms. [16405]

Mr. Malone: There has never been any precise definition of the role of hospital doctors. However, they have always been and continue to be responsible for providing high quality patient care.

Drug Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average spending on drugs by *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in the latest available quarter. [16406]

Mr. Malone: The average net ingredient cost expenditure on drugs prescribed during the quarter October to December 1994 was £18 per patient by fundholders and £19 per patient by non-fundholders.

Hospital Closures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have temporarily closed *(a)* their accident and emergency department and *(b)* any other acute services for any length of time in each of the past 24 months; and if she will list the hospitals, and give details of the length of closure and causes. [16638]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst) on 7 March at column *101*.

Hospitalised Boxer (Security Costs)

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of security guards for the American boxer Gerald McClellan in the Royal London hospital; and on whom this cost falls. [16639]

Mr. Sackville: National health service trusts are free to take measures that they deem necessary to protect the safety or privacy of patients. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust for details.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors account for recent trends in lengths of waiting lists for NHS hospital treatment. [16947]

Mr. Malone: The number of people waiting for treatment has remained at around 10 per cent. of the number of patients treated for over 20 years. Our policy is to ensure that waiting times for treatment are reduced. Nearly half of patients have a waiting time of less than five weeks. In 1987 more than 200,000 were waiting over a year; in December 1994 fewer than 55,000 were waiting over a year. This success has been achieved by a combination of increased activity and better management of specialities with waiting lists.

Stress

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has that the stress under which *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* pharmacists, *(d)* physiotherapists and *(e)* ambulance women and other health care professions including dentists has increased or decreased in (i) the last year, (ii) the last four years and (iii) the last 15 years; and if she will make a statement on the suicide rates amongst the above professions. [16948]

Mr. Malone: We have commissioned Dr Toby Wall of the university of Sheffield to carry out a five-year study of the mental health of the national health service work force and the first results from this research are expected to be available later this year.

Trauma Unit Research Project

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give further details of progress on the trauma pilot scheme at the Staffordshire infirmary; and when she expects to receive the completed evaluation and make proposals for implementation of any recommendations for change throughout England and Wales. [16850]

Mr. Sackville: We now expect to receive the final report in June 1995. Copies will be placed in the Library when it is published. We will be considering our policy on trauma centres in the light of the report. Consideration of the report in respect of Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

GP Fundholding

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the total health budget per patient is held by GP fundholders, total fundholders and community fundholders. [14994]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* For 1994–95 general practitioner fundholders hold nearly 9 per cent. of the total national health service budget per patient. In addition to the four pilots which began in 1994–95, total purchasing pilots will begin on 1 April 1995. The 52 sites involved in the total purchasing pilot schemes will manage all hospital and community health services resources on behalf of their patients. Community fundholders will not hold a budget until 1996–97.

EDUCATION

Administrative Staff

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the total number of administrative staff employed by each local education authority in England for each year since 1988. [16368]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member.

Funding

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she intends to meet a cross-party delegation from Devon concerning education funding during March; [16397]

(2) when she expects to respond to the two recent letters from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, requesting an urgent meeting about education cuts in Devon; [16398]

(3) if she will list the names of Conservative hon. Members from Devon and Cornwall who have written to her regarding education cuts in those counties; and when she last met Conservative hon. Members from Devon and Cornwall to discuss education budgets. [16399]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend met cross-party delegations of Members from Devon to discuss education funding on 22 March and from Cornwall on 9 February 1995.

We are aware of one outstanding letter from the hon. Member to which my right hon. Friend will reply shortly.

My right hon. Friend and I have received letters on education funding in Devon and Cornwall from the following Conservative Members:

> Mr. Rupert Allason, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. Sebastian Coe, Sir Peter Emery, Dame Janet Fookes, Sir John Hannam, Mr. Robert Hicks, Mr. Patrick Nichols, Mrs. Emma Nicholson, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Gary Streeter.

Computer Pornography

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the departmental advice for schools and parents on computer pornography will be published; how many leaflets will be available; and how they will be distributed. [16800]

Mr. Forth: An information sheet for schools and a leaflet of advice for parents were published by the National Council for Educational Technology in February. These are available to all schools and libraries which request them. It is for individual schools to decide how many copies of the parents' leaflet to distribute.

School Meals

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the amount of money spent by local education authorities in England on providing school meals other than those who are entitled to free school meals in the last year for which figures are available. [16792]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally in the form requested. Gross expenditure by local education authorities in England on their school catering services in 1993–94, covering both free and paid meals, is estimated to have been £685.2 million.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to review the arrangements for the ethnic monitoring of school pupils. [17067]

Mr. Robin Squire: We have today issued a consultation paper to local education authorities and other interested organisations, reviewing the current arrangements for the ethnic monitoring of school pupils and inviting comments on proposals to change those arrangements. Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise we propose to replace the ethnic monitoring survey of school pupils in England with a combination of approaches:

a. to incorporate two additional questions within the schools' census in respect of (i) the number of minority ethnic pupils; and (ii) the number of pupils for whom English is a second language;

b. to obtain information about the progress of minority ethnic pupils in individual schools, by means of information gathered by Ofsted as part of its regular inspection process; and

c. to undertake ad hoc surveys and research, as necessary, to look in greater depth at particular issues.

These are designed to check that all minority ethnic groups have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential. Copies of the consultation paper are available in the Library.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to increase the number of people from ethnic minorities continuing to higher education. [16388]

Mr. Boswell: The Government are concerned to promote wider participation in HE, including participation of people from ethnic minorities. The proportion of people from ethnic minorities continuing to HE is higher than the proportion of people from ethnic minorities in the population at large.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of producing and circulating the last Departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold and at what price. [16653]

Mr. Forth: The Department's annual report published on 7 March 1995 cost £22,500 to prepare for printing.

It was published by HMSO and sold through their bookshops at £11.65 per copy. Printing costs were borne by HMSO, who look to recover these and other administrative costs from sales. The print run was £2,900 and 2345 copies have been sold up to 24 March.

The Department obtained copies to distribute to its own staff at middle management level and above, to institutions of further and higher education and local education authorities and to various educational organisations. The cost of buying copies from HMSO and circulating these was some £10,000.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16654]

Mr. Forth: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The five reports have been published as Command Papers by HMSO.

The costs to the Department of preparing the reports for printing are as given. Printing costs were borne by HMSO, which looks to recover these and administrative costs from sales revenue.

Financial year	*Cash terms* £	*At 1993–94 prices* £
1990–91	4,900	5,581
1991–92	4,800	5,144
1992–93	5,200	5,359
1993–94	15,200	15,200
1994–95	22,500	22,059

Costs of buying in and circulating copies of the report were £10,000 in 1994–95. Costs are not held separately for the four previous years.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will ring fence finance for special needs pupils. [16593]

Mr. Forth: No. Detailed spending decisions are for individual schools and local authorities to make in the light of their own particular circumstances and from within the resources available to them.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will implement the new code to protect special needs pupils. [16595]

Mr. Forth: The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs came into effect on 1 September 1994.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will incorporate special training for teachers in recognition of special needs pupils suffering from dyslexia. [16590]

Mr. Forth: It is a requirement that initial teacher training courses should equip teachers with the skills to identify special educational needs.

The Government make money available to local education authorities to contribute, under the grant for education support and training—GEST—programme, towards the cost of in-service training for teachers of children with special educational needs. This enables local education authorities to bid for funds to provide for particular disability areas, such as dyslexia, as appropriate to local needs.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will institute screening for pre-school children to establish the need for special care. [16596]

Mr. Forth: Care facilities for the under fives are a matter for local social services departments, central responsibility for which rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. There are already a variety of routes by which special educational needs can be recognised, including the family doctor, the child health services and playgroup or nursery provision.

Mature Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has had from vice-chancellors and principals regarding the effect of changes in Benefit Agency regulations on mature students taking higher education courses. [16382]

Mr. Boswell: Social security regulations are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has, however, received a number of representations concerning students and benefits.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many press officers there are in her Department currently; and what figure was in 1979. [16558]

Mr. Boswell: There are currently 11 press officers in the Department. Information for 1979 is not available.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the annual expenditure on discretionary awards for students attending further education college courses for each of the metropolitan authorities, for each financial year since 1990–91. [16225]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested for the academic years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93, the latest year for which data are available, is shown in the table. Financial year information is not available.

Expenditure on further education discretionary awards in the metropolitan authorities in 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93

£'000

LEA name	*1990–91 Expenditure*	*1991–92 Expenditure*	*1992–93 Expenditure*
West Midlands			
Birmingham	923	1,299	955
Coventry	527	558	514
Dudley	456	393	443
Sandwell	497	871	261
Solihull	129	201	230
Walsall	1,451	1,894	1,879
Wolverhampton	75	35	23
Merseyside			
Knowsley	1,047	1,369	1,404
Liverpool	5,697	4,433	2,329
St. Helens	531	678	665
Sefton	278	224	206
Wirral[2]	1,453	1,653	1,731
Greater Manchester			
Bolton	536	821	739
Bury	510	642	609
Manchester	—	1,836	2,105
Oldham	544	459	631
Rochdale	490	741	903
Salford	423	314	149
Stockport	504	691	806
Tameside	239	352	403
Trafford[1]	n/a	302	340
Wigan	418	499	514
South Yorkshire			
Barnsley[2]	1,270	789	1,064
Doncaster	698	685	685
Rotherham	669	904	727
Sheffield	2,026	1,931	630
West Yorkshire			
Bradford	1,612	1,778	2,190
Calderdale	250	310	281
Kirklees	1,403	2,196	3,123
Leeds	2,117	2,743	2,858
Wakefield	1,018	1,048	992
Tyne and Wear			
Gateshead	454	376	235
Newcastle upon Tyne	609	770	430
North Tyneside	706	1,024	738
South Tyneside	326	450	353
Sunderland[1]	n/a	933	—
Total metropolitan authorities	29,883	[3]37,333	32,144

Expenditure on further education discretionary awards in the metropolitan authorities in 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93

£'000

Notes:

—Between £0 and £500.

[1] Discretionary awards data not provided in 1990–91.

[2] Incomplete returns were received from Wirral and Barnsley LEAs in 1991–92.

[3] The 1991–92 total has been grossed to compensate for partial returners.

Source:

F503G

Expenditure, Derbyshire

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent in total on education in Derbyshire at constant prices in each of the last 20 years. [16299]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows total expenditure by Derbyshire local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Derbyshire County Council	*Gross Expenditure (1994–95 prices) £ million*
1974–75	381,861.4
1975–76	387,288.2
1976–77	395,135.5
1977–78	372,438.5
1978–79	378,791.1
1979–80	369,800.4
1980–81	378,639.3
1981–82	381,745.2
1982–83	379,909.1
1983–84	382,882.8
1984–85	385,540.5
1985–86	388,305.3
1986–87	414,685.8
1987–88	437,179.5
1988–89	451,680.7
1989–90	461,473.9
1990–91	451,060.5
1991–92	450,054.8
1992–93	461,817.8
1993–94[1]	380,087.7

[1] Provisional

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent per pupils in Derbyshire in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last 20 years at constant prices. [16481]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows expenditure by Derbyshire local education authority on *(a)* pre-primary and primary pupils combined, and on *(b)* secondary pupils from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available.

Derbyshire County Council
Spending per pupil (1994–95 prices)

	Nursery/Primary	*Secondary*
1974–75	1,212	2,061
1975–76	1,081	1,840
1976–77	1,102	1,835
1977–78	1,044	1,715
1978–79	1,064	1,746
1979–80	1,049	1,677
1980–81	1,071	1,585
1981–82	1,119	1,624
1982–83	1,158	1,654
1983–84	1,206	1,713
1984–85	1,217	1,761
1985–86	1,235	1,838
1986–87	1,346	2,064
1987–88	1,426	2,277
1988–89	1,470	2,458
1989–90	1,550	2,491
1990–91	1,588	2,448
1991–92	1,587	2,404
1992–93	1,657	2,429
1993–94[1]	1,632	2,258

[1] Provisional

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the amount held back by Derbyshire county council of its total education budget. [16482]

Mr. Robin Squire: In the financial year 1994–95, Derbyshire county council is retaining 31.3 per cent. of its general schools budget.

Virtual Universities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans her Department has to explore the concept of virtual universities. [16384]

Mr. Boswell: None. The use of information technology in teaching, learning and research is primarily a matter for individual universities and colleges. The higher education funding councils will shortly be consulting higher education institutions on issues surrounding the exploitation of information systems with a view to considering a strategy for their use in higher education over the next decade.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines her Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16207]

Mr. Forth: Central Government conventions for the use of public relations companies are set out in a working guide for Government information officers, a copy of which is available in the Library. The same conventions generally apply to executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much her Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if she will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16281]

Mr. Forth: The Department does not employ public relation companies.

School Places

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much an unfilled place costs at *(a)* a primary school and *(b)* a secondary school. [16300]

Mr. Robin Squire: The national average premises-related cost of maintaining a school place is estimated to be £182 a year for a primary school and £303 a year for a secondary school at 1995–96 prices. The actual cost and the scope for realising savings from removal of surplus school places in practice will depend on local circumstances.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will state the cost of producing and distributing to schools her recent document about the private finance initiative being used in education. [16479]

Mr. Forth: The total cost of designing and printing the document about the private finance initiative in education, "Education means Business" was £101,000. Distribution of one copy to schools cost some £18,400. The chief target audience for the booklet was the business community.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the value and scope of capital spending projects in schools which have taken advantage of the private finance initiative. [16480]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not available centrally. We are, however, actively reviewing ways in which school-business partnerships may be further encouraged to enable private sector investment and expertise to play its full part in education provision.

Student Hardship

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations she has received from university administrators and student unions on students facing hardship. [16387]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from university administrators and student unions on the subject of student support.

Teaching and Research

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps her Department is taking to ensure parity of esteem between teaching and research in higher education. [16385]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend attaches importance to both teaching and research. It is however for individual universities and colleges to decide on the relative weight to attach to each in the light of their institutional missions.

BMA Medical Students' Committee

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were her reasons for refusal on 13

February to meet the British Medical Association's medical students' committee. [16117]

Mr. Boswell: I wrote again on 15 March to explain that the pressure of other commitments means that I am unable to meet representatives of the medical students' committee. I am well aware of the arguments advanced by the BMA medical students' committee, and have answered the points raised in correspondence.

Student Support

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received concerning the level of maintenance grant and loans for *(a)* all students and *(b)* medical students. [16116]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations for a variety of reasons about levels of student support, both for all students and for medical students.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what financial support is available from public funds to a person, born in 1976, who is studying at college for more than 20 hours a week and whose parents are in receipt of income support; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The person could apply to his or her local education authority for a discretionary award. The decision on how many awards to make, to whom, and the rate payable is a matter purely for LEAs. Anyone over 18 can also apply for a career development loan. These are designed to cover course fees and other living costs. The person may also be eligible for a mandatory award depending on the type of course. In addition, depending on his or her exact age and circumstances, some social security benefits might be available.

Special Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of statutory age pupils attended a special school in each local education authority as at January 1994; and what was the percentage nationally. [14989]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 20 March 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Percentage of pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained special schools in each Local Education Authority in England January 1994

LEA	*Percentage of pupils attending special schools*
Corporation of London	0.00
Camden	1.68
Greenwich	2.12
Hackney	2.44
Hammersmith	2.41
Islington	1.40
Kensington and Chelsea	0.47
Lambeth	3.14
Lewisham	1.68
Southwark	1.53
Tower Hamlets	1.70
Wandsworth	3.30
Westminster	1.05
Barking	0.74
Barnet	0.70
Bexley	0.92
Brent	1.19
Bromley	1.04
Croydon	1.26
Ealing	1.30
Enfield	1.10
Haringey	1.31
Harrow	0.79
Havering	0.60
Hillingdon	1.29
Hounslow	1.32
Kingston upon Thames	1.41
Merton	1.27
Newham	0.62
Redbridge	1.37
Richmond upon Thames	0.86
Sutton	1.10
Waltham Forest	2.22
Birmingham	1.75
Coventry	1.88
Dudley	1.42
Sandwell	1.75
Solihull	0.91
Walsall	1.13
Wolverhampton	1.39
Knowsley	2.40
Liverpool	2.06
St. Helens	1.71
Sefton	0.95
Wirral	1.56
Bolton	1.14
Bury	1.11
Manchester	2.35
Oldham	1.17
Rochdale	1.45
Salford	1.24
Stockport	0.96
Tameside	1.31
Trafford	1.24
Wigan	1.97
Barnsley	0.44
Doncaster	1.49
Rotherham	1.54
Sheffield	1.28
Bradford	0.86
Calderdale	0.43
Kirklees	1.14
Leeds	0.93
Wakefield	1.34
Gateshead	1.36
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.95
North Tyneside	1.56
South Tyneside	1.54
Sunderland	1.52
Isles of Scilly	0.00
Avon	1.62
Bedfordshire	1.36
Berkshire	1.57
Buckinghamshire	1.71
Cambridgeshire	1.02
Cheshire	0.94
Cleveland	1.50
Cornwall	0.42
Cumbria	0.32
Derbyshire	0.87
Devon	1.35
Dorset	1.34
Durham	1.24
East Sussex	1.59
Essex	1.20

Percentage of pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained special schools in each Local Education Authority in England January 1994

LEA — *Percentage of pupils attending special schools*

Percentage of pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained special schools in each Local Education Authority in England
January 1994

LEA	*Percentage of pupils attending special schools*
Gloucestershire	1.75
Hampshire	1.60
Hereford and Worcester	1.21
Hertfordshire	1.41
Humberside	0.91
Isle of Wight	1.34
Kent	1.38
Lancashire	1.51
Leicestershire	0.79
Lincolnshire	1.31
Norfolk	0.91
North Yorkshire	1.04
Northamptonshire	1.14
Northumberland	1.17
Nottinghamshire	0.92
Oxfordshire	1.08
Shropshire	0.85
Somerset	0.98
Staffordshire	1.42
Suffolk	0.85
Surrey	1.62
Warwickshire	1.54
West Sussex	1.35
Wiltshire	0.95
England	1.30

SCOTLAND

Training and Enterprise Programmes

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what ways the eligibility, financial and operating rules which apply to local enterprise companies in Scotland differ from those outlined in the 1995–96 training and enterprise council operating agreement for *(a)* youth training and youth credits and *(b)* training for work; and if he will make a statement. [15158]

Mr. Kynoch: The rules which govern the delivery by local enterprise companies in Scotland of the principal Government-funded training and enterprise programmes for 1995–96 are set out in an operating agreement between Scottish Enterprise/Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies which follows closely that for training and enterprise councils.

Housing, Wigtown

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the legal status of the Wigtown housing association and its membership; what funds have been provided to it from public sources; and if he will make a statement. [15816]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In developing proposals for the transfer of its housing stock to a locally based housing association, Wigtown district council has supported the formation of Wigtown housing association. I understand that the steering group of Wigtown housing association has recently applied for registration as a friendly society in terms of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. It expects to apply in due course for registration with Scottish Homes. Current membership proposals are for a voluntary board of management with 16 members, comprising three local authority members, six tenants and seven other local people with the skills necessary to run such an organisation.

I understand that the council intends to apply for the consent of the Secretary of State, in terms of section 25 of the Local Government Act 1988, to provide financial assistance towards the new association's setting-up costs.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what request he has received from Wigtown district council regarding the transfer of its housing stock to a housing association; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement. [15814]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Wigtown district council has not yet applied to the Secretary of State for consent to transfer its housing stock to a locally based housing association, although I am aware that the council is currently developing proposals in consultation with tenants. The Secretary of State is generally sympathetic to requests from local authorities to transfer housing stock; each case is considered on it merits and must command the support of the tenants involved.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the proposed transfer of housing stock by Wigtown district council to a housing association; if the council has drawn to his attention potential conflicts of interest; what has been his response; and if he will make a statement. [15815]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State has received six representations from two individuals on a range of issues connected with the proposed transfer of Wigtown district council's housing stock, including the potential for conflict of interest.

The question of conflict of interest is primarily a matter for the council to address. The council is aware that it will have to take steps to avoid any conflict of interest, particularly in the context of discussions of financial arrangements, which may arise in the stock transfer process.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to publish his revised guidance to local authorities relating to large-scale voluntary transfers of their housing stock; and if he will take steps to prevent authorities with special reference to Wigtown district council carrying through such transfers before the guidance has been published. [16821]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I expect that revised guidance to local authorities on large-scale voluntary transfers of housing stock will be issued by early summer. This will replace advice issued in 1988 which currently guides local authorities transferring stock. There is no reason why Wigtown district council should not seek to develop proposals for a transfer of stock before publication of the revised guidance.

Housing Stock Transfer

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has received from district councils for transfer of housing stocks to housing associations or private landlords. [15817]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State receives many requests from district councils to transfer housing to housing associations and private landlords. Since January 1989, he has approved over 180 applications to transfer a total of over 13,000 houses to the private sector, mainly to locally based housing associations.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Payments

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers or crofters in Scotland received environmentally sensitive area payments greater than *(a)* £100,000, *(b)* £50,000, *(c)* £10,000, *(d)* £5,000 or *(e)* £1,000 in the last year for which figures are available. [15523]

Sir Hector Monro: The information, in the format requested, is set out in the following table. The figures are for 1993–94, the latest year for which information is available.

Farmers/crofters receiving payments of more than:	*Number*
(a) £100,000	—
(b) £50,000	—
(c) £10,000	—
(d) £5,000	10
(e) £1,000	278

In addition, a number of participants received payments of £1,000 or less.

Hospital and Health Service Contracts

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the contracts for hospital and health services awarded so far under the competitive tendering process by *(a)* Argyll and Clyde, *(b)* Western Isles, *(c)* Tayside, *(d)* Shetland, *(e)* Orkney, *(f)* Lothian, *(g)* Lanarkshire, *(h)* Highland, *(i)* Greater Glasgow, *(j)* Grampian, *(k)* Forth Valley, *(i)* Fife, *(m)* Dumfries and Galloway, *(n)* Borders and *(o)* Ayrshire and Arran health boards, including the successful tenderer and value of contracts. [15768]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is available but as it is lengthy, I have arranged to place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of goat pox were reported in each year since 1985. [15975]

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of goat pox have ever been recorded in Scotland.

Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what remuneration and expenses Mr. Stephen P. Newall will receive as chairman of the Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust; and what is the membership of this board. [16877]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The chairman of the Lomond Healthcare NHS trust, Mr. Stephen P. Newall, receives remuneration of £17,145 per annum and is entitled to claim travel and subsistence expenses at standard rates. The non-executive directors of the trust board have still to be announced.

Incontinence Services

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if NHS Executive Guidance (EL(93)54) and Agenda for Action on Continence Services (1991) or their Scottish counterparts have been implemented in all health board areas; and if he will make a statement. [15963]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish health management efficiency group published a report on incontinence services in the community in November 1993 which was circulated widely to bodies in the NHS in Scotland including health boards, which are expected to take account of its recommendations.

Scottish Record Office

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the targets he expects the Scottish Record Office to achieve in 1995–96. [17152]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have set the Scottish Record Office the following key targets for 1995–96:

> to reduce the unit cost of preserving and making available the records of Scotland by 4 per cent. in real terms;
>
> to increase the number of catalogue entries available for public scrutiny on the electronic system from 119,000 in 1994–95 to 122,000;
>
> to produce material from the same building for readers in 30 minutes or less in 90 per cent. of cases, absorbing up to a 2 per cent. increase in demand;
>
> to answer 85 per cent. of correspondence within 10 days, absorbing up to a 2 per cent. increase in demand; and
>
> to discuss with every shadow local authority the arrangements each proposes for the preservation and management of the records of the new councils after 1 April 1996.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what areas will have individual assessors appointed following local government reform in Scotland on 1 April 1996. [17151]

Mr. Kynoch: Having considered representations made in response to consultation on this subject, I have decided that in terms of each assessor's geographical area of responsibility, apart from in Strathclyde region, the present arrangement should continue whereby there are joint arrangements for Highland and Western Isles and Orkney and Shetland and there is one assessor appointed for each other present regional council area. In the Strathclyde area, we propose that there should be five separate assessors with geographical responsibilities extending respectively to Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Argyll and Bute together with Dunbartonshire. The new local authorities for the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife and Glasgow will therefore each appoint their own assessor and in other areas joint boards will be introduced to oversee this service.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what compensation will be available for staff who are obliged to take lower-paid jobs as a result of the reorganisation of local government in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [17153]

Mr. Kynoch: On 5 December 1994, my hon. Friend, the former Minister with responsibility for industry and local government issued for comment proposals for compensating local authority staff who may be obliged to accept lower-paid jobs as a result of local government reorganisation in Scotland. The responses have been carefully considered and I will be bringing forward shortly regulations to introduce a new scheme for compensation.

In essence, the scheme will allow for current staff appointed during the period 6 April 1995 to 31 March 1997 to lower-paid jobs in the new local authorities, the new water and sewerage authorities or the Scottish children's reporter administration to have their present salary maintained for a transitional three-year period.

The scheme will allow the new authorities, during the crucial transitional period, to retain and make use of experienced personnel who would otherwise be made redundant. By avoiding the need for redundancy payments and encouraging councils to retrain existing employees in new jobs, this scheme should benefit staff, employers and the taxpayer.

Pay Beds

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amounts of revenue were gathered for the NHS by the operation of pay beds for each health board area in Scotland for each financial year since 1979. [16334]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The following table has been derived from health board annual accounts and shows revenue generated for the NHS by the operation of pay beds for each health board area in Scotland for each financial year since 1979. The amounts shown from 1992–93 onwards do not include pay beds sited in NHS trust hospitals. Information on pay beds for NHS trust hospitals is not collected centrally.

Pay Beds

£

	Ayrshire and Arran	*Borders*	*Dumfries and Galloway*	*Fife*	*Forth Valley*	*Grampian*	*Highland*	*Lothian*	*Tayside*	*Scottish totals*
1979–80	570	606	28,556	3,456	6,184	96,705	4,599	50,551	4,719	195,946
1980–81	960	387	18,384	4,327	6,436	88,698	4,635	51,909	4,332	180,068
1981–82	552	204	13,850	3,709	6,444	89,711	754	52,388	5,490	173,102
1982–83	628	1,729	10,377	4,921	3,292	93,309	994	44,907	10,212	170,369
1983–84	1,584	345	7,195	8,570	845	92,987	1,613	63,629	10,324	187,092
1984–85	1,305	995	6,102	6,700	1,295	36,747	3,057	63,260	6,718	126,179
1985–86	1,488	1,142	5,301	5,280	1,479	37,022	1,666	64,334	7,499	125,211
1986–87	1,032	1,254	8,624	5,768	528	33,433	2,603	91,264	9,551	154,057
1987–88	507	670	6,337	6,771	1,359	40,957	3,671	88,027	6,871	155,170
1988–89	1,360	3,322	5,100	7,020	1,443	35,573	4,896	106,790	9,449	174,953
1989–90	819	9,563	4,274	6,986	4,199	33,821	3,840	126,520	5,229	195,251
1990–91	468	10,936	0	7,358	9,810	39,135	6,425	158,204	6,480	238,816
1991–92	325	12,144	1,094	8,608	11,000	49,862	7,813	194,065	7,451	292,362
1992–93	0	11,773	252	9,380	15,858	19,978	9,799	180,223	11,060	258,323
1993–94	0	9,403	0	8,357	3,177	0	51	133,854	8,534	163,376

The following health boards have not had pay beds since 1979–80: Argyll and Clyde, Greater Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Orkney, Shetland, Western Isles.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidance his Department has issued to NHS trust hospitals on the operation of pay beds with particular reference to patients with private medical insurance; [16332]

(2) what representations his Department has received from private medical insurance companies on the operation of pay beds by NHS trust hospitals in the last three years. [16333]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* There is no compulsion on health boards and NHS trusts to provide pay beds but they are encouraged to do so as a means of contributing to income generation. The decision whether or not to provide pay beds is entirely for boards and trusts to determine within the terms of Section 55 of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978.

No representations have been received from private medical insurance companies and no specific guidance has been issued to NHS trusts on the operation of pay beds.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the number of pay beds in (i) 1979 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* the amounts of revenue raised through the operation of pay beds in 1979 for the latest year for which figures are available and for each national health service hospital in Scotland. [16329]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The following tables have been derived from health board annual accounts. The latest year in which numbers of pay beds were collected was 1988. The latest year in which amounts of revenue raised through the operation of pay beds was 1993. The pay bed numbers for 1979 and 1988 are the total for health boards. A breakdown to hospital level is not available centrally.

The revenue figure for 1993 excludes any revenue collected by NHS trust hospitals. Information on pay beds for NHS trust hospitals is not collected centrally.

Table 1: Number of NHS Pay Beds

Year	*Number of pay beds*
1979	114
1988	113

Table 2: Revenue from NHS pay beds managed by Health Boards

Year	£
1979	195,946
1988	174,953
1993	163,376

Pupils (Costs)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the average amount of money spent by his Department on educating a pupil within *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools adjusted for 1992–93 prices for each year since 1979 and for each education authority in Scotland; [16318]

(2) what was the average amount of money spent by his Department on educating a pupil within *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools adjusted for 1992–93 for each year since 1979. [16321]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Direct expenditure by the Scottish Office on the education of school pupils is limited to grants made available to Jordanhill school, the self-governing Dornoch academy, and certain residential special schools. Grants are also made available for pupils at certain independent schools under the assisted places scheme. Comprehensive information on the division of these resources between the primary and secondary sectors is not available.

Expenditure per pupil in education authority schools is the responsibility of each education authority. Local authority expenditure is supported by aggregate external finance. Such financial support is not specific to particular local authority services and it is for each authority to determine the allocation of all the resources at its disposal.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the average number of pupils per class in Scotland for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for each year since 1979; [16323]

(2) if he will list the average number of pupils in each class for each education authority in Scotland for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for each year since 1979. [16322]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The available information on average class size is given in the following table.

Education Authority Schools Average number of pupils per class at September

Education authority	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1987*	*1989*	*1991*	*1993*
Primary schools[1]										
Scotland	23.9	23.8	23.8	23.8	25.3	25.2	24.9	24.7	24.7	24.7
Borders	21.8	21.4	21.1	21.1	22.5	22.8	23.1	22.9	22.6	22.8
Central	23.0	22.4	22.4	21.9	24.0	24.0	25.0	24.9	24.6	24.7
Dumfries and Galloway	22.3	22.1	22.3	21.7	22.7	22.5	22.8	22.9	23.3	23.3
Fife	25.5	25.6	25.9	25.9	26.6	26.3	26.3	25.5	25.4	25.4
Grampian	23.2	22.9	23.0	22.9	24.4	24.7	24.4	24.6	24.8	24.6
Highland	21.5	21.0	21.3	21.2	22.7	22.6	22.7	22.2	21.8	21.5
Lothian	22.5	21.9	22.1	23.0	25.9	25.9	25.7	25.5	25.8	25.8
Strathclyde	25.0	25.3	25.2	25.0	26.3	26.0	25.4	25.1	25.1	25.1
Tayside	23.5	23.9	23.7	23.8	24.9	24.7	24.2	24.6	24.8	25.2
Orkney	20.6	20.2	20.0	20.5	21.2	20.7	19.0	20.3	18.8	19.4
Shetland	18.3	18.1	17.9	17.2	18.8	18.2	18.2	17.0	17.5	17.3
Western Isles	19.6	19.1	19.1	18.7	19.5	20.0	19.1	18.8	17.9	17.2
Strathclyde Divisions:										
Argyll and Bute	21.3	20.8	20.7	21.1	21.4	21.3	21.3	20.8	20.1	20.1
Ayr	25.1	25.4	25.4	25.1	26.4	25.9	25.3	25.2	25.0	25.2
Dunbarton	24.9	25.4	25.3	25.3	26.6	26.7	26.4	26.0	26.0	25.8
Glasgow	24.7	24.9	24.9	24.4	25.9	25.7	25.1	24.7	24.8	24.7
Lanark	25.4	25.5	25.4	25.4	27.0	26.5	25.5	25.2	25.0	24.9
Renfrew	26.1	26.2	26.0	26.0	26.9	26.5	26.0	25.9	26.1	26.4
Secondary schools										
Scotland	18.9	19.0	19.1	19.0	19.5	n/a	18.8	18.6	18.9	19.4
Borders	18.1	18.2	16.7	17.8	19.1	n/a	19.2	17.6	17.7	18.0
Central	18.7	19.3	19.2	18.8	20.0	n/a	19.8	19.5	19.7	19.6
Dumfries and Galloway	18.4	18.8	18.3	19.0	18.3	n/a	18.8	17.2	17.1	17.7
Fife	18.8	19.9	19.6	19.6	19.8	n/a	19.7	19.4	19.8	20.0
Grampian	17.9	18.4	18.5	18.2	19.0	n/a	18.0	18.4	18.9	19.1
Highland	17.8	17.1	17.2	17.4	17.7	n/a	17.8	17.0	17.6	18.0
Lothian	17.8	17.6	17.9	18.1	19.1	n/a	19.1	18.3	18.5	19.2
Strathclyde	19.8	19.9	19.9	20.0	20.3	n/a	19.3	19.2	19.6	20.1
Tayside	18.2	17.9	18.1	17.6	18.8	n/a	17.9	17.3	17.8	18.8
Orkney	14.6	15.5	15.1	13.8	15.4	n/a	15.8	15.2	14.9	15.2
Shetland	15.2	14.3	14.8	14.9	15.1	n/a	15.8	14.1	13.5	14.3
Western Isles	16.2	16.2	17.3	14.6	15.5	n/a	15.4	14.1	14.3	14.0
Strathclyde Divisions:										
Argyll and Bute	16.4	17.3	17.0	17.1	17.8	n/a	18.9	16.9	17.8	17.9
Ayr	19.5	19.6	19.5	19.8	20.5	n/a	20.2	18.8	18.6	19.4
Dunbarton	20.1	20.4	19.8	19.9	20.3	n/a	20.2	19.7	20.2	20.3

Education Authority Schools Average number of pupils per class at September

Education authority	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1987*	*1989*	*1991*	*1993*
Glasgow	19.8	19.7[1]	20.2	20.0	19.8	n/a	17.4	18.5	18.9	19.5
Lanark	20.2	20.5	20.0	20.7	21.1	n/a	20.4	19.9	20.4	20.8
Renfrew	19.6	19.9	20.2	20.2	20.4	n/a	18.7	19.7	20.2	20.7

[1] Until the 1983 school census, classes for small numbers of primary pupils withdrawn for short periods of time from their normal classes were included in the calculation of average class size. From 1983, all pupils were counted against their normal class for statistical purposes.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average salary paid to a teacher in Scotland and the average salary paid to a teacher in Scotland as a percentage of average non-manual earnings for each year since 1979. [16320]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Average salary of teachers in Scotland	*Percentage of average male non-manual earnings in Scotland*
1979-80	5,602	95.3
1980–81	7,435	102
1981–82	8,390	99
1982–83	8,996	96
1983–84	9,620	94
1984–85	10,117	93
1987–88	13,649	102
1988–89	15,333	105
1989–90	16,409	105
1990–91	17,937	105
1991–92	19,611	108
1992–93	21,018	107

Figures for 1985–86 are not available due to teachers' industrial action. Information for years subsequent to 1992–93 is not yet available.

Intensive Care Units

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what recent representations he has received from Scottish health boards concerning collective arrangements for the admission of patients to intensive care units; [16316]

(2) what arrangements exist within the NHS in Scotland for the admission of seriously sick patients to intensive care units; [16317]

(3) if he will list the number of intensive care beds available for the treatment of patients for each health board area in Scotland for each financial year since 1979. [16328]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received any representations from health boards concerning collective arrangements for the admission of patients to intensive care units. Arrangements for the admission of seriously sick patients to intensive care units are a matter for the relevant trusts and health boards informed by clinical decisions about individual patients.

Information on the average available staffed intensive care beds is shown in the following table.

Intensive care beds[1]: by health board area of treatment: years ending 31 March

Intensive Therapy Unit	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Scotland	125	136	137	142	159	166	168	166
Argyll and Clyde	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Ayrshire and Arran	5	5	5	5	7	10	8	6
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	2	8	8	8	8
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forth Valley	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Grampian	6	6	6	6	6	10	11	11
Greater Glasgow	65	72	72	74	80	81	81	81
Highland	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Lanarkshire	13	15	15	16	19	19	20	19
Lothian	12	12	12	12	12	11	12	12
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	11	13	14	14	14	15	15	15
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Intensive Therapy Unit	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Scotland	166	166	182	189	198	219	230	250
Argyll and Clyde	3	1	—	—	—	4	7	12
Ayrshire and Arran	8	6	6	6	6	7	8	8

Intensive Therapy Unit	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Borders	—	—	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dumfries and Galloway	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	16
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
Forth Valley	4	4	4	9	9	9	9	9
Grampian	11	11	10	10	10	10	11	10
Greater Glasgow	80	75	76	78	77	77	77	75
Highland	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Lanarkshire	18	19	24	31	35	37	37	37
Lothian	14	21	30	25	28	38	41	41
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	15	15	15	15	15	20	24	28
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note:

[1] Average available staffed beds in specialties of intensive therapy unit.

Source:

Information and Statistic Division.

Teachers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of teachers employed and the number and percentages of women employed in these posts for each education authority within Scotland for each year since 1985 for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [16325]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The available information is given in the following table:

Education Authority Schools number (full-time equivalents) of teachers[1]; number (FTE) and percentage of female teachers (at September)

		1987			1988			1990			1992	
Education authority	*Total*	*Number female*	*Per cent. female*	*Total*	*Number female*	*Per cent. female*	*Total*	*Number female*	*Per cent. female*	*Total*	*Number female*	*Per cent. female*
Primary schools												
Scotland	21,480	19,457	90.6	21,586	19,619	90.9	22,628	20,745	91.7	22,728	20,947	92.2
Borders	448	383	85.5	466	404	86.6	472	416	88.1	476	425	89.4
Central	1,162	1,074	92.4	1,160	1,079	93.0	1,165	1,090	93.5	1,167	1,095	93.8
Dumfries and Galloway	654	562	86.0	648	561	86.6	690	603	87.4	697	620	88.9
Fife	1,524	1,384	90.8	1,552	1,416	91.2	1,614	1,486	92.0	1,617	1,505	93.1
Grampian	2,251	1,991	88.5	2,261	1,997	88.3	2,280	2,060	90.4	2,361	2,159	91.4
Highland	1,052	928	88.2	1,052	933	88.7	1,109	991	89.4	1,137	1,020	89.7
Lothian	2,742	2,510	91.5	2,770	2,542	91.8	2,842	2,623	92.3	2,853	2,636	92.4
Strathclyde	9,559	8,805	92.1	9,602	8,875	92.4	10,311	9,575	92.9	10,264	9,557	93.1
Tayside	1,612	1,402	87.0	1,606	1,399	87.2	1,659	1,471	88.7	1,662	1,493	89.8
Orkney	113	98	87.3	112	100	89.8	125	112	89.8	127	117	92.3
Shetland	175	153	87.6	174	151	86.9	174	151	86.7	178	151	84.6
Western Isles	189	167	88.6	182	161	88.3	188	168	89.4	190	171	89.6
Strathclyde Divisions:												
Argyll and Bute	300	259	86.5	311	270	86.9	357	316	88.4	348	309	88.9
Ayr	1,569	1,419	90.5	1,578	1,438	91.1	1,696	1,556	91.7	1,700	1,572	92.5
Dunbarton	1,392	1,313	94.3	1,384	1,302	94.1	1,431	1,363	95.3	1,423	1,359	95.5
Glasgow	2,687	2,492	92.7	2,696	2,506	93.0	3,002	2,783	92.7	3,020	2,790	92.4
Lanark	2,205	2,025	91.9	2,211	2,044	92.4	2,324	2,160	93.0	2,296	2,143	93.3
Renfrew	1,407	1,297	92.2	1,423	1,315	92.4	1,501	1,398	93.1	1,478	1,384	93.7
Secondary schools												
Scotland	25,462	11,279	44.3	24,757	11,028	44.5	23,988	11,065	46.1	23,994	11,518	48.0
Borders	504	200	39.8	496	202	40.7	494	209	42.4	501	222	44.3
Central	1,379	634	46.0	1,327	605	45.6	1,276	602	47.2	1,283	624	48.6
Dumfries and Galloway	821	321	39.1	814	320	39.3	778	313	40.2	759	314	41.4
Fife	1,686	730	43.3	1,657	732	44.2	1,615	749	46.4	1,626	791	48.7
Grampian	2,452	1,120	45.7	2,393	1,101	46.0	2,312	1,081	46.8	2,444	1,217	49.8
Highland	1,148	498	43.3	1,153	494	42.8	1,150	519	45.1	1,229	603	49.0
Lothian	3,213	1,413	44.0	3,092	1,357	43.9	2,945	1,341	45.6	2,888	1,354	46.9
Strathclyde	11,697	5,247	44.9	11,330	5,131	45.3	11,014	5,170	46.9	10,879	5,284	48.6
Tayside	2,032	914	45.0	1,960	875	44.7	1,862	857	46.0	1,832	878	47.9
Orkney	120	36	30.2	126	46	36.1	132	49	36.7	135	51	38.1
Shetland	168	71	42.1	173	73	42.5	178	78	44.0	190	88	46.1
Western Isles	243	94	38.9	238	92	38.6	233	95	40.9	228	93	41.0
Strathclyde Divisions:												
Argyll and Bute	351	136	38.8	346	145	41.8	360	160	44.4	352	159	45.3
Ayr	1,923	832	43.3	1,856	808	43.5	1,868	859	46.0	1,843	881	47.8
Dunbarton	1,672	825	49.4	1,630	803	49.3	1,627	820	50.4	1,663	842	50.6
Glasgow	3,165	1,368	43.2	3,063	1,354	44.2	2,828	1,283	45.4	2,703	1,275	47.2
Lanark	2,683	1,194	44.5	2,585	1,154	44.7	2,550	1,176	46.1	2,534	1,214	47.9
Renfrew	1,904	892	46.8	1,850	868	46.9	1,781	873	49.0	1,784	912	51.1

[1] The total figures given are based on statistical returns made by individual teachers, and hence may differ slightly from those figures published elsewhere which are based on the totals reported by each school.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of *(a)* staff and *(b)* women employed at head teacher, assistant head teacher and deputy head teacher levels for (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools for each education authority within Scotland for each year since 1985. [16326]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The available information is given in the following table:

Education authority primary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1987

Education authority	*Head teacher*		*Deputy head teacher*		*Assistant head teacher*	
	Total	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	2,299	1,484	14	11	1,611	1,444
Borders	71	36	0	0	22	20
Central	114	83	0	0	89	76
Dumfries and Galloway	113	58	0	0	36	30
Fife	142	84	0	0	112	101
Grampian	260	139	0	0	135	110
Highland	202	126	0	0	55	50
Lothian	234	137	14	11	209	192
Strathclyde	886	661	0	0	799	734
Tayside	187	101	0	0	122	102
Orkney	20	15	0	0	5	5
Shetland	29	16	0	0	13	11
Western Isles	41	29	0	0	14	13
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	75	45	0	0	17	15
Ayr	149	91	0	0	137	126
Dunbarton	113	90	0	0	125	116
Glasgow	232	192	0	0	214	197
Lanark	210	172	0	0	179	164
Renfrew	107	70	0	0	128	117

Education authority primary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1988

Education authority	*Head teacher*		*Deputy head teacher*		*Assistant head teacher*	
	Total	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	2,255	1,480	238	206	1,340	1,197
Borders	77	43	4	4	20	19
Central	112	83	15	14	73	62
Dumfries and Galloway	110	56	5	5	28	24
Fife	142	87	23	22	78	69
Grampian	265	145	29	21	108	91
Highland	200	128	5	5	49	44
Lothian	231	137	45	39	179	160
Strathclyde	848	636	85	75	682	626
Tayside	187	105	23	18	97	81
Orkney	20	15	1	1	2	2
Shetland	29	17	2	2	11	9
Western Isles	36	27	1	1	13	11
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	72	42	2	1	15	14
Ayr	146	90	22	21	106	97
Dunbarton	108	88	16	15	99	90
Glasgow	220	185	12	11	185	170
Lanark	199	164	14	11	172	159
Renfrew	104	68	19	16	105	96

Education authority primary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1990

Education authority	*Head teacher*		*Deputy head teacher*		*Assistant head teacher*	
	Total	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	2,301	1,597	293	253	1,187	1,074
Borders	75	44	4	4	19	18
Central	113	85	23	19	63	57
Dumfries and Galloway	113	60	4	4	28	25
Fife	141	91	25	25	82	72
Grampian	265	167	40	31	92	83
Highland	200	134	9	9	40	34
Lothian	240	154	46	37	159	141
Strathclyde	889	694	113	102	591	546
Tayside	184	107	26	20	90	79
Orkney	20	16	0	0	2	2
Shetland	27	19	2	2	10	8

Education authority primary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1990

Education authority	*Head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Deputy head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Assistant head teacher* *Total*	*Female*
Western Isles	34	27	1	1	13	10
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	74	50	3	2	11	10
Ayr	151	95	24	23	101	93
Dunbarton	115	102	20	18	90	83
Glasgow	231	194	20	20	152	144
Lanark	212	178	18	16	142	128
Renfrew	107	76	28	23	95	88

Education authority primary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1992

Education authority	*Head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Deputy head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Assistant head teacher* *Total*	*Female*
Scotland	2,277	1,622	509	464	984	880
Borders	75	48	10	10	10	10
Central	113	87	46	40	41	40
Dumfries and Galloway	113	68	23	22	12	11
Fife	142	98	48	45	54	47
Grampian	267	172	77	73	59	47
Highland	194	132	26	25	21	15
Lothian	236	152	63	56	146	128
Strathclyde	872	689	153	136	564	520
Tayside	183	113	58	52	56	45
Orkney	20	17	1	1	1	1
Shetland	28	19	3	3	8	6
Western Isles	34	27	1	1	11	9
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	73	53	3	2	10	9
Ayr	148	99	26	24	93	88
Dunbarton	115	101	30	26	79	74
Glasgow	223	184	31	30	158	149
Lanark	207	172	27	25	129	111
Renfrew	106	80	36	29	94	88

Education authority secondary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1987

Education authority	*Head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Deputy head teacher* *Total*	*Female*	*Assistant head teacher* *Total*	*Female*
Scotland	414	17	424	25	1,050	180
Borders	9	0	9	0	19	3
Central	20	0	20	1	57	9
Dumfries and Galloway	16	0	17	1	33	4
Fife	18	0	19	1	83	17
Grampian	40	3	36	1	96	18
Highland	26	1	25	1	42	10
Lothian	47	3	51	4	145	29
Strathclyde	186	6	194	12	489	79
Tayside	28	2	30	2	75	11
Orkney	6	0	3	0	4	0
Shetland	7	1	7	1	3	0
Western Isles	14	1	13	1	5	1
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	9	1	9	0	14	1
Ayr	31	0	29	2	80	9
Dunbarton	24	1	25	1	69	19
Glasgow	52	2	57	3	131	23
Lanark	37	2	38	1	116	16
Renfrew	33	0	36	5	79	11

Education authority secondary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1988

	Head teacher		Deputy head teacher		Assistant head teacher	
Education authority	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	413	17	417	25	1,028	174
Borders	9	0	8	0	24	3
Central	20	0	20	1	59	8
Dumfries and Galloway	16	0	16	0	33	4
Fife	21	0	19	1	77	17
Grampian	38	3	38	2	91	16
Highland	24	1	26	1	38	7
Lothian	50	3	50	5	146	30
Strathclyde	179	6	189	12	471	78
Tayside	30	3	30	1	74	9
Orkney	6	0	2	0	5	0
Shetland	7	1	8	1	4	0
Western Isles	14	1	12	1	7	2
Strathclyde Divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	8	1	9	0	14	1
Ayr	29	0	30	3	75	8
Dunbarton	23	1	26	1	69	18
Glasgow	51	2	53	2	122	23
Lanark	36	2	36	1	108	17
Renfrew	32	0	35	5	83	11

Education authority secondary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1990

	Head teacher		Deputy head teacher		Assistant head teacher	
Education authority	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	415	11	406	31	987	187
Borders	9	0	9	0	24	3
Central	19	0	19	1	49	3
Dumfries and Galloway	16	0	15	1	32	4
Fife	19	0	20	3	73	18
Grampian	38	2	37	2	85	21
Highland	24	1	26	2	39	4
Lothian	51	2	51	4	135	31
Strathclyde	182	4	177	14	466	89
Tayside	31	2	31	1	70	12
Orkney	6	0	2	0	5	0
Shetland	8	0	8	1	4	0
Western Isles	13	1	13	2	6	2
Strathclyde Divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	9	1	8	2	13	1
Ayr	31	1	29	0	75	10
Dunbarton	25	0	26	1	64	18
Glasgow	50	0	46	4	126	26
Lanark	38	2	35	2	104	19
Renfrew	29	0	33	5	85	15

Education authority secondary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1992

	Head teacher		Deputy head teacher		Assistant head teacher	
Education authority	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*	*Total*	*Female*
Scotland	403	12	405	37	1,021	225
Borders	9	0	9	0	26	4
Central	18	0	18	1	49	5
Dumfries and Galloway	15	0	16	0	32	4
Fife	19	0	20	3	73	18
Grampian	38	1	38	4	95	25
Highland	26	1	27	1	37	6
Lothian	47	1	49	4	133	30

Education authority secondary schools total and female teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) at head, deputy head and assistant head teacher levels—September 1992

Education authority	Head teacher Total	Head teacher Female	Deputy head teacher Total	Deputy head teacher Female	Assistant head teacher Total	Assistant head teacher Female
Strathclyde	172	6	176	19	479	105
Tayside	30	1	31	1	81	24
Orkney	6	0	2	0	5	1
Shetland	8	1	8	2	4	1
Western Isles	15	1	12	2	7	2
Strathclyde divisions:						
Argyll and Bute	9	1	9	0	20	3
Ayr	29	0	27	2	80	13
Dunbarton	24	0	25	3	70	21
Glasgow	44	2	44	4	118	29
Lanark	37	3	38	3	102	18
Renfrew	29	0	34	7	89	21

Council Tax Valuations (Appeals)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appeals against valuations for council tax have been lodged; how many appeals have been considered; how many appeals have been successful; and what is the average time taken to consider an appeal against valuation in each valuation area in Scotland. [16319]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The table provides the available information, which relates to all classes of proposals to change the valuation list made to assessors and subsequent appeals. The table, which is taken from information supplied by assessors, shows the position at 31 December 1994 for all areas.

Number of proposals/appeals and their progress as at 31 December 1994[1]

Region	Number of proposals/appeals lodged	Number settled	Number where list adjusted/appeal upheld	Average[2] time from date of lodgement to date of settlement Months
Borders	3,124	2,943	2,314	10
Central	3,115	2,751	1,706	9
Dumfries and Galloway	3,235	3,213	1,824	7
Fife	6,735	6,354	3,634	7
Grampian	11,741	9,945	6,023	9
Highland	6,366	5,286	3,037	8
Lothian	13,451	12,569	8,202	10
Strathclyde	42,734	35,780	25,618	5
Tayside	11,629	7,095	5,306	9
Orkney	217	216	122	3
Shetland	181	176	130	3
Western Isles	929	818	424	9
Scotland	103,457	87,146	53,340	7

Source:

Information supplied by assessors in regular statistical returns.

Notes:

[1] Analysis of all classes of proposal/appeal lodged with assessors, almost all of which will relate to appeals against banding. Separate statistics are not provided for each class of appeal.

[2] Average time from date of lodgement to date of settlement, of those proposals/appeals which have been settled.

NHS Management Grading Structure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the management grading structure currently in operation in the national health. [16324]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* New arrangements for the grading of general and senior manager posts in the national health service in Scotland were introduced as from 1 September 1993. These arrangements apply to health boards and are commended to NHS trusts.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individuals were on the electoral register of each local authority area in Scotland for each year since 1987. [14541]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The information is set out in the following table. Data on the 1995 registers are not yet available centrally.

	Total electors							
Area	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Scotland	3,994,211	3,967,334	3,932,897	3,936,737	3,912,528	3,927,475	3,930,286	3,946,264
Borders	81,963	82,078	82,268	82,902	83,346	83,879	84,405	84,774
Berwickshire	15,020	15,038	15,041	15,177	15,261	15,400	15,631	15,620
Ettrick and Lauderdale	26,424	26,549	26,849	27,096	27,383	27,534	27,795	27,972
Roxburgh	28,665	28,601	28,450	28,505	28,496	28,598	28,572	28,625
Tweeddale	11,854	11,890	11,928	12,124	12,206	12,347	12,407	12,557
Central	211,944	211,190	210,333	210,588	210,115	211,171	211,041	211,434
Clackmannan	36,946	36,588	36,360	36,461	36,708	36,794	36,806	37,006
Falkirk	110,951	110,580	110,416	110,554	110,180	110,655	110,576	110,424
Stirling	64,047	64,022	63,557	63,573	63,227	63,722	63,659	64,004
Dumfries and Galloway	*113,970*	*113,601*	*113,449*	*115,574*	*116,055*	*116,708*	*116,914*	*116,548*
Annandale and Eskdale	*28,475*	*28,541*	*28,599*	*29,053*	*29,253*	*29,415*	*29,571*	*29,372*
Nithsdale	*43,755*	*43,501*	*43,358*	*44,223*	*44,222*	*44,612*	*44,532*	*44,517*
Stewartry	*18,544*	*18,536*	*18,494*	*18,712*	*18,908*	*18,981*	*19,098*	*19,073*
Wigtown	*23,196*	*23,023*	*22,998*	*23,586*	*23,672*	*23,700*	*23,713*	*23,586*
Fife	266,585	265,105	3,590	264,366	263,563	264,601	266,807	271,160
Dunfermline	97,250	96,468	96,480	96,498	95,861	96,147	96,839	98,179
Kirkcaldy	116,580	116,150	115,587	114,959	114,291	114,249	114,345	116,036
North East Fife	52,755	52,487	52,355	52,909	53,411	54,205	55,623	56,945
Grampian	391,115	388,252	385,170	391,081	390,279	397,563	401,700	406,199
Aberdeen City	175,434	171,205	168,266	169,336	168,169	170,075	170,627	172,043
Banff and Buchan	62,864	63,054	62,830	64,249	64,126	65,621	66,717	67,571
Gordon	53,321	53,982	54,188	56,124	56,135	57,976	59,095	60,027
Kincardine and Deeside	36,588	36,808	37,048	38,064	38,507	39,959	40,677	41,435
Moray	62,908	63,203	62,838	63,308	63,342	63,932	64,584	65,123
Highland	151,641	149,963	151,361	152,806	155,078	157,393	159,000	160,950
Badenoch and Strathspey	8,378	8,406	8,411	8,516	8,941	9,128	9,348	9,227
Caithness	20,765	20,462	20,564	20,240	20,611	20,624	20,645	20,820
Inverness	45,409	45,329	45,976	46,856	47,211	48,023	48,552	49,216
Lochaber	14,744	14,392	14,486	14,610	14,531	14,809	14,907	15,071
Nairn	7,976	7,931	7,992	7,988	8,139	8,370	8,496	8,582
Ross and Cromarty	34,776	34,393	34,871	35,379	36,170	36,759	37,361	38,065
Skye and Lochalsh	8,842	8,530	8,591	8,752	8,972	9,136	9,224	9,320
Sutherland	10,751	10,520	10,470	10,465	10,503	10,544	10,467	10,649
Lothian	599,036	598,561	593,864	597,136	590,523	590,780	589,218	592,093
East Lothian	65,559	65,543	66,112	67,519	67,193	67,565	67,530	67,832
Edinburgh City	367,582	366,102	358,940	359,122	351,743	350,930	350,281	351,748
Midlothian	61,128	61,141	61,092	60,981	60,836	61,166	60,959	61,050
West Lothian	104,767	105,775	107,720	109,514	110,751	111,119	110,448	111,463
Strathclyde	1,819,132	1,801,468	1,776,392	1,767,109	1,746,981	1,745,127	1,739,901	1,741,190
Argyll and Bute	49,274	48,923	48,704	48,637	48,056	48,428	48,991	49,345
Bearsden and Milngavie	31,853	31,806	31,570	31,598	31,508	31,593	31,588	31,743
Clydebank	38,189	37,539	36,691	35,985	35,405	35,234	35,182	35,392
Clydesdale	44,310	44,406	44,227	44,172	44,110	44,374	44,589	44,807
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	46,136	46,388	46,341	46,723	46,869	47,140	47,415	47,573
Cumnock and Doon Valley	34,107	33,869	33,554	33,543	33,332	33,243	33,106	33,049
Cunninghame	106,060	105,980	105,194	105,478	105,058	105,195	105,184	105,597
Dumbarton	59,490	59,352	58,310	58,041	57,680	57,855	57,498	57,592
East Kilbride	63,993	63,954	63,715	64,206	64,331	64,799	65,031	65,352
Eastwood	44,203	44,621	45,399	46,289	46,377	46,712	46,644	46,899
Glasgow City	573,009	561,512	547,594	537,691	524,481	523,080	518,308	518,131
Hamilton	81,268	81,364	80,918	81,347	80,738	80,638	80,743	81,151
Inverclyde	75,605	74,480	72,957	72,283	71,136	70,742	70,282	69,462
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	63,437	63,325	62,834	62,982	62,491	62,764	62,632	62,544
Kyle and Carrick	90,290	89,902	89,333	89,267	88,736	89,018	89,178	89,487
Monklands	80,280	79,784	78,456	78,717	78,098	77,693	77,720	77,191
Motherwell	111,377	110,930	109,675	109,582	109,266	108,609	108,276	107,933
Renfrew	160,171	157,482	155,782	155,771	155,206	153,772	153,543	153,913
Strathkelvin	66,080	65,851	65,138	64,797	64,103	64,238	63,991	64,029
Tayside	303,808	302,852	301,424	300,996	302,177	305,415	306,135	306,292
Angus	71,661	71,510	71,612	72,036	72,345	73,367	74,117	74,854

Area				*Total electors*				
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Dundee City	137,921	136,960	134,949	133,725	133,924	134,799	133,525	132,188
Perth and Kinross	94,226	94,382	94,863	95,235	95,908	97,249	98,493	99,250
Orkney	14,975	14,960	15,029	15,142	15,204	15,404	15,552	15,555
Shetland	16,357	16,219	16,088	15,953	16,139	16,424	16,493	16,753
Western Isles	23,685	23,085	23,097	23,084	23,068	23,010	23,120	23,316

Prescriptions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much revenue his Department has raised from payment for national health service prescriptions for each financial year since 1968 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each health board area. [14543]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* The information requested, which is available only from the financial year 1978–79, is set out in the tables. The amounts of revenue shown include:

(i) NHS prescription charges paid by patients in respect of drugs and appliances dispensed by pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers;

(ii) the sums collected in respect of the sale of prepayment certificates, and;

(iii) NHS prescription charges recovered from patients under health board post-dispensing checking arrangements.

£

Health board	*1978–79*	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*
Argyll and Clyde	253,495	384,553	710,375	912,138	1,061,996	1,140,655	1,248,761	1,367,266
Ayrshire and Arran	229,680	372,980	611,728	884,519	945,886	1,012,273	1,092,777	1,222,220
Borders	50,976	82,995	160,373	199,830	239,355	261,077	293,543	343,694
Dumfries and Galloway	75,606	125,434	210,020	289,827	346,765	381,207	412,283	469,511
Fife	192,135	302,176	507,722	703,629	819,691	895,391	969,976	1,091,333
Forth Valley	156,147	240,709	447,119	575,067	671,486	737,966	800,850	887,644
Grampian	243,511	405,785	767,762	993,264	1,217,667	1,331,868	1,515,858	1,761,953
Greater Glasgow	569,490	827,176	1,512,904	1,871,278	2,104,653	2,263,993	2,403,376	2,544,619
Highland	93,039	152,733	287,663	367,900	430,711	473,272	508,331	567,855
Lanarkshire	340,890	513,804	943,964	1,204,771	1,382,484	1,491,495	1,623,988	1,775,441
Lothian	342,405	598,195	1,004,091	1,388,292	1,628,506	1,771,330	1,923,164	2,165,150
Orkney	9,030	14,113	26,139	34,558	42,707	44,157	49,924	78,156
Shetland	11,135	22,933	46,290	51,351	53,750	53,303	59,549	70,211
Tayside	196,643	322,775	600,078	743,446	894,191	960,155	1,069,281	1,209,421
Western Isles	10,561	18,437	32,287	347,855	51,258	55,486	62,683	69,478
Total	2,774,743	4,384,789	7,868,515	10,267,725	11,891,106	12,873,628	14,034,344	15,623,952

£

Health board	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Argyll and Clyde	1,686,047	1,559,865	1,801,196	1,864,601	1,976,974	2,191,217	2,362,746	2,553,453
Ayrshire and Arran	1,399,374	1,498,208	1,537,218	1,698,499	1,834,772	1,989,472	2,141,099	2,375,010
Borders	399,503	410,304	474,894	496,887	534,811	596,394	669,390	752,834
Dumfries and Galloway	597,128	577,792	670,903	703,861	756,737	856,385	943,044	1,064,693
Fife	1,413,629	1,262,129	1,372,150	1,533,802	1,639,310	1,851,376	2,006,133	2,085,955
Forth Valley	1,111,409	1,047,005	1,196,049	1,246,609	1,342,106	1,509,718	1,624,407	1,868,042
Grampian	2,025,171	2,249,322	2,233,299	2,467,763	2,691,248	3,044,950	3,424,948	3,772,414
Greater Glasgow	3,064,898	2,765,545	2,962,109	3,134,470	3,274,768	3,521,660	3,728,157	3,984,581
Highland	694,861	634,423	788,072	845,898	943,125	1,075,565	1,177,872	1,279,493
Lanarkshire	2,133,117	1,988,051	2,166,055	2,387,645	2,475,710	2,728,958	2,932,888	3,220,526
Lothian	2,725,794	2,566,582	2,789,551	3,302,626	3,338,395	3,694,434	4,039,914	4,534,870
Orkney	89,461	85,812	95,512	100,388	119,264	136,354	259,837	188,254
Shetland	85,335	86,971	93,694	99,316	123,642	126,551	138,170	157,075
Tayside	1,500,871	1,433,136	1,557,736	1,721,211	1,883,434	2,083,760	2,307,325	2,541,305
Western Isles	77,078	88,235	80,494	87,552	97,826	101,328	116,826	136,040
Total	19,003,676	18,253,380	19,818,932	21,691,128	23,032,122	25,508,122	27,872,756	30,514,545

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Definitions

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to clear up the ambiguities in the statutory terms "dwelling house", "building" and "house in multiple occupation" and the two statutory definitions of an HMO which are referred in paragraph 18 of the Department of the Environment's publication, "Monitoring the New Housing Fitness Standard", reference 95/2/140ES. [15353]

Mr. Curry: The definitions referred to are being considered in the context of the current review of the house renovation grant system and the Government's consideration of the case for licensing HMOs.

Correspondence

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will send the letter he undertook to write in the debate on 17 February, *Official Report,* column *1311.*

Sir Paul Beresford: I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 March.

Town and Country Planning (Costs of Enquiries) Bill

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received on the Town and Country Planning (Costs of Enquiries) Bill; what was the length of the consultation period for the Bill; if he will list the organisations that have responded and the nature of the response; and what action he is taking as a result of the consultation. [16174]

Sir Paul Beresford: My letter of 23 January to the hon. Member explained that my Department's officials were inviting comments from officers of the English local authority associations on the provisions of the Bill. By the time limit of 24 February, comments had been received from the Association of County Councils, the Association of District Councils, the Association of London Authorities and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The comments are being considered.

Carbon Dioxide

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has revised the carbon dioxide savings target he set for the Energy Saving Trust in the climate change programme; [15893]

(2) what representations the Energy Saving Trust has made to him regarding the carbon dioxide savings they expect to deliver by 2000; [15894]

(3) what meetings he has held with the Energy Saving trust to discuss the carbon dioxide savings they are expected to deliver by 2000; and if he will make a statement. [15895]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department has held several meetings with the Energy Saving Trust recently and has received a number of representations. The trust is currently reviewing its plans. It estimates that the programme of activities already established and financed will save about 0.3 million tonnes of carbon in the year 2000. Further schemes will make additional contributions, but they are not yet established.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the scientific studies funded by his Department which link United kingdom coastal erosion with chemical contamination of Danish beaches. [15938]

Mr. Atkins: No studies funded by the Department show any link between United Kingdom coastal erosion and contamination of Danish beaches. German, Dutch and Danish coastal waters receive large inputs from the major continental rivers such as the Rhine and the Elbe. Danish agriculture is a substantial source of nutrients in their waters. Inputs are kept close to the coast by poor mixing with waters well out to sea, leading to problems such as eutrophication.

The 1989 "North Sea Satellite Colour Atlas", published with data and financial contributions from the Department and the Natural Environment Research Council, showed a natural plume of sediment material from the Norfolk coast. The poor mixing of continental waters with those offshore prevents material from the UK reaching Danish coastal waters; there is, therefore, no link between this material and problems in Danish waters.

Asbestos

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statutory obligations are imposed on owners of land which the Health and Safety Executive has identified as a major asbestos contamination zone; and if he will make a statement. [15972]

Mr. Atkins: The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for the operation of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987. The regulations place duties on employers in respect of their employees when working with asbestos. Employers also have duties in relation to other persons who might be affected by such work.

Contamination with asbestos could come within the definitions of statutory nuisances under the terms of section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 if, in any individual circumstances it is prejudicial to health or a nuisance. Under section 80 of that Act, the owner or occupier of premises could be served with an abatement notice requiring the execution of such works as may be necessary to deal with the asbestos contamination, either where he is himself responsible for the nuisance, or where the person responsible cannot be found.

The Environment Bill, which received its First Reading in this House on 21 March 1995, introduces a specific definition of contaminated land and regulatory machinery for dealing with it, to replace the use of the more general definitions and procedures relating to statutory nuisances. Under these provisions, local authorities will serve remediation notices requiring steps by way of assessment, remedial works or monitoring when they identify contaminated land. In line with the "polluter pays" principle, the primary responsibility for dealing with any contamination will rest with the person who caused or knowingly permitted the contamination to be present. However, responsibility will pass to the owner or occupier of the land, either where no such person can be found or where his responsibilities have been transferred through contractual means.

Odour Emissions

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce on-the-spot fines for local authorities to apply to those responsible for smell nuisances to residential areas from industrial and farming sources; and if he will make a statement. [16127]

Mr. Atkins: No. Many industrial processes are regulated under part I of the Environmental Protection Act

1990, which provides for controls over odour emissions among other types of pollution. Controls also exist under part III of the Act to deal with complaints of possible statutory nuisances, which includes smells arising on industrial, trade or business premises and those premises being in a state which is prejudicial to health or constitutes a nuisance.

Enclosure Acts

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the Enclosure Acts; and if he will make a statement. [16171]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have no plans to review the Enclosure Acts.

North Sea Pollution

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has undertaken on the economic and employment impacts of North sea pollution on *(a)* fisheries and *(b)* tourism. [15937]

Mr. Atkins: No studies of economic and employment impacts of North sea pollution have been undertaken by the Department. The priority for the Department's marine research programme is to provide a scientific basis for measures to control pollution. It is implicit within this that high standards of water quality can only be of benefit to economic and tourism prospects.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has evaluated that discharged substances are dispersed once they reach the coastal waters of the United Kingdom. [15939]

Mr. Atkins: A range of studies, the latest of which is quoted in the 1993 "North Sea Quality Status Report"—page 102—have shown that physical, chemical and biological mechanisms in North sea waters lead to widespread dispersal of substances, subject to the mixing characteristics of different regions. A copy of the quality status report is in the Library of the House.

Rights of Way

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to place a statutory requirement on highway authorities to consult persons whose property rights may be directly or indirectly affected by proposals affecting rights of way; and if he will make it his policy to require such consultations to be completed before the implementation of any such proposals. [15891]

Mr. Atkins: I have no such proposals. Consultations, other then those statutorily required, are at the discretion of the order-making authority.

However, Rights of way Review Committee, practice guidance note no. 1, on consultation over changes to rights of way, recommends authorities to consult landowners affected by a proposal, including owners and occupies other than those across whose land the right of way in question runs or will run. This is helpful advice.

"Using Water Wisely"

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received and from what sources, in respect of the Government's consultation paper "Using Water Wisely". [16577]

Mr. Atkins: The responses received in respect of the consultation paper "Using Water Wisely" are shown in the table.

Source	*Number*
Water companies[1]	10
Professional and Trade Associations	30
Local Authorities (including local authority associations)	150
Consumer Groups	5
Environmental Groups	21
Water Industry Companies and Consultants	29
Government Departments, Agencies Etc	12
Other Organisations and individuals	90
Total responses	347

[1] The Water Services Association and Water Companies Association submitted a joint response on behalf of all water service and water only companies. In addition nine water service companies submitted separate responses.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the responses to the paper, "Using Water Wisely", supported the proposal to give water companies mandatory targets for reducing leakage. [16552]

Mr. Atkins: Of the 347 responses received 126 were in favour of the proposal to give water companies mandatory targets for reducing leakage.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish his response to the consultation process prompted by the publication of "Using Water Wisely". [16551]

Mr. Atkins: We expect to publish the response to the consultation process later this year.

Water Rating

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes to the system of water rating his Department is considering under the Government's review of charging policy. [16424]

Mr. Atkins: The outcome of the Government's deliberations will be made known in due course.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who is responsible for approving applications to develop opencast mining in Oxfordshire. [16241]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Mineral Planning Authority, Oxfordshire county council are responsible for determining applications to develop opencast mining in Oxfordshire.

Smoking

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what facilities are provided and arrangements made for the comfort and well-being of staff who *(a)* smoke and *(b)* do not wish to be affected by smoking at (i) the work station and (ii) rest, recreation and refreshment facilities at 2 Marsham street, London. [16567]

Sir Paul Beresford: Smoking is prohibited in lifts, toilets, conference rooms, designated restaurant and refreshment areas, some rest rooms and in areas where there are health and safety implications. Staff may decide among themselves to ban smoking in their own or shared offices and in recreation areas. Staff are discouraged from smoking in other common areas.

Inspectorate of Pollution

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the 1995–96 charging schemes for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. [17203]

Mr. Atkins: Charges to cover the costs of regulating processes under integrated pollution control and Premises Subject to Radioactive Substances Act 1993 Regulations were introduced in 1991 under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Act requires Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to balance costs and income, taking one financial year with another.

With the agreement of the Treasury, and following consultation with industry and other bodies, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have now made revised IPC and RSA93 charging schemes, specifying the revised scales of fees and charges which will take effect from 1 April 1995.

Most charges are held at their 1994–95 levels, the exceptions being the IPC subsistence charge which is increased by 4.7 per cent. to £1,805 per component, to contribute to additional regulatory activity of around 10 per cent. needed to implement the check monitoring programme, and an increase in the RSA93 band 3 subsistence charge of 12 per cent. to £1,115, to accommodate a request from some operators who sought and were granted a compensatory reduction of 50 per cent. to £710 in some variation fees.

The rate per inspector day will be £924, a reduction of 5.1 per cent. in the rate for 1994–95, but offset in calculating the charges by a change in the method of accounting for inspector's travelling time.

Full details are included in the revised schemes, copies of which I have placed in the Library.

Copies of the schemes will shortly be sent to relevant operators and to other interested bodies.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the annual report for 1994 on compulsory competitive tendering in local authorities. [17202]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has published today the "CCT and Local Government in England Annual Report" for 1994. It describes the achievements of 1994, both on the work extending CCT to new services and in promoting and enforcing fair competition for the existing services. The report also describes two major research studies which have been published in the last year.

Copies of the report will be sent to all local authorities in England, and to the main trade associations and others involved with CCT. Copies have also been placed in the House Library.

During the last year CCT has been extended to further manual services, as well as to certain local authority professional services. Housing management, legal services, construction and property services, on-street parking, vehicle fleet management and security services have been added to the statute. These followed extensive consultation with the local authority associations, and representatives from the professional and trade organisations.

My Department had to investigate over 100 allegations that local authorities had acted anti-competitively when tendering services. The majority were resolved without statutory action, but in nine cases directions were given; most required the local authority to re-tender the work. My right hon. Friend also gave 39 directions where activities had failed to meet the specified financial objective; four of these prevented the local authority from carrying out the work in-house.

Outstanding Arrears

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list, by local authority, the total amounts outstanding in arrears of *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge and *(c)* council tax; [16875]

(2) what is the total amount of outstanding arrears for all local authorities of *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* community charge and *(c)* council tax. [16876]

Mr. Gummer: Estimates of uncollected community charge and council tax for each local authority are published regularly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; figures for 31 March 1994 are available in its revenue collection statistics 1993–94 publication, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The outstanding arrears of council tax in England as at 31 March 1994 were estimated to be £580 million, of which £226 million had been collected by December 1994. The outstanding arrears of community charge in England as at 31 March 1994 were estimated to be £1,700 million, of which £217 million had been collected by December 1994. No data are yet available centrally on the sums of either council tax or community charge written off between April and December 1994.

Information on arrears of domestic rates is not published by CIPFA and is not available centrally.

EMPLOYMENT

National Vocational Qualifications

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of 16 to 17-year-olds attained qualifications equivalent to NVQ level 3 in each of the last five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the West Midlands. [15821]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is shown in the table:

Proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds attaining qualifications equivalent to NVQ levels 2 and 3 (per cent.)

	NVQ level 2		*NVQ level 3*	
Spring	*United Kingdom*	*West Midlands*	*United Kingdom*	*West Midlands*
1990	31.6	26.8	3.8	[1]—
1991	32.2	28.7	4.0	[1]—
1992	32.7	30.1	3.8	[1]—
1993	35.4	34.8	2.5	[1]—
1994	38.5	31.1	2.1	[1]—

Source:

Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Note:

[1] — Indicates fewer than 10,000 respondents in the cell.

Progress towards foundation target 3 of the national targets for education and training

Proportion of young people gaining NVQ level 3 or equivalent by the age of 21[1]

Spring	*United Kingdom*	*West Midlands*
1990	30.2	27.8
1991	30.2	25.1
1992	34.0	30.6
1993	36.9	35.4
1994	39.4	37.9

Source:

LFS

Note:

[1] The proportion of 21 to 23-year-olds is used as a proxy for achievement at 21. The sample size of a single year's data in the LFS does not allow the achievement of 21-year-olds to be measured accurately.

Race Relations Employment Advisory Service

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence he has, following the decision to put out to tender the services provided by the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service, that those not currently employed by the service will have greater knowledge and skills and perform in a superior manner to those currently employed in that service. [15863]

Mr. Oppenheim: The market test of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service will explore how the service can best be delivered. In considering bids, the Department will consider most carefully which organisation is best placed to maintain the nature and quality of the service. The assessment of suppliers will cover their financial standing, experience in providing similar services and experience of staff and quality systems and methods. At this stage it is too early to speculate on the outcome of the market test.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the expected savings from the market testing of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service; over what period savings will be costed; and when he expects savings to be first identifiable. [16128]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government's policy, which is set out in the White Paper, "Competing for Quality", is to provide high quality public service in the most cost effective way. The Race Relations Employment Advisory Service was assessed as meeting the criteria for market testing. At this stage it is too early to speculate on the outcome of the market test, including details of any savings that may be made. Tenders will be evaluated over a 10-year period.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assurances he can give on the maintenance of the quality and quantity of the service provided by the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service. [16129]

Mr. Oppenheim: Ministers have given an undertaking that the nature and quality of the service will be maintained following market testing. The precise requirements for the service, including activity levels and quality criteria, will be determined during the process. Whatever the outcome of the market test, the Department will continue to monitor performance to ensure that employers receive sound advice on the development of racial equality policies.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what was the cost of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service in 1993–94; and what is the expected cost for 1994–95 and 1995–96. [16420]

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1993–94, the cost of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service was £0.9 million. The cost for each of the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 is expected to be £1 million.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will commence the market testing of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service. [16418]

Mr. Oppenheim: The process of market testing the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service began in November 1994. An invitation to potential suppliers to express an interest in providing the service was published on 23 February 1995.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many companies, voluntary groups or employee groups have expressed an interest in the market testing of the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service. [16421]

Mr. Oppenheim: So far, expressions of interest have been received from 18 organisations.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what criteria will have to be met by those who tender for the Race Relations Employment Advisory Service. [16419]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Department's requirement is for a national service under a single contract—or a prime contractor, if a consortium—with a clear specification of the types of services and standards required. Potential suppliers will be shortlisted on the information requested by the Department in response to expressions of interest. In broad terms, this will cover financial standing, experience in providing similar services, experience of staff and quality systems and methods. Evaluation criteria for bids are being drawn up in parallel with the statement of service requirements. Further information will be provided to shortlisted suppliers at the invitation to tender stage.

Sheep Dip

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he intends to publish the report commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive from the institute of occupational health at Birmingham university on the effect of organo-phosphorous chemicals in sheep dip on 200 sheep farmers. [16061]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my noble Friend Lord Inglewood on 20 March 1995, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *1014.*

Remploy

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the special contracts arrangements in assisting disabled Remploy workers. [16059]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 15 March 1995, *Official Report*, column. *624.*

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's proposed additional expenditure to help people coming off incapacity benefits in each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98; on what items it is to be spent; and how many people it is estimated will be helped in each of those years. [16115]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 28 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about proposed additional expenditure to help people coming off Incapacity Benefit (IB).

We are keen to ensure that people no longer entitled to IB who make a claim for unemployment benefit are given effective help with returning to work. We therefore intend to provide a comprehensive package of additional help for them.

Clients coming off IB will be eligible for immediate entry to a number of our programmes. As a result a number of additional places in Jobplan Workshop (JPW), and Jobclub/Job Interview Guarantee (JIG) scheme are being funded, details of which are as follows.

Year	*Clients*	*Programme*	*Cost*
1995 to 1996	86,000	JPW	£9,630,000
	70,000	Jobclub/JIG	£13,230,000
1996 to 1997	66,700	JPW	£7,837,000
	58,000	Jobplan/JIG	£11,063,000
1997 to 1998	15,400	JPW	£1,900,000
	14,000	Jobplan/JIG	£2,683,000

Those people who are identified at an initial interview as needing specialist help will be referred to Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams, the number of clients and additional costs for which are estimated as follows.

Year	*Clients*	*Cost £*
1995 to 1996	40,000	11,840,000
1996 to 1997	29,000	8,787,000
1997 to 1998	15,000	3,266,000

All new clients who were previously claiming IB will be given, like all new clients, a full advisory interview when they make their claim for unemployment benefit. This interview will provide the opportunity for a full discussion of the client's job goals and of the most appropriate means for achieving this.

I hope this information is helpful and assures you of our intent to provide clients who were previously claiming IB with practical advice and information which is geared to their individual needs.

Job Clubs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the details of the financial assistance available to job clubs in the Durham North district to assist them in the provision of services for people with disabilities; and what were the amounts spent during the last financial year. [15997]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 28 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about financial assistance available to Jobclubs in the Durham North District to assist people with disabilities.

The cost of Jobclub provision in Durham North District between April 1994 and February was £161,940. Separate records on the cost of providing facilities for people with disabilities are not maintained.

There are seven Jobclubs within the Durham North District, none of which are specifically for any particular client group. People with disabilities are encouraged to use the standard provision and where necessary specialist help, for example communicators for the deaf and personal readers or specialist equipment is available via our Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs).

During the period April 1994 to February, 111 people, who have indicated that they have a long term health problem or disability which affects the kind of work they are able to do, have attended Jobclubs in the Durham North District. None of these clients required extra assistance from the PACT to enable them to utilise facilities in the Jobclubs.

I hope this is helpful.

Lucas Gardner Site (Asbestos)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what grounds the Health and Safety Executive has ordered cessation of work at the former Lucas Gardner site at Bath road, Bristol; and if he will make a statement. [15971]

Mr. Oppenheim: Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive visited the former Lucas Gardner site at Bath road, Bristol in December 1994 where demolition work was in progress. They suspected that roofing sheets and pipe lagging contained asbestos. The manner of demolition was such that if asbestos were present it was not being properly removed or controlled to minimise the spread of asbestos fibres. A prohibition notice was served on the contractor preventing further demolition work until a safe system of work had been prepared and appropriate precautions taken.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what types of asbestos have been found on the premises at the former Lucas Gardner site at Bath road, Bristol. [15969]

Mr. Oppenheim: Samples taken from the former Lucas Gardner site and analysed by the Health and Safety Executive were found to contain crysotile (white), crocidolite (blue) and amosite (brown) asbestos.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people he estimates will lose their social security entitlement as a consequence of his reduction of the number of weekly hours which students can commit to their studies without losing benefit eligibility. [15944]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's proposals are designed to allow the same number of people to study while claiming benefits for the unemployed after the introduction of jobseeker's allowance as do so now. The new rules will not come into force until April 1996. The detail of the transitional arrangements for JSA and other social security benefits is still being considered. I explained to the Jobseeekrs Bill Committee on 14 February 1995 at column *374*, however, that our intention is that no one who is currently on a course will have to give it up because of the change that we are proposing.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16280]

Miss Widdecombe: There was no expenditure by the Employment Department Group or contracts with the private sector for public relations activities during the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16208]

Miss Widdecombe: Central guidance on publicity and the use of public relations consultants has been produced by the Cabinet Office for Government Departments. The Employment Department Group and its agencies have been issued with that guidance which stipulates the stated policy of successive administrations to rely on the expertise and experience of the Government's own advisers and to decline offers from commercial public relations companies.

Training Budget

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money he has made available for *(a)* modern apprenticeships and *(b)* youth training in 1995–96. [16272]

Mr. Paice: We are making £669 million available for modern apprenticeships and youth training in England in 1995–96. Modern apprenticeships are part of the youth programme budget and it is not possible to distinguish elements for youth training from those for modern apprenticeships.

Caxton House (Smoking)

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what facilities are provided and arrangements made for the comfort and well-being of staff who *(a)* smoke and *(b)* do not wish to be affected by smoking at (i) the work station and (ii) rest, recreation and refreshment facilities at Caxton house, Tothill street, London. [16566]

Miss Widdecombe: All refurbished offices and other areas are designated non-smoking areas. There are four rooms on the refurbished floors for staff who wish to smoke. In unrefurbished areas, people may smoke only if all staff in the area consent. The staff restaurant, staff tea point areas and all common areas are designated non-smoking areas.

Careers Service Contracts

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Careers Service contracts awarded to private sector companies are identical to those awarded to TEC/LEA partnerships other than in respect of volumes and other volume-related details. [16262]

Mr. Paice: Yes.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16650]

Miss Widdecombe: A total of 3,550 copies of the Department's 1995 departmental report, Cm 2805, were printed and published. In addition to the copies presented to Parliament and placed in the Library, the report was also circulated to the Employment Select Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, the media and internally within the Department. The costs of printing and publishing the report were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover the costs from sales revenue. The Department met the design costs of the report, which were £35,600. The cover price of the report is £14.60. A total of 2,134 copies of the report have been sold since its publication on 10 March 1995.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16651]

Miss Widdecombe: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. Printing and publishing costs of the reports have been borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which has sought to recover these costs from sales revenue. The Department is responsible for the design costs of the report. Data for the five years of publication are as follows:

1991:—£12.780
1992:—£12,540
1993:—£13,450
1994:—£21,600
1995:—£35,600

The increased costs for the 1994 and 1995 reports reflect decisions to improve the range, quality and presentation of informaiton provided to both Parliament and the public.

Environmental Improvement

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he is taking to increase the number of people involved in types of employment that enhance the environment. [16295]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government do not seek to influence the number of people employed in specific parts of the economy. Our role is to promote the right framework in which businesses can create jobs. If there is a demand for more jobs that enhance the environment, employment in that sector will increase. The Government's commitment to sustainable development encourages economic development that is compatible with environmental protection and enhancement.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16559]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the following list:

1979–80: Not available
1994–95: 14.5

The Department's press office was merged with the Training Agency press office in November 1989. Staffing figures reflect this.

Client Advisers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the duties and job objectives of the client advisers appointed by his Department to liaise with claimants of unemployment benefit or other benefits granted as a consequence of unemployment; and whether these objectives include facilitating clients to find work or a place on a training scheme. [16726]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 28 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the duties and objectives of Employment Service (ES) client advisers.

Employment Service (ES) client advisers have two main objectives: to help people into work as soon as possible by providing them with practical advice and information about jobs, training and other opportunities that are available; and to make sure people claiming benefit understand and comply with the conditions under which it is paid. These are that people are available for, capable of and actively seeking work.

To fulfil these objectives all my offices offer our unemployed clients a structured and coherent information and advisory service which is based on regular interviews with an adviser. At these interviews clients are able to discuss their situation, the steps they are taking to find work and the employment and training opportunities which are available. The aim of each interview is to assess the client's situation, determine their needs and agree an appropriate course of action which, if taken, will offer the client the best chance of success in their search for work.

As part of this, our advisers liaise closely with employers, providers of employment, training and other opportunities, to maintain their knowledge of the jobs market and make sure clients have access to as wider range of opportunities as possible. They are also able to give clients advice and information on other benefits, including benefits available to people in work.

I hope this is helpful and assures you of our intent to provide our clients with as much practical help as possible to support their search for work.

Council of Ministers

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Social Affairs Council held on 27 March. [17183]

Mr. Portillo: I attended the Social Affairs Council on 27 March in Brussels. I was accompanied by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. The principal items on the agenda were the draft directive on posted workers, a draft decision on the programme to combat social exclusion, draft resolutions on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making and on implementation of community social legislation, a Presidency memorandum on the social dimension of international trade and discussion of follow-up to the discussion of employment issues at the Essen European Council on 9 and 10 December 1994.

Discussion of the draft directive on posted workers was once again inconclusive. The UK has considerable and long-standing difficulties of both principle and detail. A number of other member states also had significant difficulties with various aspects of the proposal, which the Presidency referred back to COREPER for further work.

There was, in the event, no discussion of the social exclusion programme. The resolutions on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making and on the implementation of directives in the social field were unanimously agreed with little discussion.

There was a tour de table on the Presidency memorandum on the social dimension of international trade. I said that the UK was strongly opposed to child and forced labour and that developing countries needed help and encouragement to eliminate such practices. I emphasised the importance of free trade in promoting both economic and social development in the third world and that trade sanctions would hold back rather than encourage social progress. No Council conclusions were reached, though the Presidency drew some conclusions of its own.

There was a discussion of the role of the Social Affairs Council in the follow-up to the conclusions of the Essen European Council on employment. The Commission reported briefly on progress on establishing the European Health and Safety Agency and on action it was taking under the social protocol.

Lindane

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what instructions are to be given to workers who use or spray Lindane—Gamma HCH or Gamma BHC—as part of their employment. [15499]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Work with Lindane—the common name for Gamma HCH, also known as Gamma BHC—is covered by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994. COSHH requires employers to inform, instruct and train their employees about: the nature of the substances they work with, the risks created by exposure to those substances, and the precautions to be taken. When used as a pesticide, lindane is also subject to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. COPR requires that pesticides are approved by Ministers. Conditions of approval and instructions for use appear on the product labels.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence has been supplied by the London Hazards Centre to the Government about health problems and hazards to the development and functions of vital organs possibly caused by the use of Lindane—Gamma HCH or Gamma BHC; and if he will make a statement. [15492]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The Government are not aware of any such evidence supplied by the London Hazards Centre. The Government's armoury of controls for chemicals, including Lindane, provide adequate safeguards to protect the health of users and people who might be affected by their use.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15578]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The Department and its Ministers pursue objectives which fully reflect the need to minimise regulatory and administrative burdens on business. There is also a Minister with particular responsibility for promoting deregulation within the Department.

Agricultural Wages Board

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of employees in employment covered by the Agricultural Wages Board, using micro data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, for all quarters from spring 1992 to the last quarter. [16104]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* All employees in agriculture and horticulture are covered by the Agricultural Wages Board. The table gives information from the Labour Force Survey for the number of employees in agriculture for all quarters from spring 1992.

Number of employees in agriculture and horticulture in the United Kingdom between spring 1992 and autumn 1994, Great Britain—not seasonally adjusted

	Thousands
SIC 80	
Spring 1992	216
Summer 1992	211
Autumn 1992	210
Winter 1992–93	184
Spring 1993	196
Summer 1993	212
Autumn 1993	216
SIC 92	
Winter 1993–94	195
Spring 1994	199
Summer 1994	213
Autumn 1994	196

Note:

The figures above the line are not strictly comparable with those below the line following the change in the standard industrial classification in winter 1993–94.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Butter

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what price British wholesalers buy butter per 250g pack; at what price the European Community sells butter per 250g pack on the world market; what are the levels of European Community production and consumption of butter; what is the level of common agricultural policy expenditure on butter subsidies; and what is the annual cost to the British Exchequer of European Community intervention in the butter market. [16134]

Mr. Jack: The first-hand delivered price of butter in the United Kingdom is between 68p to 82.5p per 250g pack. The price of butter on the world market fluctuates and is currently in a range $2,000 to $2,430 per tonne.

Estimates of production and consumption of butter in the European Community are given in "Agriculture Situation in the Community, 1993 Report".

CAP expenditure in 1994 on internal butter disposal subsidies was 669.4 million ecu=£517.1 using the average 1994 conversion rate of 1 ecu=£0.77249 million.

Details of the Exchequer cost of CAP support in the UK for butter can be found in section I of table 9.1 of "Agriculture in the UK". The UK also contributes to the EC budget as a whole, which funds the cost of the CAP support in other member states.

Copies of the publications mentioned have been deposited in the Library of the House.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers have had their monthly milk cheques withheld by Milk Marque because of administration problems at the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce. [15940]

Mr. Jack: Purchasers do not inform the intervention board of payments they are withholding for milk deliveries. This is a matter between the purchaser and the producer. The intervention board has provided Milk Marque, and all other milk purchasers, on a weekly basis with all changes in the quota registered with it confirmed in the previous week. The intervention board is always ready to assist if the processing of any quota movement had been delayed for any reason.

Farm Costs

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the cost to the United Kingdom per acre farmed in the European Community. [16136]

Mr. Jack: A note on "The Cost of the Common Agricultural Policy to Consumers and Taxpayers" was placed in the Library of the House on 9 March 1995. Information on the area farmed in the European Community is given in "Agricultural Situation in the Community, 1993 Report", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Food Prices

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate by how much the average food bill of the average family of four is altered as a direct result of the common agricultural policy, giving figures separately for *(a)* dairy products, *(b)* sugar, *(c)* beef, *(d)* cereals, *(e)* rice, *(f)* fruit and vegetables, *(g)* potatoes, *(h)* oilseeds, *(i)* linseed, *(j)* olive oil, *(k)* wine and *(l)* tobacco. [16154]

Mr. Jack: A note on "The Cost of the Common Agricultural Policy to Consumers and Taxpayers" was placed in the Library of the House on 9 March 1995. Separate figures are not available by commodity, but some information for the European Community as a whole is given in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "Agricultural Policies' Markets and Trade, Monitoring and Outlook 1994" a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will estimate the cost of the common agricultural policy to each household in the United Kingdom, breaking this figure down into *(a)* the running costs of the common agricultural policy and *(b)* the amount which the policy adds to food prices; [16150]

(2) if he will estimate the combined cost of the common agricultural policy and other national farm aids to the United Kingdom; and if he will break down this figure into *(a)* payments directly or indirectly received by farmers and *(b)* the cost to consumers in the form of higher food prices. [16151]

Mr. Jack: A note on "The Cost of the Common Agricultural Policy to Consumers and Taxpayers" was placed in the Library of the House on 9 March 1995.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the price at which British wholesalers buy *(a)* linseed, *(b)* tobacco, *(c)* cereals, *(d)* oilseeds, *(e)* milk and *(f)* beef per tonne; what he estimates the price of each commodity would be in a free market without European Community price intervention; what are the levels of European Community production and consumption of each commodity; what is the level of common agricultural policy on expenditure on subsidies to each commodity; and what is the cost to the British Exchequer of European Commodity intervention in the market in each community. [16153]

Mr. Jack: Prices received by producers for agricultural commodities are reported to Eurostat, and consistent series for cereals, oilseeds, milk and beef appear in the publication "Agricultural Prices". No representative price series is available for linseed or tobacco.

It is not possible to estimate what the price of each commodity would be in the free market without European Community intervention without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions.

Estimates of production and consumption in the European Community for each commodity are given in the "Agricultural Situation in the Community, 1993 Report".

The 1994 budget outturn estimates of common agricultural policy expenditure on these commodities are as follows:

	mecu	*£ million*
Cereals (Market support)	2,087	1,612
Arable area payments:		
Cereals	5,540	4,280
Linseed	125	97
Oilseeds	2,549	1,969
Tobacco	1,057	816
Milk	4,249	3,282
Beef	3,467	2,678

Details of the Exchequer cost of CAP support in the UK for these commodities, except tobacco, for which there is no expenditure in the UK, can be found in section I of table 9.1 of "Agriculture in the UK". The UK also contributes to the EC budget as a whole, which funds the cost of the CAP support in other member states.

Copies of the publications referred to are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate by how much common agricultural prices have risen in weak currency countries as a direct result of the system of pegging farm prices to the deutschmark via the switchover system for each country. [16137]

Mr. Jack: As support prices are set by the Council of Ministers in the annual price-fixing negotiations, it is not possible to say what prices would have been set had the switchover system not existed.

The switchover mechanism was abolished on 1 February 1995. This did not result in any change in the level of CAP support prices in national currency terms. However, there will be no further increases as a result of this mechanism.

Sugar

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what price British wholesalers buy sugar per kilogramme; at what price the European Community sells sugar per kilogramme on the world market; what are the levels of European Community production and consumption of sugar; what is the level of the common agricultural policy expenditure on sugar subsidies; what is the cost to the British Exchequer of European Community intervention in the sugar market. [16132]

Mr. Jack: Information on actual prices paid for bulk white sugar is not available. However, prices are likely to be in the range of the effective support price provided by the sugar regime and producers "list" prices—between about 57p per kilogramme and 68p per kilogramme.

Export refunds enable Community bulk white sugar to be sold at the world price, which is currently around 25p per kilogramme, free on board.

Estimates of production and consumption of sugar in the European Community are given in the "Agricultural Situation in the Community, 1993 Report", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

The provisional outturn for Community expenditure on sugar in 1994 is 2,062 mecu—£1,593 million[1]. Production and storage levies contributed 1,118 mecu—£864 million[1]—to own resources.

Details of the Exchequer cost of CAP support in the UK for sugar can be found in section 1 of table 9.1 of "Agriculture in the UK", copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House. The UK also contributes to the EC budget as a whole, which funds the cost of the CAP support in other member states.

Rice

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what price British wholesalers buy rice per tonne; what he estimates the price of rice per tonne would be in the free market without European Community price intervention and what is the annual cost to the British consumer of the common agricultural policy in the rice market. [16135]

Mr. Jack: Information on the price of rice to wholesalers is not gathered centrally.

It is not possible to estimate what the price of rice per tonne would be in the free market without European Community intervention without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions.

The only readily available information on the cost to the British consumer of the common agricultural policy in the rice market is given by the consumer subsidy equivalents in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "Agricultural Policies, Markets and Trade, Monitoring and Outlook 1994".

Organo-phosphorous Chemicals

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to publish the latest report from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on adverse reactions to organo-phosphorous chemicals by farmers; and what change to such reactions was shown by the last published report. [16062]

Mrs. Browning: I expect the next report to the Veterinary Products Committee, by the appraisal panel for human suspected adverse reactions to veterinary medicines, to be published by the end of April. Only one report has thus far been published, so no comparisons can yet be drawn.

Wine

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what price British wholesalers buy wine per 75 cl bottle; what he estimates the price of wine per bottle would be in a free market without European Community price intervention; what are the levels of European Community production and consumption; what is the level of common agricultural policy expenditure on wine subsidies; and what is the cost to the British Exchequer of European Community intervention in the wine sector. [16155]

Mr. Jack: The price at which British wholesalers buy wine is a matter for commercial negotiation and varies by consignment.

For this reason, and because it would require a large number of hypothetical assumptions, it is not possible to estimate what the price of wine per bottle would be in the free market without European Community intervention.

The European Commission estimates that European Community wine production in the 1993–94 wine year was 159 million hectolitres, that 129 mhl was consumed as wine in the EC, net exports were 9 mhl and other uses—for example, vinegar, vermouth and eaux de vie—12 mhl.

Total common agricultural policy expenditure in 1994 on the wine regime was 1,220 million ecu, or £1,002 million, provisional outturn.

The Exchequer cost of CAP support for wine in the UK is estimated at £820,000 for the 1994–95 financial year. The UK also contributes to the European Community budget as a whole, which funds the cost of the wine support system in other member states.

Olive Oil

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what price British wholesalers buy olive oil per tonne; what she estimates the price of olive oil per tonne wold be in a free market without European Community price intervention; and what is the annual cost to the consumer of taxes on imports of olive oil. [16133]

Mr. Jack: Prices received by producers for agricultural commodities are reported to Eurostat and a consistent series for olive oil appears in the publication "Agricultural Prices", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

It is not possible to estimate what the price of olive oil would be in the free market without European Community intervention without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions.

No estimates are readily available on the annual cost to the consumer of taxes on imports of olive oil.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of goat pox were reported in each year since 1985. [15973]

Mrs. Browning: No cases of goat pox have ever been recorded in England.

Fish Catches

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the value and tonnage of i(a) fish, *(b)* molluscs and *(c)* crustacea landed in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Wales, (iii) England, (iv) Scotland and (v) Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [16690]

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[1] £1=1.2945 ecu.

Mr. Jack: The available information is published in table 3.3. of "UK Sea Fisheries Statistics", 1993.

Comparable information for 1994 is not yet available.

Fishing Restrictions

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the defence his officials will be employing in the European Court of Justice in the case brought by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations against the Government's days at sea restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [16371]

Mr. Jack: It would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the oral hearing due to take place in Luxembourg on 29 March. The positions of both parties will, however, be a mater of public record in the reports of proceedings and, ultimately, the judgment of the court.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to abandon the defence of the days at sea restrictions in the European Court of Justice in the case being brought by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations; and if he will make a statement. [16370]

Mr. Jack: The action in question was initiated by the NFFO by way of judicial review in the United Kingdom courts of certain measures adopted by Parliament. It was subsequently referred to the European court for a ruling on the interpretation of EU law. In the circumstances, the Government are obliged to respond and explain their position. It is, however, open to the applicants to discontinue the proceedings at any stage.

Mr. Philip J. Corrigan

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to obtain from the Minister of Primary Industries and Energy in Australia details of the nature and outcome of each of the charges under the Australian Public Service Act against Mr. Philip J. Corrigan, now appointed head of operations at the Meat Hygiene Service; and if he will make a statement on the information so obtained. [16724]

Mrs. Browning: My Ministry has contacted the Department of Primary Industries and Energy in Canberra on this matter.

Agricultural Tenancies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the number and total acreage of tenancies under the categories *(a)* agricultural holding tenancies as defined in the Agriculture Act 1986, *(b)* Gladstone *v.* Bower arrangements, *(c)* grazing or mowing agreements and *(d)* Ministry-approved short-term lettings and licences. [14927]

Mr. Jack: The surveys operated by MAFF do not require respondents to supply the level of detailed information that would enable these separate totals to be compiled. There is, however, a survey carried out annually by the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers which gives information on new lettings in these categories.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list those producer organisations in the fishing industry that were fined in each year since 1988 for overshooting their allocated quota; [15587]

(2) what evidence he has that producer organisations in the fishing industry have taken action against individual members who breached their quota in each year since 1988; [15589]

(3) if he will list for each year since 1988 what action was taken by his Department against those producer organisations in the fishing industries which overshot their quota; and how many prosecutions were commenced in England and Wales; [15586]

(4) if he will list those producer organisations in the fishing industry that have taken action against individual members; and what penalties were imposed in each case in England and Wales since 1988. [15588]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* In the United Kingdom, producer organisations are permitted to manage allocations of quota on behalf of those members with vessels exceeding 10m overall length. Once an allocation has been made, it is the responsibility of the producer organisation to ensure that its overall allocation is not exceeded and to take appropriate action to deal with those members who infringe the rules of the organisation. The fisheries departments do not maintain records of the disciplinary action that producer organisations take. Where a producer organisation has exceeded or is likely to exceed its quota allocation for any particular stock, the licences of its members will be varied to prohibit further landings of the stock in question.

Producer organisations are subject to a system of quota penalties and compensation for over-fishing. These arrangements, which have been agreed with the industry, require that where any producer organisation or other group in the UK fishing fleet exceeds its allocation for a particular stock, the over-fish will not be included in its track record when the departments calculate the subsequent year's allocation. Where the over-fish leads to the UK quota being exceeded, and other groups in the fleet being disadvantaged by the early closure of a fishery, the over-fish will be deducted from the offending group's allocation for the subsequent year. This deduction will then be used to compensate groups prejudiced by the over-fishing, after taking account of those groups likely uptake had the fishery not been closed.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list for each year since 1988 *(a)* the total allowable catch for each International Council for the Exploration of the Seas area, *(b)* the British total allowable catch for each ICES area, *(c)* the total allocated to each producer organisation in tonnage and percentage terms of the British total allowable catch and *(d)* the total allocated to the non-sector in tonnage and percentage terms of the British total allowable catch; [15591]

(2) if he will list those producer organisations in the fishing industry which overshot their allocated quota for each species in each year since 1988 in England and Wales. [15585]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The system of sectoral management, under which producer organisations may manage allocations of quota on behalf of their members, has been fully operational since 1991.

I have arranged for tonnage data on Community TACs and UK quota since 1988, and on allocations made to producer organisations and the non sector and the uptake of their allocations since 1991, to be placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Former Yugoslavia

14. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce or withdraw British forces in former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [14640]

Mr. Soames: We intend to maintain our contribution to UNPROFOR so long as our forces can continue to carry out the UN mandate at an acceptable level of risk. The size of our contribution is kept under close review.

21. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what redeployment is planned for UK military forces currently serving with UNPROFOR in Croatia. [14647]

Mr. Soames: None.

24. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are currently serving in Bosnia with the United Nations; and what plans he has for increasing their numbers. [14651]

Mr. Soames: There are currently some 3,400 British personnel serving in the former Yugoslavia as part of UNPROFOR. Some 190 personnel are on standby to deploy to Bosnia as the remainder of the additional forces which the United Kingdom offered to the UN in January to help with the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

Chemical Weapons Convention

15. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the chemical weapons convention on international security. [14641]

Mr. Soames: The chemical weapons convention provides for a comprehensive, global and verifiable ban on a complete class of weapons of mass destruction and also for the destruction of very large quantities of existing chemical warfare agents. Once fully implemented it will make a significant contribution to international security.

Armed Services (Deaths)

16. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the number of members of Her Majesty's armed services who have died on active service since 1965. [14642]

Mr. Soames: In the period from 1966 to 1994, 850 members of the armed forces have died on active service as a result of hostile and enemy action or as a result of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland.

National Army Museum

17. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the development of the national army museum beyond London; and if he will make a statement. [14643]

Mr. Soames: Although the national army museum receives a grant in aid from my Department, the question of development of the museum is, in the first instance, a matter for the museum trustees.

British Defence

18. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that British defence will not be run by the European Commission. [14644]

Mr. Soames: Yes. One of the key considerations in the Government's approach to the treatment of European defence issues at the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference is that the essential inter-Governmental nature of decision making on defence should be preserved.

Naval Engineering College, Manadon

19. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the sale of RNEC Manadon. [14645]

Mr. Soames: I am pleased to say that our disposal strategy has progressed well. A planning brief for the site is now complete and has been approved by Plymouth city council planning officials.

Farms, Upper Coquet Valley

20. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent progress he has made in providing electricity supplies to farms owned by his Department in the Upper Coquet valley, Northumberland. [14646]

Mr. Soames: A stand-alone farm power system has been installed on one of my Department's farms on the Otterburn training area. We are at present discussing with tenants the suitability of replicating the system on other farms on the training area.

RAF Chivenor

22. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he is making in considering the relocation of Marines units to RAF Chivenor; and when he expects to make an announcement. [14648]

Mr. Soames: Studies are nearing completion and it is our intention to publish a consultative document setting out any proposals which emerge from them. No decisions will be taken until interested parties have had an opportunity to comment and their responses have been carefully considered.

Belize

23. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the training programme in Belize. [14650]

Mr. Soames: The British Army training support unit, Belize is set up to conduct jungle, field firing and adventure training, primarily at company level, and expects to train seven such deployments from the United Kingdom each year, each lasting for about six weeks. Although we do not have a regular requirement for exercises of bigger units, there will be occasions when we would wish to deploy battalions and we have such an exercise planned for July next year.

Falkland Islands

25. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are currently committed to the defence of the Falkland Islands. [14652]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 15 February, *Official Report*, column *726*.

Ex-service Personnel

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next be meeting representatives of the Royal British Legion and other ex-service organisations in order to discuss the promotion of the interests of ex-service personnel and their dependants. [14653]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has no plans at present to meet representatives of the Royal British Legion or other ex-service organisations. At a meeting last November between the Minister of State for Social Security, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence and the Legion it was agreed that many of the matters relating to the welfare of former service personnel fall within the scope of the Department of Social Security. As a result of this agreement, that Department is now taking the lead on this issue.

Eurofighter 2000

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions are taking place, or proposed, to revise the share of work by each nation in respect of the Eurofighter 2000 project. [15519]

Mr. Freeman: Workshare and other matters relating to planning for future phases of the project are covered in our regular programme of contacts with our Eurofighter 2000 partners.

Debriefing

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy in respect of debriefing service personnel formerly involved in active combat before their discharge back into the community. [15765]

Mr. Soames: Each of the services provides education, counselling and treatment programmes before and after active operations. These ensure that members of the armed forces are aware of the possibility of stress reaction, and that it can be identified and treated when it occurs. While the care of those who have left the armed forces is properly the responsibility of the national health service, medical summaries will in future indicate whether an individual has been treated for stress disorder while he or she was in the services.

Overseas Students

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many students from overseas were trained at Ministry of Defence establishments during 1994. [16177]

Mr. Soames: According to available records, 4,777 overseas students were trained at UK military establishments during 1994.

Astra plc

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific efforts were made by his Department to establish with Mr. James himself whether any of the documents referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton, (Mr. Cohen) of 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *556*, were personal rather than company documents. [17002]

Mr. Soames: None. The documents were taken by the Ministry of Defence police from Astra plc/BMARC after Mr. James had left the company. They were considered to be company documents and treated as such throughout the MDP investigation.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he has handed any of the Astra plc documents to Sir Richard Scott, pursuant to his Department's letter of 27 January 1993 to Mr. J. Barratt of Cork Gulley. [17008]

Mr. Soames: The provision of documents to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is a matter between my Department and the inquiry.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the role of Ministers and deputy permanent secretaries in his Department in authorising or sanctioning the raid on Astra plc in 1990; and which of his officials and Ministers were subsequently consulted about the return of documents. [17010]

Mr. Soames: None. Ministry of Defence police who conducted the investigation are operationally independent in such matters.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what opportunity was afforded to Mr. James to recover documents which may have been his personal property or to consult with his staff; and if a list of seized documents was made available to him. [17004]

Mr. Soames: No opportunity was offered to Mr. James to recover documents which may have been his personal property or to consult with his staff. Documents taken by Ministry of Defence police were considered to be company documents and a list was never made available to Mr. James who had left Astra/BMARC at the time of the MOD police investigation.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions when his Department has been approached by Mr. Gerald James seeking to recover his own personal documents from among those documents seized by MOD staff in April 1990. [17006]

Mr. Soames: Ministry of Defence police have no record of any direct approach by Mr. James seeking to recover documents seized by them.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the role and function of Mr. J. W. Cassey at the offices of Astra plc in 1990; and what have been his official appointments before and since that period. [17005]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence police have no knowledge of Mr. Cassey's role and function at the offices of Astra plc in 1990; nor of his official appointments before and since that date.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what period in 1990 his staff were on the premises of Astra plc at 6 St. James place, London; and if he will summarise the documents and materials removed by his staff from those premises. [17007]

Mr. Soames: Ministry of Defence police have not conducted a search of the premises of Astra plc at 6 St. James place, London.

Market Testing

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and grades of the members of the panel appointed by his Department to evaluate the in-house bid by Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills), Liverpool to retain the service it provides at present. [16917]

Mr. Freeman: The panel appointed to evaluate the bid submitted by the Accounts (Bills) in-house team is:

Name	Grade	Department
Mr. M. J. Dymond	Grade 3	Chief Executive, Defence Accounts Agency (Chairman)
Mrs. S. A. Beaver	Grade 5	Director of Procurement (Finance)
Mr. M. A. Rowe	Grade 5	Director of Accounts (Bills)
Mr. D. A. Thomas	Grade 6	Assistant Director of Accounts (Staff)
Mr. P. J. Chafer	Grade 6	Assistant Director of Accounts (Budgets and Agency)

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which basis he estimates that the total running cost of providing the service currently provided by Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills), Liverpool would be 20 per cent. lower if it were provided by a private sector firm. [16913]

Mr. Freeman: This figure of 20 per cent. represents a level of savings achieved in other market-testing exercises. This is the target the in-house team have been asked to aim at in formulating its bid.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what market testing criteria are applicable to the in-house bid by Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills) for the retention of its service. [16915]

Mr. Freeman: The Accounts (Bills) in-house bid is being handled under the Department's market testing procedures. The bid is presently being evaluated against a formal statement of requirement, and if it is compliant a three-year service level agreement will be recorded between the MOD and the in-house team. The criteria for evaluating the bid include service delivery and standards, customer satisfaction,. flexibility and overall value for money.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision to reduce the running costs of Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills), Liverpool by 20 per cent. by 31 March 1996. [16918]

Mr. Freeman: The decision to keep the work of Accounts (Bills) in-house was made on the understanding that the in-house team should be asked to achieve the sort of savings that might have been possible with a full commercial test. The financial target is 20 per cent. but the in-house team's bid will also be evaluated against a formal statement of requirement which includes quality, standard of service and value for money performance criteria.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments he has made of the impact on running costs of having the works currently carried out by Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills), Liverpool contracted out to a private sector firm. [16914]

Mr. Freeman: No specific assessment has been made although the levels of saving achieved through market testing have influenced the financial target set for the Accounts (Bills) in-house team.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has for maintaining the service provided by Defence Accounts Agency Department of Accounts (Bills), Liverpool in the event of its in-house bid being unsuccessful. [16916]

Mr. Freeman: The in-house bid is being evaluated. If it fails to meet the requirement the options for maintaining the service provided by Accounts (Bills) will be reviewed in the light of the reasons for non-compliance.

Redundancies

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the ratio of field officers and above to other ranks before and after the recently announced redundancy programme; and if he will make a statement. [14935]

Mr. Soames: Before the recently announced programme of redundancies arising from the Defence costs study, the ratio of Army other ranks to field officers was approximately 14:1; in future it will be approximately 17:1. It has been possible to achieve these reductions without the need for a large redundancy programme, and no further Army redundancies beyond those already announced are anticipated in the foreseeable future.

BBC "The Vet" Series

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the animals and equipment which were housed at vacant dwellings owned by his Department on the Furse Park estate at Barne Barton in Plymouth, in connection with the filming of the BBC TV vet series; [14931]

(2) how many vacant dwellings owned by his Department on the Furse Park estate at Barne Barton in Plymouth were used by the BBC this year in connection with the filming of a programme about vets; and how much was paid to his Department for this purpose. [14932]

Mr. Soames: A single vacant married quarter on the Furse Park estate at Barne Barton, Plymouth, was used during the filming of a production entitled "The Vet". No animals or equipment were housed in the property, and the fee paid by the company is commercial in confidence.

Training

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to make available information on military aid to foreign countries. [16723]

Mr. Soames: We disclose details of those countries which receive United Kingdom training, whether in the UK or overseas, and also the total numbers of students concerned during any particular period. It is not normally our practice to disclose the precise details of military training given to any particular country as such details are regarded as being confidential between Governments. There are no plans to change this policy.

Road Transport Regulations

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the new edition of the joint service road transport regulations; and how many copies will be printed. [16807]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will arrange for a copy of the new edition of the joint service road transport regulations to be sent, as promised in his letter of 4 January, as soon as it is available. We expect some 3,600 copies of these regulations to be distributed around the middle of the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 March 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. Darius Guppy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *30*, if he will list the applications for legal aid made over the past 12 months by Darius Guppy. [15665]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Over the past 12 months, Mr. Guppy has made six applications for civil legal aid and one for ABWOR—assistance by way of representation. No central record of applications for criminal legal aid is kept, but I am aware of one such application from Mr. Guppy, to which I referred in my answer of 20 March.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *30*, if he will seek to amend section 38 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 to remove the confidentiality provisions on the disclosure of information on an applicant's financial means where the applicant is serving a prison sentence for theft. [15666]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The "confidentiality" clause in section 38 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 is not unique to legal aid and is common practice in organisations which retain personal details of an individual's circumstances.

Legal Aid Expenditure

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will estimate what was the expenditure from the legal aid fund *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Wales in the last available year. [15789]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Actual net expenditure on legal aid in England and Wales in 1993–94 was £1,210 million. For expenditure in Wales, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 2 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *677*. The legal aid fund in Wales is administered by two separate area offices, situated at Cardiff and Chester, the latter being also responsible for administering legal aid in parts of England. It is therefore not possible readily to identify payments made solely in respect of assisted persons resident in Wales, nor is it possible to estimate what proportion of legal aid fund expenditure related specifically to Wales.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the costs and benefits of constructing a high speed rail link from north-west England to connect with the proposed channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Watts: I have not assessed the costs and benefits of a completely new line. However, on 22 March, I announced the first stage of a £1 billion modernisation of the west coast main line.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16210]

Mr. Steven Norris: Guidelines for the employment of public relations companies are contained in the working guide for Government information officers, copies of which are available in the library of the House. The procurement rules and procedures for the Department are contained in the Departmental procurement manual.

Railway Heritage

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the Railway Heritage Group about the preservation of early records of the railway system in the last five years. [16597]

Mr. Watts: None. Early records which have come to light in the last five years have been sent to either the Public Record Office, the Scottish Record Office or the National Railway Museum to add to their existing collections. If the records were not appropriate for these three national bodies, they were sent to one of the local record offices listed by British Rail's records advisory panel. In future, the new independent Railway Heritage Committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Gordon Higginson, will supervise the transfer of historic railway artifacts and records to the collecting institutions.

Railtrack (Land Sales)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *89*, if he will give the total acreage of the 134 pieces of land sold by Railtrack to date. [16276]

Mr. Watts: I am advised by Railtrack that the total acreage of the 134 sale transactions by Railtrack to date amounts to about 41 acres.

Royal Train

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions the royal train was used in 1993–94; what were its destinations; which members of the royal family used it and on how many occasions; and on how many occasions was it used overnight. [16768]

Mr. Watts: The royal train was used on 47 separate occasions, involving use of the royal train coaches on 95 days in 1993–94. I understand that the destinations were as follows:

- Aberdeen
- Aberystwyth
- Ashford (Kent)
- Bodmin Parkway
- Bridgend
- Bridgwater
- Cardiff
- Derby
- Edinburgh
- Fort William
- Gatwick Airport
- Glasgow
- Hexham
- Inverkeithing
- Lancaster
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Lockerbie
- London
- Lympstone Commando
- Malton
- Manchester
- Mexborough
- Morpeth
- Newport
- Northallerton
- Penzance
- Plymouth
- Runcorn
- Sheffield
- Shrewsbury
- Slough
- Southampton Docks
- Stirling
- Stonehaven
- Sunderland
- Tattenham Corner
- Thirsk
- Truro
- Whitland
- Workington

The members of the royal family and numbers of occasions on which they used the royal train were as follows:

	Number of occasions
Her Majesty the Queen	11
The Duke of Edinburgh	5
The Prince of Wales	17
The Princess Royal	6
The Prince Edward	1
The Duke of Kent	1
The Duchess of Kent	4

The royal train was also used twice for state visits. The train was used overnight 48 times.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report for each of the last three years in real terms. [16641]

Mr. Dorrell: The last three editions of the report have been published as Command Papers by HMSO, which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from sales revenue.

My Department incurred additional production and distribution costs relating to the 1995 report of approximately £1,000, and additional production costs relating to the 1994 report of £9,473 at current prices. Information on the production costs of the 1993 report, and distribution costs of the 1993 and 1994 reports can be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16640]

Mr. Dorrell: Some 1,900 copies of my Department's report were printed and published. Of these, 500 copies were purchased by the Department for distribution to its agencies, sponsored bodies and other external contacts, as well as distribution internally for use as a working document. In addition to those copies required by Parliament, Government Departments and agencies concerned, just over 1,150 copies were produced to satisfy other sales at a price of £9.55 net. The costs of printing and publishing the report were borne by HMSO, which aims to cover these costs from sales revenue. The Department incurred additional production and distribution costs approximately £1,000.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17039]

Mr. Dorrell: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference of the type requested, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and occasional general references are made to persons who are Members of one or other Houses of Parliament. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 makes a reference to the Leader of the Opposition in schedule 6 concerning nominations for membership of the Millennium Commission.

Public Library Review

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date he received the report of the public library review from the consultants, ASLIB. [16180]

Mr. Sproat: The report of the public library review was received from the consultants on 23 February.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he will publish his response to the public library review. [16179]

Mr. Sproat: I hope to make a statement shortly.

Taylor Report Deadlines

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will extend the deadline for meeting the recommendations of the Taylor report for those football clubs which have experienced protracted planning difficulties. [15953]

Mr. Sproat: Any applications for an extension to the deadlines already announced for football clubs to meet the all-seater or safe terracing will be considered on their individual merits, as occurred in 1994, following consultation with the Football Licensing Authority. Extensions will be granted only in the most exceptional circumstances and where delays in meeting the necessary criteria are unforseen and unavoidable. Whether planning difficulties would fall into such a category would depend on the facts of the individual case.

Sports Council for England

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to be able to announce the membership of the proposed Sports Council for England. [17499]

Mr. Dorrell: I confirmed the Government's intention to set up new United Kingdom and English Sports Councils from 1 January 1996, subject to the grant of royal charters, on 23 March, *Official Report*, column *316*. I announced at the time of his appointment as chairman of the GB Sports Council that Mr. Rodney Walker would in due course become first chairman of the Sports Council for England. I am pleased to be able to announce today the remaining members-designate of the Sports Council for England:

Mr. Gerald Dennis[1] Vice-Chairman
Mr. Trevor Brooking[1] Vice-Chairman
Mr. Keith Oates[1]
Ms Julia Bracewell[1]
Mr. Tim Marshall[1]
Mr. Geoff Thompson[1]
Mr. Ian Botham
Mr. Jeff Probyn
Mr. Chris Boardman
Mr. Peter Blake
Mr. Andrew Hancock
Mr. Jim Munn
Mr. David Oxley
Mr. Sam Stoker

[1] Are serving members of the present GB Sports Council.

We proposed last July that the English council should concentrate its resources on an increased programme of direct support for governing bodies of sport for the development of sport from the grass roots to the highest competitive levels. We expect the English council to develop its policies and programmes in full and meaningful co-operation both with the Central Council of Physical Recreation, which represents the interests of governing bodies, and with local authority interests.

I am also able to confirm that, as proposed on 8 July 1994, the present linkage between the Sports Council and the Regional Councils for Sport and Recreation will come to an end from 1 January 1996. Ministers will cease from today to renew or make fresh appointments to those bodies, but will in future appoint ministerial nominees in each of the regions of the English Sports Council. These will bring a further range of experience and expertise to the council's work, including that of local government.

Political Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15619]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The names of those persons appointed as special advisers to my Department since May 1992 are:

Name	*Date appointed*	*Date appointment ended*
Mr. Chris Hopson	22 April 1992	24 September 1992
Viscountess Cobham	12 July 1992	24 September 1992
Mr. Dominic Loehnis	7 November 1992	20 July 1994

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *280*, who is responsible for establishing the accuracy of local claims regarding the origins of historical figures used in terms of tourism promotion. [16044]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Where such claims are made in advertisements or sales promotions, these must conform with the appropriate self-regulatory codes of practice. These require advertisements and sales promotions to be legal, decent, honest and truthful.

Certain claims must also comply with the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, which makes it an offence for a trader knowingly or recklessly to make a false or misleading statement about the nature of services, accommodation or facilities. This Act is enforced by local authority trading standards departments.

PRIME MINISTER

Bank of England

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he approved the statement of Government policy set out in paragraph 5 of the Bank of England press release of the text of the Deputy Governor's speech to the City branch of the Institute of Directors on 13th December 1993. [16988]

The Prime Minister: As stated in the 1995–96 Financial Statement and Budget Report, the role of monetary policy is to deliver low inflation. The Deputy Governor's speech to the City branch of the Institute of Directors was fully consistent with the Government's monetary policy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether the appointment of the Governor or Deputy Governor of the Bank of England requires or receives *(a)* Cabinet approval and *(b)* positive security vetting. [16942]

The Prime Minister: Appointments of Governor and Deputy Governor of the Bank of England are made by Her Majesty the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister. The posts are subject to security vetting procedures.

Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15615]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The Prime Minister's staff includes a number of appointments as special advisers, both political and expert. The names are as follows:

	Date appointed	*Date left*
Lord Poole	May 1992	July 1994
Sir R. Braithwaite	June 1992	December 1993
Mr. D. Green	June 1992	December 1994
Mrs. K. Ramsay	June 1992	To date
Miss A Warburton	January 1994	To date
Mr. N. R. Blackwell	February 1995	To date
Mr. S. M. Williams	March 1995	To date
Ms C. Fairbairn	March 1995	To date

EMPLOYMENT

Income Statistics

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the real change in take-home pay for a married couple on average earnings, with two children, between *(a)* 1973-74 and 1978–79 and *(b)* 1978–79 and 1993–94; and what were the figures in other EC countries.

Mr. Oppenheim: Real take-home pay for a married couple on average earnings, with two children, decreased by 2 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and increased by 41 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94. Independent research shows that the take-home pay of production workers in the UK is comparable with that in Germany and ahead of that of France, the Netherlands and Denmark, once the cost of living has been taken into account.

Pools Industry

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures in the pools industry on Merseyside. [16372]

Miss Widdecombe: The proposed redundancies in the pools industry are regrettable. However, staffing levels must be a matter for the commercial judgment of companies concerned. Individuals who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs from any sector can benefit from the Employment Department's extensive range of measures designed to help them find new jobs, re-train or set up in business. There are now more than 10,000 fewer unemployed in Merseyside than there were a year ago.

Prior Options Review

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the outcome of the prior options review of the Employment Service. [17357]

Mr. Portillo: The review is now complete and I have placed a summary of the review's conclusions in the Library. I have accepted all its recommendations, subject to the following points. The report sets out a compelling case for the agency and demonstrates its importance to the labour market. As the evaluation undertaken in support of the review shows, the Employment Service has steadily and substantially improved its performance since it became an agency in 1990. It also confirms the value of integrating job-broking, advisory and benefit services.

The prior options review confirms the importance of the work of the ES in helping employers and unemployed people to operate more effectively in the labour market. The policies the agency has pursued have played a significant role in helping unemployed people, particularly those at a disadvantage, to compete effectively and actively for jobs. That has assisted many employers in filling their vacancies. The ES's operation as an agency has enabled it to meet increasingly stretching performance targets, while achieving better value for money for the taxpayer.

I therefore endorse the recommendation of the review that the agency status of the ES should be confirmed. A new framework document will be drawn up to reflect working arrangements for the operation of the jobseeker's allowance subject to the passage of the necessary legislation. The ES, along with the Benefits Agency, will have a crucial role to play in implementing the JSA and ensuring it is delivered effectively, to a high standard of service to its clients and with increased benefit to the operation to the labour market. I am pleased that the review confirms that the ES is well positioned to carry out these tasks.

The review recommends that, once the JSA is implemented successfully, there will be scope to test the potential for private sector involvement in the delivery of functions, other than adjudication, that are carried out in ES offices. I accept this conclusion in principle. My aim would be to take forward the review's proposal to market test the work of two or three ES districts in 1997 once the JSA has been fully introduced and subject to establishing the feasibility of separating adjudication from other aspects of the work of districts.

I shall also be asking the ES to work up proposals for a market test in, one or two regions of placing, assessment and counselling teams, which provide specialist services for unemployed people with disabilities.

The review also made recommendations about ES fraud work. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and I are considering how the fraud work currently undertaken by the ES and the BA will be organised under the JSA and will make an announcement shortly.

ENVIRONMENT

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16574]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment currently employs 31.5 information officers, including those employed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. All deal with the full range of information services; none are exclusively press officers.

The records for 1979 show that there were 40 professional information officers employed by the Department.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16287]

Sir Paul Beresford: During the 1993–94 financial year my Department part-funded one PR contract to a value of £28,000. The activities carried out included planning, design and strategic work undertaken on behalf of the Lighting Industry Federation, the National Energy Foundation and my Department's "Helping the Earth Begins at Home" domestic energy campaign to encourage the use of energy-saving light bulbs.

Chicken Farm, Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a reasoned opinion from the European Commission concerning the grant of planning permission for a chicken farm at the former airfield at Throckmorton, Worcestershire. [16767]

Sir Paul Beresford: No.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on sustainable development and the environment over the past year; and when he intends to respond to the recommendations in the first report of the Government's panel on sustainable development. [17181]

Mr. Gummer: We are today publishing "This Common Inheritance: UK Annual Report 1995", which reports progress on commitments in previous environment White Papers and the sustainable development strategy. To complement this, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is today placing in the House Library a copy of the letter which he is today sending to the Government's panel, responding to the recommendations in its first report.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps Her Majesty's Government will take to ensure that important British habitats omitted from the EU habitats directive are given statutory protection at European level. [15114]

Mr. Atkins: The provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for the protection of sites of special scientific interest will continue to apply to sites notified by the nature conservancy councils, including those which contain habitats not listed in the EC habitats directive. The directive is intended to cover only those habitat types and species that are rare or endangered at a European level. We shall play a full part in the consideration of any revision of the habitat types listed in annexe I of the directive if proposals are made by the European Commission.

European Environment Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what measures he proposes to ensure the adequacy of the quality of environmental data provision for the European Environment Agency; [15115]

(2) what provision he will make to ensure that dissonant information is given adequate recognition in EU environmental networks through the United Kingdom focal point. [15116]

Mr. Atkins: My Department has established a network of organisations in the UK which will contribute to the work of the European Environment Agency. These organisations have widely recognised expertise in the fields of environmental monitoring and data collection, in particular at the national and European levels which will be the EEA's primary interest. Co-ordination of the UK network is the responsibility of the UK national focal point based in the environmental protection statistics division of my Department. The NFP will act as a channel of communication between the network and the EEA, to ensure that network members provide reliable and balanced information to the EEA and that network members are not overburdened with requests for unnecessary information.

The EEA will also be open to receiving information form other organisations which are not part of the official network, including, for example, non-governmental organisations. Where any information provided by such organisations does not accord with that from official sources, the agency will investigate discrepancies.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the terms of reference for private sector participation in the European regional development fund objective 2 and 5b schemes. [16729]

Sir Paul Beresford: A broad range of private sector organisations may benefit directly from ERDF grants, providing they are non-profit making and acting in the public interest.

Although ERDF grants have not normally been available to profit-making companies in the past, the Government wish to maximise the private sector contribution to projects attracting ERDF grants, and has put to the European Commission proposals for facilitating this while ensuring that projects are of general economic benefit to the areas concerned, and that ERDF grants do not lead to excessive profits. The Commission's comments are awaited.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes that English local authorities which are to remain unchanged, following his recent decision on the recommendations of the Local Government Commission, will be required to extend compulsory competitive tendering. [17356]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am keen to see the benefits of competition brought to local people as soon as possible. It is now clear that many shire counties and districts will retain their existing two-tier structure, and these authorities are in a position to press ahead with the extension of CCT to further manual and white-collar services as soon as possible.

On 31 January, my Department sent a consultation paper to English local authority representatives which proposed bringing forward the implementation of CCT by up to one year from the timetable initially proposed in December 1993. I have considered carefully the associations' clear and cogent arguments for not imposing a timetable which may give rise to undue haste in implementing CCT, and decided to strike a balance between the concerns they have expressed and the need to maintain a rigorous timetable for CCT.

I therefore intend to require all authorities which are to remain unchanged in both functions and boundaries following review to advance the timetable for implementing CCT extension by six months. I will bring forward regulations to require these authorities to have achieved their competitive tendering obligations for each of the new services by the following dates:

Security work, management of vehicles and management of parking: 1 April 1997

Legal and construction and property services: 1 October 1997

Finance and personnel services: 1 April 1998

IS/IT services: 1 April 1999

Any other shire authority which is to change either its functions, by becoming a unitary authority, or its boundaries, including minor changes in boundaries but not including the creation of new parishes within their area, will be expected to follow the timetable for each service which applies to reorganised authorities. For legal, construction and property and the further manual services these dates are already provided for in regulations. The detailed regime for the other services is currently subject to consultation and I will announce final decisions shortly.

A number of authorities have expressed concern about the implications for the CCT timetable of the further review of individual districts. In announcing his decisions on the review of shire authorities on 2 March at column 1183 and 21 March at column 145, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he was minded to ask the Local Government Commission to consider further the case for change in a small number of districts. We will consider carefully over the next few weeks which areas might be reviewed further and I anticipate an announcement will be made at the end of June. When that announcement is made I will put forward proposals for further modifying the implementation timetable for CCT extension in the areas to be considered by the Commission. Until then, all shire authorities for which no decision to implement structural change has been announced should plan on the basis of the timetable that I have set out. The additional preparation time now permitted should mitigate any delay caused by individual authorities' uncertainty as to whether they are candidates for a further review.

EU Urban Initiative

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has decided which non-objective 1 areas in England should be included under the European structural funds Urban initiative; and if he will make a statement. [17716]

Mr. Gummer: I have today presented the European Commission with the Government's decision on the six non-objective 1 areas in England to receive £37 million under the Urban initiative.

In reducing the 11 areas originally proposed to the European Commission, to meet their overall limits on the size of the initiative, a number of considerations have been taken into account. Urban Regeneration Minister David Curry and Sir Paul Beresford have received presentations from the eleven areas, and on the basis of area need, written proposals, ability to provide jobs and business opportunities and use the funds effectively to deliver lasting results, the following areas have been selected: Birmingham, London (Park Royal), Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and London (Hackney/Tower Hamlets).

This was a difficult decision to make as all the 11 areas had strong cases and I regret that we could only choose 6 areas for inclusion. The quality of work done in all the areas was excellent. I well understand the disappointment of those areas that were not able to have a place on the programme. I am grateful to all those who put so much effort into the selection process for their areas, and I am sure that the experience will be useful in taking advantage of any other suitable initiatives in the future.

We look forward now to making good progress in negotiations with the Commission.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Shipbuilders

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have been made to the British Shipbuilders' external financing limit for 1994–95. [17501]

Mr. Heseltine: The external financing limit for British Shipbuilders for 1994–95 has been increased by £15 million from minus £3.8 million to positive £11 million. This increase is attributable to the sale of the McDermott barge, the company's largest and longest-running liability. The increase in the EFL will be met from the reserve and does not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure in 1994–95.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17031]

Mr. Heseltine: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and occasional general references are made to persons who are Members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15608]

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 27 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *435*.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15609]

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* No persons have been appointed as political advisers to this Department since May 1992.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport about reducing noise at Coventry airport; and what assessment he has made of the impact on economic growth in the area of *(a)* aircraft noise pollution and *(b)* the increase in night flights. [16228]

Mr. Page: I have had no consultations. These are matters for the local planning authorities and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to assist Coventry airport via the European Commission's objective 2 programmes; and what representations he has received from the residents of Willenhall. [16227]

Mr. Page: It is for Coventry city council, as owner of the airport, to make applications for grant activities that can be assisted through the west midlands objective 2 single programming document 1994–96.

All applications received will be considered in accordance with the programme arrangements agreed between the UK Government and the European Commission.

I have not received any representation on this matter from residents of Willenhall.

Post Office

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post office staff have left the Post Office as a result of crown post offices being converted to agency status. [16314]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that some 4,000 staff have left on voluntary redundancy terms since 1989–90 as a result of crown post offices being converted to agency status. Many of them are now working in post offices either as agents or employed by agents.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial benefits the Post Office has obtained during the last and current financial years through the policy of converting crown post offices to agency status. [16312]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that conversions of crown post offices in the financial year 1993–94 yielded net recurring savings of £3.9 million. The figures for the current financial year are not yet available but are expected to be of a similar amount.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the crown post offices converted to agency status in Scotland since January 1994 giving the parliamentary constituency within which they lie. [16315]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that the following 18 crown post offices in Scotland have been converted to agency status since January 1994:

Post Office	*Parliamentary Constituency*
Annan	Dumfries
Anniesland	Glasgow Garscadden
Blantyre	Hamilton
Carluke	Lanark
Castle Douglas	Dumfries
Charing Cross	Glasgow Hillhead
Dumbarton	Dumbarton
Elgin	Moray
Kirkcaldy	Kirkcaldy
Livingston	Livingston
Partick	Glasgow Hillhead
Peterhead	Banff and Buchan
Renfrew	Paisley North
Stranraer	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale
Thurso	Caithness and Sutherland
Milngavie	Clydebank and Milngavie
Newington	Edinburgh South
Wick	Caithness and Sutherland

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many crown post offices have been converted to agency status in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* throughout the United Kingdom for each financial year since 1989–90. [16313]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that numbers of crown post offices converted to agency status in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom in each financial year since 1989–90 are as follows:

	Scotland	*United Kingdom*
1989–90	32	153
1990–91	29	164
1991–92	40	147
1992–93	11	108
1993–94	13	117

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many crown post offices within *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* throughout the United Kingdom the Post Office views as appropriate for agency status. [16309]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that it uses the following criteria for deciding on the appropriateness of agency status for a given office:

> the customer service benefit of changing, e.g. longer opening hours, better location;
>
> financial benefits;
>
> ability to redeploy any surplus staff;
>
> availability of a suitable partner to become agent.

Since some of these factors have a degree of uncertainty attaching to them, the Post Office does not have a fixed view about the number of crown post offices appropriate for agency status. The Post Office continues to convert crown post offices to agency status where the right circumstances prevail.

Corporate Insolvencies

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of corporate insolvencies in Scotland for each of the years 1993 and 1994, and in respect of each year *(a)* the number of reports submitted by practitioners, *(b)* the number of court proceedings commenced and *(c)* the number of disqualification orders made under the Companies (Disqualification of Directors) Act 1985; and if he will express the last figure as a percentage of the total number of corporate insolvencies in each year. [16049]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The figures requested are as follows:

	1993	*1994*
Corporate Insolvencies	941	695
(a) Conduct reports submitted by Insolvency Practitioners	241	215
(b) Disqualification Proceedings Commenced	75	114
(c) Disqualification Orders Made	54	72
Disqualification Orders as a Percentage of Corporate Insolvencies	5.74	10.36

Note:

1. The figures for corporate insolvencies are for the numbers of companies and include a few members voluntary liquidation cases (which are not insolvent) which cannot be separated in the total figures provided by Companies House.

2. The number of proceedings refer to individuals. Proceedings and results are not necessarily finalised in the year of issue, and conduct reports may relate to companies which failed in preceding two years.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figures were for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Department of Energy in 1979. [16560]

Mr. Heseltine: There are 17 press officers currently employed in my Department. Comparable figures for 1979 are not available.

Companies House and the Patent Office

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) in what circumstances he will allow in-house bids at Companies House and the Patent Office, following his recent statements on the futures of these two organisations; [16985]

(2) what method will be used at Companies House and the Patent Office to determine whether or not it will provide value for money to contract out services in comparison to continuing with the current in-house provision. [16979]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Existing employees may bid for contracts on the basis that, if successful, they would carry out the work as private sector contractors.

The basis for assessing bids will be overall value for money, including both cost and quality of service. On cost, bids will be assessed against the benchmark of forecast costs to carry out the function within the public sector, taking into account any planned efficiencies.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the full cost, from 1991 to date, of the reviews into the futures of *(a)* Companies House and *(b)* the Patent Office. [16980]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The full costs of the reviews into the futures of *(a)* Companies House and *(b)* the Patent Office are not available, although internal and external costs are taken into account in the DTI efficiency plan. The costs of consultancy advice to the reviews since 1991 are £283,000 and £135,000 respectively, both figures being exclusive of VAT.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assurances he gave the member of the European Commission responsible for regional development concerning the application of the additionality principles agreed with her predecessors that would apply to the reduced grant in aid to the Welsh Development Agency and increased dependence of the agency on the European regional development fund; [16848]

(2) if he will list the principal points raised in his meeting with the European Commission member responsible for regional development on Thursday 23 March; what representations were made in relation to the additionality issue; and if he will make a statement. [16849]

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy and I both met Dr. Wulf-Mathies on 23 March. We discussed means of improving the European structural funds value for money throughout the EU; the importance of combating fraud and mismanagement; EU grants in Northern Ireland; regional challenge; and the importance of private sector financial contributions to structural funds programmes.

The Commissioner raised points about the composition of United Kingdom structural funds monitoring committees, and the resources available for the administration of programmes. These are matters for the United Kingdom.

Dr. Wulf-Mathies mentioned that the Commission had received representations from Merseyside and from Wales described as concerning "additionality". It appeared, however, that these representations did not relate to the regulatory provision, which requires additionality only at the level of each objective, not separately for individual areas, measures, projects or beneficiaries. The Welsh Development Agency was not mentioned.

Temporary Export Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether his Department refused any applications for temporary export licences for companies to exhibit at the IDEX 95 defence exhibition held in the United Arab Emirates in March. [15968]

Mr. Ian Taylor: No.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many temporary export licences were issued to companies wishing to exhibit at the International Defence Exhibition, IDEX, in Abu Dhabi in March. [15967]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Licences for the temporary export of controlled goods are valid for 12 months. In the 12 months leading up to IDEX, beginning 1 April 1994, the Export Control Organisation issued 125 licences for temporary export valid for Abu Dhabi and the United Arab Emirates. Licences for temporary export are usually for the purpose of "display", "exhibition", "demonstration" and similar reasons. The particular forum for the display or exhibition of the goods in question is not always specified. I cannot therefore say specifically whether or not all the licences referred to above were to enable the goods in question to be exhibited at IDEX.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Journalists

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will estimate the number of journalists with parliamentary press passes in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1995.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that the figures are *(a)* 356 and *(b)* 407. The current figure is 489.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will arrange to monitor for a week the number of journalists in the Gallery during each hour the House sits.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Yes. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to make the arrangements for the first full sitting week after the House returns from the Easter Adjournment.

Members' Interests

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, if an hon. Member in receipt of a gift or loan whose purpose, wholly or in part, is intended to avoid disqualification from the House is required to register it.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The liability of an hon. Member to register an interest can be decided only by the Registrar in the light of specific information about an individual case.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of producing and circulating the annual report of the Cabinet Office for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16628]

Mr. Horam: The annual Cabinet Office departmental report was first published in 1991. The printing and publishing costs are borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover these from sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; and how many copies were sold and at what price. [16627]

Mr. Horam: The printing and publishing costs were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover these from sales revenue. The report was circulated to the Prime Minister, OPSS Ministers, Opposition spokesmen, Parliament, Cabinet Office senior management, and contributors in HMSO, COI and the other organisations included within the report. There were 1,500 copies printed, and just over 900 copies were distributed for sale to the public, at a cover price of £11.55.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Council of Ministers

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Minister what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 27 and 28 March 1995 and if he will make a statement. [17498]

Mr. Waldegrave: At this meeting, the Council again considered possible rules on transport of live animals. The Commissioner floated some new ideas which would protect animal welfare better than those in the current presidency compromise. It was agreed that these should be examined at official level before the Council returns to the subject in May with a view to reaching a final conclusion.

The Council also discussed the agri-monetary effects of the recent turbulence on international currency markets, as a result of which certain green currencies may need to be revalued according to the Community rules. A further Council will be held on 10 April to take decisions on this aspect, but the Commission indicated that it would use its powers to ensure that revaluations did not come into effect before 5 May.

The 10 April Council meeting is also expected to take decisions on the reform of the Community sugar regime. At this meeting we again argued that any cuts in sugar quotas necessary for the Community to meet its GATT commitments should be targeted on those countries with the largest surpluses.

The Council extended the marketing years for milk and beef since farm prices for 1995–96 have not yet been set.

In other discussions, the United Kingdom strongly opposed any proposal to place limits on nitrates in lettuce which cannot be fully justified by the scientific evidence.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the budget forecast for the common agricultural policy in 1995; and what proportion of this fund will be allocated to the United Kingdom. [15796]

Mr. Jack: The draft supplementary and amending CAP budget for 1995, the latest official forecast, has been set at 36,897 mecu or £29,283 million—1,047 mecu or £831 million below the guideline. It is set in relation to forecast expenditure throughout the Community, and not on the basis of allocations to individual member states. The level of UK CAP receipts will depend on a variety of factors, such as production levels, quantities exported, and purchases in and sales out of intervention storage. It is forecast at £2,873 million for the 1995–96 financial year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column 63, on water and sewerage charges, if he will define disproportionate cost. [15934]

Mr. Jack: Disproportionate cost is when it is estimated that the staff costs of preparing a full reply to the parliamentary question are likely to exceed £450.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the cost of producing and circulating the last Departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price; [16658]

(2) what was the cost of producing and circulating Departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16659]

Mr. Jack: A total of 2,250 copies of the 1995 departmental report of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the intervention board were produced. About half were required by Parliament, the Ministry, its agencies and the intervention board, the remainder being produced for sale at £19.60 net. Actual sales figures are not yet available.

Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The estimated cost of producing the 1995 report, including the cost of the Ministry's staff resources and the use of professional typesetters, was very approximately £100,000. Similar figures are not available for earlier years.

Press Officers

Mr. Doug Henderson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16564]

Mr. Jack: The number of press officers, including the chief press offficer, employed by MAFF is seven. In 1979, the number was the same.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Llywd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when it was decided to include off-farm income in the formula for determining the average income of hill farmers for the purposes of hill livestock compensatory allowances; and if he will make a statement. [16782]

Mr. Jack: Off-farm income has never been included in the calculations of farm income taken into account in determining the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances. The Government have made no decision, nor are there plans, to do so.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Minister what representations he has received about the Meat Hygiene Service's proposed charges and if he will make a statement. [17500]

Mr. Waldegrave: The chief executive has kept me fully informed of the progress of consultation on the Meat Hygiene Service's proposed charges for 1995–96, and of the industry's request for some short-term assistance to facilitate the transition to the new system.

While I cannot take final decisions until the statutory consultation exercise has been completed in mid-April, I am minded to make available transitional assistance to allow the MHS to offer a rebate on its hourly rate for meat inspectors of £2 per hour for the first six months of 1995–96 and £1 per hour for the second six months, and to set a ceiling on the official veterinary surgeon hourly rate of £35 per hour.

In making any such rebates, the MHS would need to observe the requirements of the European legislation which prohibits subsidisation of inspection charges below the level of the Community standard charge.

I will shortly be publishing performance targets for the MHS which are designed to ensure that the chief executive maximises efficiency and minimises costs. The MHS will be expected to recover the full economic cost of its chargeable services from the industry from 1996–97 onwards.

TREASURY

EU Fraud

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to help combat fraud in the European Union, with particular reference to the spending of the common agricultural policy and structural or cohesion budgets. [14974]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Steps are being taken to combat fraud in all areas of the European Community budget.

At the Essen European Council last December, the Prime Minister made a number of proposals to help tackle fraud, as well as waste and mismanagement. These are now being taken forward. Member states will report back to the European Council later in the year on what they are doing to combat fraud against the Community budget on their own territories. The Council is actively pursuing agreement on a legally binding instrument on national criminal law protection of the Community budget, as well as on a regulation on the protection of the Community's financial interests which would establish a framework for extending Community administrative penalties to all areas of the Community budget.

Significant progress is being made against fraud under the common agricultural policy. Administrative penalties are being applied on overclaims and member states are being "disallowed" previous agricultural expenditure where it is found not to be in accordance with the applicable rules. CAP reform is addressing weaknesses in controls that have previously led to fraud and irregularity. This includes a Commission proposal for a new procedure to reform the clearance of CAP accounts, involving in-year audits to improve management, and preventative and corrective action with suggestions from the Commission on possible changes to procedures instead of financial penalties. Also well advanced is Council consideration of a significant measure for tackling fraud, known colloquially as the CAP blacklist. This would set down a framework for member states to identify, and to notify each other of, traders who have deliberately, or as a result of serious negligence, committed an irregularity prejudicial to Community funds or who are subject to "well found suspicion" of having done so.

In July 1994, Commission regulations were introduced to ensure that member states report irregularities under the structural funds and the cohesion fund. These require member states to submit quarterly reports to the Commission on any irregularities which have been the subject of initial administrative or judicial investigations. These reports, the first of which was presented by member states to the Commission at the end of last year, will provide a more complete picture of fraud, financial mismanagement and waste in the structural funds.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual increase in Government expenditure for the years *(a)* 1965 to 1970, *(b)* 1970 to 1974, *(c)* 1974 to 1979, *(d)* 1979 to 1989 and *(e)* 1989 to 1995. [16810]

Mr. Aitken: Figures are readily available only for financial years. The table shows the average annual percentage increases in general government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, over the relevant periods.

From	*To*	*Increase per cent.*
1965–66	1970–71	9.7
1970–71	1974–75	18.7
1974–75	1979–80	16.1
1979–80	1989–90	8.5
1989–90	1995–96	6.8

Speed Cameras

Mr. Day: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what cost-benefit analysis he has *(a)* carried out and *(b)* plans to carry out on the effects of hypothecating the income generated from fines due to speeding offences detected by automatic cameras to the provision of further speed cameras and the processing of the resultant offence data. [15661]

Mr. Aitken: No cost-benefit analysis has been carried out, nor are there any plans to do so. The Government take the view that, in general, hypothecation of revenue is not the best way of matching resources to needs.

Bank Reserves

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government ceased to require United Kingdom banks to hold reserve requirements on deposit with the Bank of England. [15899]

Mr. Nelson: The requirement ceased on 20 August 1981, when new arrangements for monetary control were introduced by the Bank of England.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16618]

Mr. Aitken: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The reports for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments have been published as Command Papers by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from the sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16617]

Mr. Aitken: A total of 1,500 copies of the departmental reports for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments were printed and published as Cm 2817, 2818 and 2819. In addition to those copies required by Parliament and the Government Departments and agencies concerned, 1,000 copies of each report were produced to satisfy other sales at a net price of £18.40 for Cm 2817, £7.35 for Cm 2818 and £6.65 for Cm 2819. The costs of printing and publishing these reports were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue.

Late Payment of Debts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is planning to take to encourage companies to pay promptly. [16619]

Mr. Aitken: A package of measures aimed at bringing about a change in business culture and hence shorter payment times was announced in the Competitiveness White Paper last May. That package is being implemented. The Government will continue to keep the position under review. If there has not been a significant improvement by 1996, they will review the case for legislation.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the overall percentage change in the value of the £ sterling since 1 September 1992 against *(a)* the dollar, *(b)* the Deutchsmark and *(c)* the basket of currencies. [16862]

Mr. Nelson: Between 1 September 1992 and 27 March 1995, sterling has fallen by *(a)* 20 per cent. against the dollar, *(b)* 19 per cent. against the Deutchsmark and *(c)* 15 per cent. on an exchange rate index basis.

Export Margins

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what influence the levels of export margins have on decisions on interest rate levels; and what criteria are used to determine whether export margins are considered to be excessive. [16990]

Mr. Nelson: Interest rates decisions are based on a wide range of information, including monetary and other financial indicators, indicators of activity and indicators of costs. The price of UK exports, and hence the export margin, is a matter for the individual firms concerned. But export volumes in the fourth quarter were up 13½ per cent. on a year earlier, so margins do not appear excessive.

Privatisation

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure has been incurred recently in order to finance privatisation costs; and if he will make a statement. [17359]

Sir George Young: Expenditure has been incurred to cover:

(i) the residual costs arising from the sale of National Power and PowerGen shares in March 1995, estimated at £32,000,000.

(ii) expenditure, estimated at £600,000 in connection with the Treasury's sale of privatised companies debt this year.

Costs incurred on this vote will be offset by receipts appropriate-in-aid. Such receipts will include the second instalments on National Power and PowerGen shares, estimated to be some £1.1 billion.

Parliamentary approval of these new services is being sought in the 1995–96 main estimate for HM Treasury's sale of sales of residual Government shareholdings and Government holdings of privatised companies' debt vote, class XVII, vote 15.

Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £32,600,000 will be met from repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the tax to be forgone by the Treasury in 1995–96 through profit-related pay schemes. [15843]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* An estimate of the cost of income tax relief for profit-related pay schemes in 1994–95 is published in table 1.6 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1994, a copy of which is in the Library. An estimate of the cost in 1995–96 is not yet available.

Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the names of those persons appointed as political advisers to his Department since May 1992. [15605]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The special advisers appointed to the Treasury since May 1992 are as follows:

Name	*Period of appointment*
D. W. D. Cameron	11 May 1992–21 June 1993
R. Darwall	8 February 1993–27 May 1993
Mrs. T. Keswick	1 June 1993–
D. Ruffley	28 May 1993–
J. Bercow	20 March 1995–

NORTHERN IRELAND

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [16094]

Sir John Wheeler: An analysis of all legislation introduced by the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and occasional general references are made to persons who are members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15556]

Mr. Ancram *[holding reply 27 March 1995]:* At present there are some 30 regulations unique to Northern Ireland which impact on business. Five of these have been targeted for repeal or amendment and legislative action is in progress.

Other Northern Ireland regulations which replicate Great Britain provisions, and also impact on business, are reviewed and action taken in the light of decisions taken in Great Britain.

Fair Employment Small Business Scheme

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *227*, on what basis James Hawthorne CBE was judged to have satisfied the criteria for established management consultants for the fair employment small business scheme as set out in the answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *402*. [16045]

Mr. Ancram: On the basis of his experience at senior management level for a period well in excess of five years, Mr. Hawthorne was judged by the Fair Employment Commission to have the necessary experience of human resource management, including recruitment and selection procedures. In addition, Mr. Hawthorne was able to demonstrate to the interviewing panel that his knowledge of the fair employment legislation and code of practice satisfied the criteria for appointment.

Rate Relief

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the kinds of recreations which qualify certain hereditaments for rate relief under article 31 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 as amended. [16046]

Sir John Wheeler: The relevant recreations are specified in the schedule to the Rates (Recreational Hereditaments) Order (Northern Ireland) 1979, SR 1979 No. 428, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the amounts paid each year to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools under each of paragraphs 11, 13, 14 and 15 of schedule 8 to the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and the amounts repaid under paragraph 16. [16047]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	Paragraph 11 staff salaries	*Paragraph 13 allowances*	*Paragraph 14 total recurrent grant from DENI*	*Paragraph 15 capital expenditure grant from DENi*
1990–91	536,398	13,878	678,881	86,750
1991–92	583,826	44,313	778,000	68,974
1992–93	607,523	60,522	832,000	90,906
1993–94	753,038	52,040	1,018,000	92,986

No moneys have been due to be repaid in the above years under paragraph 16.

Police Complaints Commission

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has reached his decisions on the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints "Triennial Review 1991–1994". [17167]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Yes. On 22 March 1994 *Official Report*, column *148*, I announced the publication of the report and that I intended to consult various interested bodies before reaching any decisions on the recommendations made. I have now given further consideration to the recommendations in the light of the comments received.

I am glad that the commission considers that the system works well in practice and that it is rigorous and effective. However, like the commission, I am determined that the system should be reviewed and improved. Consequently, I have given deep thought to the commission's proposals and to the way forward and I am glad to say that I have been able to accept, in total or in part, most of the recommendations made.

I have accepted in full two recommendations. I intend to bring forward legislation which will establish a tribunal, chaired by the Chief Constable and balanced by two assessors drawn from an independent panel appointed for the purpose, to hear certain types of disciplinary procedures. (Recommendation 5). It is in the nature of these types of case that the commission instigates the disciplinary proceedings and I have accepted that it is then inappropriate for the commission to be represented on the tribunal hearing the charges as it is at present. I share the commission's considered view that the Chief Constable, who is responsible for discipline within his service, should retain a leading role.

I also agree that there should be a review of the use of the informal resolution procedure. (Recommendation 6). Use of the procedure in Northern Ireland has more than doubled—to 10 per cent.—in the last five years. In Great Britain, around 30 per cent. of complaints are informally resolved. I accept that a review of the procedure in Northern Ireland should be carried out.

I have also accepted three of the recommendations in part.

The commission reaffirmed that it wished to have the power to supervise some non-complaint matters where it appears to the Commission that such supervision was necessary because of either the gravity of the matter or the exceptional circumstances involved. (Recommendation 2). I am unable to agree that the commission should have the power to "call in" cases when no complaint is made. I am, however, willing to agree that the commission should have a statutory power to draw matters to my attention. It would then be my responsibility to refer appropriate cases to the commission. This arrangement will enable the commission to make known its concerns in non-complaint cases without impinging on my statutory responsibilities or those of the police authority and the Chief Constable.

The commission also recommended that it should be notified at once where death or serious bodily harm has been caused or may have been caused to any person by a police officer. (Recommendation 3). I have decided to accept that the commission should be notified of all deaths which may have been caused by a police officer even if there is no prima facie evidence of police misconduct or oppressive behaviour, and this will be included in legislation when the opportunity arises. I will not, at present, extend this cover to incidents of injury. I have accepted the view that such a requirement would cause administrative difficulties and over-reporting.

I have given further thought to the commission's recommendations that it should be given the discretion to concentrate its resources of those cases of public concern which are deserving of very close scrutiny, rather than being constrained by the mandatory supervision of certain cases. (Recommendation 4). I have decided not to accept this recommendation as I feel that mandatory supervision of *all* cases involving death or serious injury is an important safeguard in our complaints system. It was agreed after the last triennial review that legislation would be introduced to allow the commission to withdraw from mandatory supervision in those cases where the injury turns out to be less serious than was first thought. This provision will be included in legislation in the near future. I want to see the differences which will follow on from this change before deciding whether any more radical approach is necessary.

Finally, I have decided not to accept the recommendation that the commission should be in a position to direct the Chief Constable to record a complaint where there is a dispute over its validity. (Recommendation 1). I again share the views of the Home Secretary. The autonomy of chief constables in discharging their responsibilities to maintain law and order within their areas is an important constitutional issue. One important factor in that autonomy is the Chief Constable's authority over the actions and discipline of his officers. I am reluctant to diminish that authority by giving an outside agency, even one as respected as the commission, power to decide what should or should not be a complaint.

I would like to pay tribute to the commission and to its work over the period of this review from 1991 to 1994. The period saw the commission tackle its responsibilities enthusiastically. Two important features stand out. First, there was a very substantial increase in the number of investigations in which the commission undertook supervision. Secondly, the commission undertook a major initiative to publicise the mechanism for raising complaints about policing in Northern Ireland. The existence of a widely known and trusted system for dealing with complaints makes a major contribution to maintaining and building public confidence in the integrity and probity of the police service. We have recognised the importance of the commission's work by making available this year substantial extra resources to help it meet the demands on its services.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anglo-Israeli Relations

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between Britain and Israel. [14940]

Mr. Hurd: Bilateral relations with Israel are excellent. During his recent visit to Israel the Prime Minister and Mr. Rabin agreed that they have never been better.

Serbia

18. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further discussions he has had with his counterparts abroad about the need to strengthen sanctions against Serbia. [14959]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our partners and allies regard sanctions as an important element in our efforts to achieve a peace settlement in Bosnia. In response to President Milosevic's decision last summer to support the Contact Group plan and close the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to all but humanitarian goods, the United Nationals Security Council decided to suspend sanctions on international air links with Belgrade, a ferry service between Montenegro and Italy and in the fields of sporting and cultural relations. At the same time United Nations sanctions against the Bonsnia Serbs, who have refused to accept the Contact Group plan were tightened. We continue to support, together with other states, the effective enforcement of these sanctions.

UN Peacekeeping Operations

21. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss the future of peacekeeping operations with the Secretary General of the United Nations. [14962]

Mr. Hurd: We are a major troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, and will continue to hold regular discussions with the UN Secretary General on all aspects of peacekeeping.

We are concerned by legislative proposals in the US Congress which would severely restrict US contributions to assessed peacekeeping costs. The proposals would require the United States to deduct from its assessed contributions all costs incurred directly by the US for operations in support of UN Security Council resolutions.

If these proposals were implemented the established system of financing UN peacekeeping operations would unravel. We welcome the commitment by the US Administration to oppose.

Security Guarantees

22. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline what steps the Government are taking to provide non-nuclear states with binding security guarantees; and if he will make a statement. [14963]

Mr. David Davis: We already provide non-nuclear weapon states with security assurances in which we undertake not to use nuclear weapons against them unless they attack us in association of alliance with a nuclear weapon state and further to seek UN Security Council action to provide assistance to any such state that is attacked with nuclear weapons.

Middle East Peace Process

23. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [14964]

Mr. James Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support Britain is giving to the middle east peace process. [14942]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's recent visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan underlined Britain's firm support for the peace process. He announced an increase in aid to the Palestinians to £82 million over the three years 1994 to 1997.

Brunei

24. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British relations, including trade relations, with Brunei. [14965]

Mr. Goodlad: Britain has very close and friendly relations with Brunei. Our links are strong in many areas including trade, education and defence. The Sultan is a regular and most welcome visitor to this country.

Brunei is our 43rd largest export market. In 1994, UK exports totalled £418 million, having risen by 28.7 per cent. from the 1993 figure. In 1993, Britain's share of OECD exports to Brunei was 34 per cent.

South Africa

25. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about British relations with South Africa. [14966]

Mr. Baldry: During the state visit by Her Majesty the Queen to South Africa last week, President Mandela expressed warm appreciation for Britain's contribution to strengthening and developing these relations.

United States of America

26. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to hold discussions with the United States Secretary of State in respect of United States relations with member states of the European Union. [14967]

Mr. Hurd: I have regular discussions with the US Secretary of State on many subjects including EU-US relations.

32. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with the United States of America. [14976]

Mr. Hurd: They are excellent.

33. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British trade relations with the United States of America. [14977]

Mr. Goodlad: The US is our largest trading partner. United Kingdom exports of goods to the US were worth £16.8 billion last year, and two-way trade in services was worth over $35 billion in 1993.

United Kingdom-Iranian Relations

27. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom-Iranian relations. [14968]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We restored relations with Iran on 27 September 1990 on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each other's affairs.

We and our European partners made clear at the European Council at Edinburgh in December 1992 that improvements in Iran's behaviour in a number of areas, particularly human rights, the fatwa on Rushdie and terrorism, would be important in determining the extent to which closer relations and confidence in Iran could be developed. This remains European Union policy.

Georgia

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new plans he has to improve bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Georgia. [14970]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During Georgian Head of State Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to the UK in February my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that a British embassy will be opened in Tbilisi later this year. The UK has recently doubled its technical assistance programme through the know how fund to £1.2 million for projects in the near term.

The British Council plans to expand its teachers' resource centre in Tbilisi to a general information centre, and to promote the teaching of modern English.

World Service

29. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current grant in aid from the Foreign Office to the BBC World Service; and what percentage increase he expects for the next funding triennium; and if he will make a statement. [14971]

Mr. Baldry: The grant in aid to the BBC World Service in the current financial year is £175.2 million. It will rise to £178.8 million in each of the following two years of the current triennium, that is 1995–96 and 1996–97.

Discussions on the level of funding for the next triennium from 1997–98 to 1999–2000 will begin early next year. The actual funding for that triennium will be determined during the 1996 public expenditure survey.

"Britain in the World" Conference

30. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the "Britain in the World" conference taking place in London on 29 March. [14972]

Mr. Hurd: The conference on Britain in the world is taking place today. It has been organised by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, in association with Her Majesty's Government, as part of the institute's 75th anniversary celebrations.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the opening speech. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales gave a lunch-time address. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will speak this afternoon. So will I.

I hope the conference will stimulate an open and lively debate on Britain's overseas interests.

European Legislation

31. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the number of proposals for new legislation being put forward by the European Commission for 1995; and what the figure was in each of the last three years. [14975]

Mr. David Davis: We welcome the emphasis on subsidiarity in the Commission's work programme for 1995. We will examine carefully every proposal which is tabled, on the basis of subsidiarity and the national interest.

The number of proposals for new legislative initiatives tabled by the Commissions in the last three years is:

1992: 89

1993: 75

1994: 42

NATO Information Budget

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current NATO information budget; what are its main purposes; what was the budget *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago in real terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The budget of the NATO office of information and press for 1995 is 192,583,000 Belgian francs. In 1990, the figure was 171,400,000 Belgian francs. The figure for 1985 is not available.

The purpose of NATO's information work is to create and reinforce a positive climate of informed public opinion concerning the alliance, encourage informed dialogue about the alliance and current issues, and explain current policy.

Mrs. Patricia Bland

Mr. David Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the authorities in the Republic of Ireland with regard to the legal difficulties encountered by Mrs. Patricia Bland, a British subject, arising out of the incestuous rape of her daughter. [16048]

Mr. Baldry: None. The legal process is continuing: the case is still before the Irish courts. It is a matter for them.

Treaties and Agreements

Mrs. Anne Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Congleton of 28 February, what steps he is taking to identify all those treaties and agreements to which the United Kingdom is a signatory but of which his Department has lost sight; if he will list those treaties and agreements so far identified; if he will indicate in each case the main provisions of the treaty or agreement and the action which he now proposes to take to comply with the provisions of those treaties and agreements; and if he will make a statement. [16524]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Treaty records, which were opened in 1835, show that the United Kingdom is now signatory to some 2,460 multilateral and 9,273 bilateral treaties.

The treaties cover a wide range of subjects and most fall to other Government Departments to administer. Each treaty would need to be researched individually to determine its present status. The information sought is not therefore readily available from treaty records and could be provided only after lengthy research at disproportionate cost.

Somalia

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made as to the implications for human rights of the introduction of Sharia law in parts of Somalia. [14938]

Mr. Baldry: Parts of Somalia have long suffered from anarchy and general lawlessness. There is evidence that in some areas the introduction of Sharia law, with broad consent, has improved the security of ordinary people. Whatever the system of law, it is important that it is applied fairly and with respect to the dignity of the individual.

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the international community to assist the Government of Burundi to reform its army so that it is acceptable to both Hutus and Tutsis in the country. [16604]

Mr. Baldry: The Government of Burundi has not requested assistance in reforming its army. Should it do so, we believe that the international community would be willing to consider the request.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made about the widespread arrests in Nigeria, with particular reference to General Obasanjo, and others who were working for a return to democratic rule. [15533]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* We have urged the Nigerian Government to ensure that former President Obasanjo is subject to due process of law: and is either released or promptly charged. I understand that he remains under house arrest, and that others recently arrested remain in detention, including Shehu Yar'Adua, leading member of the National Constitutional Conference. The Commonwealth Secretary-General and the European Union have also issued statements expressing concern, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

WALES

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of goat pox were reported in each year since 1985. [15974]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of goat pox have been recorded in Wales since 1991 when the disease became notifiable. This disease is not know to have ever occurred in the UK.

Clinical Outcome Indicators

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to publish health service clinical outcome indicators similar to those published in December 1994 by the Secretary of State for Scotland, in respect of individual health authorities and hospitals in Wales. [15870]

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office is working with the medical and nursing professions to agree suitable clinical outcome indicators for Wales, and the best method of publishing them.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16209]

Mr. Redwood: No general guidance has been issued to public bodies.

The guidance applying to Government Departments is set out in a Cabinet Office letter, reprinted as annex 2 to "Publicity Services For Government Departments", NAO 1989—HC 46. The general principles of value for money and propriety are applicable to public bodies, and the letter is referred to in "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments", Her Majesty's Treasury/Cabinet Office 1992, which has been issued to non-departmental public bodies in Wales.

Normal tendering procedures should be followed in appointing public relations companies.

Bridge Strengthening Works

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost of bridge reinforcement work undertaken on main roads in Wales in 1993–94; and if he will make a statement. [16781]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Cost of the bridge strengthening works undertaken on trunk roads in Wales in 1993–94 was £2,407,000. The remainder of the main road network is the responsibility of the eight Welsh county councils.

Hill Farmers (Income)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if off-farm income was included in the formula for determining the average income of Welsh hill farmers in 1993–94; and if he will make a statement. [16783]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The estimates of Welsh hill farm income for 1993–94 included only those miscellaneous off-farm receipts which were derived from use of the farm business resources. They took account of such items as contracting work which involved farm labour and machinery, but then excluded any income earned by the farmer from employment or self-employment away from the farm and not involving farm resources, investment income pensions and the like.

Dental Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives are being pursued by the Health Education Council for Wales to educate the public about the benefits of regular brushing and cleaning of teeth; and if he will make a statement. [16773]

Mr. Richards: The Health Education Council has no remit in Wales.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of local government reform on the work of those engaged in combating drug abuse; and if he will make a statement. [16836]

Mr. Richards: We have allowed adequate time for shadow authorities to plan services and to put arrangements in place to ensure that those services are delivered to at least the same standard following reorganisation as before.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *260*, on which date he intends to publish his action plan for the Countryside Council for Wales; to whom he will circulate this publication; and what scope he has allowed for consultation with the full council on its contents as soon as it has been published. [16930]

Mr. Redwood: The action plan will be issued shortly with a press notice and will be available on request. The Countryside Council for Wales have been consulted during the formulation of the plan.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *260*, if he will list those individuals and organisation whose advice he *(a)* sought and *(b)* used in constructing the action plan for the Countryside Council for Wales. [16949]

Mr. Redwood: Advice from the Countryside Council for Wales, on which a wide range of interests is represented, was sought and used in preparation of the action plan. In addition, I took account of views expressed to me by a variety of interests during the preparation of the plan.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Overcrowding

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons are currently assessed to be overcrowded; and if he will list them, indicating the number of places by which they exceed their quota. [16688]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many prisons are currently assessed to be overcrowded. The attached table, which will be placed in the Library of the House, lists the 50 prisons in which, on 28 February, the number of prisoners exceeded the Certified Normal Accommodation in use and by how much.

	CNA in use	*Population*	*Number of prisoners in excess of CNA in use*
Birmingham	567	821	254
Blakenhurst	649	652	3
Bristol	464	470	6
Brixton	484	639	155
Brockhill	111	130	19
Camp Hill	378	403	25
Canterbury	184	267	83
Cardiff	321	441	120
Channings Wood	482	569	87
Chelmsford	251	403	152
Cookham Wood	120	139	19
Dartmoor	538	560	22
Doncaster	771	780	9
Dorchester	147	205	58
Durham	448	643	195
Exeter	260	385	125
Feltham	844	854	10
Gartree	277	280	3
Glen Parva	767	771	4
Gloucester	202	265	63
Grendon	190	199	9
Holloway	517	526	9
Hull	328	404	76
Leeds	814	1,066	252
Leicester	192	352	160
Lewes	312	318	6
Lincoln	444	625	181
Lindholme	567	583	16
Liverpool	973	1,274	301
Low Newton	198	245	47
Manchester	830	899	69
New Hall	169	200	31
North Sea Camp	201	205	4
Northallerton	150	194	44
Norwich	333	348	15
Pentonville	559	731	172
Preston	342	488	146
Pucklechurch	56	69	13
Reading	182	185	3
Rochester	294	301	7
Send	113	124	11
Shepton Mallet	158	192	34
Shrewsbury	168	281	113

	CNA in use	*Population*	*Number of prisoners in excess of CNA in use*
Stafford	358	517	159
Swansea	151	229	78
Swinfen Hall	182	183	1
The Wolds	320	330	10
Wormwood Scrubs	714	822	108
Wandsworth	922	968	46
Winchester	261	364	103

Note:

CNA in use does not include those places which are not available for immediate use, for example: damaged cells, cells affected by building works and cells not being used because of a shortage of staff resources.

Prison Service

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made on increasing private sector involvement in the Prison Service. [17602]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In addition to existing plans for private sector involvement in the Prison Service, Lowdham Grange prison near Nottingham will be rebuilt as a 500-bed, category B prison to be operated by the private sector. This will increase from 12 to 13 the number of prisons to be operated by the private sector in the initial phase of the private sector programme.

Four prisons are already under private management and tendering for the first two of the six entirely new prisons to be designed, constructed, managed and financed by the private sector is nearing completion.

The programme of contracting out court escort and custody work is being accelerated. Contracts covering south-west England and south Wales, south-east England and the west midlands and central Wales will be let early in 1996. This builds on the considerable success of the programme so far. Escapes have been reduced by 40 per cent. in east midlands and Humberside and the courts are receiving a better service.

The combined effect of those prison and escort contracts already let will be cost savings of £18 million a year for the taxpayer.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prisoners with 24-hours access to sanitation excluding new and renovated accommodation for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales. [16265]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter for Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about access to sanitation in prisons in England and Wales.

In the 12 months up to the end of February of this year 24 hour access to sanitation was provided for an additional 2202 prison cells, excluding new and renovated accommodation. The following table shows the month by month breakdown.

Month	*Additional cells (excluding new and renovated)*	*Percentage of prisoners with access*
March 1994	388	91
April 1994	38	91
May 1994	128	91
June 1994	151	92
July 1994	292	92
August 1994	247	92
September 1994	319	93
October 1994	163	94
November 1994	82	94
December 1994	297	95
January 1995	30	95
February 1995	67	95

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prisoners who are held two or three to a cell in units of accommodation which are certified as being suitable for only one person for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales. [16230]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners who are held two or three to a cell in units of accommodation which are certified as being suitable for only one person for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales.

The information is given in the attached table.

	Two prisoners sharing a cell designed for one	*Three prisoners sharing a cell designed for one*
1994		
March	8,488	24
April	8,406	0
May	8,106	0
June	8,434	0
July	8,618	0
August	8,662	0
September	8,728	0
October	8,600	0
November	8,480	0
December	7,754	0
1995		
January	7,998	0
February	8,592	0

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the prisons in which operational capacity on at least one wing has been exceeded during the last 12 months and in each of the previous five years; [15942]

(2) under what circumstances a prison governor has authority to exceed the operational capacity of a prison wing. [15943]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Jon Owen Jones, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about prisons in which the operational capacity on at least one wing has been exceeded during the last 12 months and in each of the previous 5 years; and the circumstances in which a prison governor has authority to exceed the operational capacity of a prison wing.

Operation capacity is the total number of prisoners which an establishment can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of the planned regime. Operational capacities are set for an establishment, rather than for individual wings, by area managers based on their operational judgement. The information you request is therefore not available.

Governors may, with the agreement of area managers, accept prisoners in excess of operational capacity if there are compelling operational reasons for doing so. But every effort is made to avoid this by maximising the use of all available accommodation and allocation and transfers to other establishments.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are employed at each grade within the Prison Service, and what have been their responsibilities for every year since 1989, broken down by category and type of prison. [14861]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has a been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question requesting information about the numbers and responsibilities of men and women employed in the Prison Service for each year since 1989.

The attached tables are based on information held in the personnel information computer system. This information varies slightly from the figures used in response to an earlier Question (House of Commons Hansard 24 January 1995, Vol 253, Number 36 Column 43–44) because of the differing source of information. The information contained in the tables was used as it provides a breakdown, by grade and sex, of all staff employed by the Service for each year since 1989, whose details were on the system at the relevant times. The totals for officers for 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1992 are slightly lower than those given in my reply to Mr Redmond on 23 January and slightly higher for 1 April 1993. As information for April–September 1991 is unavailable, the figures for October have been provided.

A breakdown of the information in the tables by category and type of establishment is not available for 1989–94 and could be obtained for 1995 only at disproportionate cost. Copies of these tables will be placed in the Library of the House.

The responsibilities of staff are determined by their grade and by the structure and work of the establishment or unit concerned, it is not possible to provide meaningful overall categorisations of responsibility by grade.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what changes there have been in policy on searching in *(a)* women's gaols and *(b)* men's gaols between 1990 and 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about changes in policy on searching in male establishments and female establishments between 1990 and 1994.

The policy changes are listed below.

For male establishments

October 1992—Policy changed to allow women officers to "rub-down" search male prisoners. (This did not extend to intimate or strip-searching.) The change in policy was to ensure that women could carry out the majority of duties expected of male officers and so would not be debarred in practice from working in male establishments, so effectively limiting their career options as the great majority of establishments hold male prisoners.

For all establishments

January 1993—Amendment to Prison Service Manual on Security which allowed instructions to be given to a prisoner during a strip search to bend over/spread legs, if they were suspected of concealing a weapon in the anal or genital area.

Searching practices were also tightened following the attempted escape from Whitemoor prison in September 1994, although these did not involve changes in policy. We are now in the process of making further changes to our searching procedures following Sir John Woodcock's inquiry into the escape from Whitemoor prison. Sir John Woodcock made a number of recommendations which will have an impact on searching. The main changes are more rigorous procedures for searching cells, introduction of dedicated search teams, and searching of staff and visitors on entry to prisons and, on a random basis, on leaving for certain categories of prison. The Home Secretary published the implementation schedule for all the recommendations contained in the report on 8 February. A copy of that schedule has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the special constabulary in England and Wales, and if he will make a statement. [17676]

Mr. Maclean: We are establishing a Home Office joint working group to review the special constabulary in England and Wales and to consider what changes are needed.

The group will include representatives of the regular police staff associations, local authorities, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, and special constables. It will be chaired by me or by a Home Office official.

I expect the group to produce recommendations about terms and conditions of service by mid-summer and on other matters within the year.

I am placing in the Library today a copy of an open letter I am sending to all serving special constables asking them to contribute to the group's work.

Betting

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to consult interested parties about the proposals for an all-cash amusement-with-prizes machine and changes to betting shop facilities. [17677]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As part of the Government's deregulation initiative my Department today issued a consultation paper seeking views on proposed changes to the law on gaming machines and betting shops. These include:

> an all-cash amusement-with-prizes machine with a maximum prize of £10 in essentially adult environment, including betting shops;
>
> an extension of the services betting shops may offer; to permit the sale of racing publications, society lottery tickets, prize competitions, such as spot the ball and payment of football pools winnings;
>
> increases in the numbers of jackpot machines permitted in casinos, bingo clubs and registered clubs.

The all-cash machine would dispense with tokens, which are unpopular with both players and the industry. Overall, the changes would remove unnecessary restrictions on the facilities which may be offered and improve consumer choice while ensuring adequate protection for young people.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation process, I propose to bring forward these changes by means of an order or orders under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library.

DNA Databases

Mr. Llywd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from police authorities on the capital funding for the establishment of DNA databases; and if he will make a statement. [16785]

Mr. Maclean: Of the representations made to the Government by police authorities or chief officers on their grant for 1995–96, 10 have made reference, either directly or indirectly, to costs arising from police use of the DNA database. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has also made representations on behalf of the metropolitan forces.

The costs and benefits to the police of the database have been taken fully into account in our assessment of future police spending requirements. Additional capital provision of £2.5 million is being made available to the forensic science service to launch the operational service and will be recovered over time as a component of the charge to the police for processing each sample. But costs to the police will ultimately be determined by the use they make of the service, and that will be a decision for individual chief officers on their assessment of the balance of costs and benefits.

Interpol (Wildlife Crime)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the workings and development of the Interpol wildlife groups. [16937]

Mr. Maclean: The International Criminal Police Organisation—Interpol—established a working party on environmental crime in 1992. It has met twice—in September 1993 and May 1994. Its next meeting is in May 1995.

The working party has four sub-groups, one of which is concerned with wildlife crime—illegal traffic in species of wild flora and fauna. The other sub-groups deal with illegal traffic in waste, illegal traffic in radioactive substances and the fourth co-ordinates the work of the other three.

The sub-group on wildlife crime is developing a network of law enforcement contacts dealing with wildlife crime, promoting the exchange of information about international wildlife crime and effective enforcement methods and is working closely with the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species on Wild Fauna and Flora—CITES. The sub-group met at the CITES secretariat in Geneva in October 1994.

The UK national central bureau of Interpol, part of the national criminal intelligence service, contributes to the work of the Interpol sub-group on wildlife crime to improve police co-operation against international wildlife crimes. The global wildlife division of the Department of the Environment has also participated in a sub-group meeting.

Charities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to order a public inquiry into the financial affairs of the charities Child Aid and Children in Crisis. [16236]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Charity Commissioners have the statutory oversight of charities and the function of instituting inquiries into their affairs where appropriate. I understand that the commissioners' inquiry into the affairs of the Child Aid Foundation is continuing and that the foundation's trustees are co-operating with the inquirers. The commissioners have not had reason to institute any inquiry into Children in Crisis.

Police Authority Budgets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the additional reductions to the budget limits of each police authority for 1995–96. [16255]

Mr. Maclean: The amounts of grant to police authorities were announced in the reply given to a question from the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on 30 January, column *516*. Funding of the police service in England and Wales will be increased by 4 per cent. in 1995–96. The setting of budgets is a matter for police authorities, subject only to the capping criteria. The capping of budgets for all classes of local authority is a matter, in England, for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and in Wales for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. No changes have been made to the provisional capping criteria for 1995–96 announced in December 1994.

Truck Crime

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what action his Department is taking to combat truck crime. [16380]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The Government recognise the serious effect which the loss of lorries or their loads can have on individual businesses. For this reason we are determined to do all we can to tackle this problem.

It is important that truck owners and drivers are aware of the risks they face and take steps to prevent this type of crime. Manufacturers also have a part to play by improving the security features of commercial vehicles. Last year, the Home Office published an advice leaflet, "A Load on Your Mind", which outlines measures which owners of heavy goods vehicles can take to protect them from theft.

Theft of and from vehicles carry stiff maximum penalties. Taking a vehicle without consent carries a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000. Where there is intent to deprive the owner permanently of the vehicle or its load, the offender is liable to seven years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

The vehicle crime prevention sub-group of the National Board for Crime Prevention advises the Government on initiatives aimed at reducing theft of and from all types of motorised vehicles. The remit of the vehicle crime prevention group was extended to cover heavy goods vehicles in recognition of the fact that commercial vehicle crime is a serious problem. The group brings together key representatives in the vehicle security field and is a symbol of the Government's partnership approach to crime prevention.

The group maintains links with other bodies working in the vehicle crime prevention field. Its chairman also chairs the Metropolitan police's joint action group on organised lorry theft which has been established to study the scale and nature of organised lorry theft and make recommendations on how to reduce it.

Home Office researchers are currently undertaking an in-depth study into heavy commercial vehicle crime using data held on the police national computer supplemented by a postal survey of victims of lorry theft. The research is looking at the numbers and types of lorries stolen; time and location at which thefts occur; the extent of the losses involved and the level of security used to protect vehicles. The results of the study, which are due to be published in the early summer, will be used to develop well targeted initiatives aimed at reducing lorry theft.

The police accord a high priority to tackling vehicle crime and have developed many initiatives. There have been a number of successful police operations against heavy goods vehicle crime, most recently Operation Tupps where the Metropolitan police stolen vehicle squad, in conjunction with Kent constabulary, arrested two men who ran a commercial breaker and exporter's yard in Essex.

The Government have also given their backing to Truckwatch, an initiative to counter commercial vehicle theft which has the support of the road haulage and freight transport associations and the police. It was first launched by Norfolk constabulary at the beginning of 1994.

Hit-and-run Accidents

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years for cases involving hit-and-run accidents; and what charges were referred in each case. [16666]

Mr. Maclean: The available information is for prosecutions for offences as defined in section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

The number of prosecutions in England and Wales for offences of failing to stop after an accident or failing to report an accident within 24 hours for the years 1989 to 1993 are set out below. More serious charges may have been preferred in some of these cases depending on the circumstances.

	Failing to stop after accident	*Failing to report accident within 24 hours*
1989	26,784	23,400
1990	25,827	22,642
1991	25,418	22,044
1992	22,225	19,738
1993	19,043	15,665

Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

HEALTH

General Practitioners

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average length of time for each GP consultation; and what this was for each of the last 10 years. [15369]

Mr. Malone: The information requested has not been routinely collected every year. The information is available for 1985–86, 1989–90 and 1992–93 from surveys of general practitioners work load and is as follows:

Average time spent per consultation by GMPs by type of activity

	Time (minutes)		
Activity	*1985–86*	*1989–90*	*1992–93*
Surgery[1]	8.2	8.8	8.8
Home visits (including travel time)	24.4	25.5	25.2
Home visits (time in home)	13.1	13.5	13.2
Clinics	11.0	12.0	12.6

Notes

1. To aid comparison, the 1992–93 figure for "surgery" 'includes the time spent on "telephone consultations"; these were included within "surgery" in the 1985–86 and 1989–90 Surveys.

Sources:

General Medical Practitioners' Workload 1985–86 [ISBN 1 85197 068 1].

General Medical Practitioner's Workload Survey 1989–90 [ISBN 1 85197 561 6].

General Medical Practitioners' Workload Survey 1992–93 Joint evidence to the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body from the Health Departments and the GMSC, November 1994.

Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of general practitioners and the number of secretaries, administrators, receptionists and practice managers in general practice in each of the last six years *(a)* in total, *(b)* by family health service authority and *(c)* broken down between fundholding and non-fundholding practices. [16166]

Mr. Malone: The information requested will be placed in the Library. The data collected do not distinguish between fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by region *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the proportion of each trust's income derived from general practitioner fundholders' contracts. [15830]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if she will list those services which fundholding general practitioners can currently purchase; to which services she proposes to extend this list; and what plans she has to reduce the number of patients needed for a GP to become a fundholder. [16667]

Mr. Malone: The approved list of goods and services details those goods and services which a fundholding general practitioner may purchase. Both the current list and the revised list, which will be effective from 1 April 1996, are available in the Library. As announced in EL (94)79, it is proposed that from 1 April 1996 general practitioners with a list size of 5,000 or more patients may enter standard fundholding and those with over 3,000 patients may enter community fundholding.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a definition reply to his letter of 1 December 1994, Ref. POH2 4593/41. [14414]

Mr. Malone: I wrote to the hon. Member on 24 March.

Retirement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* other hospital doctors have retired in each year for the last 10 years; and how many of these have (i) taken early retirement, (ii) retired before 60 and (iii) retired before 55. [15773]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its chief executive, A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Nicholas Brown, dated 29 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

A breakdown of the figures in the format requested is not available. We are however able to provide the following information.

Figures in respect of General and Medical Practitioners quinquennially:

	1985–89		*1990–94*		
	Retirements due to age	*Early retirements due to ill-health*	*Retirements due to age*	*Early retirements due to ill-health*	*Early retirement scheme*
General Medical Practitioners	3,950	554	3,458	746	—
General Dental Practitioners	1,165	366	1,085	381	526

Note:
The Early Retirement Scheme was restricted to general dental practitioners and came into effect from April 1991. The aim is to improve efficiency by allowing older dentists to retire early in favour of younger dentists.

Figures in respect of consultants from 1988

	Consultants			
	Retirements due to age	*Early retirements due to ill-health*	*Early retirement programme to allow for replacement of senior posts*	*Other early retirements*
1988–89	383	38	29	58
1989–90	359	39	75	52
1990–91	376	46	45	77
1991–92	368	56	38	92
1992–93	369	56	35	111
1993–94	380	45	66	157
1994–95	418	47	59	159

Note:
The Early Retirement programme is open to all consultants aged 50 or over. Consultants include Senior Hospital Medical and Dental Officers who worked full or part-time.

Vacant Medical Posts

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of all *(a)* house officer, *(b)* senior house officer, *(c)* registrar, *(d)* senior registrar and *(e)* consultant posts remained vacant as at 1 April on each of the last 10 years for each regional health authority. [15772]

Mr. Malone: Data as at 1 April are not available. Information on vacancies for consultants, senior registrars, registrars and senior house officers is collected from the national health service each year, and is available in the Library in Crown copyright table R5 of the Department's census of the medical and dental work force. As these relate to a single date they may not fairly reflect the trend for the number of vacancies in the stated grades over the year as a whole.

Staff Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average annual cost of employing *(a)* a hospital consultant, *(b)* a senior house officer, *(c)* a qualified nurse and *(d)* an ambulance paramedic. [15827]

Mr. Malone: In 1992–93, the latest year for which data are available, the average annual cost of employing a hospital consultant was £63,000 and a senior house officer was £34,410. Information for 1992–93 cannot be broken down to show the average costs of a qualified nurse and an ambulance paramedic.

Asset Disposal

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the value of NHS assets which have been *(a)* sold or *(b)* privatised since 1985. [16186]

Mr. Sackville: The information available on receipts from the sale of surplus hospital and community health services capital assets since 1985–86 is shown in the table. These receipts are retained by the national health service and additional to Government spending on capital.

There is no question of these NHS assets having been privatised.

Year	*Capital receipts (£ million)*
1985–86	76
1986–87	149
1987–88	201
1988–89	280
1989–90	232
1990–91	178
1991–92	169
1992–93	113
1993–94	213
1994–95[1]	165

[1] Forecast outturn.

Endocrine System (Chemical Disruption)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has evaluated in the last 10 years on the effects on the human endocrine system of known endocrine disruptive chemicals present in the environment; [15936]

Mr. Sackville: The Department has for many years evaluated worldwide experimental and epidemiological evidence about the potential health effects of chemicals present in the environment, including their effects on the human endocrine system. We are advised on such evidence by independent expert advisory committees.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research her Department has carried out in the last 10 years into the effects on the human endocrine system of known endocrine disruptive chemicals present in the environment. [15955]

(2) what research her Department has carried out in the last 10 years into the effects on human health of organochlorines as a class with regard to both lethal and sub-lethal effects. [15954]

Mr. Sackville: None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment.

Birth Abnormalities

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department monitors the rates of abnormalities of the genital tract in male babies on a continual basis; and if she will make available the most recent statistics. [15957]

Mr. Sackville: Since 1964, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has run the national congenital malformation notification scheme. The data for this scheme are received on a voluntary basis from district health authorities. Until 31 December 1994, data were requested for all babies where the malformation was identified at or within 10 days of birth. This time limit has since been removed. Data are routinely collected on hypospadias[1] and epispadias—the most commonly visible malformations of the male genital tract. The most recent statistics are shown in the table.

Notification of male babies born with hypospadias[1] and epispadias in England and Wales, 1992 and 1993
Rates per 10,000 male live and still births

Year	*Number*	*Rate*
1992	532	15.0
1993	533	15.3

[1] Excludes hypospadias when the meatus lies before the coronary sulcus.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing total Government expenditure on the NHS in each year since 1985. [16188]

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Year	*Government expenditure on the national health service—England (£ million)*
1985–86	14,176
1986–87	15,173
1987–88	16,668
1988–89	18,413
1989–90	19,855
1990–91	22,328
1991–92	25,356
1992–93	27,973
1993–94	28,953
1994—95[1]	30,706

[1] Estimated outturn.

Accident and Emergency Department Closures

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments have had to be closed for reasons other than a planned closure in each of the last 10 years; and if she will list the name of the unit, the date and length of the unplanned closure and the reason why it was closed. [16093]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Dementia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken, following the introduction of the care programme approach and services for older people with dementia, to increase the number of clinical psychologists available to the NHS; and what steps she is taking to ensure that mechanisms exist to effectively link vacancy figures with training commissions. [16173]

Mr. Bowis: It is for local employers to determine the staff needed to deliver the services that they have contracted to provide. Since 1991, the number of clinical psychologists employed by the national health service trusts and the number of training places commissioned on their behalf by regional health authorities has continued to increase to meet the growing demand for clinical psychologists. The number of clinical psychologists has risen from 2,100 in 1990 to 2,810 in 1993 which represents an increase of 34 per cent.

Board Members (Hours of Work)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to *(a)* advise the Audit Commission of the number of hours that chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and NHS trusts are expected to devote to their duties for their salaries and *(b)* to report on those who significantly fail to honour their commitments. [16217]

Mr. Malone: None.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines her Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16215]

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not issued guidelines to agencies and public bodies under its authority specifically for the employment of public relations companies. However, the requests for tenders for these and other services are handled in accordance with general purchasing guidance issued by the Department.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much her Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if she will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16282]

Mr. Sackville: Functions which are identified as public relations are normally carried out within the Department by the press and publicity branches of the information division.

Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *830*, if she is now in a position to make a statement on the payment of defence costs in the Cornwall Health trust libel case involving an earlier chairman. [16206]

Mr. Malone: No. The matter remains before the courts.

Body Scanner, Greenwich

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the South East Thames regional health authority purchased the second-hand body scanner for Greenwich health authority. [16242]

Mr. Sackville: The scanner was supplied by American Medical Ltd.

Trainee Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trainee nurses there were in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994. [16238]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 30 November 1994, column *794* for the 1992 figures. Information shown in the table for 1993 and 1994 is taken from the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting annual reports for 1993 and 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

In training population nurses and midwives—England
Years ended 31 March 1992 and 31 March 1994

	1993	*1994*
Pre-registration	53,085	54,898
Post-registration	3,718	3,038
Total pre- and post-registration	56,803	57,936

Source:
English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Long-stay Care of the Elderly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to health authorities on the number of beds per 1,000 population aged over 65 years to be provided for the long-stay medical and nursing care of the elderly. [16244]

Mr. Bowis: HSG(95)8, issued on 23 February to health authorities, made clear the national health service's responsibility for purchasing a full range of services to meet continuing health care needs. Copies are in the Library.

Pensioners (Mailshot)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will order the Paymaster General's Office to remove NHS pensioners' personal pension account numbers from labels used in any future departmental mailshot and from any envelope addressed to NHS pensioners. [16275]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

Keith Sullens, Chief Executive of Paymaster who the NHS Pensions Agency contracts to pay our NHS pensioners informed me that account numbers which appeared on envelopes addressed to NHS pensioners were printed in error. A new system has been introduced which will ensure NHS pensioners personal pension account numbers do not appear on any envelopes addressed to NHS pensioners in the future.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what fees the Paymaster General's office charged Medicash for the recent mailshot to NHS pensioners. [16249]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 29 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question as it falls within my areas of responsibility.

I understand that Paymaster whom the NHS Pensions Agency contracts to pay NHS pensioners charged Medicash £21,379.21 (including VAT) for the recent mailshot to NHS pensioners.

Surrey Ambulance Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will inquire into and publish details of the terms on which Lynn Samuel and Mike Foy left the Surrey ambulance trust and the cost to the NHS. [16254]

Mr. Sackville: The terms on which Mr. Lynn Samuel left Surrey Ambulance Service National Health Service trust are a matter for the trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Lady Helen Gardiner, for details.

The arrangements for Mr. Mike Foy, the former chief ambulance officer and then general manager of Surrey Ambulance Service, are a matter for the East Surrey health authority, which managed the service before it became a trust on 1 April 1994. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority, Mr. John Poole, for details.

Dental Services

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will advise health authorities only to employ in part-time posts dental contractors who have a substantial number of national health patients. [16389]

Mr. Malone: Family health services authorities are given approval to employ salaried dentists, whether full or part-time only when they can demonstrate that patients in a particular area would otherwise have difficulty obtaining general dental services.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press officers there are in her Department currently; and what was the figure in 1979. [16561]

Mr. Sackville: The number of press officers currently employed is 15. Figures for 1979 are not available.

Clinical Negligence Fund

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she proposes to take following the issue in 1994 of a consultation document on the proposed creation of a central fund for clinical negligence costs in the NHS. [17358]

Mr. Malone: Last year, the Department of Health published outline proposals for a central fund to help national health service trusts spread the costs of clinical negligence. The response to the proposals, both from the NHS and other interested parties, was very positive. Detailed design work on the scheme has been carried out for the Department by a team from the Medical Protection Society and Willis Corroon Ltd. in full consultation with the trust movement.

In the light of the continued high degree of interest shown by NHS trusts, I have decided that—subject to parliamentary authority—the scheme should go ahead with effect from 1 April 1995. The scheme will be voluntary. The necessary regulations to set up the scheme, and the special health authority which will administer it on behalf of the Secretary of State, will be laid in the near future.

Prescriptions

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people claimed free prescriptions on grounds of *(a)* automatic entitlement and *(b)* low-income entitlement as outlined in the Department of Health form P11, during the last year for which figures are available. [16929]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she has received concerning the disease myalgic encephalomyelitis; and if she will make a statement on her proposals for improving *(a)* the treatment, *(b)* medical and public knowledge and *(c)* research of the disease. [16813]

Mr. Sackville: The national task force on chronic fatigue syndrome, post viral fatigue syndrome or ME, which is independent of the Department of Health, has produced a report. With a view to securing progress and promoting the development of a professional consensus, the chief medical officer has invited the conference of colleges to consider the report. The views of the conference of colleges will be of much assistance to the Department in helping to determine the best way forward on matters concerning this condition.

NHS Trusts (Borrowing)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each NHS trust has paid for the cost of borrowing in each year since its inception.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* This information will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16214]

Mr. Hague: Guidance on the use of public relations companies is issued by the Cabinet Office and is contained in the booklet, "A Work Guide for Government Information Officers", a copy of which is in the Library. All business units in this Department are expected to work within the Cabinet Office guidelines.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16622]

Mr. Hague: The total cost of producing the 1995–96 departmental annual report was £34,104.

Copies were circulated to all personnel at grade 7 and above in the Department and executive agencies, members of the Social Security Select Committee, members of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, members of the Social Security Advisory Committee and all Opposition spokesman on social security. A copy has also been placed in the Library.

A total of 3,500 copies were produced, 1,700 of which were designated for sale through Her Majesty's Stationery Office bookshops at a cover price of £16.35.

Appeals

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the speed with which *(a)* reviews and *(b)* appeals involving benefit cases are dealt with by his Department; and if he will make a statement; [16496]

(2) what discussions he has had with regard to appeals and reviews affecting cases inside his Department during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [16498]

(3) what representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding delays in dealing with appeals and reviews affecting cases involving his Department; and if he will make a statement. [16497]

Mr. Hague: The table shows average clearance times for:

(a) the three types of benefit cases which are subject to mandatory review prior to appeal; and

(b) benefit appeals, divided by type of tribunal.

Benefit reviews and appeals

	Number
Reviews	
Disability living allowance	81 per cent. in 55 days
Disability working allowance	91 per cent. in 20 days
Attendance allowance	92 per cent. in 75 days
Appeals[1]	
Social security appeal tribunal	[2]44 weeks
Disability appeal tribunal	23 weeks
Medical appeal tribunal	36 weeks

[1] Figures include the time taken by the Independent Tribunal Service to hear appeals.

[2] This time is higher than usual because the Independent Tribunal Service are clearing appeals which were previously held up awaiting the outcome of a Court of Appeal case. The underlying clearance time is around 28 weeks.

We have received representations from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Social Security Advisory Committee about delays and also letters concerning individual cases. Ministers have regular meetings with His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte, the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, which hears social security benefit appeals, and with the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, who is responsible for ensuring that targets on reviews and appeals preparation are met.

War Disablement Pension

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants there have been in the last five years for a war disablement pension under the personal injuries (civilians) scheme for tuberculosis sufferers; and how many of these applications have been successfully granted a pension. [16668]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16565]

Mr. Hague: The number of press officers currently employed by this Department is as follows:

	Number
The Department's headquarters in London	10
Seconded HQ press officer to the charity Motability (includes publicity and promotions work)	1
The Child Support Agency	2
The Contributions Agency	1
The War Pensions Agency	0.25
The Benefits Agency	
National press office	8
Regional press offices	9
Information Technology Services Agency	0.6

This Department was not in existence until 1988 and figures for 1979 are therefore not available.

Benefits Agency Review

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the outcome of the review of the Benefits Agency. [17601]

Mr. Lilley: I announced on 20 July 1994, *Official Report*, column 257, a formal review of the Benefits Agency. Each next steps agency undergoes a periodic review to evaluate performance, to reconsider whether agency status is the best way of doing the job and to revise its framework document.

Part of that review involved an evaluation of the performance of the Benefits Agency since its creation in April 1991. I am pleased to announce that the evaluation report has been published today and a copy has been placed in the Library.

My colleagues and I have now considered the review team's recommendations. These take account of a number of detailed submissions from hon. Members, national and local customer representative organisations, and private companies. I am grateful to all those who have participated in the review.

The main conclusions of the review, which I accept, are that the Benefits Agency should remain a next steps agency within the civil service, responsible as now for a wide range of social security benefits. There is no scope to abolish or privatise an organisation of this nature; nor is there any evidence to suggest that wholesale contractorisation of the agency's functions is at present feasible or likely to improve value for money for the taxpayer. The review endorses the agency's initiatives to integrate its services more closely in order to provide a "one stop" customer service and to reduce significantly the scope for fraud and abuse.

The review also recommends that the agency should build on its existing change programme by developing a comprehensive strategy for improving its performance and efficiency. The details will be for the chief executive to decide, but they will include the involvement of the private sector wherever its skills would be of assistance, for example through re-engineering of the agency's business processes. The Government's "Competing for Quality" programme will continue to apply to the majority of the agency's support functions. In addition, and in order to inform the debate about longer-term possibilities, I have asked the chief executive to conduct a pilot project to establish the feasibility and desirability of separating the adjudication function from other parts of the benefits administration process.

The review goes on to recommend that the chief executive conduct internal reviews of the agency's structure and organisation, including the relationship between the corporate centre and the local units, and the numbers and boundaries of those units. This will devolve more power to local units to respond to local needs whilst at the same time sharpening accountability. All the elements of the strategy should have been decided by April 1996 to enable implementation of any changes from April 1997.

In conclusion, the review recognises the significant improvements in customer service and efficiency which the agency has achieved since its inception in 1991. These reflect great efforts by the chief executive and his staff. The review's recommendations are designed to build on this work. I am placing a copy of the executive summary of the prior options report in the Library today, and I shall shortly publish a revised framework document confirming the agency's aims, objectives and responsibilities.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *64*, how long he estimates it will take for absent parents to benefit from reduction in maintenance as a result of the introduction of travel cost allowances in the CSA formula. [15864]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Andrew Miller, dated 29 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about travel to work costs in the child support formula.

Subject to the approval of the regulations by Parliament, travel to work costs will be taken into account in the maintenance formula from 18 April 1995.

Applications for travel to work costs will be incorporated into appropriate assessments as they are made from that date.

Existing clients will be sent a leaflet explaining the change. This will include a tear-off portion inviting them to make a claim within three months. The Agency will start processing these claims as soon as they are received.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff are currently employed in the prevention of benefit fraud; and what was the financial benefit of such work in the last financial year for which figures are available. [16823]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of fraud work is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Greg Pope, dated 28 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the numbers of staff currently employed in the prevention of benefit fraud; and the financial benefit of this work in the last financial year.

The Benefits Agency currently employs over 3,000 staff in fraud work where duties include both prevention and detection. Separate figures are not kept on the work of staff where work is related to the prevention of fraud, nor on the financial value of preventative work. The total estimated benefit savings for the financial year 1993/94 from fraud work was £654m. Recoveries of benefit overpaid, including fraud cases, totalled £80m for the same period.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

EDUCATION

Education Expenditure

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent in total on state schools in Bedfordshire in each of the last 20 years at constant prices. [16928]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows total expenditure by Bedfordshire local education authority on its maintained schools from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available. The table does not include information on grant-maintained schools.

Bedfordshire County Council

	Gross expenditure Nur/pri/sec/spl (1994–95 prices) £000
1974–75	168,728
1975–76	175,013
1976–77	184,289
1977–78	n/a
1978–79	176,510
1979–80	172,568
1980–81	176,925
1981–82	176,983
1982–83	167,550
1983–84	166,307
1984–85	165,402
1985–86	165,871
1986–87	169,281
1987–88	181,932
1988–89	185,859
1989–90	186,259
1990–91	181,145
1991–92	190,796
1992–93	219,064
1993–94[1]	182,297

[1] Provisional.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the outcome of consultation on her proposal to accept the pay settlement for school teachers which was recommended by the School Teachers Review Body. [17481]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am today confirming that I am accepting the School Teachers Review Body's recommendation to increase school teachers' pay by 2.7 per cent. I will make an order which will increase all points on the teachers' pay spines by 2.7 per cent. with effect from 1 April.

I am writing to the teacher unions, the National Employers Organisation for School Teachers, bodies representing school governors and to the head teachers and chairmen of governors of all schools in England and Wales. Teachers are making the key contribution to raising standards in education. They deserve their pay award, at the level recommended by the independent School Teachers Review Body, without undue delay.

I have received many representations about the funding of the teachers' pay award and considered them carefully. I believe the local government funding settlement is tough but manageable, and I have concluded that it would be right to implement the recommendation in full. It is for local authorities to give priority to front-line services such as schools. School governors in turn should ensure the efficient management of staff and resources.

I can also confirm my decisions to bring into force from 1 September 1995 the following proposals by means of revisions to the school teachers pay and conditions document:

i. relevant bodies should be able, at their discretion, to reward teachers for work on initial teacher training;

ii. relevant bodies should be able, at their discretion, to compensate teachers for in-service training at weekends and in school holidays, the compensation to be paid from savings on supply cover that would otherwise be necessary were the in-service training to be undertaken during the school day;

iii. the STPCD should recognise the employment status of teachers in Education Associations and GM clusters.

I can also confirm my decisions to accept the following conclusions and recommendations of the School Teachers Review Body, not all of which will require changes to be made to the STPD:

i. there should be no change to the structure of the classroom teachers' pay spine, but the STRB will produce a consultative document on this subject;

ii. the current transitional arrangements for safeguarding the inner London Supplement should remain in place;

iii. returners to the profession should retain their entitlement to their accumulated experience points;

iv. there should be no change in the employment status of teachers at Pupil Referral Units. Such teachers will continue to be "unattached";

v. there should be no separate performance related pay scheme for heads and deputies, but the Secretary of State should issue guidance on the assessment of performance, drawing on the four essential performance indicators set out in the STRB's consultative document, which should be taken into account by relevant bodies when reviewing salaries for these staff;

vi. there should be no direct funding of excellence points through GEST, but the Department should consider other direct funding mechanisms; and

vii. the Teachers' Pension Agency should distribute copies of a poster and a leaflet about the benefits of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme.

European Social Fund

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding is obtained from the European social fund for courses in British universities. [16892]

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

In 1993, £40.35 million was claimed for European social fund provision across objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5b by the higher education sector, which includes universities, in Great Britain. Final figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines she is giving to universities and other higher education institutes on how to deal with mature students who receive training allowances from the European social fund. [16840]

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

Each year, the Department issues comprehensive guidance to all potential applicants, including universities and other higher education institutes, on how to apply for, and claim European social fund grants. This guidance covers how the allowances to students and other trainees are to be treated.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students benefit from the European social fund provision entitling them to pursue courses in United Kingdom universities. [16893]

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

In 1993, 50,309 students in Great Britain benefited from European social fund provision across objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5b in the higher education sector, which includes universities. Final figures for 1994 are not yet available.

National Science Week

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost to the university sector of the National Science Week promotion. [16897]

Mr. Boswell: The requested information is not held centrally.

Grant-maintained Schools

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the total cost of cash protection of the central element of grant-maintained schools' budgets in England and Wales in 1994–95, listed by local education authority; and what will be the costs in 1995–96, based on the local education authority provisional estimates submitted by 31 March; [16935]

(2) which grant-maintained schools, listed by local education authority, will receive more cash protection within central AMG in 1995–96 than in 1994–95, based on provisional estimates; [16891]

(3) which grant-maintained schools, in each local education authority area, will receive, on provisional estimates, an element for cash protection within their annual maintenance grant for 1995–96, when no element was received in 1994–95. [16986]

Mr. Robin Squire: Responsibility for the calculation of grants for grant-maintained schools is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Teachers Pensions Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many former teachers' pensions are covered by the privatisation review which is currently taking place at the Teachers Pensions Agency. [16981]

Mr. Robin Squire: We have made it clear that there is no question of privatising the teachers' superannuation scheme. The present review is concerned solely with the administration of the scheme.

Some 250,000 former teachers have preserved rights in the scheme. Some 340,000 retired teachers are receiving pension payments.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether, as part of the privatisation review of the Teachers Pensions Agency, she is considering allowing private firms to charge teachers' employers directly for the provision of administrative services. [16982]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no plans for any such arrangement.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total numbers in Derbyshire schools over the last 20 years in the *(a)* 11 to 16 years, *(b)* 16 to 19 years and *(c)* five to 11 years age range. [16714]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils in Derbyshire local education authority area for years 1975–1994 is shown in the table.

Pupils by age in maintained schools[1] *in Derbyshire Local Education Authority area: 1975–1994*
Position in January each year
Ages at previous 31 August

	Pupils aged		
	5–10	*11–15*	*16–19+*
1975	85,400	67,200	4,300
1976	86,100	67,770	4,300
1977	85,600	69,500	4,400
1978	84,300	70,800	4,300
1979	82,000	71,600	4,300
1980	79,300	72,000	4,300
1981	76,200	72,000	4,600
1982	72,800	71,200	5,100
1983	68,500	70,800	5,200
1984	65,200	69,300	5,100
1985	64,100	67,300	4,900
1986	63,900	64,500	4,700
1987	64,100	61,900	4,400
1988	64,600	58,100	4,440
1989	65,900	54,900	4,900
1990	66,700	52,500	4,700
1991	66,900	51,900	4,600
1992	66,700	52,200	4,900
1993	67,100	52,700	5,200
1994	68,300	53,400	5,000

[1] Excludes Sixth Form Colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1993.

School Meals

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent by Derbyshire county council local education authority on subsidising school meals in each of the last 12 years. [16866]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The table shows Derbyshire local education authority's total expenditure on, and income from, its school catering service from 1982–83 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available.

Derbyshire local education authority

£000

	School catering service total expenditure (cash terms)	*School catering service total income (cash terms)*
1982–83	15,117	5,674
1983–84	16,084	6,055
1984–85	16,799	5,728
1985–86	16,641	5,457
1986–87	18,974	6,542
1987–88	21,617	7,092
1988–89	23,305	7,546
1989–90	22,477	7,413
1990–91	22,872	7,560
1991–92	26,921	8,226
1992–93	28,192	9,873
1993–94[1]	22,959	9,051

[1] Provisional.

University Evaluation System

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to change the English and Welsh university evaluation system for teaching to take them closer to the system operated for Scottish universities. [16890]

Mr. Boswell: The Higher Education Funding Council for England is responsible for quality assessment in England. Following consultation with the sector, the council has announced a revised methodology from April 1995 which contains some elements in common with the system operated in Scotland. Responsibility for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Funding Agency for Schools

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, Official Report, column *784*, when the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley may expect to receive a reply from the chairman of the Funding Agency for Schools. [16652]

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand that the chief executive of the funding agency wrote to the hon. Member on 27 March.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Gaza

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals are being put forward by the World bank, European Union and British Government to help improve reproductive health services in Gaza and on the west bank. [16606]

Mr. Baldry: We are not aware of any proposals being put forward by the World bank or the European Union. We have agreed to contribute £400,000 for the UN Relief and Works Agency's expanded family health programme in the Gaza strip which aims to help improve reproductive health.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what gaps exist in the food pipeline to camps holding refugees from Rwanda; and what measures are proposed to fill any such gaps. [16598]

Mr. Baldry: We have pledged 21,000 tonnes of cereals and 2,800 tonnes of beans, with a total value £7 million, to the world food programme for its operations in and around Rwanda, in the last month. From this pledge, 8,500 tonnes of maize have already been bought for delivery in May; the beans will be bought locally and quickly.

Taking account of this and other donors' pledges, WFP calculations suggest the pipeline for cereals is reasonably healthy until September, apart from some possible, short-term problems in April, which they are currently considering how to tackle. Additional pledges for non-cereal commodities are needed.

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the international community to establish an effective and objective judicial system in Burundi. [16603]

Mr. Baldry: A UN Security Council mission to Burundi last month reiterated the importance of strengthening the national judicial system. A number of donors have expressed interest, including the European Union. Belgium plans an appraisal mission in April which others may join but the situation in Burundi is extremely fragile and plans to support the judicial system are very difficult to advance. We have contributed £100,000 this month to a UN High Commission for Human Rights programme of training and technical assistance for Burundis in justice and human rights.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the World bank, IMF and donor countries to assist Burundi to stabilise and achieve economic development. [16605]

Mr. Baldry: The fragile political and security environment in Burundi is making progress with economic development very difficult. The World bank agreed an emergency assistance project last December, worth nearly £10 million, for the import of high-priority goods for education, health, agriculture, infrastructure and private sector development. IMF staff hope to restart discussions with Burundi officials in Geneva this week leading to the formulation of a three-year economic policy framework for IMF assistance. An EU troika mission left for Burundi on 23 March and will present recommendations for strengthening EU support.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects on which the United Kingdom's aid contribution to Iraq has been spent since 1991. [16632]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* A list providing details of United Kingdom emergency aid contributions totalling £57.2 million since 1991 has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Most of this aid went to Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, and refugees in neighbouring countries. Smaller amounts have been used for medical supplies and water projects in central and southern Iraq. In addition, our share of EC spending has totalled £13.3 million over the same period.

Aid Strategies

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is now available under the Overseas Development Administration's published policy on open government on aid strategies for the United Kingdom's main bilateral aid programmes. [17678]

Mr. Baldry: Country aid programme statements on the United Kingdom's bilateral programmes to Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Russia are now available from the ODA library.

Further CAPS will be added to this list as and when the relevant country programmes are reviewed—those over £10 million per year; this process is carried out every other year.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations led to the making of low flying passes by a Royal Navy Westland helicopter over Goodison Boulevard, Cantley, Doncaster around 14.20 hours on 3 March. [16237]

Mr. Soames: Extensive enquiries have been made, but it has not proved possible to identify the helicopter in question from the details given.

Old Sarum Airfield

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who holds the lease of Old Sarum airfield; when the lease was granted and for how long; and whether the terms of the lease permit the cessation of flying activity and the development of the airfield for housing and industrial use. [16855]

Mr. Soames: The lease of Old Sarum airfield is held by two parties, Blane Field Investments Ltd.—the major leaseholder—and Old Sarum Park Properties Ltd. The lease was granted on 16 November 1982 for 999 years and allows for the erection of new buildings with the landlord's consent.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to sell the freehold of Old Sarum airfield; and if tender documents have been prepared. [16854]

Mr. Soames: We intend to sell the freehold of Old Sarum airfield by public tender. Final tender documents are being prepared with a provisional tender date of 26 April.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rights are reserved for use of Old Sarum airfield by his Department; on how many occasions those rights have been exercised since a lease was granted on the property; and if he will make a statement. [16856]

Mr. Soames: The rights reserved for the use of Old Sarum permit my Department to use the airfield for the taking off and landing of military aircraft, including helicopters, on no more than 150 occasions per year. Information on the number of occasions when those rights have been exercised is only available for the last two financial years: in 1993–94, some 80 landings took place for which a landing fee was charged; in 1994–95 there were around 50 landings.

Decommissioned Warships

Mr. MacKinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *816*, to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on HMS Sirius what were the dates and total cost of the final refits undertaken for the three decommissioned warships used as targets and sunk in live firing exercises between 1990 and 1994. [16926]

Mr. Freeman: The last refit dates of the decommissioned warships used as targets and sunk in live firing exercises in 1990, 1991 and 1993 were, respectively: 5 September 1983 to 1 June 1984, 29 May 1985 to 17 February 1986, and 7 April 1986 to 8 December 1986. The costs of refit work undertaken before the royal dockyards passed into commercial management in April 1987 are not available.

HMS Fort Victoria

Mr. MacKinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will write to the hon. Member for Thurrock, as undertaken during the debate on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *1152*, giving details of delayed delivery and commissioning times of HMS Fort Victoria and the reasons for these delays, together with the total costs and penalties paid. [17000]

Mr. Freeman: I shall be writing to the hon. Member very shortly.

Vehicle Purchases

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military purpose his Department requires to purchase 30 wheeled industrial diesel tractors, as set out in tender No. LV2B/488; what consideration has been given to leasing or hiring of such tractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The wheeled industrial diesel tractors are required for the general haulage of stores, materials handling activities and occasional light aircraft towing. A number of these are also protected to allow safe movement of ammunition, bombs and missiles. The provision, management and support of service transport is at present being reviewed to determine whether there is scope for greater involvement of the private sector. We intend to establish pilot leasing schemes by the end of this calendar year. Tender LV2B/488 represents the minimum order necessary to meet the requirement pending the outcome of the review. Any resultant contract will be sufficiently flexible to take account of changes in vehicle purchasing arrangements for any further requirements.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military purpose his Department requires to purchase various diesel 4 x 2 trucks, as set out in future purchase LV1B/983; what consideration has been given to leasing or hiring of such trucks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The vehicles are required for the transportation of military stores and equipment. The provision, management and support of service transport is at present being reviewed to determine whether there is scope for greater involvement of the private sector. We intend to establish pilot leasing schemes by the end of this calendar year. Future purchase LV1B/983 represents the minimum order necessary to meet the requirement pending the outcome of the review.

Horses and Ponies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* ponies and *(b)* horses have been owned by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [16078]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* My Department had a requirement for 517 horses in each year between 1985 and 1991; this changed to 471 in 1992, 499 in 1993 and 1994, and will reduce to 433 next month. In addition, we owned five ponies throughout this period.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many *(a)* ponies and *(b)* horses have been transported by his Department to (i) Cyprus and (ii) Germany in each of the last 10 years. [16077]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* An average of three horses were transported to Germany each year between 1985 to 1992. Two ponies were transported to Cyprus in 1991 and one in 1994.

SCOTLAND

Fisheries Protection

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the fisheries for which exclusion orders under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 are *(a)* currently in operation and *(b)* currently under request; if he will make a statement on the operation of public access agreements in each of these fisheries; and whether he is conducting a review of the situation regarding public access to the boats operated by the Aberfeldy Angling Club on the Tay. [15520]

Sir Hector Monro: The following protection orders made under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 are currently in force:

The Rivers Tweed and Eye Protection Order 1980.
The Upper Spey and Associated Waters Protection Order 1982.
The River Lunan Catchment Area Protection Order 1983.
The River Tummel Catchment Area Protection Order 1983.
The River Tay Catchment Area Protection Order 1986.
The West Strathclyde Protection Order 1988.
The River Earn Catchment Area Protection Order 1990.
The River Don Catchment Area (Part) Protection Order 1990.
The Loch Morar and River Morar Protection Order 1992.
The Loch Awe and Associated Waters Protection Order 1992.
The River Clyde Catchment Area (Part) Protection Order 1994.
The North West Sutherland Protection Order 1994.

Applications for protection orders for Loch Arkaig and the River Arkaig, Middle River Spey, St. John's loch in Caithness and Loch Ruthven and Loch Choire are under consideration.

The operation of public access to fishings in each area is considered regularly by a liaison committee. My Department is liaising with the Aberfeldy Angling Club on access to its fishings but not on boat access as no boats are operated by that club.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amount of environmentally sensitive area grant budget for 1994–95 is still uncommitted *(a)* in cash and *(b)* as a percentage of the budget; and if he will make a statement on underspending in the environmentally sensitive areas budget for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Sir Hector Monro: Sufficient resources have been made available to enable eligible farmers and crofters in the designated areas to participate in the environmentally sensitive area scheme. Expenditure in 1994–95 is expected to be £1.16 million which represents almost 26 per cent. of the total provision of £4.5 million.

The level of uptake has been lower than anticipated since additional environmentally sensitive areas were designated in 1993 and 1994, but we hope that more farmers and crofters will wish to take advantage of the scheme.

Forestry Commission

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list and give the acreage of Forestry Commission woodlands *(a)* currently scheduled for sale in Perthshire and *(b)* sold over the past five years. [15521]

Sir Hector Monro: The Forestry Commission records its land holdings by region, not by the former Scottish counties. The following Forestry Commission woodlands in Tayside region are currently for sale on the open market.

Name of property	*Area (hectares)*
Camusericht	304
Dalguise (part)	7
Long Plantation, Crieff	80
Upper Glenprosen	230

Lists of the woodlands sold over the last five years, by region, are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what level of Government support the Forestry Commission has received in each year since 1985; [15976]

(2) what was the level of financial remuneration received from the Forestry Commission in each year since 1985. [15980]

Sir Hector Monro: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Grant-in-aid used by Forestry Commission (net) £ million*	*Receipts from sale of Forestry Commission land payable into consolidated fund £ million*	*Overall Government support (net) £ million*
1985	54.0	21.8	32.2
1986	51.4	17.2	34.2
1987	51.2	14.5	36.7
1988	48.1	13.1	35.0
1989	53.5	12.4	41.1
1990	58.2	12.9	45.3
1991	74.3	12.0	62.3
1992	76.5	14.9	61.6
1993	97.1	9.9	87.2
1994	85.9	17.3	68.6

Forestry Enterprise Framework Document

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place a copy of the Forestry Enterprise framework document in the Library; and what parliamentary scrutiny he now proposes the document will be subject to. [15994]

Sir Hector Monro: The framework document will be placed in the Library of the House when it is completed. Hon. Members will be able to raise it, like any other published document, in the House.

Hunting

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify the areas of Forestry Commission land where the lease stipulates that *(a)* fox and *(b)* deer hunting must be allowed. [15978]

Sir Hector Monro: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *168*, how many cases of food poisoning were reported in 1994. [16296]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 4,098 cases of food poisoning were reported in Scotland in 1994.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15571]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* My ministerial colleagues in the Scottish Office and I have implemented and keep ourselves fully informed of progress on a wide range of deregulation activity undertaken by the Department.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15555]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* The Scottish Office is fully committed to the deregulation initiative and operates a rolling programme of review of the regulations, forms and rules for which it has responsibility with a view to identifying scope for repeal or simplification.

Woodland Planting

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares of forestry or woodland have been planted by the private sector in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [16934]

Sir Hector Monro: The areas planted by the private sector with grant aid from the Forestry Commission were as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Area planted (hectares)*
1985	19,095
1986	23,358
1987	23,618
1988	28,675
1989	29,942
1990	21,531
1991	22,542
1992	21,978
1993	23,369
1994	24,352

Holyroodhouse

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to his Department of the maintenance and running costs of Holyroodhouse, whether occupied or unoccupied, in the last five years; and what proportion of this sum is represented by employees' salaries. [16919]

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend is responsible for the cost of the maintenance of the fabric of the palace, for security and for the costs of utilities such as fuel and telephones. All other costs are met by the royal household.

The information for the most recent five years is:

	Programme expenditure £	*Historic Scotland employee costs £*	*Total £*
1990–91	860,833	288,636	1,149,469
1991–92	723,000	334,346	1,057,346
1992–93	696,600	338,530	1,035,130
1993–94	693,215	337,852	1,031,067
1994–95[1]	897,700	345,124	1,242,824

[1] Estimate.

These costs include all expenditure directly attributable to the palace, but not professional and central administration.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the draft list of areas of special conservation and protection required under the EC habitats directive will be announced; what the length of the consultation period will be; on what date the draft list is due to be submitted to the European Commission; and if the consultation process can be extended beyond that date. [16925]

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on behalf of the UK Environment Ministers will be making a statement to the House on these matters very shortly.

Health Board Funding

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total allocation of funding to health boards in Scotland in each of the past five years; if he will show this in constant figures taking 1989 as base year; and if he will indicate the percentage levels of increase in real terms. [16050]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table.

Year	*Total allocation £ million*	*At constant 1989 prices £ million*	*Real terms increase Per cent.*
1990–91	2,184.0	2,021.9	–0.5
1991–92	2,466.9	2,148.9	6.3
1992–93	2,621.9	2,196.4	2.2
1993–94	2,706.8	2,200.4	0.2
1994–95	2,869.9	2,287.0	3.9

Body Scanners, Ayrshire

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust had with Ayrshire and Arran health board and the North Ayrshire NHS trust prior to their agreement with Medical Support Ltd. for the provision of a magnetic resonance image scanner at the Ayr hospital, with special reference to the effect of the new facility on existing facilities; [16730]

(2) when the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust first considered entering a contract with Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. for the provision of a magnetic image resonancing facility at the Ayr hospital; and at what stage Ayrshire and Arran health board and the Scottish Office became involved in these discussions. [16732]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Discussions between those parties on service needs and on means of meeting these needs took place in November and December 1994. It was at the December meeting that the South Ayrshire trust representative indicated that the trust was proposing to purchase a fixed base scanner. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State was made aware of the proposal in February 1995.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland where magnetic resonance imaging facilities within the Ayrshire and Arran health board area and neighbouring health boards are based; and what is the nature of the current agreements and contracts for existing equipment. [16731]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are at present no fixed-base magnetic resonance imaging scanners in Ayrshire and Arran, Argyll and Clyde, Lanarkshire or Dumfries and Galloway. There are such fixed scanners in Glasgow and the Southern General hospital and Western infirmary and at Ross Hall and the Glasgow Nuffield hospital.

The agreements for 1995–96 propose the increased use of the mobile magnetic resonance scanner alternating week about between Crosshouse hospital and Ayr hospital.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what control the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust has over Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. as regards the provision of magnetic resonance imaging facilities at the Ayr hospital; if he will make a statement on the financial details of this contract, the contract's duration, the trust's liabilities under the contract; and for what reasons the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust opted for the involvement of the private sector in this facility. [16739]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust will, through a contract, control the quality and price of the magnetic resonance imaging service from Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. The contract details have still to be finalised.

The trust's potential liability is limited to the loss of building lease income amounting to £20,000 per annum. The trust would seek to mitigate this loss, should it ever arise, by securing an alternative use for the premises.

The trust believes that the new arrangements will result in an improved service to patients.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what process was used by Ayrshire and Arran health board to evaluate the decision of the South Ayrshire Hospitals trust to conclude the recent contract with Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. and what additional resources are being awarded to the trust to enable it to meet its obligations under its contract with Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. [16740]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The health board contracts with the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust for the provision of magnetic resonance imaging services. It is open to the trust to make its own arrangements for securing that provision, subject to the health board being satisfied that the quality and price is contained within the sum made available for the current mobile service in 1995–96.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust will make resources available to meet its obligations under the terms of its contract with Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. and if he will make a statement. [16741]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The trust will meet the costs of the service from Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. as it will any other services, from the contract income it receives from its purchasers.

NHS (Private Sector Involvement)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which NHS trusts have approached the Scottish Office with proposals for the involvement of private sector bodies in the provision of treatment facilities within NHS hospitals. [16736]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following NHS trusts have approached the Scottish Office with proposals for the involvement of private sector bodies in the provision of treatment facilities within NHS hospitals.

Dundee Teaching Hospitals
Grampian Healthcare
Law Hospital
Hairmyres and Stonehouse
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh
Edinburgh Healthcare
Western General Hospitals
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services
South Ayrshire Hospitals

However, there are other schemes in formative stages where trusts are yet to come to the Scottish Office with firm proposals.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance the Scottish Office has issued to Scottish health boards and NHS trusts relating to the involvement of private sector bodies in the provision of facilities for treatment within the NHS. [16737]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The NHS management executive in Scotland has issued a wide range of guidance to health boards and NHS trusts over the last two years on this topic. These circulars build on guidance provided by Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions Ayrshire and Arran health board and the Scottish Office have had with other NHS trusts and health boards in the west of Scotland in relation to the conclusion of the contract between the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust and Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd. and the long-term financial implications of this agreement to these bodies' operational budgets. [16738]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Neither the Ayrshire and Arran health board nor the Scottish Office has had discussions with any other health board or NHS trust about the services offered by Ayrshire Medical Support Ltd.

NHS Trusts (Asset Disposals)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment the Scottish Office has made of the disposal of assets by Scottish NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement indicating for each health board in Scotland the asset disposals which have occurred for each NHS trust which his Department has approved, the value of the disposal in each case, the body to which the asset was sold and the utilisation made of the capital receipt in each case. [16733]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Property disposals by NHS trusts are assessed as required in the context of the NHS management executive's national oversight of NHS estate management in Scotland. In 1994–95, no disposal has been specifically approved by the management executive.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers of approval the Scottish Office has in relation to the disposal of assets by NHS trusts; and what involvement Scottish health boards have in this process. [16734]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a reserve power to prevent the disposal of property where this would be against the interests of the NHS. This power applies only to assets valued at more than a specific threshold—currently £0.5 million—and the trust is required to notify the management executive of such planned disposals in its annual business plans.

In addition, certain types of disposal by trusts are covered by notification requirements contained in the NHS property transactions handbook issued in May 1993 by the NHS management executive. The property transactions handbook provides for the involvement of boards where they have an interest in the disposal concerned, for example if there are relevant service considerations.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been issued by his Department to NHS trusts and health boards in Scotland in relation to the disposal of assets by these bodies. [16735]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current guidance on NHS property disposals in Scotland is contained in the property transactions handbook, issued in May 1993 by the NHS management executive.

Constituency Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the visits he has made since the start of the current parliamentary Session to the constituencies of other hon. Members without prior warning to these hon. Members for any purpose connected with his departmental responsibilities. [15022]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* None. My office always informs the local Member of Parliament of my forthcoming visit to their constituency once arrangements have been finalised.

Education Expenditure

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much is currently spent on education in each local education authority; and to what extent this has changed in relation to last year's figures in *(a)* real and *(b)* percentage terms. [16790]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is set out in the table. The comparable information for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Total Education Expenditure

Authorities	*1993–94 Final outturn actual £000*	*1994–95 Budget estimates actual £000*	*1994–95 Real terms at 1993–94 prices £000*	*Actual increase Per cent.*	*Real terms increase Per cent.*
Borders	49,000	50,181	49,197	2.41	0.40
Central	129,577	129,297	126,762	–0.22	–2.17
Dumfries and Galloway	73,196	72,996	71,565	–0.27	–2.23
Fife	166,671	167,369	164,087	0.42	–1.55
Grampian	249,057	250,572	245,659	0.61	–1.36
Highland	115,612	114,646	112,398	–0.84	–2.78
Lothian	326,297	324,327	317,968	–0.60	–2.55
Strathclyde	1,078,254	1,103,418	1,081,782	2.33	0.33
Tayside	178,802	180,690	177,147	1.06	–0.93
Regions	2,366,466	2,393,496	2,346,565	1.14	–0.84
Orkney	13,438	15,148	14,851	12,73	10.51
Shetland	24,271	24,478	23,998	0.85	–1.12
Western	26,729	27,344	26,808	2.30	0.29
Islands	64,438	66,970	65,657	3.93	1.89
Total	2,430,904	2,460,466	2,412,222	1.22	–0.77

Notes:

1. The figures for 1993–94 are final outturns, and are net current expenditure figures, including loan and leasing charges.
2. The 1994–95 figures are budget estimates on the same basis.
3. The 1994–95 budget figures were converted to real terms using Her Majesty's Treasury GDP deflators dated 30 November 1994.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 March 1995

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Service

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Employment Service annual performance agreement for 1995–96 will be published. [17944]

Mr. Portillo: I have today placed copies of the 1995–96 Employment Service annual performance agreement in the Library. The new targets will require the ES to build on this year's extremely good performance and will challenge it to improve its effectiveness in the coming year. I have set a demanding target of placing a record 1.9 million unemployed people in jobs in the 12 months from April. Related targets for placing long-term claimants and people with disabilities will also call for even higher levels of achievement.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to receive the annual report for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. [17945]

Mr. Oppenheim: I have received the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service report for 1994, which will be laid before both Houses on Monday 3 April 1995. The report will be released to the public on 4 April 1995—copies will then be available from the Vote Office.

Gloucestershire TEC

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Gloucestershire training and enterprise council is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [18052]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that the Gloucestershire training and enterprise council has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three year licences. Its licence will be effective from April 1995.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15244]

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department group currently supports six workplace nurseries run either solely or in partnership with other Government Departments or outside organisations and has bought a number of places in other nurseries. The ED group is also involved in over 50 holiday playschemes and provides financial help with additional child care costs incurred through attending training courses and other work-based events. The information requested about those using the provision is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library the memorandum of evidence which was produced for the preparation of HSC report 92/129. [17334]

Mr. Oppenheim: No. The memorandum of evidence and the report itself are internal, confidential, management advice prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for the Health and Safety Commission.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he met *(a)* the TUC or *(b)* the CBI to consider HSC report 92/129 and how many times the HSC has met to consider the report since its completion.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have not met either the TUC or the CBI to discuss the Health and Safety Commission's report 92/129. I understand that the HSC has considered the report on two occasions since its completion.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library, Health and Safety Executive's paper HSC 92/129 relating to the privatisation and contractorisation of the Health and Safety Executive functions. [17327]

Mr. Oppenheim: No. The Health and Safety Commission report 91/129 is internal, confidential, management advice prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for the HSC.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Department of Employment group-wide promotion panel hearings have been held in each of the last 10 years for the purpose of appointing Health and Safety Executive executive officers. [17323]

Mr. Oppenheim: None. All group-wide panels for promotion to executive officer have been arranged to fill vacancies throughout the Employment Department group.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many current executive officers in the Health and Safety Executive have entered the executive officer grade without going before a Department of Employment group-wide formal promotion panel hearing. [17324]

Mr. Oppenheim: Thirty-six current executive officers in the Health and Safety Executive entered the executive officer grade without going before an Employment Department group-wide formal promotion panel.

Entry to the executive officer grade can be by direct entry on the basis of educational qualifications and passing an interview, or by appearing before a properly constituted promotion board.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *180*, if he can confirm *(a)* that the information requested on 19 January is contained in the Health and Safety Executive's SHIELD computer database and *(b)* that similar requests for information tabled by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) have previously been answered. [17328]

Mr. Oppenheim: Some of the information to which I referred in my reply of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *180*, will for the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division, be on the SHIELD database; the rest will be kept in paper files. Inspectorates in other HSE divisions will keep information both on separate database and in paper files.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of *(a)* the Health and Safety Executives's contracted-out advice helpline planned to commence in September, *(b)* the cost of the helpline in a full financial year and *(c)* details of the company awarded the contract. [17325]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Heath and Safety Executive is currently advertising for firms which are interested in providing a telephone information line. The firms which may wish to participate, details of the way that the service will operate and the costs will be established only by responses to the advertisement and the subsequent contracting process.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *184*, if he will publish details of the value of the contract between the Health and Safety Executive and the Norwich offshore safety division of Manpower. [17330]

Mr. Oppenheim: The offshore safety division of the Health and Safety Executive has placed a contract for six clerical support posts at its Norwich office with Manpower plc. The value of the contract is commercially confidential.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will *(a)* publish or *(b)* place in the Library the EMAS feasibility study; and when the prior options study of EMAS activities will be published. [17336]

Mr. Oppenheim: The employment medical advisory service feasibility and the prior options studies are one and the same thing. The EMAS feasibility study, when complete, will be internal, confidential, management advice to the Health and Safety Executive and the commission, and will not be published or placed in the Library.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will *(a)* publish the proposed salary to be awarded to the new director general of the Health and Safety Executive, *(b)* state what percentage increase the gross salary awarded will be in relation to the current director general's gross salary and *(c)* state whether the proposed award breaches the Health and Safety Executive's declared pay norm for staff of 1.5 per cent. in the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17329]

Mr. Oppenheim: The salaries of the current director general for the period after 1 April 1995 and of a new appointee have not yet been determined, but they will be made publicly available in the normal way. There has been no declaration of a pay norm of 1.5 per cent. for Health and Safety Executive staff in the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the future of the Health and Safety Executive library in Buxton, Derbyshire. [17326]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive does not have a library in Buxton, Derbyshire.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *178 (a)* how many of the 60 principal inspector's posts have been advertised for each of the Health and Safety Executive regions; and *(b)* by what dates he expects all posts to be advertised and filled. [17331]

Mr. Oppenheim: Further to my answer of 24 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *178*, no principal inspector's posts have been advertised.

"Investors in People" Award

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive application to receive an "Investors in People" award has been successful. [17335]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive is working towards gaining accreditation as an investor in people.

Greenwich Refugee and Training Project

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if money provided by the Home Secretary in pursuance of his statutory powers can be appropriated to meet a debt due to him under other statutory provisions; and if he will make a statement on the matters relating to the Greenwich refugee and training project raised in a recent letter from the hon. Member for Woolwich. [17338]

Mr. Paice: It is for the receiver to decide whether the Home Office ethnic minority grant funding is part of the assets held by him and to determine the correct course of action. If it is part of the assets available for the payment of creditors it is for the receiver to determine how these assets will be used to pay creditors in accordance with his statutory duties.

South Thames TEC

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what sums are due to Woolwich college for contracts entered into with South Thames TEC; and if he will make a statement. [17339]

Mr. Paice: The amount of money owing to any individual contractors for work carried out under contract to South Thames training and enterprise council is a matter for the receiver.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders will be fully reimbursed for any extension of contract authorised by the receiver or the Government office for London for provision of training by the new careers project; and if he will make a statement. [17337]

Mr. Paice: The Government office for London has asked the receiver of South Thames training and enterprise council to continue to provide training services until 24 April 1995. How this will be arranged is a matter for the receiver. All training for work and youth training credits providers were sent a letter by the receiver on 21 and 22 March 1995 outlining the new arrangements and enclosing new contracts where appropriate.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Commonwealth Aid Programmes

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he supplies training and technical assistance to Commonwealth countries for the purpose of enforcement of CITES as part of the Commonwealth aid programmes; and if he will make a statement. [16938]

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration supports a number of development activities which promote the conservation of endangered species and the strengthening of customs authorities in developing countries. However, it has no projects with the specific objective of assisting the enforcement of CITES.

Yemen

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those projects together with the financial amounts that the Overseas Development Agency funded in Yemen prior to the suspension of aid; and if he will make a statement. [16742]

Mr. Baldry: Projects on which expenditure was continuing when our aid personnel were withdrawn from Yemen on the outbreak of civil war in May 1994 were:

	Planned duration year	*Total commitment £*
National Veterinary Service Development Project: phase IV	1990–1995	8,500,000
Public Electricity Corporation: management assistance and training:	1992–1995	2,750,000
Sana'a University Professional English Teaching:	1991–1994	1,360,000
English for Development: English Language Teaching:	1993–1994	118,000
Aden University: training of English Teachers:	1991–1994	490,000

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to restore Overseas Development Agency funding for the Yemen with specific reference to the Sana'a university English training project; and if he will make a statement. [16743]

Mr. Baldry: In my reply to the hon. Member for Surrey East, (Mr. Ainsworth) on 20 March, *Official Report*, column 86, I announced that we would be resuming our aid programme in Yemen. We shall review with the Government of Yemen how best to use the available funds. Possible further funding for the Sana'a university professional English training project is amongst the small projects to be included in this review.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15241]

Mr. Horam: The child care and nursery facilities within the Departments and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible and other areas which fall to the Cabinet Office vote are as follows. Workplace nurseries are available to staff at the Civil Service college and Chessington computer centre. HMSO staff use a nursery in partnership with a local college. Holiday playschemes are available to all staff working in Departmental buildings in London and in Norwich.

Following is a breakdown by grade and gender of staff who use the nursery facilities.

Agency	Grade/band	Gender
Civil Service College	1 x Grade 6	All Female
	1 x Grade 7	
	1 x SEO	
	2 x HEO	
	5 x EO	
	3 x AO	
	1 x PS	
HMSO	1 x 11	Male
	2 x 10	2 Female
	4 x 9	2 Male: 2 Female
	5 x 8	1 Male: 4 Female
	9 x 7	5 Male: 4 Female
	2 x 6	2 Female
	5 x 5	2 Male: 3 Female
Chessington Computer Centre	1 x SHO	Male
	5 x HWO	1 Male: 4 Female
	10 x EO	5 Male: 5 Female
	5 x AO	1 Male: 4 Female
	1 x AA	Female

Information Technology Advisory Board

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the membership of the Information Technology Advisory Board at the time of its disbanding in March 1994; and for which companies each member was employed. [17318]

Mr. Horam: Following are the names of the members of the board at the time of its disbanding.

Name of Member	*Company*
Professor J. M. Brady	Department of Engineering Science, Oxford University
Professor M. Atkinson	Department of Computer Science, Glasgow University
Dr. K. Baughan	Nokia Mobile Phones
Professor M. J. Cardwell	Department of Electrical Engineering and Applied Physics, Aston University
Professor M. Denham	Department of Computing, University of Plymouth
Professor W. Eccleston	Department of Electronics and Engineering, Liverpool University
Mr. G. Hayes	TSB Bank plc
Professor J. J. O'Reilly	School of Engineering and Science, University College of north Wales

Name of Member	*Company*
Professor R. H. Perrott	School of Electrical and Computer Science, Queen's University of Belfast
Dr. I. L. Robertson	Electronics and Information Technology Division, British Technology Group
Dr. J. Taylor	Hewlett Packard Laboratories
Mr. M. Thomas	Praxis, plc
Ms J. E. Tozer	Softwright
Mr. A. O. Ward	British Aerospace Military Aircraft Ltd.

Civil Service (Equality of Opportunity)

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress towards achieving equality of opportunity for women staff in the civil service. [17803]

Mr. David Hunt: Considerable progress has been made since the first programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity for women in the civil service was launched in 1984. Women now represent 51.3 per cent. of staff in the non-industrial home civil service compared with 47.7 per cent. in 1984. Women's participation is also increasing in the management grades, with almost 10 per cent. at grades 1 to 3 compared with under 5 per cent. 10 years ago. Nearly half of executive officer level posts—the first step in the management rung—are now held by women. Indeed, a huge range of complex jobs is being carried out by ambitious, committed women in all grades up to the very top.

A report on the progress made since 1984 towards achieving equality of opportunity for women in the civil service was published yesterday. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Obsolete Restrictive Covenants

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how the Government have responded to the Law Commission report on obsolete restrictive covenants of 16 July 1991, Law Com 201; and if he intends to respond further. [16158]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have received a number of comments on this report, and are discussing these with the Law Commission. An announcement will be made when those discussions are concluded.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15229]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has access to 12 nursery facilities for pre-school children and 18 holiday playschemes for children of primary school age. A breakdown of the staff using these facilities, by grade and gender is shown in the following table:

Breakdown of staff using Departmental child care facilities

Grade	*Male*	*Female*
Grade 5	1	0
Grade 6	0	1
Grade 7	3	2
SEO	1	4
HEO	4	10
EO	1	20
AO	4	27
AA	0	3
Personal Secretary	0	1
Typist	0	7
Bailiff	1	0
Support Grades	0	3

Legal Aid

Ms Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the total sums of money *(a)* recouped and *(b)* charged against properties by the Legal Aid Board in matrimonial cases, for the last five years for which figures are available. [16114]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total amounts retained by the Legal Aid Board in respect of charges under section 16(6) of the Legal Aid Act 1988 in matrimonial proceedings were as follows:

1989–90: £24.2 million
1990–91: £24.7 million
1991–92: £27.9 million
1992–93: £34.6 million
1993–94: £37.1 million

These figures include money received in satisfaction of registered charges during each year.

The total amounts registered against properties in respect of all proceedings were as follows:

1989–90: £9.2 million
1990–91: £11.6 million
1991–92: £16.9 million
1992–93: £25.6 million
1993–94: £26.7 million

Ms Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sums of money are allocated by the Legal Aid Board for matrimonial and ancillary relief cases, for the last five years for which figures are available. [16113]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to provide net expenditure figures in respect of ancillary relief matters alone. Net expenditure in respect of matrimonial cases, including ancillary relief, for the last five years are as follows.

1989–90: £87.5 million
1990–91: £108.6 million
1991–92: £150.5 million
1992–93: £207.2 million
1993–94: £266.7 million

Courts Service

Mr. Nick Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Court Service is to be established as an executive agency. [18008]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Further to my answer of 27 May 1993 to my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), *Official Report*, 27 May 1993, column *657*, I am please to confirm that the Lord Chancellor will establish the Court Service as an executive agency on 3 April 1995. I will arrange for a copy of the framework document for the Court Service to be placed in the Library. The following table sets out the key performance targets which the Lord Chancellor has set for the Court Service for 1995–96:

The Court Service—key performance targets for 1995–96

Business area	*Performance indicator*	*Target*
Crown Court	1. Percentage of defendants committed for trial waiting 16 weeks or less	70 per cent.
	2. Unit cost of a productive courtroom hour	£462.40
County Courts	3. Percentage of administrative process dealt with within target time	90 per cent.
	4. Unit cost of an hour of administrative work as measured by the Business Management System	£53.39
High Court	5. Percentage of administrative process dealt with within target time	93 per cent.
Enforcement	6. Number of warrants paid as a percentage of number of correctly directed warrants	65 per cent.
Quality	7. Percentage of courts meeting all Courts Charter Standards	95 per cent.
Cost recovery	8. Percentage of the costs of civil business recovered	75 per cent.

HEALTH

Departmental Staff

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of people directly employed by her Department and by executive agencies accountable to her Department, expressed as full-time equivalent posts for *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93 and *(d)* 1993–94; and if she will give the projected figures for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [16091]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Years	*Total DH*	*Non agency*	*Agencies*
Previous Figures			
April 1990[1]	5,388	5,134	254
April 1991[1]	4,651	4,339	312
April 1992[1]	4,803	4,172	631
April 1993[1]	4,846	3,682	1,164
April 1994[1]	4,672	3,283	1,389
Projected Figures			
April 1995	4,550	3,113	1,437
April 1996	4,294	2,881	1,413
April 1997	4,039	2,677	1,362

Source:

[1] Department of Health Staff in Post Data.

Subject to Parliament's consent to the Health Authorities Bill, 1,100 staff from the current regional health authorities will transfer into the Department on 1 April 1996.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price; [16644]

(2) what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16645]

Mr. Sackville: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The five reports to date of the Department of Health and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys have been published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which has borne the main printing and publication costs with the aim of recovering these from the sales revenue.

The table shows the additional costs incurred by the Department of Health, in relation to the associated artwork.

Year	*Artwork costs of Departmental Report (£–in 1994–95 prices)*
1991	852
1992	1,541
1993	1,081
1994	1,132
1995	1,969

Some 3,150 copies of the 1995 departmental report, Cm 2812, have been printed and published.

Copies have been laid before Parliament and circulated to regional and district health authorities, family health services authorities, national health service trusts, social services departments, and members of the press.

HMSO has produced just over 1,300 further copies at a price of £18.40 net; sales of these are a matter for it.

Special Needs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to implement facilities for orthoptists to deal with special needs children in conjunction with education authorities. [16594]

Mr. Bowis: The Education Act 1993 introduced a duty on health authorities and national health service trusts to co-operate with local education authorities in the assessment of children with special educational needs. A code of practice issued under the Act emphasises the need for external consultation when children are suspected of having visual difficulties and there are well-established arrangements within child health services for referral to orthoptists and, where necessary, ophthalmologists.

Malaria

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when malaria protection for travellers ceased to be available under the national health service. [16239]

Mr. Sackville: Advice on the precautions which should be taken when travelling to a malarious area continues to be available under the national health service. The regulations—SI 1995/80—giving general practitioners the power to charge for drugs for malaria prophylaxis, and thus ending NHS provision of anti-malarial drugs for travellers, came into effect on 6 February. Patients who have contracted illnesses requiring the same drug therapy, such as malaria or rheumatoid arthritis, will continue to receive these drugs on the NHS.

NHS Purchasing

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by the NHS on purchasing care from non-NHS bodies in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [16888]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 9 December 1994, column *401*. This information was not available centrally prior to 1991–92.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the child care or nursery facilities within her Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15228]

Mr. Sackville: The Department provides the following childcare facilities for its staff: 43 nursery places; holiday playschemes each half term and major school holidays; a child care co-ordinator to provide Leeds-based staff with advice on local child care facilities and a subscription to "Childcare Solutions", an information service on child care facilities available nationally. Except for nursery places, records of usage of child care facilities are not kept by grade and gender. The table shows the current allocation of nursery places by grade and gender.

Grade	*Male*	*Female*
G7	2	2
SEO	2	1
HEO	2	5
EO	4	8
AO	—	1
AA	—	1
SPES	—	1
PES	—	8

NHS Hospitals

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals there were in England *(a)* by region and *(b)* in total in each year since 1979. [17068]

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of hospitals in England by region is as shown in the table.

Approximate number of hospitals on 31 March 1994

NHS region	*Approximate number*
Northern and Yorkshire	230
Trent	115
Anglia and Oxford	120
North Thames	190
South Thames	190
South and West	320
West Midlands	140
North West	135
Total	1,440

Figures include an estimate for incomplete returns.

This information was not available centrally for previous years.

Accident and Emergency Treatments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been *(a)* the percentage change of accident and emergency treatments and *(b)* the total number for each region in each of the last three years. [17082]

Mr. Sackville: The information on activity in accident and emergency departments is for new attendances and total attendances. Regional information for each of the last three years is published in table 8 of "Outpatients and Ward attenders, England, Financial Year 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library.

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column 742, what was the total expenditure on all forms of publicity by her Department and its agencies for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94. [17245]

Mr. Sackville: Expenditure on publicity for 1992–93 and 1993–94 is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	19.053
1993–94	19.147

This largely represents public health campaigns; information for the national health service, general practitioners and the medical professions.

EDUCATION

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the child care or nursery facilities within her Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15243]

Mr. Forth: London based staff are able to use the Westminster holiday play scheme, which is organised by the Office of Public Service and Science. The cost of places is shared equally by parents and the Department.

Darlington-based staff have access to a holiday play scheme which was set up at the instigation of the Department for Education. Places are shared with civil servants working in the Darlington area.

The table provides a separate breakdown of usage of the holiday play schemes in London and Darlington for *(a)* grade and *(b)* gender.

	Number
London	
(a)	
Grade 7	2
HEO	4
EO	3
AO	1
Personal Secretary	2
Support Grade	1
(b)	
Four male and nine female staff	—
Darlington	
(a)	
SEO	4
HEO	5
EO	6
AO	21
AA	3
Typist	1
Support Grade	1
(b)	
Five male and 36 female staff	—

The figures are of staff using the holiday play scheme for their children on one or more occasions for the year ending 28 February 1995.

Public Bodies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average number of days worked per week by the chairmen of each non-departmental public body sponsored by her Department. [17353]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is given in the following table:

Non-departmental Public Body	*Number of days expected to be worked per week averaged over a year*[1]
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit	[2]0.25
Centre for Information on Language Teaching	[2]0.1
Education Assets Board	3
Funding Agency for Schools	2
Further Education Unit	[2]1.7
Further Education Funding Council	2
Higher Education Funding Council in England	2
National Council for Education Technology	[2]0.35
National Youth Agency	0.4
School Curriculum Assessment Authority	2.5
Special Educational Needs Tribunal	[3]2
Teacher Training Agency	1
University Commissioners	[2,4]—

[1] Chairmen can often work for more days than is usually expected of them.

[2] These chairmen are unpaid. The others are either paid or receive an honorarium.

[3] The President of the SEN tribunal is appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

[4] The main body of work carried out by the commissioners ended in 1993–94. The chairman will work on an ad hoc basis until the residual work is completed.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the total number of staff employed by all non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department, including the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and Ofsted, for each year since 1987; [17249]

(2) if she will list the names and most recent salaries and other emoluments of the chief executives and chairmen of the *(a)* National Youth Agency, *(b)* National Council for Vocational Qualifications, *(c)* National Council for Education Technology, *(d)* Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, *(e)* Education Assets Board, *(f)* School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *(g)* teaching as a career unit, *(h)* Further Education Funding Council, *(i)* Higher Education Funding Council for England, *(j)* Funding Agency for Schools, *(k)* Teacher Training Agency and *(i)* Ofsted; [17247]

(3) if she will give the total expenditure on the salaries and other emoluments of the chief executives and the chairmen of all non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department, including the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and Ofsted, for each year since 1987. [17250]

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with the information requested.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the total running costs of all non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department including the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and Ofsted for each year since 1987. [17248]

Mr. Boswell: The National Council for Vocational Qualifications is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

I will write to the hon. Member with information on running costs of the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department as soon as possible.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on future funding for grant-maintained schools. [17984]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am pleased to announce that the Government propose to introduce legislation amending the Education Act 1993 to allow grant-maintained schools to borrow from sources other than the Funding Agency for Schools. This measure opens the way for increased business investment in schools in accordance with the Government's private finance initiative. Local education authorities can already, within limits, borrow commercially and fund their school capital programmes from a mix of capital receipts, revenue monies and borrowing. GM schools are at present almost entirely dependent on central Government grant.

GM schools have expressed keen interest in the possibility of commercial borrowing. They have demonstrated that they are able to manage their own budgets effectively, and it is right that they should be able to benefit from the flexibility that such legislation will bring. Vital schools assets must of course be protected, and the new arrangements will provide for that.

Student Loans

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what factors led to the inclusion in the calculation of grants for mature students of student loans; and if she will make a statement. [17220]

Mr. Boswell: The Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations, which govern the payment of mandatory awards, require that account be taken of a student's income from all sources reduced by income tax and social security contributions. Student loans, however, are specifically disregarded for the purpose of calculating a student's income.

Schools Science Week

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the cost to her Department of the Schools Science Week. [17187]

Mr. Forth: None. Support for national science week is a matter for the Office of Science and Technology.

Special Needs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans her Department has to increase resourcing for the implementation of the special needs code of practice. [17217]

Mr. Forth: The grant for education support and training programme in England in 1994–95 includes support of £5.6 million to enable schools to develop their policies for special educational needs in the light of the code of practice, and support of £3.7 million to enable LEAs to develop local parent-partnership schemes as recommended in the code of practice. These figures will be increased respectively to £10.2 million and £4 million, in 1995–96.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in the legislation introduced by her Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17040]

Mr. Forth: It is extremely unlikely that the Education Acts contain any reference to an individual hon. Member. There are frequent statutory references to Parliament and to officers of state where functions are conferred upon them. Information on references to Parliament, individual hon. Members or officers of sate could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

References to the House of Commons, as opposed to references to Parliament or "either House of Parliament", are rare.

Teacher Quality (Universities)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many university departments have failed to achieve a satisfactory rating for their teaching quality. [16898]

Mr. Boswell: Under the assessment arrangements operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, three university departments have failed to achieve a satisfactory rating for teaching quality out of over 600 assessments and one of those has subsequently been regraded as satisfactory on a follow up visit. over 99 per cent. of assessed provision is graded as satisfactory or better.

Padstow School

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) when she expects to notify the Nottinghamshire county council of her decision on the proposals for Padstow school published on 30 June 1994; and if she will make a statement; [16664]

(2) when she expects to notify the Nottinghamshire county council of her decision on the proposals for Padstow school published on 30 June 1994; and if she will make a statement. [16664]

Mr. Robin Squire: Nottinghamshire county council was notified in a letter dated 23 March that my right hon. Friend proposed to give grant-maintained status to Padstow comprehensive school and, subject to the governor's agreement to certain modifications, to reject the proposal published on 30 June 1994 to cease to maintain the school.

TREASURY

Balance of Trade

13. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Untied Kingdom's balance of trade and its effect on the economy. [15287]

Mr. Aitken: Our balance of payments figures show a current account surplus of £2 billion in the last six months. Exports are growing by 13 per cent. These excellent results have contributed to the UK's gross domestic product growth of around 4 per cent.

Self-assessment for Tax

15. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has that payment on tax through self-assessment is likely to improve the tax collection rate. [15290]

Sir George Young: Tax collection should be streamlined by moving to a current year basis of assessment and through self-assessment by largely removing the lengthy process of estimated assessments and appeals.

Private Finance Initiative

16. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the contribution which the private finance initiative could make to *(a)* infrastructure and *(b)* other projects by the end of the decade. [15291]

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend announced in his Budget speech that contracts leading to £5 billion worth of capital investment are due to be signed in 1995 under the PFI. He announced a further £1 billion of projects in January. Much more will follow as PFI becomes the procurement route of choice.

Tax Increases

17. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the economy of the direct and indirect tax rises announced in the 1994 Budget statement. [15292]

Sir George Young: The tax changes announced in the 1994 Budget statement are expected to have a broadly neutral effect on the economy.

Direct Taxation

18. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect on the economy of changes in the level of direct taxation since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [15293]

Sir George Young: Since 1979, we have reduced the standard rate of income tax from 33p in the pound to 25p in the pound, and a loser rate of 20p in the pound now covers over 5 million people. We have also reduced the main corporation tax rate, from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent. These changes have improved incentives and helped the supply side.

Interest Rates

19. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect recent changes in interest rates have had on the economy. [15294]

Mr. Nelson: The recent rises in interest rates are intended to ensure inflation remains under control and healthy economy recovery is sustained.

Alcohol Smuggling

20. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress Customs and Excise has made in the past 12 months in tackling cross-border smuggling of alcohol. [15295]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Customs and Excise has continued to take vigorous action against those engaged in cross-border smuggling of alcohol. In the 12 months to 31 January 1995, it made 910 detections related to alcohol with a review value of £1,970,953.

Government Debt

21. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the gross general Government debt as a percentage of gross domestic product for European Union member states in 1994 in descending order. [15296]

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is shown in the following table. This shows that among EU member states, only Luxembourg has a lower debt-GDP ratio than the United Kingdom.

Gross general Government debt up to 1994 as a percentage of GDP

Belgium	140
Italy	124
Greece	121
Ireland	89
Sweden	79
Netherlands	79
Denmark	78
Portugal	70
Finland	70
Spain	64
Austria	65
Germany	51
France	50
United Kingdom[1]	49
Luxembourg	9

Source:

[1] End March 1995

For UK, excessive deficits return 1 March 1995; for other EU countries, European Commission Economic Forecast, November 1994.

Personal Debt

22. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present level of personal debt in the United Kingdom. [15297]

Mr. Nelson: At the end of December 1994, total personal sector debt was £523 billion. Personal sector financial assets were £1,645 billion.

Inheritance Tax

23. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of money raised via inheritance tax for the last year for which figures are available. [15298]

Sir George Young: Net receipts of inheritance tax for the year ending March 1995 are provisionally estimated at £1,425 million.

Gaming Machines

24. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the income in 1995–96 from the tax on fruit machines and other game machines in public houses; and if this estimate takes into account the withdrawal of some machines as a result of his proposals. [15299]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The 1995–96 forecast for all betting and gaming duties in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" is £1.2 billion. This figure takes account of policy measures announced in the Budget; there are no separate forecasts for the different duties.

Direct Taxation

25. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he had made of the effect on the economy of reductions in the levels of direct taxation since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [15301]

Sir George Young: Since 1979, we have reduced the standard rate of income tax from 33p in the pound to 25p in the pound, and a lower rate of 2p in the pound now covers over 5 million people. We have also reduced the main corporation tax rate, from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent. These changes have improved incentives and helped the supply side.

Small Businesses

26. **Sir Donald Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress of measures to help small business announced in his November 1993 and 1994 Budgets. [15302]

Mr. Aitken: The Government have taken action to implement all measures aimed at small businesses announced in the November 1993 and 1994 Budgets. Progress on the main measures is as follows:

Enterprise Investment Scheme

The scheme, announced in 1993 and enhanced in the 1994 Budget, has been implemented with effect from 1 January 1994. Early indications are that, on average, companies are raising £80,000 under the EIS and over 50 per cent. of EIS equity issues involve a business angel.

Venture Capital Trusts

The necessary legislation is expected to come into force from 6 April 1995 following Royal Assent.

Relaxation of audit requirements

In August 1994, regulations were introduced exempting most small companies with a turnover of up to £350,000 from the statutory requirement to have their annual accounts audited; companies with a turnover of up to £90,000 may dispense with audit altogether, while the remainder only need a simple report by an independent accountant.

Prompt payment

A package of measures aimed at improving payment performance in the public sector has now been implemented. The Government are also working with the business community through a CBI working group to develop proposals for a British standard for prompt payment; consulting on the implementation of a requirement on public companies to state their payment policies in their directors' reports and reviewing court systems and procedures for debt recovery. These measures are aimed at bringing about a change in business culture and hence, shorter payment times.

Insolvency reform

A further consultation paper will be issued shortly.

Financial Management Certificate

A consultation paper will be issued shortly.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

A consultation document was issued on 10 March.

Small businesses have also benefited from the various tax measures and refinements announced in these budgets and from the continuation of the scheme of transitional relief to ease the impact of the revaluation in business rates.

Feel-good Factor

27. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of when the feel-good factor will permeate the economy. [15303]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I believe that consumer confidence will strengthen as people come to feel more secure about their jobs and living standards. This will happen progressively through sustained economic growth, which Government policies are achieving.

Privatised Utilities (Executive Pay)

28. **Ms. Church:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new proposal he has with regard to executive remuneration in the privatised utilities. [15304]

Sir George Young: Remuneration is a matter for the companies and their shareholders. The Greenbury committee is reviewing best practice for companies and we will consider the need for any Government measures, if appropriate, in the light of its conclusions.

Funding Programme

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the Government's funding programme for 1995–96. [17875]

Mr. Nelson: Yes. The Government today published the 1995–96 debt management report. This report, the first of an annual series, includes details of the 1995–96 funding programme. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15231]

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury participates in the Westminster holiday playscheme. Until the end of July 1994, my Department also offered subsidised places at a Westminster-based nursery for short-term emergency use. However, due to lack of demand, it gave poor value for money and the contract was not renewed.

The use by Treasury staff of the Department's child care and nursery facilities in 1994 broken down by grade and gender is set out in the following tables.

Westminster holiday playscheme: days used by Treasury staff in 1994

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
Grade 5	8	42	50
Grade 6	68	0	68
Grade 7	55	33	88
SEO	9	16	25
HEO	0	30	30
EO	18	31	49
PS	0	187	187
SGB1	0	6	6
Total	158	345	503

Emergency Nursery: Days used by Treasury Staff 1 January 1994–31 July 1994

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
Grade 5	4	0	4
Grade 7	0	7	7
Total	4	7	11

Economic Recovery

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from employee organisations about the progress of economic recovery. [15459]

Mr. Aitken: Treasury Ministers meet representatives from employee organisations from time to time and discuss a wide range of issues.

EC Budget

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year from 1979 to the present, in 1994 prices *(a)* the total budget of the European Community, *(b)* the total cost of the common agricultural policy, *(c)* Britain's gross contribution to the EC budget, *(d)* Britain's net contribution to the EC budget and *(e)* total payments to British farmers from the common agricultural policy. [16857]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is shown in the table:

£ million—1994 prices

	(a) Total EC budget	*(b) Total EAGGF*[2] *Guarantee*	*(c) UK's gross contribution to the EC budget (after abatement)*	*(d) UK's net contribution to the EC budget*	*(e) Total UK EAGGF*[2] *receipts*
1979	23,701	17,213	4,091	2,412	754
1980	20,993	14,570	3,603	1,524	1,141
1981	18,973	11,683	2,857	766	1,156
1982	20,322	12,308	3,275	1,076	1,272
1983	24,222	15,730	3,683	1,099	1,685
1984	26,302	17,513	4,328	1,061	2,027
1985	25,222	17,708	5,660	2,756	1,701
1986	33,836	21,890	4,116	843	1,962
1987	49,974	32,471	5,728	2,435	1,742
1988	55,671	35,591	4,780	1,837	1,684
1989	51,458	30,601	5,544	2,896	1,421
1990	49,499	28,540	5,322	2,828	1,469
1991	40,633	23,813	3,570	587	1,708
1992	44,742	23,858	5,053	2,112	1,712
1993[1]	51,187	27,442	5,577	2,207	2,205

[1] The latest year for which outturn information is published.[2] EAGGF: European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund.

Exchange rate: annual average £1—ecu rate.

Price deflator: Retail Price Index.

Source:

Annual statement on the Community budget; and European Court of Auditor's annual report.

Mr. John Bercow

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what conditions have been attached to the employment contract of Mr. John Bercow as special adviser to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to avoid conflicts of interest with his previous employers and their clients. [15832]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There are standard terms and conditions for all special advisers. They are subject in this respect to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, who must not make use of their official position to further their private interests or those of others. Where a conflict arises, it must be declared.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the precise terms of John Bercow's appointment to be his special adviser; and what pecuniary interests he retains in public relations companies. [15759]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Mr. John Bercow took up appointment as special adviser to the Chief Secretary on 20 March 1995. There are standard terms and conditions for all special advisers, based on those for other civil servants. In particular, the general principles of conduct for civil servants—that is, relating to business interests or shareholdings—apply to special advisers. Mr. Bercow has retained no pecuniary interest in any public relations company.

Mr. Mick Newmarch

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings he, his ministerial colleagues or his officials have had with Mr. Mick Newmarch; and what matters relative to the sale of pensions and other investment products were discussed. [16570]

Mr. Nelson: Ministers and officials have met senior figures from firms in the financial services industry, including Mr. Mick Newmarch, from time to time and discussed a range of issues.

Investments and Pensions (Sales)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about progress by the regulators set up under the Financial Services Act 1986 *(a)* to compensate people who were mis-sold pensions and other investment products and *(b)* to deter and punish those found guilty of deliberately mis-selling such products. [16608]

Mr. Nelson: I have received a number of such representations.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has of the number of people mis-sold pensions and other investment products since sections 44 and 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986 came into operation. [16657]

Mr. Nelson: As far as personal pensions transfers and opt-outs are concerned, I refer to the reply I gave on 25 October 1994 to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), *Official Report*, column *508*. For other investment products, some of the cases compensated by the investors compensation scheme and through the financial services regulators may have involved mis-selling. There are no central records which distinguish such cases.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his officials, and those of the regulators established under the Financial Services Act 1986, are instructed to inform those complaining about mis-selling of pensions and other investment products, that they have redress through the criminal law as well as through the regulatory system. [16568]

Mr. Nelson: No. Although investors can seek redress through the courts, the regulatory system under the Financial Services Act should provide redress in a more timely fashion and with less administrative cost for investors.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* criminal investigations and *(b)* criminal prosecutions have been brought under section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986. [16569]

Mr. Nelson: The Department of Trade and Industry, the Serious Fraud Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and the procurators fiscal in Scotland have powers to bring prosecutions under section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986. Disaggregated figures do not exist showing cases brought by the SFO or the CPS and no cases have been brought by the procurators fiscal. The DTI has mounted criminal investigations in six cases; four cases have been prosecuted resulting in two convictions.

Civil List Audit

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to transfer the audit of the civil list from the Treasury to the Comptroller and Auditor General. [16924]

Mr. Kenneth Clark *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* None.

National Debt

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many years it would take before the existing national debt could be fully paid off from the present value of the national fund on the assumption of a compound tax free rate of 8 per cent. per annum. [16803]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* Based on the most recent figures for the value of the fund and of the national debt and assuming a compound tax-free interest rate of 8 per cent. it would take approximately 100 years before the existing national debt could be fully paid off under the terms of the trust.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional annual taxation which will be incurred in the financial year 1995–96 versus the year 1992–93 as a consequence of intervening changes in income tax, tax reliefs, national insurance contributions and duty rates, beyond those due to standard indexation for inflation, for average taxpayers in the pre-tax income bands *(a)* 0 to £2,500, *(b)* £2,001 to £5,000, *(c)* £5,001 to £10,000, *(d)* £10,001 to £20,000, *(e)* £20,001 to £30,000, *(f)* £30,001 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 to £100,000 and *(h)* over £100,000.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 29 March 1995]:* The change in annual taxation for the average taxpayer in these income bands will depend on their personal circumstances and spending pattern as well as on their income.

ENVIRONMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report,* column *550,* whether copies of all letters from Ministers in his Department to local government leaders sent in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1988, *(e)* 1989 and *(f)* before March 1990 have now been destroyed. [15848]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This could be ascertained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report,* column *550,* if it is the practice of his Department to destroy all general correspondence after five years; and when this policy was introduced. [15849]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department's practice is to destroy files of general correspondence not later than five years after they have been closed. This practice accords with the provisions of the Public Records Act 1958 and with guidance from the Public Record Office.

National Parks (Quarries)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated working life of the quarries in each national park. [15889]

Mr. Atkins: The significant active quarries in the national parks are listed, together with the approximate lifespan provided for under the current permissions. The information shown in the table has been supplied by the national park authorities.

National Park	*Quarry*	*Estimated lifespan in line with current permissions (Years)*
Dartmoor	Meldon	59
	Linhay Hill	53
	Yennadon	31
Exmoor	None	—
Lake District	Brathay	50
	Broughton Moor	50
	Bursting Stone	5
	Elterwater	10
	Hill Fellside	10
	Hodge Close	5
	Honistor	not yet established
	Kendall Fell	50
	Low Brandy Crag	5
	Petts	10
	Shap Beck	not yet established
	Shap Blue	not yet established
	Shap Pink	15
Northumberland	Roddam	6
	Cop Crag	11
	Saffron	11
	Harden	47
North York Moors	Spaunton	12
	Spikers Hill	9
Peak District	Estimated to be over 25 major active quarries	between a range of 30–50
Yorkshire Dales	Acrow	26
	Coolscar	2
	Dry Rigg	47
	Giggleswick	47
	Horton	47
	Ingleton	23
	Swinden	47
	Threshfield	47

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the lifespan for the disused quarries in each of the national parks. [15888]

Mr. Atkins: There is a very large number of disused quarries in the national parks, but no comprehensive records of their working life.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what carbon dioxide emissions savings he now expects to be delivered by 2000 by (i) the imposition of VAT on fuel, (ii) energy savings in the public sector, (iii) new combined heat and power plant, (iv) new renewable capacity, (v) stricter building regulations and (vi) increases in efficiency of domestic appliances. [15897]

Mr. Atkins: As announced by the Secretary of State on 8 March, VAT on domestic fuel and power is expected to deliver savings of 0.4 million tonnes of carbon—MtC. I continue to expect combined heat and power to deliver savings of 1 MtC and the new building regulations to contribute 0.25 MtC. I expect the contributions of the public sector and renewable energy to be as set out in the UK climate change programme subject to adjustment to reflect the reduced carbon intensity of the electricity displaced. The adjusted figures are 0.8 MtC from the public sector and 0.4 MtC from new renewable energy capacity. The carbon savings expected from improved efficiency of domestic appliances have not been separately quantified at present.

Local Authorities (Restrictive Covenants)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to allow local authorities to be able to disregard restrictive covenants in the provision of certain public facilities and amenities; and if he will make a statement. [16157]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to prevent previous owners from using restrictive covenants to profit from agreeing to allow present freeholders to make a planning application and from the subsequent development; and if he will make a statement. [16156]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply. The Government have received a number of comments on the Law Commission's report on obsolete restrictive covenants, Law Com. No. 201, and it is discussing these with the commission. An announcement will be made when those discussions are concluded.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what organisations and other bodies have made representations to him on the subject of local government reorganisation since his statement of 2 March, *Official Report*, columns *696–97*; and if he will make a statement; [16492]

(2) with whom he has held discussions on the subject of local government reorganisation since his statement of 2 March; and if he will make a statement; [16493]

(3) what discussions he will have with county councils and other district councils in those areas where a hybrid solution is *(a)* being proposed or *(b)* may be proposed following the fourth local government review; and if he will make a statement. [16494]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State has received a large number of representations from organisations and other bodies since 2 March, but it is not possible to identify all these representations individually except at disproportionate cost. The Secretary of State has met the following organisations specifically to discuss local government reorganisation since his announcement on 2 March: South Hams district council, meeting arranged before the announcement of his decision on Devon; Unison; GMB and the Transport and General Workers Union.

All those district councils mentioned in the announcements on 2 and 21 March as possible cases for further review will be invited to discuss their cases for unitary status. These are: Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe; Dartford and Gravesham; Exeter; Gloucester; Huntingdonshire; Halton; Norwich; The Wrekin.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which former county boroughs are to be reconsidered under the new review for unitary status; [16487]

(2) which former county boroughs are to regain unitary status following local government reorganisation; [16486]

(3) which areas that were not former county boroughs are to be given unitary status following local government reorganisation; [16488]

(4) which areas that were not former county boroughs are to be considered for unitary status under the new review; [16489]

(5) which former county boroughs will remain as district authorities in a two-tier system following local government reorganisation; [16490]

(6) what is the population of each of *(a)* the new proposed unitary authorities, *(b)* those areas under the new review for possible unitary status and *(c)* those districts remaining within a two-tier system. [16491]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We intend to refer the following districts to the Local Government Commission for a further review—those marked '*' were, or have within their areas, former county boroughs:

Blackburn* 139,528
Gillingham 95,969
Northampton* 187,244
Warrington* 185,005
Basildon 161,699
Blackpool* 139,528
Rochester 146,201
Peterborough 158,375
Thurrock 131,226

We are considering whether to refer the following districts to the Local Government Commission for a further review—those marked '*' were, or have within their current areas, former county boroughs:

Broxtowe 110,566
Exeter* 105,087
Gloucester* 104,805
Halton 124,111
Norwich* 128,050
The Wrekin 142,724
Dartford 82,600
Gedling 111,566
Gravesham 93,029
Huntingdonshire 148,786
Rushcliffe 101,457

We have announced that we have accepted the commission's proposals for unitary status for the following districts or combination of districts—those marked '*' were, or have within their proposed areas, former county boroughs:

Bristol* 397,585
Woodspring 182,140
Luton 178,642
Windsor 136,695
Reading* 137,749
Wokingham 142,894
Langbaurgh 143,858
Stockton 177,794
Derby* 228,648
Torbay 121,113
Bournemouth* 159,876
Brighton and Hove* 242,925
Portsmouth 189,073
Herefordshire 162,000(est)
York (extended) 167,000(est)
Stoke-on-Trent 252,914
Hull 267,889
Bath and Wansdyke* 163,533
Northavon and Kingswood 230,078
Bracknell Forest 101,905
Newbury 140,967
Slough 103,454
Milton Keynes 184,440
Middlesborough* 145,843
Hartlepool* 91,982
Plymouth* 259,040
Poole 137,159
Darlington* 100,163
Southend* 167,523
Southampton 209,192
Isle of Wight 124,773
Nottingham 282,590
Thamesdown 173,761
E Yorks and Beverley and part Boothferry 293,000(est)
Glanford and Scunthorpe and part Boothferry 151,335(est)
Cleethorpes and Great Grimsby 162,003

Final decisions are outstanding on Leicester*, 289,286, and Rutland, 33,413, pending further consideration of cost and service delivery implications of a unitary Rutland.

Apart from those mentioned above, the following districts were, or contain within their areas, former county boroughs and are to remain in a two-tier county:

Barrow in Furness 73,299
Canterbury 132,391
Chester 120,845
East Staffs 98,300
Hastings 82,937
Lincoln 85,502

Preston 132,166
Burnley 91,446
Carlisle 102,878
Eastbourne 82,937
Great Yarmouth 88,799
Ipswich 114,806
Oxford 131,967
Worcester 104,934

Excluding all the districts listed above, the other districts in England have population ranging from 25,000 to 163,400. All population figures are the Registrar General's estimates for mid-1993.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what compensation will be available for staff who are obliged to take lower paid jobs as a result of the reorganisation of local government in England and Wales. [18053]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On 5 December 1994 my Department issued a consultation paper on proposals for compensating local authority staff who may be obliged to accept lower paid jobs as a result of local government reorganisation in England and Wales. Having carefully considered the responses, I intend shortly to bring forward draft regulations setting out a compensation scheme which will allow for staff to have their salary maintained for a transitional three-year period if they are appointed to a new job at a lower salary during the reorganisation period—between the shadow elections and 18 months after reorganisation in England; between shadow elections and 31 March 1997 in Wales.

By avoiding the need for redundancy payments and encouraging councils to restrain existing employees in new jobs, the scheme should benefit staff, employers and the taxpayer.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16614]

Sir Paul Beresford: Departmental annual reports were published for the first time in 1991. The quantifiable costs to the Department, in the five years of publication, of producing and circulating the report have been as follows:

(£ real terms—1993–94 prices using GDP deflators)

1991: 21,724

1992: 45,700

1993: 56,473

1994: 67,774

1995: 51,938

These are the costs of designing and typesetting the report, and of purchasing copies for the Department's own use or for complimentary distribution.

Other costs include the staff time involved in drafting the report, which is not separately recorded, and the costs of printing and publishing, which have been borne by HMSO with the aim of recovering the outlay for sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16613]

Sir Paul Beresford: The quantifiable costs to the Department of producing and circulating the 1995 annual report, CM 2807, were £52,977. Of this, £26,747 was for design, indexing and typesetting, and £26,230 was for purchasing copies for the Department's own use and for distribution free to interested bodies, including to Opposition spokesmen, the Environment Select Committee and the English local authorities. Of the 3,350 copies produced, 1,800 were bought by the Department.

Other costs include staff time in drafting the report, which was not separately recorded, and the costs of its printing and publishing, which were borne by HMSO with the aim of recovering the outlay from sales revenue. The cover price of the 1995 report is £18.60.

Council Tax, Gloucestershire

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of council tax set by local authorities in Gloucestershire for the financial year 1994–95. [16260]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The level at which an authority sets its council taxes is a matter for councillors to decide in the light of all its authority's circumstances. Only if an authority is designated under the "capping" provisions at section 54 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 would the Secretary of State take a view on whether an authority's budget requirement is excessive.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his policy on other EU states exporting hazardous waste to the United Kingdom, with particular reference to mercury; what representations he has made in the last three years to other members states that they should treat such waste in their countries; and what measures he proposes to encourage other EU states to pursue a policy of dealing with their own waste material; [16224]

(2) what evaluation he has made of the incentives applying to countries who currently export hazardous waste to *(a)* become self-sufficient in dealing with hazardous waste and *(b)* develop suitable technology to effectively treat and render harmless hazardous waste. [16229]

Mr. Atkins: It has been the Government's policy since the 1990 environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", that developed countries should become self-sufficient in disposing of their own waste. The United Kingdom negotiated successfully for the principle of national self-sufficiency in waste disposal to be incorporated into the EC waste shipments regulation—259/93.

The Government have long made clear their intention to implement as far as possible national self-sufficiency in waste disposal. This policy aim is pursued in the draft management plan for imports and exports of waste, which has recently been the subject of public consultation and copies of which are in the Library. In particular, the draft plan proposes banning most imports of waste for disposal, except where the importing competent authority is satisfied that the exporting country does not have, and cannot reasonably acquire, the facilities to dispose itself of the wastes in an environmentally sound manner.

All EC member states are required to implement Council directive 75/442/EEC, as amended, on waste. This requires member states to take appropriate measures to establish an adequate network of disposal installations, to enable the Community as a whole to become self-sufficient in waste disposal and the member states to move towards that aim individually.

The UK and other EU states became parties to the Basel convention in 1994. Parties are under the general obligation to minimize the generation and transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, and to ensure the provision of adequate disposal facilities within their territory.

Lancashire Local Authorities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the budget implications for Lancashire county council and the other Lancashire district councils for 1995–96 in respect of both income and expenditure; if Blackburn and Blackpool are to be given unitary status; and if he will make a statement. [16493]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Our assessments of the need to spend and of the income from business rates and council taxes for Lancashire authorities for 1995–96 are as follows:

£ million

	Standard spending assessment	*Business rate income*	*Council tax income*
Lancashire	845.369	258.272	185.846
Blackburn	17.221	4.665	2.931
Blackpool	18.596	5.138	3.476
Burnley	10.009	3.059	2.047
Chorley	8.192	3.248	2.403
Fylde	6.216	2.465	2.153
Hyndburn	7.600	2.642	1.795
Lancaster	14.236	4.469	3.161
Pendle	8.323	2.872	1.989
Preston	15.662	4.421	2.960
Ribble Valley	4.051	1.731	1.539
Rossendale	5.824	2.201	1.579
South Ribble	7.921	3.461	2.584
West Lancashire	10.004	3.676	2.742
Wyre	9.388	3.476	2.838

The Secretary of State has accepted the recommendations of the Local Government Commission that the existing two-tier system of local government for Lancashire should be retained. However, he intends to invite the commission to carry out further reviews of a small number of individual districts, including Blackburn and Blackpool.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16219]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department issued guidance to its non-departmental public bodies in August 1990 on publicity and advertising. This included guidelines on the use of public relations consultants and I am placing a copy of this guidance in the House of Commons Library.

General guidance for public bodies is contained in the Government publicity and advertising conventions, set out in annexes 1 and 2 to the National Audit Office report, "Publicity Services for Government Departments", House of Commons paper, 1 December 1989.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what debt the Property Services Agency left upon its disbandment; how much of that was owed to private companies; how much of that debt is still owed; if he will list the companies that have made representations to Her Majesty's Government asking to be paid; how much each one is currently owed; when, and by whom, he expects the debts to be fully paid off; and if he will make a statement. [16518]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Property Services Agency ceased to exist on 31 March 1990, when its responsibilities were split between its successor organisations: PSA Services and Property Holdings. The operating activities of PSA Services were privatised or closed down over the period December 1992 to October 1993 and since then the remaining staff in PSA Services have been responsible for completing residual activities, including the personnel management of staff seconded to the privatised companies. Liability to pay works contractors generally transferred to client departments in the period prior to the sale of the PSAS businesses. Liability for outstanding payments to suppliers of services at the point of sale generally passed to the purchasers of the PSA Services businesses, while PSA Services retained liability for only a limited number of completed projects which were not sold. These cases are progressively being resolved. I would be happy to look into any specific problem that is brought to my attention.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what actions the Government are taking to support the CITES enforcement resolution; what financial, training and technical support the Government are giving to CITES enforcement measures; and if he will make a statement. [16939]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are actively implementing the enforcement resolution which was adopted by last November's CITES conference following a United Kingdom initiative. My Department has allocated £240,000 to fund the secondment of an officer from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to the CITES secretariat to strengthen its enforcement capacity. We will also participate in a new EC enforcement working group to improve CITES implementation in the Community. At home, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise plans further increase in its specialist CITES team. Last month, police visits to oriental pharmacies in London, Birmingham and Manchester resulted in the seizure of large numbers of products suspected of containing parts of endangered species like tigers and rhinos. Code-named "Charm", the operation was planned with the assistance of my Department.

Limestone

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the use of high-quality limestone for roadstone is in accordance with his policy objectives as set out in "This Common Inheritance"; [16895]

(2) if he will take powers to specify appropriate end uses for very high-quality limestones quarried in the national parks. [16894]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government's objectives with regard to sustainable development of minerals resources is set out in minerals planning guidance note 6 issued in April last year. This gives the Government's aim that the best use should be made of the total aggregates resource by minimising waste, avoiding the use of higher quality materials where lower quality material would suffice, and encouraging the use of recycled and secondary materials in place of primary materials where possible. The Department aims to achieve these objectives by various means set out in MPG6, including undertaking research with the Department of Transport into the scope for further use of recycled materials in road construction and maintenance, and the setting up of an advisory service to inform and encourage the construction industry on the opportunities for use of alternative materials. It is not proposed to take powers to specify the end use of high-quality limestone since this would be unenforceable.

New Towns

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contributions have been made by the Commission for the New Towns towards promotional activities in each local authority covered by a former new town development corporation since 1993–94. [16786]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information for 1993–94 is as follows:

Local authority area	*Contribution (£'000)*
Halton BC	159
Milton Keynes BC	1,178
Peterborough CC	40
Warrington BC	75
West Lancashire DC	25

No comparable figures are available for 1994–95 as 1993–94 was the last year of operation of the agreement under which the Commission for the New Towns made annual contributions to agencies set up to promote individual towns.

Council Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of council tenancies, the total amount of housing revenue account subsidy payable to that authority, and the total housing benefit element within the housing revenue account for each local authority in England, for each year since 1990–91. [17043]

Mr. Curry: I have placed a copy of the information requested by the hon. Member in the Library.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he will make a statement on the conclusions of the consultation on the case for licensing houses in multiple occupation; and what legislation he proposes to introduce; [17027]

(2) how many responses his Department has received in respect of the consultation on the case for licensing houses in multiple occupation; and what proportion of these responses favoured the introduction of a national licensing scheme. [17028]

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), to the hon. Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and for Sheffield Heeley (Mr. Michie) on 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *57-58*.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17034]

Sir Paul Beresford: An analysis of all legislation introduced by the Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of State, and occasional general references are made to persons who are members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Lightbulbs

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many energy-efficient lightbulbs were subsidised by the Energy Saving Trust during the Little Bill-Large Savings campaign in October and November 1994. [17216]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This is a matter for the Energy Saving Trust and the regional electricity companies. However, I understand that the subsidised sales figures for electronic compact fluorescent lamps during last year's promotion were 981,000. In addition the publicity generated by the promotional campaign resulted in additional sales of 500,000 electro-magnetic CFLs, which were not subsidised.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15242]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department provides 10 workplace nursery places in Westminster; three places at an inter-departmental nursery in Bristol and 12 places at the Building Research Establishment agency's own nursery in Garston. Some of these places are shared by staff who work part time. The breakdown of current nursery users by grade and gender is as follows:

Bristol			Nurseries BRE			Westminster		
Number	Gender	Grade	Number	Gender	Grade	Number	Gender	Grade
2	1M/1F	EO	1	F	G7	1	F	G7
1	F	PS	4	1F/3M	SSO	2	F	HEO
2	F	TYP	8	5F/3M	HEO	1	F/M	[1]HEO/G7
			1	F	Graphics Officer	1	F/M	[1]HEO/EO
			1	F	EO	2	F	EO
			1	M	Photographer	1	F	PS
			3	2F/1M	AO	2	1M/1F	AO
			1	F	TYP			

[1] Both parents work for the Department.

In addition to a holiday play scheme run by the Building Research Establishment, my Department supports interdepartmental holiday playschemes in Westminster, Birmingham, Bristol and Bedford. These schemes are open to the children of all staff. The take-up—by gender and grade of parent users—varies between location and holiday period. Available information on parents who have used the schemes in 1994–95 is as follows:

Use of playschemes in 1994–95 by grade and gender

Number	Grade	Gender
1	G5	F
3	G6	M
7	G7	5M+2F
2	SEO	[1]1F/1MG7 [1]1F/1MHEO
1	SLIB	F
7	SSO	4F+3M
1	HEOD	M
12	HSO/HEO/HPTO	8F+4M
1	LIB	F
9	EO/SO	F
1	Graphics Officer	F
8	AO	7F+1M
2	PS	F
1	AA	F
2	TYPIST	F

[1] Both parents work for the Department.

Data cover all non-industrial staff in the DOE and its agencies.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17029]

Mr. Baldry: An analysis of all legislation introduced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration and their predecessors since 1965 for any references to hon. Members could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an hon. Member though references are customarily made to offices of state..

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender.

Mr. Goodlad: The FCO has 10 places for the under-fives at nurseries in London and 22 places in a workplace nursery for staff working at Hanslope Park, Milton Keynes.

The places are allocated as follows:

Grade	Male	Female
DS5/HCS6	1	1
DS6/SEO	2	-
DS7/HEO	4	2
DS9/EO	4	5
DS10/AO	–	4

Note:

Figures include four children with both parents employed by the FCO.

The FCO provides holiday playschemes in London and at ODA sites in East Kilbride and at NRI Chatham. Over the last 12 months play scheme places have been used by staff in the following grades:

Grade	Male	Female
DS4/HCS5	2	—
DS5S/HCS6	2	—
DS5/HCS7	6	1
DS6/SEO	4	2
DS7/HEO	8	7
DS9/EO	4	7
DS10/AO	3	5
S2/PS	—	6
Support Grades	—	1

Former Prisoners of War

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report,* column 779, regarding former British prisoners of war of Japan, what alternatives for compensation to direct payments from the Japanese Government are being discussed. [15813]

Mr. Goodlad: We have been in touch with the Japanese Government about the implementation in the UK of the "Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiative", as well as exploring what other possibilities may exist.

Colombia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received that British nationals are operating as mercenaries in Colombia. [16749]

Mr. David Davis: There were allegations in 1990 that a British citizen had renewed an association with drug traffickers in Colombia. We strongly condemn such alleged activities. There have been no allegations since 1990. We remain in close contact with the Colombian authorities about all security issues of mutual interest.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the murder of trade union activists in Colombia between August 1992 and August 1993. [16750]

Mr. David Davis: I have seen various reports on these lines. The Colombian authorities are fully aware of the concern felt in Britain about human rights in Colombia.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department gives to encourage the activities of trade unions in Colombia. [16751]

Mr. David Davis: None. The embassy in Bogota maintains contact with a wide range of organisations in Colombia, including unions.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department gives to police forces in Colombia; and how much the support has cost in each year since 1990. [16452]

Mr. David Davis: Our aid includes non-lethal equipment, technical expertise and training to the Colombian law enforcement agencies combating the drugs trade.

The figures are:

1990: £3.5 million
1991: £2 million
1992: £432,000
1993: £286,000
1994: £271,000

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on publicity and advertising for 1994–95. [17191]

Mr. Goodlad: Total estimated expenditure on promotional material and recruitment advertising in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, diplomatic wing and Overseas Development Administration, for 1994–95 is £2,417,000.

Turkey

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the use by Turkish security forces of military equipment with special reference to helicopters and armoured vehicles, to commit human rights violations; and if he will make a statement. [17145]

Mr. David Davis: None. Proposed United Kingdom arms sales to Turkey, as to other countries, are considered on a case-by-case basis and are subject to stringent licensing procedures. Before a license is granted, a wide range of factors are taken into account, including an assessment of the recipient country's human rights records and of the use to which the equipment will be put. We do not grant licences for the sale of equipment which we believe is likely to be used for internal repression.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Pension Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the Senior Salaries Review Body report on parliamentary pensions is to be published; when the Government Actuary's valuation report on the parliamentary contributory pensions fund will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [17800]

Mr. Newton: In my letter of 29 September, I invited the Senior Salaries Review Body to undertake a review of the parliamentary pension scheme to assess whether the scheme was still in line with good current practice. This was the first of the regular reviews resulting from the review body's recommendation, in 1991, that it should review the scheme regularly at the time of the Government Actuary's triennial valuations of the parliamentary contributory pension fund.

The SSRB report has been published today, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Copies are also available in the Vote Office. I am most grateful to the review body for its thoughtful and thorough report.

The SSRB has recommended that:

i) the existing accrual rate of fiftieths should apply to all service for currently sitting MPs in respect of their future pension entitlement, with appropriate augmentation for those who have been making up the shortfall voluntarily;

ii) the death in service gratuity should be increased to three times the Member's annual salary;

iii) the scheme should allow Members to nominate individuals, institutions and trusts to receive the death in service gratuity;

iv) a formal dispute resolution procedure should be established involving three stages, with questions directed first to the fund secretary, secondly to the trustees themselves and, if still unresolved, referred to an independent expert such as the occupational pensions advisory service or the pensions ombudsman.

The Government propose to accept all these recommendations, except the backdating of the fast rate of accrual introduced in 1983. A retrospective change of the kind suggested would not be justified.

The Government Actuary's valuation report on the PCPF is today being laid before the House in accordance with section 3 of the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1987.

Since the previous valuation in 1990, the fund has grown by about 38 per cent.: the market value at the valuation date was just over £150 million. Income from investments over the period has been less favourable than assumed in 1991, and the level of pensions increases has been slightly higher, although these are now decreasing.

The overall financial position shows little change from 1990. The current valuation discloses a small excess of assets over liabilities of £1.1 million—which is less than one per cent. of the value of the fund—after taking account of the implementation of the benefit improvements and reductions in contributions agreed at the time of the last report.

Taking account of the improvement in the lump sum death in service benefit, the assessed long-run total cost of the pension benefits under the scheme is now 24 per cent. of salary, compared with 23.5 per cent. at the 1990 valuation. The Member contribution was reduced in 1990 to 6 per cent., as a result of an SSRB recommendation. Under section 3 of the 1987 Act, the Exchequer pays the balance of costs, as recommended by the Government Actuary. Without the increase in benefits, the Exchequer contribution would have remained at its level following the 1990 valuation, of 6.8 per cent. of pay, for a further six-month period. Taking account of the benefit improvements recommended by the SSRB in the report published today, the actuary recommends that the Exchequer contribution from April should be 7.6 per cent. until September 2000. Assuming future experience is in line with the assumptions made for this valuation, the Exchequer contribution can then be expected to increase to 18 per cent.

As required by section 2 of the 1987 Act, I shall consult about the changes to the scheme with the trustees of the scheme and other interested parties. As is customary, the Government will hold a debate on an amendable motion to give the House a chance to consider both reports, as well as the draft regulations implementing the SSRB recommendations.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *50*, if he will publish the name of *(a)* the architect, *(b)* the designer employed on a consultancy basis by the House of Commons Commission *(c)* the annual cost of each consultancy and *(d)* the annual amount of time for which each consultant is contracted. [16185]

Mr. Beith: This is a matter for the Director of Works and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Fire Fighters

Mr. Cohen: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on the provision of fire fighters to tackle a fire in the Palace of Westminster; what changes have been made to the staff complement in each of the last three years; and what particular provisions apply to deal with the special nature of the building. [16519]

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 8 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *218*. As a result of the recent review of the fire section by the staff inspector in conjunction with the staff adviser of the House of Lords a complement of one principal fire officer, four senior fire officers and 24 fire officers has been agreed. This will be subject to review in two years' time. Particular provisions to minimise the fire risk within the Palace of Westminster are specified in the fire strategy for the Palace of Westminster and parliamentary outbuildings which was approved by the relevant Committees of both Houses in 1993. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member with further details.

Sittings of the House

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the effects of the implementation of the procedural reforms in respect of the sittings of the House on attendance in the House.

Mr. Newton: The reforms to which the hon. Member refers will be reviewed and assessed towards the end of the experiment.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the outside consultancy practice assisting the inquiry into the links between the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts and Welsh Fourth Channel Authority S4C; what remit they have been given; on what date the inquiry started; when it is anticipated to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [17299]

Mr. Dorrell: As I told the hon. Member on 27 February, *Official Report*, column *680*, my Department has commissioned a report from a senior Treasury official, Mr. John Beastall. The terms of reference of the review are:

> To review the circumstances of the applications for matching funding under the business sponsorship incentive scheme made by Pengwyn Pinc and certain other Welsh bodies. In particular, the review will consider:
>
> (a) the reports already produced by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority;
>
> (b) the financial and other relationships between S4C and the bodies which applied to BSIS; between S4C and Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru; and between S4C and organisations which applied to them or to TAC for sponsorship;
>
> (c) the understanding, in S4C, TAC and the bodies which applied to BSIS, of rules for applying to BSIS, including any guidance and procedures they may have circulated;
>
> (d) the understanding of BSIS rules within ABSA and the information and advice that ABSA and its staff provided to S4C and the other bodies involved about the rules and operation of BSIS;
>
> (e) the criteria adopted by S4C, TAC and the bodies which applied to BSIS for supporting an application for sponsorship; and
>
> (f) the action that was taken by S4C and ABSA in response to the discovery of irregularities in applications and in the operation of their internal procedures.
>
> The report will make recommendations about action to be taken.

Mr. Beastall commenced his review on 20 February and expects to deliver his report to my Department shortly after Easter.

Telephone Conversations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to introduce legislation which fill the gaps which exist in relation to the protection of private telephone conversations, as indicated on 14 January 1993, *Official Report*, column *1068*; and if he will make a statement. [17215]

Mr. Dorrell: The Government will announce their conclusions, on this as on other matters, in their response to the National Heritage Committee's report on privacy and media intrusion. We will publish this response when we have completed consideration of the legal issues surrounding the proposed criminal and civil remedies.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15224]

Mr. Dorrell: The provision of child care facilities within my Department is two-fold: one nursery place for a child aged between six months and five years at the Stepping Stones nursery based at Napier Hall, Pimlico. A female senior information officer in this Department used the nursery between November 1993 and August 1994. Since that date, no DNH member of staff has expressed an interest in securing a place at the nursery. My Department has therefore offered the place to the Department of the Environment on a temporary basis.

DNH staff can also use places at the Westminster holiday playscheme which caters for children aged between five and 12 years old and which operates during all the main school holidays. The playscheme is currently used by two DNH female members of staff at grade 7 level.

Royal Palaces

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total cost to his Department of the maintenance and running costs of the occupied and unoccupied royal palaces in 1993–94. [16921]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The cost to my Department in 1993–94 of maintaining and running the occupied royal palaces was £19.8 million. The cost for the unoccupied royal palaces was £6.7 million.

Royal Household Fuel Bills

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the fuel bills paid by his Department on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen. [16922]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* My Department pays for Her Majesty the Queen's fuel bills incurred for official purposes through its grant-in-aid payment to the royal household. The 1993–94 fuel bill was £826,000 and included the cost of electricity, gas, oil, coal and other fuels.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department, includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15575]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* This is already a high priority for me and my officials.

DEFENCE

Joint Service Command and Staff College

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the location of the proposed Joint Service Command and Staff college. [18009]

Mr. Soames: During the "Front Line First" consultation process on the establishment of a Joint Service Command and Staff college, my Department received responses from a number of individuals and organisations to our proposals.

All these responses have received the most careful and sympathetic scrutiny, and I have thoroughly reviewed the costings associated with our proposal. Although there was general support for the proposal to establish a Joint Service Command and Staff college, there have been understandable local concerns, especially in Greenwich. However, no significant arguments have emerged, nor have any new suggestions been made which have caused us to alter our original proposals. The costings continue to demonstrate that Camberley is the most cost effective option.

I can therefore confirm that we shall establish the Joint Service Command and Staff college at Camberley, and that we plan to open it and close the colleges at Bracknell and Greenwich in late 1997. We shall not develop our plans along the lines indicated in the consultative document. The Bracknell site will be considered for disposal.

With regard to the future of Greenwich, I reaffirm the Government's commitment to finding suitable occupants for this most important and historic site. Our work on this continues. In terms of defence candidates, we have concluded that a restructured Defence school of languages would be one suitable occupant. This would generate at least the same level of occupancy as the two staff colleges currently at Greenwich. The nature of this establishment is such that, unlike the Joint Services Command and Staff college, it would be able to move in with only very minor changes to the fabric of the buildings and at a capital cost of only some £6,000,000.

We have also concluded that we should not continue to pursue the Tri-Service Chaplaincy school as an option for Greenwich. Work on an appropriate location for this school will continue, and I hope shortly to make an announcement.

In addition to the potential defence candidates, interest in the Royal Naval college has been shown by organisations outside the Ministry of Defence, including the university of Greenwich and the National Maritime museum. We do not intend to reach any firm conclusions on the future of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich at this stage, but will shortly be seeking expressions of interest in the site from organisations able to propose uses sympathetic to the character of the buildings.

In considering the options, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will have very much in mind his role as sole trustee of Greenwich hospital, and also the imaginative proposals for Greenwich park, including the Royal Naval college, by Dame Jennifer Jenkins in her report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. I hope to be in a position to announce firm proposals to the

House for the future of the Royal Naval college by the end of the year.

Naval Recruiting and Training Agency

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future status of the Royal Navy's Flag Officer Training and Recruiting organisation. [18011]

Mr. Soames: The Flag Officer Training and Recruiting organisation will be launched as a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1995, and will be called the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency.

The NRTA's owner will be the Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. It will carry out its training activities at a number of training schools based in naval establishments in the south of England and operate recruiting centres in all regions of the UK. The chief executive's headquarters is collocated with that of the Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command with HM naval base, Portsmouth.

The agency's primary role is to recruit to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines and to train and develop personnel, both service and civilian, for their individual tasks in the naval service, as and when appropriate throughout their subsequent careers.

As the first chief executive of the new agency, Rear Admiral J. P. Clarke will be offered new opportunities to build on the current organisation's professional expertise and high performance standards. In maintaining the NRTA's contribution to front-line capability, the chief executive will actively seek to improve efficiency and value for money of his organisation.

The chief executive has been set the following key targets for the financial year 1995–96:

1. To achieve 90 per cent. of deliveries of categories of personnel to the trained strength from initial training within accepted variances.
2. To achieve wastage rates for new entry officers, apprentices and ratings no greater than 25 per cent., 30 per cent. and 20 per cent. respectively.
3. By 31 March 1996, to complete the process of establishing optimum pipeline times for all categories of initial training, and determine baseline figures for overruns against which future performance can be measured.
4. To maintain a success rate in excess of 95 per cent. in career and pre-joining training.
5. By 31 March 1996, to agree with NRTA's key customers a positive feedback system and criteria for the measurement of the extent to which personnel trained by NRTA satisfy the customers' requirements.

Army Districts

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to restructure the Army districts. [18012]

Mr. Soames: Following the "Front Line First" announcement, proposals to restructure the Army districts were explained in a consultative document issued on 19 December 1994. The most significant effect of the reorganisation is the splitting of the current southern district leaving the existing headquarters at Aldershot commanding only units based in the south-east, and creating a new headquarters at Bulford, to be known as HQ3 (UK) Division, to have administrative and budgetary responsibilities for all Army units in the south-west. There will be changes to the subordinate brigade headquarters structure and adjustments to the boundaries of the current districts. To emphasise the operational aspects of their role, and to reflect that administrative responsibility for Army units in the UK will no longer be on a purely geographical basis, the headquarters at York, Bulford, Aldershot and Shrewsbury will be known as 2, 3 (UK), 4 and 5 Division respectively. No structural changes are planned for Scotland or London district.

In total, 17 responses to the consultative document were received from one MP, trade unions and local authorities, all of which have been given careful and sympathetic consideration. Understandable concerns were expressed about the effects on local employment where job losses will occur, and every effort will of course be made to redeploy staff where possible to alternative locations.

As part of the restructuring programme I am pleased to be able to highlight an increase of 100 jobs in the south-west; this was warmly welcomed by the local communities. The vast majority of the jobs will be filled by local recruitment and will boost the employment opportunities in the area.

I can therefore confirm that the restructuring will take effect from 1 April 1995. I am confident that these changes will create a more efficient and economic structure which will enhance operational and administrative effectiveness.

We will continue to consult with staff and trade unions about the implementation of this restructuring exercise.

Military Schools

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the triennial review of the Duke of York's Royal Military School and Queen Victoria School defence agencies. [18013]

Mr. Soames: A review of the agency status of the Duke of York's Royal Military School and Queen Victoria School is now due and will commence shortly. As next steps agencies, the performance of both schools will be evaluated and their activities will be subjected to the normal "prior options" tests.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in the work of these agencies would be welcome and should be sent by 12 May to:

Mr. W. A. Perry
Command Secretary (Adjutant General)
Ministry of Defence
Headquarters Adjutant General
(Personal and Training Command)
Trenchard Lines
Upavon
Pewsey
Wiltshire
SN9 6BE

Army Industrial Training Organisation

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Army's individual training organisation. [18014]

Mr. Soames: As originally announced to the House by the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 2 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *124*, the Army's individual training organisation has been included in the Department's list of candidate agencies. A "Prior

Options" study of Army individual training as a whole is being undertaken to determine whether agency status would be appropriate. Any comments that interested parties may wish to contribute would be welcome and should be sent, by no later than 12 May to:

Mr. W. A. Perry
Command Secretary (Adjutant General)
Headquarters Adjutant General (Personnel and Training)
Trenchard Lines
Upavon
Wiltshire
SN9 6BE

Reserve Forces Bill

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the Reserve Forces Bill. [17171]

Mr. Soames: We are today publishing the draft Reserve Forces Bill, copies of which are available from the Vote Office. Outside the House, the document is being distributed widely to reserve units, employers and others, and is available on request from the Ministry of Defence.

The Bill is an important one. It brings legislation on reserves up to date, to take account of changes in both the security environment and British society since the last substantial revision in 1966. The Bill principally provides:

(a) A new power of call-out for peacekeeping, humanitarian and disaster relief operations;

(b) Two new categories of reserve:

—the high readiness reserve: individuals with skills in short supply who, voluntarily and with the consent of their employer, accept a greater call-out liability; and

—the sponsored reserve, which will permit us to let more support activities to contract knowing that the reserve element allows the task to be continued in an operational environment by uniformed personnel.

(c) A new opportunity to enable reservists to undertake tasks other than training in peace time;

(d) Three new safeguards:

—for individuals, powers for MOD to make payments to reservists in cases where their military pay when called out is less than their civilian pay;

—for employers, powers for MOD to make payments whenever a reservist who is also an employee is called out;

—for both, new, formal, rights to seek exemption from and deferral of call-out or recall, exercisable by employers or reservists themselves.

All this work is set within a comprehensive tri-service legal framework for the reserves, which will greatly simplify their use in the future.

Particular attention has been given to the tripartite relationship between the Ministry of Defence, the reservist, and his or her employer. Full account has been taken of the comments received following the publication of a consultation document in October 1993, and I believe the Bill will meet with widespread acceptance from those affected by it.

The Bill's publication in draft forms part of the Government's commitment to improving the quality of legislation brought before Parliament, and I look forward to receiving many constructive comments. The consultation period lasts until 15 June.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Teignbridge of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *73*, if he will give such statistics as have been asked for on water and sewerage costs which can be provided without disproportionate cost. [15999]

Mr. Freeman: Statistics can be provided for most expenditure on water and sewerage on class I, votes 1 and 2 for the years 1992–93 to 1994–95. Expenditure by the procurement executive on class I, vote 3 is not separately distinguishable from other utility costs.

The figures are:

1992–93: £55 million
1993–94: £52 million
1994–95: £49 million (expenditure until 27 March 1995).

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer 20 March, *Official Report*, column *73*, if he will define 'disproportionate' cost. [15998]

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) on 18 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *307*

Defence Research Agency

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received of facsimile messages sent from the Defence Research Agency at Portsdown, Portsmouth, being received by private telephone subscribers due to incorrect dialling and if he will make a statement. [15898]

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for such matters rest with the chief executive of the Defence Research Agency. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Peter Griffiths, dated 30 March 1995:

In today's written answer the Minister for State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question concerning the misdirecting of Facsimile messages from the Defence Research Agency (DRA) site at Portsdown, Hampshire.

I can confirm that Mr. Wallis of Waterlooville has received a number of facsimile messages from DRA offices at Portsdown which should, in fact,have gone to other DRA offices at Farnborough. This has occurred as a result of a change to the dialling code used by DRA staff to obtain a British Telecom telephone line and the fact that Mr Wallis' facsimile number was then very similar to a small number of our Farnborough numbers.

The two main issues of concern in this matter are firstly, the inconvenience and irritation caused to Mr. Wallis. A member of DRA security staff has spoken to him, explained how the error has occurred, and apologise for the inconvenience that he has clearly been caused.

I am also concerned about any possible breach of national security. Standing DRA security instructions covering the use of the facsimile machines involved here does not permit the transmission of confidential material. We have no evidence to suggest that these rules have been breeched. The location of the machines in question also suggests that only messages of an administrative nature have been misdirected. We do not therefore believe there has been and serious lapse of security.

In the normal course of events we would overcome the problem of misdirection by ensuring that staff take more care and by changing all of our facsimile numbers involved. In this case, however, the change to the national telephone dialling codes, on 16 April 1995 should resolve this particular problem. We have discussed this with Mr. Wallis and he is content to wait until the codes change. I have of course taken steps to ensure that all staff take more care when using facsimile machines and are fully aware of their security obligations.

Military Exports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what proportion of military exports the assistance given by the Defence Export Services Organisation is a crucial factor. [16178]

Mr. Freeman: DESO assistance to industry ranges from the crucial, in such sales as the Government-to-Government arrangements with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to a variety of small, but in some cases very significant, instances of advice and support. It is difficult to quantify this in terms of a proportion but I believe that UK defence industries would rate DESO assistance generally as an important factor in their achievement of export orders, which in 1993 were worth £7 billion.

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will press for the inclusion of fuel-air explosives in the United Nations register of conventional arms; [15873]

(2) if he will press for the inclusion of airborne early warning and reconnaissance aircraft in the United Nations register of conventional arms; [15875]

(3) if he will press for the inclusion of land mines in the United Nations register of conventional arms; [15871]

(4) if he will press for the inclusion of small arms in the United Nations register of conventional arms; [15872]

(5) if he will press for the inclusion of submersibles in the United Nations register of conventional arms. [15874]

Mr. Soames: The seven current categories of equipment subject to reporting in the UN register were chosen to reflect the register's aim of identifying excessive and destabilising build-ups of major, conventional offensive weapon systems. An international group of governmental experts met last summer to discuss the operation of the register and ways in which it might be developed. Adding further categories of equipment to the seven already covered by the register was discussed, but there was no consensus for change. A United Nations resolution on transparency in armaments of December 1994 requests the Secretary General, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts to be convened in 1997, to prepare a report on the continuing operation of the register and its further development. In the meantime we shall direct our efforts at ensuring the continued successful operation of the register in its current form.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of battle tanks; [15877]

(2) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusions in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of policies and regulations concerning arms transfers; [15879]

(3) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of military holdings; [15881]

(4) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of warships; [15883]

(5) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusions in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of combat aircraft; [15885]

(6) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of armoured combat vehicles; [15878]

(7) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of procurement through national production; [15880]

(8) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of missiles and missile launchers. [15882]

(9) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of attack helicopters; [15884]

(10) what information has been submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in the United Nations register of conventional arms in respect of large calibre artillery systems. [15886]

Mr. Soames: Copies of the United Kingdom returns to the UN register of conventional arms for 1992 and 1993 have been placed in the Library of the House. Each return includes information on the imports and exports of equipment in the seven categories covered by the register. The seven categories are: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missiles and missile launchers. The UK return also includes information on national military holdings and procurement through national production in the seven categories and a statement of procurement and export policies. The UK return for 1994 is due to be submitted to the United Nations by 30 April. A copy of the return will be placed in the Library of the House when it is submitted.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who the British representatives are on the group of experts set up to review the operation of the United Nations register of conventional arms. [15876]

Mr. Soames: An international group of governmental experts met last summer to discuss the operation of the register and ways in which it might be developed. The UK representative on the group was the director of the proliferation and arms control secretariat from the Ministry of Defence. There is no standing group of experts, but it was agreed that a similar group should be formed when the UN next reviews the operation of the register in 1997.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the journeys by the royal family on the Queen's Flight in 1993–94 were *(a)* in fixed-wing aircraft and *(b)* abroad. [16512]

Mr. Soames: Of the 968 occasions when the Queen's Flight was used by the royal family during financial year 1993–94, 608 flights were in fixed-wing aircraft and 185 flights were either from or to overseas locations.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of severance pay to executives and staff of the Ministry of Defence, Defence Housing Executive. [16240]

Mr. Soames: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Tauton (Mr. Nicholson) on 16 March, *Official Report*, columns *721–23*.

Air Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by year for the last four years, and the current year to date, the number of two-seat Royal Air Force military jet aircraft that have crashed which resulted in the death of either the pilot or navigator; and what was the date, location and type of aircraft involved in each accident. [16258]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Aircraft*	*Location*
13 January 1991	Tornado GR1	Oman
29 August 1991	Jaguar T2A	Carno, Powys
30 October 1991	Phantom FGR2	Falkland Islands
9 July 1992	Buccaneer S2B	38nm east of RAF Leuchars
30 September 1992	Hawk T1A	RAF Chivenor
8 July 1994	Tornado F3	15nm south of Akrotiri, Cyprus
1 September 1994	Tornado GR1A	Killin, Central Scotland
10 March 1995	Tornado F3	5nm east of Spurn Head

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum rank in the prison service which is approved to request and the minimum rank in the RAF which can approve low-level air passes over prisons; and what provisions exist to protect the local population from noise pollution. [16253]

Mr. Soames: There are no regulations specific to the request for, and approval of, low-level passes over prisons; the circumstances behind the overflights of Stocken prison on 27 September 1994 were unique. I have nothing further to add to my answers of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *906*, 10 January, *Official Report*, column *105* and 13 February *Official Report*, col. *545*.

Redundancy Terms

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of redundancy of senior service officers; and if he will make a full statement on the details of the redundancy terms over the last five years. [16612]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of redundancy compensation paid to two-star officers and above since the start of the armed forces redundancy programme resulting from "Options for Change" is £606,125.

The terms of the armed forces redundancy scheme have been in place since 1975 and remain largely unchanged. These terms provide for the payment of lump sum compensation, known as the special capital payment, in all cases. The amount of special capital payment is calculated by reference either to each year or part year of the uncompleted portion of career to normal retirement age, or by reference to the number of years paid service given from age 18. In addition to the benefits normally available through the armed forces pension scheme, redundant personnel may qualify for early payment of pension and terminal grant provided they have completed 12 years full-paid service.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16655]

Mr. Soames: Two thousand copies of the Ministry of Defence departmental report, Cm 2801, were printed and published this year on 2 March. In addition to those copies required by Parliament and the Government Departments and agencies concerned, just over 1,250 copies were produced for sale at a price of £8.15 net. The costs of printing and publishing the report were borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these costs from sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16656]

Mr. Soames: Departmental reports were first produced in 1991, and since then have been published as Command Papers by HMSO, which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from sales revenue.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16288]

Mr. Soames: Expenditure by the MOD headquarters information division during financial year 1993–94 was £5,450,000. Within this figure, the cost of contracts placed with the private sector was £2,427,000. This includes stand construction, graphics for various exhibitions, production of publicity films and videos, brochures and the printing of the MOD house journal, "FOCUS". The remaining £3,023,000 relates to miscellaneous programme costs as well as staff and operating costs, including the MOD press office and service directors of public relations.

Expenditure on public relations outside my Department's HQ is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16221]

Mr. Soames: My Department, and the agencies and other public bodies under its authority, adhere closely to guidelines produced by the Cabinet Office concerning the use of public relations consultants. My Department has also produced instructions for the guidance of budget holders on the use of external consultants in general.

Dartmoor National Park

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the advertised usage of Okehampton range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended December 1994 expressed by way of days; and how many days firing took place. [17084]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Oakhampton range for live firing for the year ended December was 115 days, and firing took place on 50 days.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the advertised usage of Willsworthy range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended December 1994 expressed by way of days; and how many days firing took place. [17085]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Willsworthy range in the year ending December was 232 days, and firing took place on 108 days.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was a the advertised usage of Merrivale range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended December 1994 expressed by way of days; and how many days firing took place. [17086]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Merrivale range for live firing to the end of December was 174, and firing took place on 73 days.

Chemical Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when RAF Llandwrog was last tested for traces of chemical weapons; [17294]

(2) when Fort Belan was last tested for traces of chemical weapons. [17295]

Mr. Soames: The standard certificate confirming that all areas of the RAF Llandwrog site, including Fort Belan, were free from explosives and chemical contamination was issued in 1956. My Department is not aware of any further monitoring of the site having taken place since the land was handed back to its original owners at the conclusion of Operation Sandcastle.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what measures his Department has taken to assess the long-term success of Operation Sandcastle; [17296]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the state of the scuttled sea vessels *(a)* SS Empire Claire, *(b)* SS Vogtland and *(c)* SS Kotka. [17293]

Mr. Soames: The vessels scuttled in Operation Sandcastle sank in water up to 2,000 deep some 80 miles north-west of Northern Ireland. No monitoring of these dump sites has been undertaken because of the depth of water and also because the cargo, comprising the nerve agent Tabun, is destroyed by hydrolysis and rendered harmless in sea water. The potential hazards of chemical weapon dump sites and possible remedial action have been reviewed in a number of international maritime fora, and the consensus of international expert opinion is to leave such sites undisturbed.

Land Sales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 March, *Official Report*, column 257, if he will provide a breakdown of the *(c)* £14.7 million in the financial year 1994–95 in respect of receipts received for the sale of land and buildings. [17195]

Mr. Soames: The figure of £14.7 million quoted in my earlier reply related to the projected costs incurred during the current financial year in respect of land and building sales. These costs comprise of planning and other consultancy costs, £3.7 million; works to facilitate disposal including maintenance and guarding, £9.7 million; and legal costs, £1.3 million.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the total *(a)* acreage and *(b)* market value of land and buildings that his Department is currently planning to sell. [17196]

Mr. Soames: A substantial number of sites are at present being sold and others are at various stages in the disposal process. It is also expected that further sites will become available for disposal as a result of on-going rationalisation of the defence estate. At this stage it is not possible to be certain about which sites will be released, when they will be sold or the receipts which will accrue. Estimates provide for some £697 million of receipts for the 10 years to financial year 2004, however, which is broadly the same as has been achieved in recent years.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what non-medical monitoring his Department undertakes on the activities of *(a)* serving and *(b)* non-serving soldiers with relation to Gulf war syndrome. [17168]

Mr. Soames: There is no monitoring of the activities of serving or former members of the armed forces in relation to the alleged Gulf war syndrome. As part of our investigation, however, all available material relating to the alleged syndrome is collated. This material includes: potential claims for compensation received from Gulf war veterans; media reports concerning the alleged syndrome which may refer to Gulf veterans; and correspondence with my Department from Gulf veterans and others. Where appropriate, individual veterans whose concern for their health comes to the attention of my Department are contacted and invited to take part in the medical assessment programme.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will rule out the possibility that chemical weapons were used during the 1990–91 Gulf war. [17177]

Mr. Soames: No confirmed reports of the detection of chemical warfare agent have been received relating to the Gulf conflict.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations the MOD police have undertaken in respect of Gulf war syndrome. [17169]

Mr. Soames: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports from other countries concerning analysis of weapons usage by Iraq in the Gulf war his Department has received. [17176]

Mr. Soames: My Department regularly exchanges information and assessments with allies, including data on analysis of weapons usage by Iraq in the Gulf war.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a register is maintained by his Department of membership of the Gulf War Veterans Association. [17178]

Mr. Soames: No such register is held by my Department.

Warrior Vehicles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technical problems with bolt fittings to secure machine guns in Warrior fighting vehicles in Bosnia have been encountered; and if he will make a statement. [17170]

Mr. Soames: None.

Air Bases

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many air bases his Department currently has for sale; if he will name the bases together with the counties that they are located in; and if he will specify the asking price or market value of each of these sites. [17174]

Mr. Soames: The following are the former RAF sites currently being sold which represent the whole, or a significant part of an establishment:

	Acres
RAF Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire	1,300
RAF Greenham Common, Berkshire	1,000
RAF St. David, Dyfed	350
RAF Swinderby, Lincolnshire	629
RAF Bentwaters, Suffolk	1,057
East Camp, Hendon, Middlesex	24
RAF Medmenham, Marlow, Buckingham	90
RAF West Drayton, Middlesex	43

It is not our practice to disclose the sale price of sites as that information is commercial in confidence.

Army Bases

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army bases his Department currently has for sale; if he will name the counties that they are located in; and if he will specify the asking price or estimated value of each of these sites. [17175]

Mr. Soames: A number of units or establishments may share parts of a single site and closure of one unit may therefore lead to the disposal of only a part of that site. However, the main sales of sites previously occupied by the Army which are currently in hand are as follows:

	Acres
Hilton Vehicle Storage Depot, Derbyshire	249 (phased sale)
Ruddington Storage Depot, Nottinghamshire	35 (phased sale)
Royal Arsenal West, Woolwich, SE London	76
Royal Arsenal East, Woolwich, SE London	15
Old Park Barracks, Dover, Kent	210
Beavers Lane Camp, Hounslow, Middlesex	29

It is not our practice to disclose the sale price of sites as that information is commercial in confidence.

Reserve Forces Bill

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of his Department are currently working on the Reserve Forces Bill; and how many of these are lawyers. [17172]

Mr. Soames: The Reserve Forces Bill team in the Ministry of Defence consists of four administrative civil servants—a grade 6, a grade 7, a higher executive officer and an administrative officer; a service officer, currently a commander RN; and a legal adviser grade 6. They are supported by other staff in the legal adviser's and reserves policy branches, and elsewhere in the Ministry of Defence, when required. In addition, a team of five members of the volunteer reserve forces, who are lawyers in civilian life, have provided valuable advice on a part-time basis as the work has progressed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from employers' organisations regarding the Reserve Forces Bill. [17173]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had correspondence about the proposed Reserve Forces Bill with Sir Alexander Graham GBE, chairman of the National Employers's Liaison Committee, which is responsible for promoting support of the reserve forces among employers. The NELC will be conducting an advertising campaign in the national press, starting tomorrow, 31 March 1995, to publicise the proposed legislation, and to ask employers to give their reactions and contribute their views.

COBRA Radar System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of the COBRA counter-battery radar system at current prices; what was the original total cost at current prices; when the COBRA will be in service; and when it was first estimated to be in service. [17194.]

Mr. Freeman: The latest estimated total cost to the United Kingdom of developing the COBRA counter-battery radar system is £63 million at current price levels which remains in line with the original estimate.

However, the project has not yet entered production, and the total estimated costs of the production phase are commercially sensitive. Current production cost estimates predict an increase to the UK of some £30 million at current prices owing to exchange rate variations and a change in our VAT liability arising from revised deployment plans.

The in-service date—ISD—for COBRA is classified. The currently endorsed ISD is five years later than that originally forecast in 1985 and further slippage of 18 months is expected. This delay is principally due to a reassessment of ISD following the project definition phase, protracted negotiations with collaborative partners and industry, and further development work that is aimed at reducing production costs.

Excess Equipment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 March, *Official Report*, column *256*, if he will provide a breakdown of the £72.4 million of receipts for the sale of excess equipment forecast for financial year 1994–95. [17197]

Mr. Freeman: The answer is as follows:

	£ million	*Per cent.*
Ships	25.4	35.1
Aircrafts	9.7	13.4
Vehicles	14.1	19.5
Armaments	4.7	6.5
Miscellaneous stores and equipment		
Army	8.9	12.3
Navy	6.1	8.4
Air	1.0	1.4
PE	1.1	1.5
Marketing agreements	1.4	1.9
Total	72.4	100

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what forecast he has made of the total receipts for the sale of excess equipment in the financial year 1995–96. [17198]

Mr. Freeman: The forecast for financial year 1995–96 is £51.1 million.

Child Care

Mr. McNamar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15234]

Mr. Freeman: At present, there are seven nurseries available for use by my Department's staff, with a further five planned. In addition, there are a number of holiday playschemes in operation. Responsibility for the provision of child care facilities is delegated to individual budget holders and information related to their use is not held centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 March. [15458]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

No. 10 Downing Street (Disabled Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made at No. 10 Downing street to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access, with special reference to the fitting of a permanent ramp for wheelchairs; and if he will make a statement. [16931]

The Prime Minister: No. 10 Downing street already has a number of facilities for the disabled: portable ramps are available to give access to the house; a passenger lift which can accommodate wheelchairs and gives access to all floors; and a stair climber to enable wheelchairs to be taken up the main stairs. An additional lift to enable disabled people to move more easily to the state rooms and a disabled toilet will be installed shortly.

Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister will be representing Her Majesty's Government at the forthcoming meeting of Commonwealth Youth Ministers in Trinidad; and if he will make a statement. [17298]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom delegation to this meeting will be led by the British High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago, assisted by a social development adviser from the Overseas Development Agency and the vice-chairman of the British Youth Council.

Bank of England

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent assessment he has made of whether confidential matters can safely be discussed between the Chancellor and officials of the Bank of England; [17121]

(2) what account he will take in considering candidates for appointment to the deputy governorship of the Bank of England of reports concerning their private lives; [17119]

(3) if the usual steps were taken to check Mr. Pennant-Rea's background before he was appointed Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. [17122]

The Prime Minister: I will take all relevant considerations into account in deciding who should be appointed Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. Mr. Pennant-Rea was subject to security vetting before he took up his appointment. I am satisfied that sensitive matters can be discussed in confidence between the Chancellor and bank officials.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15227]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister what were the total costs of operating the pay review bodies for *(a)* teachers, *(b)* doctors and dentists, *(c)* armed forces, *(d)* nurses and midwives, etc. and *(e)* senior salaries, including details for each of consultancy costs, members' expenses and site visits in the latest year for which figures are available. [17322]

The Prime Minster: The pay review bodies are serviced by the Office of Manpower Economics whose total operating costs, including some functions and activities not related to review bodies, amounted to £1.4 million in 1993–94, the latest period for which information is available. This figure includes staff salaries and costs, office infrastructure and support costs, but excludes rent and rates, members' travel and incidental expenses and consultancy.

Members and chairmen of pay review bodies are unpaid. Consultancy costs for review bodies vary significantly from year to year. Details of consultancy costs and members' incidental expenses are set out in the table.

£ pounds

Review body	*Consultancy costs*	*Members' travel and expenses*
School Teachers Review Body (STRB)	249,096	5,693
Doctors and Dentists Review Body (DDRB)	164,541	7,366
Nurses and Allied Professions Review Body (NAPRB)	—	5,781
Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB)	284,015	23,774
Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB)	192,992	4,485

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what was the cost of producing and circulating the annual report of the Cabinet Office for each of the last 10 years in real terms; [16648]

(2) what was the cost of producing and circulating the last annual report of the Cabinet Office; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16648]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science on 29 March at column *651*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of producing and circulating the annual report of the Cabinet Office for each of the last 10 years in real terms.

Mr. Horam: The annual Cabinet Office departmental report was first published in 1991. The printing and publishing costs are borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover these from sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of producing and circulating the last annual report of the Cabinet Office; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price.

Mr. Horam: The printing and publishing costs were borne by HMSO who aim to recover these from sales revenue. The report was circulated to the Prime Minister, OPSS Ministers, Opposition spokesmen, Parliament, Cabinet Office senior management, and contributors in HMSO, COI and other organisations included within the report. There were 1,500 copies printed, and just over 900 copies were distributed for sale to the public, at a cover price of £11.55.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quotas

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average period being taken by the intervention board to process the leasing of milk quotas and to inform Milk Marque of the transfer. [15935]

Mr. Jack: The leasing period for the 1994–95 milk quotas year during which our target was to process acceptable leases within 14 days of their receipt ended on 31 December 1994. Processing of acceptable leases was completed some weeks ago. The only leases now being processed are those with queries which are being processed as soon as they have been resolved. As they are cleared individually there are no statistics showing average clearance rates. Milk Marque, and other milk purchasers, are informed on a weekly basis of all changes in the quota registered with them confirmed in the preceding week.

Fruit and Vegetables

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the United Kingdom trade deficit or surplus in respect of indigenous fruit and vegetables as defined by "Food from Britain" for each year from 1990 to 1994. [14925]

Mr. Jack: The crude overseas trade deficit in respect of indigenous fruit and vegetables is given in the following table; the information for 1994 is not yet available.

£ million

	1990	1991	1992	1993[1]
Crude trade gap	861	883	896	919

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is *(a)* the latest European Commission estimate for the amount of tonnes of (i) apples, (ii) tomatoes, (iii) cauliflowers and (iv) peaches and nectarines withdrawn from the market to raise consumer prices and *(b)* the cost of this policy to public funds in the United Kingdom, breaking this figure down into (1) the running costs of the policy and (2) the amount which the policy adds on food prices. [16152]

Mr. Jack: The latest estimates from the European Commission for the 1995 budget year (16 October 1994 to 15 October 1995) are:

(i) apples - 950,000 tonnes
(ii) tomatoes - 70,000 tonnes
(iii) cauliflowers - 80,000 tonnes
(iv) peaches - 800,000 tonnes
(v) nectarines - 195,000 tonnes

It is not possible to estimate the UK contribution to the cost of withdrawals of fruit and vegetables across the European Community as the UK contributes to the common agricultural policy budget as a whole and not to individual parts of it.

Estimates of the amount that the policy adds to retail prices of fruit and vegetables are not available, but are likely to be relatively small.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the child care and nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15239]

Mr. Jack: During the last six months MAFF has increased the number of subsidised nursery places available to MAFF and agency staff from 48 to 84. Seventy-five of these places are currently taken up. A 33-place nursery is under construction at the Central Science Laboratory's new site at Sand Hutton, near York, which is due to open in 1996.

Current use by grade and gender is as follows:

Grade or Equivalent	*Gender*
G7	4 Female 5 Male
SEO/SSO	9 Female 3 Male
HEO/HSO	15 Female 6 Male
EO/SO	17 Female 6 Male
AO	8 Female 2 Male
AA	1 Female
Support Grades	1 Female

Twenty of these places are used by families where both parents work for MAFF. The higher grade has been used in the breakdown of users.

Holiday playscheme provision is available to staff based at a number of sites throughout the country. The facilities are available to all grades and use varies during the year.

EU Proposals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* Commission proposals and *(b)* fiches d'impact there were in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [17087]

Mr. Jack: Full details of the proposals issued by the European Commission were published in its 1993 and 1994 general reports on the activities of the European Union, paragraphs 1025 and 1202 respectively. The Commission does not publish similar information on fiches d'impact. However, in line with central requirements, MAFF actively presses the Commission to prepare fiches for legislative proposals which have the potential to impose substantial burdens on business.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, columns 775–808, what consideration underlay the decision not to produce a fiche d'impact in relation to industry costs for the minced meat directive; and what steps are being taken to ensure that in each member state for every directive the Community produces a fiche d'impact concerned with the likely cost to industry of implementation. [17090]

Mrs. Browning: It is for the Commission to explain the considerations behind its decision not to produce a fiche d'impact when it proposed the minced meat directive in 1990. In commenting on the Commission's annual work programme, the Government identify legislative proposals which have the potential to impose substantial burdens on business and urges the European Commission to prepare fiches d'impact where it has not volunteered to do so in the programme. MAFF, like other Departments, actively presses the Commission to prepare fiches at the earliest practicable point in the process.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Pesticides Safety Directorate in 1995–96. [17946]

Mr. Waldegrave: I have set the Pesticides Safety Directorate the following targets relating to financial performance, efficiency, the delivery of pesticides approval services and policy advice in 1995–96:

To achieve 100 per cent. recovery of costs and an overall efficiency gain of 2 per cent. To meet the targets for delivery of services as follows:

Application stream	*Applications completed*	*Maximum processing time (working days)*
Technical secretariat		
Normal	310	270
Fast	275	110
Experimental permit	30	185
Off label	115	60
Administrative fast	350	20
Upgrade	50	—
New substances		
Sift	11	120
New substance	16	235-275
Reviews		
Reviews (UK and EC)	14	—

Notes:

1. The processing time targets apply to 85 per cent. of new applications.
2. The quality of the directorate's scientific and policy work will be subject to separate quality audits.
3. The agency will carry out a customer satisfaction survey to assess the service delivery defined in its customer service statement published in 1994.
4. Details of performance in 1994–95 will be set out in the agency's annual report and accounts to be published during July 1995.

Sheep Rustling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to combat sheep rustling. [15650]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have taken a number of steps, such as encouraging the formation of farm watch schemes, to combat a range of crimes in rural areas. However, it is a matter for individual chief officers of police to decide operational priorities according to local needs.

WALES

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department or its predecessors, since 1965. [16096]

Mr. Redwood: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department since 1965 has not been carried out. However, it would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and general references are made to both Houses of Parliament and to membership of the House of Commons.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the TEC schemes his Department sponsors for the unemployed; and if he will list the schemes in operation since the TECs were set up. [16218]

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

Youth training (previously youth training scheme)
Youth credit (previously training credit)
Modern engineering apprenticeships
Training for work (previously employment training, employment action and higher technology national training)
Business start-up (previously enterprise allowance scheme)
Open learning credits

From 1 April 1995, the modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships schemes are being introduced.

In addition, TECs are able to offer support at local level through the local initiative fund and the use of their reserves.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what has been his Department's expenditure on each of the TECs in North Wales 1994–95; and what his plans are in 1995–96 and 1996–97. [16745]

Mr. Richards: Negotiations are continuing with TECs on the contracts for 1995–96. When these negotiations are completed I will write to the hon. Member.

Final outturn figures for the 1994–95 will not be available until the appropriation accounts are approved. When I write to the hon. Member on TEC contracts I will let him also have the latest provisional outturn figures at the time.

Expenditure in 1996–97 will be dependent on TEC contract negotiations which will take place early in 1996.

Press Officers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press officers there are in his Department and what the figure was in 1979. [16747]

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16546]

Mr. Redwood: There are currently seven press officers in my Department. The figure for 1979 is not available.

Nitrous Oxide

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the quantity of nitrous oxide emissions in Wales in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [16589]

Mr. Redwood: Estimated figures for the United Kingdom appear at table 1.4 in the latest "Digest of Environment and Water Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Figures for Wales are not separately identified.

Former Development Areas

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will take to assist those areas in Wales which lost development area status; and if he will make a statement. [16831]

Mr. Redwood: The assisted areas map settled by the Government in July 1993 represented a fair and very satisfactory settlement for Wales. I believe that the map provides an excellent basis to continue the great economic success that has been achieved in Wales in recent years.

Non-Domestic Rating

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of rating revaluation on small business in Wales. [16933]

Mr. Redwood: The 1995 rating revaluation has resulted in an estimated average increase in Welsh rateable values of 18 per cent. which, under the statutory formula, means a reduction in the poundage from 44.8p to 39p. For properties with a 1995 rateable value below £10,000, the average increase in rateable value is 28 per cent. Transitional arrangements limit increases in bills for premises with a rateable value less than £10,000 to 7.5 per cent. a year in real terms. This compares with 10 per cent. in real terms for premises with a rateable value of £10,000 or more.

Employment in House Building

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people employed in the house building industry in Wales. [16829]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information is available only for the construction industry as a whole. Latest estimates from the autumn 1994 Labour Force Survey show that there were 88,000 people employed in this industry in Wales.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions and on what dates between 1 September 1994 and 2 March 1995 he has had formal meetings with *(a)* the board and *(b)* the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales. [16760]

Mr. Redwood: I had a formal meeting with the chairman on 10 January 1994 and with the chairman and the board on 24 January 1995. In addition to these meetings, discussions have taken place between my officials and officials from the Countryside Council for Wales.

Low Pay

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on low pay in Wales. [16832]

Mr. Redwood: Since April 1990, wage levels have risen faster in Wales than in Great Britain as a whole.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources he is making available to combat drug abuse on Deeside, Clwyd. [16834]

Mr. Richards: Following the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny of health promotion in Wales, central Welsh Office resources to combat drug and alcohol misuse were added to the allocations of Welsh district health authorities from 1 April 1994. The funding of local initiatives to combat drug misuse in Wales is the responsibility of the local agencies involved.

Child Care

Mr. Kevin McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15225]

Mr. Redwood: My Department is a member of a consortium that provides nursery places for staff who are primary carers of children aged between six weeks and five years. The use of these places by grade and gender is as follows:

Grade	*Female*	*Male*
Grade 6	1	0
Grade 7	2	3
SEO	0	2
HEO	2	3
EO	11	1
AO	6	0

Places are reserved on holiday playschemes for children aged between four and 14 years during the Easter and summer school holidays. Information on the use of these places is not available in the form requested.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to introduce controls on Welsh Office spending on the promotion of grant-maintained schools similar to those which are to be imposed on local authorities in accordance with section 36 of the Education Act 1993; when he proposes to publish the result of his consultation with local councils on this issue; how much time he allowed local authorities to respond to his circular on the matter; and if he will make a statement. [16950]

Mr. Richards: Welsh Office expenditure in respect of grant-maintained status for schools in limited to what is already considered to be the minimum necessary to ensure that interested parties have sufficient information which is factual and non-political in content, tone, and presentation to enable them to take an informed view about the grant-maintained option.

The consultation paper on the joint draft Education (Ballot Expenditure) Regulations was issued on 27 January 1995. Consultees were invited to submit comments by 24 February. In the light of the comments received, my right hon. Friends have modified upwards several of the expenditure limits described in the regulations which will now come into force on 1 April this year.

The provisions to limit local authority expenditure and put modest sums at the disposal of governing bodies are designed to achieve a balance between LEAs' and governing bodies' abilities to inform local debate on the matter.

TB and Cancer

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were reported as suffering from *(a)* tuberculosis, *(b)* breast cancer and *(c)* cervical cancer in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [16744]

Mr. Richards: Information on the total number of people suffering from diseases is not collected centrally. However, provisional figures for 1994 show that there were 184 new cases of tuberculosis in Wales notified to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. In 1989, the latest year for which complete data are available, there were 1,674 new female breast cancers and 342 new cervical cancers registered by the Wales Cancer Registry.

Local Education Authority Staff

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of administrative staff employed in each of the local education authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [16746]

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of people employed by local authorities in Wales is compiled by the Local Government Management Board. Figures for staff employed in administration are not separately available. The estimated number of full-time and part-time non-manual staff employed in the education service, other than lecturers and teachers, in June 1994 was 11,050—8,870 full-time equivalents. This comprises all non-manual staff identified as employed within the education service and includes administrative, secretarial and clerical staff, youth and community workers, nursery and other non-teaching classroom assistants, library staff serving educational establishments, educational psychologists and careers guidance staff. Figures for individual education authorities are not released into the public domain because estimates at this level of disaggregation are not considered sufficiently reliable by the LGMB.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which police headquarters he has visited in Wales since taking office. [16748]

Mr. Redwood.: None. The police force is a responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to reduce the numbers of mixed-sex wards in Welsh hospitals. [17350]

Mr. Richards: Hospitals are already required to provide services which take account of an individual's privacy and dignity, and I have told the NHS that the next edition of the patients charter, to be published later this year, will emphasise the need for the service to take better account of patients' preferences when arranging hospital accommodation.

To prepare the ground for the requirements of the new charter, I have asked the chairman of each health and NHS trust in Wales to develop proposals by the end of April for improving performance in this area.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimate of departmental expenditure on advertising and publicity for 1994–95; and what was the actual number for 1993–94. [17192]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Total expenditure on publicity from my Department's centrally managed budgets was £8.47 million in 1993–94 of which £.78 million was in respect of advertising. The corresponding figures for 1994–95 are estimated to be £7.89 million and £.56 million respectively.

Indonesia (Visits)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Indonesia since 1 January 1990, naming the Ministers and giving the reasons for the visit in each case. [16510]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The following ministerial visits to Indonesia covered by my present departmental responsibilities have taken place since 1 January 1990:

26 February 1992: Lord Rae Minister for Technology and Aerospace. Trade promotion visit.

7-10 January 1993: Richard Needham, Minister for Trade. Trade promotion visit.

1-3 June 1993: Richard Needham, Minister for Trade. Trade promotion visit.

10–15 September 1993: Tim Eggar, Minister for Energy. Trade Promotion Visit.

1-3 December 1993: Richard Needham, Minister for Trade. Trade promotion visit.

18-23 October 1994: Richard Needham, Minister for Trade. Trade promotion visit.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the exact dates of visits by officials in his Department to Indonesia since 1 January 1990 and the reason for the visit in each case. [16511]

Mr. Ian Taylor: This information is not held on a central database and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

West Midlands Economy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings he has held in the last two years about future programmes to regenerate and develop the west midlands economy through the European structural funds; and what these programmes will be. [16226]

Mr. Page: My colleagues and I have on occasion met Commissioners to discuss matters generally concerning the European structural funds. No meetings have been specifically about west midlands issues. The west midlands will benefit from structural fund assistance through the following programmes already approved:

West Midlands/Objectives 2 Single Programming Document 1994–1996.

The Marches 5b Single Programming Document 1994–96.

The Great Britain Objective 3 Programme.

I expect the eligible parts of the West Midlands also benefit from structural fund community initiative programmes including, EMPLOYMENT, KONVER, RETEX, SME, RECHAR, LEADER and URBAN.

Dounreay

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals have been submitted for decommissioning the Dounreay fast reactor, the prototype fast reactor and the HMS Vulcan reactor test establishment. [16054]

Mr. Page: The responsibility for the decommissioning of nuclear plant at the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's Dounreay site rests with UKAEA Government division. The DTI has accepted responsibility for funding most of the work. Proposals for the decommissioning of the Dounreay fast reactor and the prototype fast reactor, which form part of the programme of work, have been agreed between the UKAEA Government division and the DTI. Both reactors are currently undergoing the first stage of decommissioning.

The decommissioning of the HMS Vulcan reactor test establishment is a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what comparative studies were carried out into the options for managing the final load of spent nuclear fuel from the Dounreay prototype fast reactor; and what studies were done to justify the reprocessing of the fuel, as referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 14 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *573*.

Mr. Page: The UKAEA has carried out a study of the management options for the final load of spent fuel from the Dounreay prototype fast reactor. The study considered the following alternatives to a continuation of reprocessing in the Dounreay PFR reprocessing plant:

(a) Reprocessing at Sellafield, in France, in CIS countries or in Japan;

(b) Long term storage pending either reprocessing or direct disposal;

(c) Direct disposal.

The study is presently being reviewed and updated to incorporate current data. It provisionally concluded that, on technical and economic grounds, continued reprocessing at Dounreay is the preferred option.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action will be taken concerning installation of a nitric acid neutralising plant at Dounreay. [16053]

Mr. Page: Specifications for a nitric acid neutralisation plant at Dounreay are currently being prepared. It is expected that construction and installation of the necessary equipment will be completed by 1997.

Top Executives' Pay

Mr. McFall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of the talks between his Department and the CBI committee established to look at the pay of the top executives. [15300]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The formation of a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Richard Greenbury to review the framework for determining and disclosing executive remuneration is a private sector initiative. The Government have no direct involvement in the committee's work. The committee's recommendations will be addressed in the first instance to companies and their shareholders, but the Government will be ready to consider whether any recommendations require legislative action.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15235]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The DTI—excluding the following executive agencies: Companies House, the Insolvency Service, the National Engineering Laboratory, the National Physical Laboratory, the Laboratory of the Government Chemists, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, the Patent Office and the Radiocommunications Agency—provides school holiday playscheme places in London and a number of regional locations.

The figures showing the number of staff whose children used the playschemes during 1994–95 are set out in the following table:

Grade level	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
5	2	2	4
6	1	—	1
7	12	2	14
SEO	5	3	8
HEO	6	10	16
EO	1	7	8
AO	—	19	19
AA	1	9	10
Total	28	52	80

The chief executives of the DTI's executive agencies will respond direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to respond to your question concerning child care and nursery facilities.

Companies House does not provide nursery facilities, but we do provide financial assistance (50% of the cost) to staff who wish to use our approved Holiday Play Care Scheme during the Easter and Summer school holidays. This assistance has been available since the Summer of 1993.

I have detailed below the average usage, grade and gender split for the last three holidays ie Summer 1993, Easter 1994 and Summer 1994.

Average number of staff using the scheme	*Average gender split* %	*Average grade split* %
19	Female 93 Male 7	Clerical 71 Management 29

Please let me know if you require any further details.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about childcare or nursery facilities in the Insolvency Service.

The Service participates in the DTI Playscheme in Central London, operational in school holidays, and provides a number of places at a subsidised rate. Usage in the 21 months period from April 1993 to December 1994 was:

	Playscheme days	*Staff grade*	*Gender*
	3	Assistant Official Receiver (B)	Male
	27	Examiner (D)	Female
	34	Administrative Officer	Female
	67	Typist	Female
Total	131		

Letter from Richard Worswick to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question concerning childcare/nursery facilities available at the laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC).

The three DTI Agencies based at Teddington, Middlesex (National Physical Laboratory, National Weights and Measures Laboratory and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist) together provide a nursery facility at the Teddington site for employees' children of pre-school age and babies over 3 months old. An analysis (by grade and gender) of the 17 LGC employees who have children attending the nursery is given in the table below.

In addition, two children of employees of DTI's Chemicals and Biotechnology Division (some of whose staff are co-located with LGC on the Teddington site) attend the nursery facility. The data for these employees is shown in brackets in the table below.

		Gender of employee	
Employee grade	*Number in grade*	*Male*	*Female*
Grade 7	2	1	1
S–level grades	4	3	1
H–1level grades	3	1	2
EO and equivalent grades	4	1	3
Administrative, support and equivalent	(+2 CB) 4	—	(+2 CB) 4
Totals	(+2 CB) 17	6	(+2 CB) 11

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Kevin McNamara dated, 30 March 1995:

I would refer to your Parliamentary Question to the President to the Board of Trade concerning child care and nursery facilities available within his Department. I would confirm that this agency does not provide any such facilities.

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Kevin McNamara dated, 30 March 1995:

I am writing in response to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding child care facilities within the DTI, and their use (a) by grade and (b) by gender.

The National Physical Laboratory, in conjunction with the Laboratory of the Government Chemist and the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, provides an on-site nursery at Teddington.

As at February 1995, usage of the nursery by staff at NPL was:-

	Grade	*Number*
a) by grade	Grade 7	6
	SSO & equivalent	1
	HSO & equivalent	5
	SO & equivalent	6
	ASO & equivalent	1
b) by gender	Male	7
	Female	12

I hope the above provides the information you require.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of this Agency to your Parliamentary Question about child care and nursery facilities.

There is a nursery facility on the Teddington site shared by NWML with the National Physical Laboratory and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. Three members of NWML staff currently use the facility as follows:

Grade

1 Higher Professional & Technical Officer

1 Higher Scientific Officer

1 Scientific Officer

Gender

1 female

2 male

Letter from P.R.S. Hartnack to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

I have been asked to reply—with respect to the Patent Office—to your recent Parliamentary question to the President of the Board of Trade concerning child care or nursery facilities.

The Patent Office occupies the Duffryn site at Newport, South Wales, alongside the Central Statistical Office, and has access to the nursery facilities operated by CSO. At the moment six Patent Office employees (two female executive officers, four female administrative officers) place children in the nursery during the working day.

In addition, the Patent Office operates playschemes during the Easter and Summer school holidays, when staff at work may find it difficult to arrange care for children at home. We bus children from the Newport site to a larger nursery in Cardiff (about nine miles) at the beginning of the working day, and return them to the site at the end.

Usage in 1994 was as follows:

Grade	*Gender*	*Number*
Easter playscheme		
HEO	F	2
HEO	M	1
EO	M	1
AO	F	1
AO	M	1
Support grade	M	1
AA	F	2
Summer playscheme		
HEO	F	2
HEO	M	2
EO	F	3
AO	F	2
Support grade	M	1
AA	M	1
AA	F	1

(HEO stands for higher executive officer and AA for administrative assistance). I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 30 March 1995:

CHILD CARE AND NURSERY FACILITIES

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about child care and nursery facilities.

The Agency does not have any child care or nursery facilities at present and there are no plans to introduce such facilities in the foreseeable future.

Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list imports as a percentage of the United Kingdom market for manufacturers by main sector for the latest date for which figures are available. [17128]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The latest available information was published in 1990 by the Central Statistical Office in "Business Monitor MQ12", available in the Library of the House. Information for 1993 is expected to be published by the CSO in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics", at the end of April 1995.

Financial and Advisory Services

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what leaflets are published by his Department which list the forms of *(a)* financial and *(b)* advisory assistance available from public or private sector sources to businesses in Britain. [16900]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The DTI brochure "Services for Business" sets out the range of services available from the DTI; supported by secondary publications providing more detailed information on the individual services.

Increasingly, DTI services are being delivered by Business Links. These private sector-led partnerships are bringing together the full range of business support services in their areas—providing "one stop" access.

Business Links are putting together lists of the financial and advisory assistance available from public and private sector sources in their areas. The information is not held centrally and the DTI does not have a comprehensive list of all the business support services available.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what forms of financial assistance outside areas receiving regional development assistance are available for assisting established companies *(a)* to expand premises or production and *(b)* to pilot new brands of machinery; and how many applications for such assistance are processed. [16870]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Outside the areas qualifying for regional aid there is no financial assistance from the DTI specifically to help businesses to expand premises or production or to pilot new brands of machinery. However, the SMART—small firms merit award for research and technology—and SPUR—support for products under research—schemes help small businesses research and develop new products and processes involving innovative technology. In the past year, there were 1,494 entries for the SMART competition, resulting in 180 offers of support, and there have been 168 applications for SPUR which, to date, have led to 73 offers of support.

Contract with America

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the Washington DC embassy's reports of 9 and 18 January concerning the Republicans' contract with America. [17083]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have arranged to deposit the documents requested in the Library of the House.

Deregulation Initiatives

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which overseas posts have reported on deregulation initiatives since the start of the current year. [17088]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Since the start of the current year, 14 overseas posts have reported formally and informally on deregulation in their host countries. These posts were:

Austria; Canada; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Ireland; Italy; Japan; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Spain; Sweden; and the United States of America.

Argentina

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the policy of Her Majesty's Government on trade with the Argentine; and what plans he has to review it. [16231]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), on 7 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *259–60*. Our overall policy is to promote the continued growth of trade with and investment in, Argentina and we have no plans to review that policy. There remains an embargo on the sale of arms and military equipment to Argentina.

Overseas Investments

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the contribution of overseas investment to the profitability of *(a)* British Gas, *(b)* British Telecom, *(c)* the privatised water companies and *(d)* the privatised electricity companies; and if he will make a statement. [16233]

Mr. Eggar: Decisions about overseas investment are matters for the companies themselves and not for me, but I am always pleased at the successes of the privatised companies in overseas markets.

Arms Exports to Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *483*, what were the five applications for the export of arms to Indonesia that were refused by his Department in 1994; what were the arms involved; which were the firms promoting them; and what were the reasons for refusal. [15995]

Mr. Ian Taylor: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of export licences or applications for licences.

Post Office

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many crown post offices are currently in operation throughout *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and if he will list the crown post offices still in operation in Scotland and the parliamentary constituencies within which they lie. [16311]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I understand from the Post Office that, at the end of February 1995, there were 61 crown post offices operating in Scotland and 735 crown post offices operating throughout the United Kingdom. A list of the crown post offices operating in Scotland, showing the parliamentary constituencies within which they are located, is being placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are employed at each of the crown post offices operating within Scotland. [16310]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* A copy of the list provided by the Post Office of the 60 crown post offices currently operating in Scotland and the numbers of staff employed at each of them is being placed in the Library of the House.

Indonesia (Exports)

Ms Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what export licences have been granted to British firms for export to Indonesia of *(a)* crowd control technologies and *(b)* CS gas. [16728]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of export licences or applications for export licences.

Iraq (Export Credit Guarantees)

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the potential export credit guarantee liability in respect of contracts entered into with companies in Iraq or the Government of Iraq; how much of this amount is in respect of defence contracts; and what amount of export credit guarantee liability has been actually paid. [16994]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The ECGD's current exposure on Iraq is estimated at £652 million, of which £593 million relates to un-recovered claims payments. Over the period 1985–90, ECGD supported about £52 million for exports with potential defence applications.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated total number of liable parents for child maintenance without care responsibilities prior to the Child Support Act 1991; what is the most recent estimated number of parents without care responsibilities but potentially liable for child support; and what is the estimated total number in each category who were or are not paying any child support at all and the estimated total numbers who paid £500 or less per child. [15264]

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the form requested. Estimates at the time the White Paper "Children Come First" was published in 1990 indicated that only 30 per cent. of lone mothers and 3 per cent of lone fathers received maintenance. The average amount of maintenance paid was £25 a week.

Incapacity Benefits

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of incapacity benefits have been found *(a)* capable of work, *(b)* capable of alternative work and *(c)* capable of their usual occupation during each of the last four quarters; and in each category, how many of these were examined and how many were not. [16102]

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

Outcome of claims referred to Benefits Agency medical service.

Quarter ending	*December 1993*	*March 1994*	*June 1994*	*September 1994*
Capable of alternative work	25,000	28,000	25,000	27,000
Capable of normal occupation	5,000	5,000	4,000	4,000

Notes:

1. Based on a 100 per cent. count of cases, rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. References are for sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance claimants, but excludes those references where the national insurance contribution conditions for sickness/invalidity benefit have not been satisfied and benefit is payable because the person's incapacity is the result of an accident at work or a prescribed industrial disease.

3. Figures for June and September do not include references to Durham medical examination centre. Figures for September do not include references to Swansea reference office.

All these claimants were examined by the Benefits Agency medical service.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if Mr. Harold Fairs' entitlement to incapacity benefit will cease on 1 June; if his retirement pension will be payable from the first pension pay day on 5 June; and from which public funds during the period 2 to 4 June Mr. Fairs will meet the needs for which his incapacity benefit is intended. [17354]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *351-52*.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16286]

Mr. Hague: This Department spent the following on public relations with the private sector during the financial year 1993–94:

Department	*£*
Headquarters	nil
Benefits Agency	nil
Contributions Agency	nil
Child Support Agency	nil
War Pensions Agency	nil
Resettlement Agency	nil
Information Technology Services Agency	2,765

The activities covered by the contractor to ITSA were to assist the agency in the establishment of its public relations function; to advise on dealing with the IT press, and to make recommendations on both internal and external communication.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16623]

Mr. Hague: The Department has produced only three separate departmental annual reports. Costs, in March 1995 prices, for these are as follows:

1995–96: £34,104

1994–95: £27,342

1993–94: £33,476

For the years 1991–92 and 1992–93 the Department's expenditure plans were published as part of a Treasury series and separate figures are therefore not available.

For the years 1985–86 to 1989–90 expenditure plans for all Departments were published by the Treasury in its expenditure White Paper. Separate figures are not available.

Benefits (Capital Limits)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the current capital limits to the entitlement to benefits and other assistance together with the year of introduction; what was the value of each in real terms at the time of introduction; and if he will make a statement. [16611]

Mr. Roger Evans: The five income-related benefits—council tax benefit, disability working allowance, family credit, housing benefit and income support—all have a lower capital limit, above which deductions are made from benefit, and an upper capital limit, above which no benefit can be paid. The lower capital limit in all those benefits is also the level above which no personal allowance can be paid for a dependent child if he possesses that amount of capital or more.

Additionally, in qualifying for a social fund maternity or funeral payment, community care grant or budgeting loan, if capital is held above a certain limit, deductions are made from any payment awarded.

The limits, and the dates when they were introduced or last increased, are set out in the table.

£

	Date fixed	Value now if uprated in line with prices[1]
Council Tax Benefit		
Lower capital limit £3,000	April 1993	3,108
Upper capital limit £16,000	April 1993	16,576
Disability Working Allowance		
Lower capital limit £3,000	April 1992	3,216
Upper capital limit £16,000	April 1992	£16,596
Family Credit		
Lower capital limit £3,000	April 1988	4,105
Upper capital limit £8,000	April 1990	9,940
Housing Benefit		
Lower capital limit £3,000	April 1988	4,105
Upper capital limit £16,000	April 1990	19,881
Income Support		
Lower capital limit £3,000	April 1988	4,105
Upper capital limit £8,000	April 1990	9,940
Social Fund		
Capital limit for funeral £500 or maternity payments (up to age 60)	April 1990	621
Capital limit for funeral £1,000 or maternity payments (60 and over)	April 1990	1,242
Community care grant £500 (up to age 60)	April 1988	684
Community care grant £1,000 (60 and over)	April 1988	1,242
Budgeting loan £500 (up to age 60)	April 1988	684
Budgeting loan £1,000 (60 and over)	April 1988	1,242

[1] Uprated in line with ROSSI—retail prices index excluding housing costs.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people who will receive the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement. [16830]

Mr. Roger Evans: On current assumptions, 2,110,00 people would be receiving a jobseeker's allowance at any one time in 1996–97. Once transitional protection has ended, on the same assumptions 2,070,000 would be receiving a jobseeker's allowance.

Notes:

1. Assumes in 1996–97 and 1997–98 claimant unemployment in Great Britain of 2.4 million and an unemployment benefit case load of 500,000.

2. Estimates rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17037]

Mr. Hague: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is exceptional for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and occasional general references are made to persons who are members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Performance Targets

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance targets he has set his Department's agencies for 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [18010]

Mr. Lilley: The targets I have set my executive agencies for 1995–96 are given.

The targets represent a significant challenge to each agency, and support the continued success of the citizen's charter and next steps programmes.

As well as performance targets, I have also set resource management targets requiring agencies to deliver their services within agreed financial resources.

Further information on my agencies' plans for 1995–96 is contained in their individual business plans which have been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The targets for 1995–96 are:

BENEFITS AGENCY

1 Benefit clearance times[1]

Social fund crisis loans—the day the need arises.

Income support new claims—63 per cent. of claims cleared in five days and 87 per cent. in 13 days.

Incapacity benefit—65 per cent. of claims cleared in 10 days and 85 per cent. in 30 days.

Child benefit—68 per cent. of claims cleared in 10 days and 94 per cent. in 30 days.

Family credit—60 per cent. of claims cleared in 13 days and 95 per cent. in 42 days.

Disability living allowance—68 per cent. of claims cleared in 30 days and 85 per cent. in 53 days.

2 Benefit Accuracy

Income support—to pay the correct amount in 87 per cent. of cases.

Incapacity benefit—to pay the correct amount in 94 per cent. of cases.

Family credit—to pay the correct amount in 91 per cent. of cases.

Disability living allowance—to pay the correct amount in 96 per cent. of cases.

3 Customer satisfaction

85 per cent. of customers to regard the agency's service as satisfactory or better.

4 Resource management

To manage the agency's resources so as to deliver its business plan within the gross budget allocation.

To keep to the net cash limited provision for the discretionary social fund budget approved by Parliament.

To deliver new efficiency savings of at least £75 million.

5 Financial recovery

Recovery of social fund loans—£273 million.

Benefit savings from the detection of fraud—£680 million.

Recovery of benefit overpayments—£110 million.

CONTRIBUTIONS AGENCY

1 Performance: compliance

Collection of contribution arrears, excluding central payments section, of £250 million.

Identification of £133 million class 1 arrears as a result of compliance work.

Carry out 116,500 surveys, including 23,300 employer educational visits.

Actively identify 40,000 persons with class 2 liability who have an immediate requirement to pay contributions.

2 Performance: records maintenance

Process 98 per cent. of available employers' end of year returns by 31 December 1995.

Correct 92 per cent. of rejects from employers' end of year returns by 31 March 1996.

3 Performance: information provision/customer service

Clear 99 per cent. of benefit inquiries handled clerically in two working days to 98 per cent. accuracy.

Despatch either a full reply, or an informative response to 95 per cent. of customer enquiries within 10 working days of receipt.

Complete action to register acceptable personal pension cases and process straight-forward termination notices for 95 per cent. of all cases within 22 working days of receipt.

4. Customer satisfaction

Provide a level of public service considered to be satisfactory by at least 80 per cent. of customers surveyed.

5. Resource management

Manage the agency's resources so as to deliver its business plan within a total budget of £240.244 million.

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

1. Performance

£300 million of maintenance to be collected, or arranged for direct payment from AP to PWC IN 1995–96.[2]

90 per cent. of payments made to PWCs to be made within 10 working days of receipt from the AP.

To achieve a rapid and continuing improvement in accuracy so that in at least 75 per cent. of cases checked during March 1996 the cash value will be for the correct amount.

Where a client is dissatisfied with a child support officer's decision and requests a review, 50 per cent. to be cleared within 13 weeks; 80 per cent. to be cleared within 26 weeks; and no more than 20 per cent. to be older than 26 weeks as at 31 March 1996.

60 per cent. of new maintenance applications to be cleared within 26 weeks and as at 31 March 1996 no more than 10 per cent. of all maintenance applications received by the agency to be over 52 weeks old.

2. Customer satisfaction

To achieve a score of 65 per cent. on an index of client satisfaction with the agency's service, as determined by an independent national survey.

3. Resource management

To manage the agency's resources so as to deliver its Business Plan within the gross budget allocation.

WAR PENSIONS AGENCY

1. Performance

Disablement first claims (UK)—60 per cent. cleared in 150 days

Disablement second and subsequent claims—60 per cent. cleared in 135 days.

War widows claims (UK)—80 per cent. cleared in 70 days.

Entitlement appeals—70 per cent. in 275 days.

Assessment appeals—70 per cent. in 190 days.

Claims Accuracy, all claims—95 per cent.

2 Customer satisfaction

To achieve a level of 85 per cent. of war pensioners sampled who regard the agency's service as satisfactory or better, as determined by an independent survey.

3 Resource Management

To manage the agency's administration resources so as to deliver the business plan within a total budget of £40.56 million.

RESETTLEMENT AGENCY

1 Disengagement strategy

Ensure sufficient replacement bedspaces are operational to enable the closure of Leeds and Bishopbriggs (Glasgow) resettlement units and thereby completion of the disengagement programme by 31 March 1996.

2 Customer care

Visit 30 per cent. of grant-aided organisations by 31 March 1996 to ensure that the conditions of the grant award are met, that facilities are managed in a way which ensures value for money and to establish levels of customer care, with a view to dissemination of best practice throughout the network of hostel provision.

3 Resettlement

Ensure that the objective of successful resettlement is maintained through the Resettlement Agency's own systems of measurement, including extending the use of its resettlement index to 50 per cent. of grant-aided organisations.

4 Planning

In collaboration with DSS headquarters, plan and effect the orderly transfer of appropriate residual agency functions to them, assuming that all possible business is concluded by 31 March 1996 and that ministerial approval for funding and monitoring arrangements from April 1996 is agreed.

5 Resource management

Manage the agency's resources so as to deliver its business plan within a total allocation of £26,975 million.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AGENCY

1 Performance

Deliver an overall business efficiency improvement of 8 per cent.

Deliver 90 per cent. of services to customers to service levels for budget, time and quality as agreed within contracts.

During 1995–96 to outsource the bulk of ITSA's IT processing functions to departmental time scales.

Define the three-year contract frameworks with customers for core systems development.

2 Resource management

Manage ITSA's resources within the agency's funding regime.

Notes:

[1] Clearance times cover the date of receipt of a written claim in the agency to the date of decision/payment. All days refer to working days.

[2] The maintenance target comprises the following two forecast components:

£140 million of maintenance will be collected by the agency and £160 million assessed by the agency for direct payment by absent parents to parents with care; and

£540 million benefit savings are expected to result from the achievement of CSA targets.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* gender. [15240]

Mr. Hague: The Department provides a range of subsidised child care facilities to its staff, including nurseries, 646 places; holiday playschemes, 2,560 places; and child care referral services. A breakdown of child care usage by grade and by gender is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the Department's child care facilities are open to men and women of all grades.

National Insurance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how long it takes the Contributions Agency to respond to requests for records of national insurance payments made; [15988]

(2) what are the performance targets set for the Contributions Agency when clients seek a record of payment contributions. [15992]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of national insurance is the responsibility of Mr. George Bertram, the acting chief executive of the Contributions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 29 March 1995:

As Acting Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the National Insurance scheme. I have been asked to reply to your questions about requests from customers for information about their National Insurance Contributions records. In view of the nature of the questions I have combined the responses.

There is no specific performance target for the Agency to respond to requests from customers for information about their contributions records. However, one of the targets set by the Secretary of State for the Contributions Agency is to send either a full reply, or an informative response, to 95% of all customer enquiries within 10 working days of receipt. We treat requests for records of National Insurance payments as falling within the scope of this target.

In many cases, eg where contributions are paid by direct debit and the enquiry relates only to contributions paid by that method, we can readily provide the information from the computer sub-system which processes those payments. Similarly where the question is simply how much was paid in specific years we can quickly obtain a copy of an individual's National Insurance account.

Where however customers require a comprehensive statement of their National Insurance position, usually because they are concerned about entitlement to retirement pension, a computer produced statement, detailing yearly contributions paid, is normally issued. The statement also advises customers of any years in which insufficient contributions have been paid towards retirement pension, how much would need to be paid to make good any shortfall, and how much contributions can be paid. In line with the customer enquiry target set for the Agency we respond to those requests within 10 working days and advise the customer that normally it takes about six weeks to provide the required statements. On an exception basis, where an urgent response is required, it is possible to obtain the information from the computer and then process the application clerically. But to do this for all cases would be a costly way of dealing with the large numbers of requests we receive.

I hope you find this reply helpful. If I can be of any further assistance, please let me know.

TRANSPORT

Tourist Signs

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the results of his review of tourism signing and proposals for deregulation. [18054]

Mr. Watts: I have been reviewing, in close collaboration with the Department of National Heritage, and the Welsh and Scottish Offices, the policy and regulations dealing with the provision of white and brown tourist traffic signs on local authority roads. We have concluded that there should be much more flexibility in the provision of signs, to help tourists and tourist businesses. In particular we have decided that the definition of tourist establishments eligible for signs should be extended to a wider range of destinations and facilities that attract or are used by visitors, including retail and catering establishments. This will involve an amendment of the existing Traffic Signs Regulations, and we are about to consult further on specific proposals for an amending statutory instrument. Copies of the consultation documents for England including revised draft guidance to local authorities, will be placed in the Library on 3 April.

Automatic Train Protection

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received from the Health and Safety Commission and Railtrack on British Rail's report on automatic train protection; and if he will make a statement. [17947]

Dr. Mawhinney: Serious railway accidents are relatively rare and there has been a significant improvement in railway safety in recent years. Accidents involving signals passed at danger, overspeeding and buffer stop collisions, which ATP would prevent, are infrequent and account for about 3 per cent. of fatalities and injuries, excluding trespassers and suicides. The trend in the number of serious incidents where signals have been passed at danger has been downward in the last five years. But there is no room for complacency about the need to pursue cost effective measures to reduce the risk of accidents to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

The British Rail report on ATP examined the technical feasibility, costs and benefits of two pilot ATP systems. Copies of the report were placed in the Library of the House last July. The HSC and Railtrack have concluded that the report was thorough and sound. I welcome that conclusion.

On the basis of advice I have received from the HSC, I have concluded that applications of ATP, other automatic devices or measures giving protection against ATP-preventable accidents may be justified on parts of the network. In particular, the HSC has asked the Health and Safety Executive to explore with Railtrack the options for tackling ATP-preventable accidents, and the criteria that might be used for identifying parts of the network where such measures could yield value for money, with a view to receiving a proposed strategy from Railtrack by June 1995. In addition and in the longer term, the HSC has advised me that ATP or automatic train control should be adopted as standard on new high speed lines including the channel tunnel rail link, and that full consideration should be given to installing ATP functions within future major resignalling works, such as modernisation of the west coast main line.

BR and Railtrack have advised me that network-wide fitment of ATP as piloted is not justifiable because the costs far outweigh the benefits. The HSC has endorsed this view and, furthermore, considers that there are alternative safety investments which would be likely to yield greater effectiveness in terms of lives saved, and better value for money. The BR report on ATP has demonstrated the importance of assessing the costs and benefits of all investment aimed at improving safety to ensure that funding goes to schemes which maximise the benefits for rail users. Copies of the HSC's full advice, which I accept in full, have been placed in the Library of the House.

British Rail and Railtrack remain committed to a co-ordinated programme to reduce the risks associated with signals passed at danger, overspeeding and buffer stop collisions. As part of this programme, the feasibility of a drivers' reminder device is being researched which will help prevent drivers stopped at danger signals for inadvertently starting against these signals when the train is ready to move, for example at a station. This is one of the more common type of SPAD leading to serious consequences and such a device could potentially deliver up to 25 per cent. of the benefits of network-wide ATP. An early trial of this device is proposed.

A further project is examining enhancement of the present automatic warning system so that the brakes are applied automatically if a train approaches a red signal at excessive speed indicating an impending signal passed at danger or over-speeding incident. A detailed specification is being drawn up.

Risk analysis is also being applied to track layout and signalling design, to ensure that safety factors are taken into account quantitatively in the design of the network. Protective signalling measures have already been introduced at a number of vulnerable locations and examinations of other vulnerable locations is ongoing.

Railtrack is giving high priority to the development of appropriate techniques for quantifying the costs and benefits of all these projects and considering their application at individual locations.

ATP and other devices are not the only way of preventing or mitigating certain risks. The human factors involved will continue to be addressed through driver selection, training and motivation and supervision programmes. This includes close attention to driver familiarisation when new rolling stock and signalling is introduced, and a rigorous alcohol and drugs policy.

The Chiltern line and Great Western pilot ATP installations will continue in service, and ATP will be extended to the new Heathrow express link in due course. The scope for improvement in the cost/benefit ratio of ATP will continue to be examined through these schemes.

I have asked the HSC for an overall progress report in July.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the childcare or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15232]

Mr. Norris: Staff in DOT central and its agencies have access to 10 holiday playschemes and three nursery facilities throughout the United Kingdom.

Due to the varying number of places taken up at different times of the year, and the changing client group, it is not possible to supply precise numbers, by grade and gender of all parents/guardians whose children use the playschemes.

The table confirms the gender breakdown of parents/guardians who use the available nursery facilities. Figures are not available in relation to grade.

Nursery	*Female*	*Male*
Swansea on site DVLA	49	9
Bristol Acorns Nursery	2	3
Hastings CSA Nursery	3	3

Computer Associates

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action British Rail is taking to stop Computer Associates terminating its software licences before privatisation; what damages and costs are being sought; if a counter-claim has been made against British Rail; and if he will make a statement. [17319]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate has been made of the costs incurred by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency as a result of Computer Associates' court action limiting access to software.

Mr. Norris: The cost of migrating from CA to substitute products was borne by EDS, the Department's IT supplier.

Bull Bars

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what obstacles in European law would prevent the introduction in the United Kingdom of a ban on the use and manufacture of bull bars; [17252]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a ban on the use of bull bars on the fronts of road vehicles; [17251]

(3) what is his most recent assessment of the numbers of additional road fatalities and serious injuries that are likely in the next two years as a result of collisions involving cars fitted with front bull bars. [17253]

Mr. Norris: We would expect to be in a position to take powers at a national level to ban the fitment of bull bars as aftermarket accessories. However, certain vehicle models with bull bars fitted as original equipment have received European whole vehicle type approval and no EU member state can prevent the free circulation and use of a vehicle so approved.

The Transport Research Laboratory has estimated that an extra 35 deaths and 350 serious injuries to vulnerable road users could result from collisions with vehicles fitted with bull bars. As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Gentleman on the 31 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *586*, we have taken steps to identify specific injury accidents involving bull bars to determine the effects of bull bars in practice. It would be premature to propose legislative action until the results of this exercise are analysed, which should be towards the end of this year.

Fatal Accident Injuries

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *385*, and his statement in the answer that the costs of relatives at inquests or fatal accident inquiries are not generally a charge on public funds, if he will list the exceptions to this general practice since 1979 and state the criteria or tests applied in making any such determination.

Mr. Norris: It is not usual Government practice to meet the costs of legal representation for relatives of accident victims because inquests are intended to be informal and legal representation is not considered necessary. Any exceptions to this have been judged on individual merits.

The Lockerbie disaster was the only recent instance where Department of Transport funds have been used to meet relatives' legal costs at a transport-related fatal accident inquiry or at an inquest. As regards other Government Department funds, the Lord Chancellor considered that the wholly exceptional circumstances of the Marchioness disaster, particularly the fact that this is effectively the second inquest, justified making assistance available in this case in the interests of justice.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how many contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16278]

Mr. Norris: Nothing was spent on such activity.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many tests for vehicle exhaust emissions were conducted in each of the past five years on heavy goods vehicles; [16943]

(2) how many tests for vehicle exhaust emissions were carried out on coaches in each of the past five years; [16944]

(3) how many tests for vehicle exhaust emissions were carried out on buses in each of the past five years. [16896]

Mr. Norris: All heavy goods vehicles, coaches and buses have their emissions checked as part of their annual roadworthiness test. The number of tests has remained fairly constant over the last five years: with 663,757 HGVS and 86,499 buses and coaches being tested on average each year.

In addition, emissions are checked at the roadside as part of the general enforcement checks carried out by the vehicle inspectorate and also at operators' premises as part of maintenance assessments. The number of such checks carried out over the last five years are as follows:

Year	*HGVs*	*Buses/coaches*
1993–94	148,365	37,810
1992–93	146,952	33,023
1991–92	129,850	28,394
1990–91	150,853	27,313
1989–90	119,867	26,991

The 1993–94 figures include 10,589 heavy goods vehicles and 5,165 buses and coaches which had special checks on emissions only.

Air Traffic Services

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received in opposition to the proposed privatisation of national air traffic services. [16712]

(2) what discussions he has had with the chief executives of airport authorities and air traffic control officers concerning the proposed privatisation of national air traffic services; and if he will make a statement. [16713]

Mr. Norris: The then Secretary of State for Transport conducted a public consultation into the proposed privatisation of the national air traffic services between May and July 1994. Comments on the proposal were received, inter alia, from airport authorities and from individual air traffic controllers and their representatives, including the Civil Aviation Authority trade unions. The then Secretary of State for Transport also held a meeting with the Civil Aviation Authority trade unions to discuss the proposal.

Of those who responded to the consultation, privatisation in principle was supported by the airlines, airport operators, ATC providers, and aviation consultants. A majority of individual respondents and their representatives argued that NATS should remain in the public sector. The Secretary of State published a response to the consultation on 22 November 1994; copies were placed in the Library of the House.

The Government continue to favour the proposed privatisation in principle, but wish the concerns raised in the consultation to be properly considered before proceeding further. This process is still under way, and the Secretary of State will announce his intentions in due course.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17033]

Mr. Norris: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Clinical Outcome Indicators

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to publish health service clinical outcome indicators similar to those published in December 1994 by the Secretary of State for Scotland in respect of individual health boards and hospitals in Northern Ireland. [15868]

Mr. Moss: No. I intend to await the outcome of the Department of Health working group which is looking at clinical indicators before taking a decision on publication of indicators in Northern Ireland.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *614*, if he will give the costs of water and sewerage charges incurred in respect of the Department's premises in the mainland of Britain. [15933]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Office pays water and sewerage charges for two premises in mainland Britain in which they are minor tenants. The charges form a proportion of the annual rental charge which includes the cost of utilities and are not separately identified on the quarterly basis of accounts sent by Property Holdings. It would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *614*, if he will give such information regarding the water and sewerage charges paid by his Department as can be supplied without disproportionate cost. [15932]

Mr. Moss: It is not possible to supply any information except at disproportionate cost.

Special Branch

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to transfer Special Branch and associated covert police agencies from anti-terrorism operations to working against the leading importers/suppliers of illegal drugs. [16412]

Sir John Wheeler: The deployment of Special Branch and associated police covert agencies in anti-terrorist and anti-crime operations is a matter for the Chief Constable. However, as publicly stated recently by the head of the RUC Special Branch, it is currently providing its expertise in combating areas of criminality, including the import and supply of illegal drugs.

Fatal Accident Statistics

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the fatal accidents which have occurred on *(a)* the M1 motorway, *(b)* the M2 motorway and *(c)* the M5 motorway in each year since 1988; if he will list the type, capacity and age of each vehicle involved; and what was the primary attributive cause of each accident. [16414]

Sir John Wheeler: The fatal accidents which have occurred on the M1, M2 and M5 motorways from 1 January 1988 are as follows:

M1 Motorway

Date of accident	*Distance from/direction from junction*	*Casualties killed/serious injury/slight injury*
25.05.88	100m S Stockman's Lane	1/0/0
10.07.88	150m S M12 on-slip	1/1/1
08.02.89	Junction Stockman's I/C	1/0/0
12.10.89	60m W Coalisland I/C	1/0/0
23.05.90	200m E Ivy Cottage Br	1/1/0
04.08.90	150m S Lurgan I/C	1/1/0
06.10.90	Junction Sprucefield I/C	1/1/0
01.12.90	80m N Sprucefield on-slip	1/0/0
02.05.91	300m S Donegall Road slip road	1/0/0
07.07.91	500m S Stockman's Lane	1/0/0
08.11.91	100m E Lurgan off-slip	2/1/1
11.11.91	800m N Sprucefield T/C	1/2/0
26.01.92	1500m N Lisburn T/C	1/0/0
08.06.92	800m S Moira I/C	1/0/0
16.09.93	300m W Tamnamore off-slip	1/1/0
05.03.94	Junction M12 link road	1/0/0
03.09.94	450m E Kesh Bridge	1/0/2
19.09.94	Junction Finaghy Road N	1/0/0
	Total accidents 18	
	Total casualties	19/8/4

The principal causes of the above accidents were attributed as:

- Driver alcohol or drugs (4)
- Excessive speed having regard to the conditions (3)
- Inattention or attention diverted (3)
- Pedestrian alcohol or drugs (3)
- Other driver factor (3)
- Other pedestrian factor (2)

The types of vehicle involved in the above accidents were:

- Car (18)
- Motorcycle (1)
- Goods vehicle 3.5 tonnes or less (1)
- Goods vehicle exceeding 3.5 tonnes but less than 7.5 tonnes (1)
- Goods vehicle 7.5 tonnes or over (1)

M2 Motorway

Date of accident	*Distance from/direction from junction*	*Casualties Killed/Serious injury/slight injury*
02.05.89	Junction Greencastle off-slip	2/0/0
14.10.90	Junction Teesham off-slip	1/2/0
10.07.91	1600m N A57 I/C	1/0/0
02.11.91	100m S Longlands Br Road	2/1/1
25.03.92	500m N Duncrue Street	1/1/0
	Total accidents 5	
	Total casualties	7/4/1

The principal causes of the above accidents were attributed as:

- Driver alcohol or drugs (3)
- Other driver factor (2)

The types of vehicle involved in the above accidents were:

- Car (6)
- Large PCV (1)
- Motorcycle (1)

M5 Motorway—No fatal accidents during this period.

The capacity and age of the vehicles involved in accidents is not available.

Corncrakes

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has a contingency plan and adequate financial resources to offer crofters and farmers conservation grants to help the conservation of corncrakes should this bird species return to Northern Ireland to attempt to breed. [16665]

Mr. Moss: The Department of the Environment will continue to operate a grant system which has been in operation for the past five years for farmers who have on their land corncrakes with an indication of nesting. Discussions have recently taken place between officials and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on the detailed operation of this scheme which, despite the co-operation of the farming community, has failed to halt the serious decline of this bird.

RUC Officers

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC officers, by rank, are operating, full time, in *(a)* the anti-drugs unit, *(b)* the complaints and discipline branch and *(c)* the anti-racketeering unit. [16410]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of officers in the relevant branches at 23 March 1995 are set out in the following table:

	Establishment	*Actual*
Drugs Squad		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	5
Constable	23	35
Complaints and Discipline		
Assistant Chief Constable	1	1
Chief Superintendent	2	0
Superintendent	10	12
Chief Inspector	25	25
Inspector	10	10
Sergeant	9	10
Constable	8	12
Anti-racketeering Unit		
Superintendent	1	1
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	2	3
Sergeant	8	8
Constable	27	27

Police Advisory Board

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how often the Police Advisory Board, as constituted under the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, has met in each year since January 1988; and if it is planned to meet in the current year. [16413]

Sir John Wheeler: Meetings of the Police Advisory Board took place in January 1988, July 1993 and November 1993. There are no meetings scheduled for 1995.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the evidence of trends in the level of drugs abuse in Northern Ireland during 1993 and 1994; and if he will give details of *(a)* drugs, by type, seized and their street value and *(b)* the number of convictions by category. [16409]

Sir John Wheeler: The drug scene in NI is similar to that of the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland with the exception of heroin and cocaine abuse, levels of which are extremely low. The trend in NI is for an increasing availability of ecstasy, LSD and cannabis. There is a strong drug culture among young people.

(a) Drugs seized in Northern Ireland 1993 and 1994

	1993	*1994*
Cannabis	44.5 kilos 419 plants	81.9 kilos (resin) 7.1 kilos (herbal) 66 plants
MDMA (Ecstasy)	2,923 tablets	23,853 tablets 168 gms powder
LSD	8.022 doses	15,392 doses 92 microdots 900 (fake)
Amphetamines	1,728 doses	7.7 kilos powder 2,858 wraps (powder) 242 tablets 200 speedballs
Opiates (inc. Heroin)	363 gms	34 gms
Cocaine	19 gms	1,092 gms

As the availability of drugs increases, supply outstrips demand and the cost of drugs reduces.

The street values of drugs in NI at present are as follows:

Cannabis: £10 per gram
LSD: £3–5 per tab
Ecstasy: £12–15 per tablet
Amphetamines: £10 per gram

(b) Persons found guilty in NI of drug offences 1993 and 1994

Offence	*1993*	*1994*
Importing controlled drug	3	3
Exporting controlled drug	0	1
Producing controlled drug	15	10
Supplying controlled drug	16	27
Permitting supplying controlled drug	0	1
Cultivating cannabis	3	4
Possessing controlled drug with intent to supply	71	68
Attempted possessing controlled drug with intent to supply	2	2
Possessing controlled drug	305	374
Attempted possessing controlled drug	1	1
Permitting premises to be used for supply of drugs	1	1
Permitting premises to be used for use of drugs	3	1
Obstructing powers of search for drugs	3	1

Fixed Penalty Tickets (Speeding)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average number of fixed penalty tickets issued for speeding on each of the main motorways in Northern Ireland over the three-year period till 31 August 1994; and what has been the monthly total for each month since. [16415]

Sir John Wheeler: Separate figures are not maintained in respect of motorways.

The following figures refer to the number of fixed penalty notices issued by police for speeding offences throughout Northern Ireland, during the relevant periods.

	Number
1 September 1991 to 31 August 1992	30,367
1 September 1992 to 31 August 1993	23,323
1 September 1993 to 31 August 1994	30,299
September 1994	3,060
October 1994	3,141
November 1994	2,627
December 1995	1,712
January 1995	1,856
February 1995	n/a

n/a = Not yet available.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16588]

Sir John Wheeler: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The five editions of the Northern Ireland departmental report produced since 1991 have been published as Command Papers by HMSO, which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from the sales revenue.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16587]

Sir John Wheeler: Some 1,400 copies of the Northern Ireland departmental report, Cm 2816, were printed and published. In addition to those copies required by Parliament and the Government Departments and agencies concerned, just under 1,000 copies were produced to satisfy other sales at a price of £22.50 net. The cost of printing and publishing Cm 2816 were borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these costs from sales revenue.

Home Helps

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what policy guidelines are set out in relation to the provision of home helps on holidays such as St. Patrick's day. [16235]

Mr. Moss: Where an individual is assessed as needing the home help service, health and social services boards or trusts are expected to make the necessary arrangements for the service to be provided, including appropriate cover for holiday periods.

RUC Drug Squad

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the six-monthly change in full-time manpower resources deployed in the RUC drug squad till August 1993, February 1994, August 1994 and February 1995; and what are the projected figures for each six month period till February 1996. [16411]

Sir John Wheeler: Manpower figures are not available for all the dates specified. Figures for the nearest available dates are as follows:

Drugs Squad

	Establishment	*Actual*
31 March 1993		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	4
Constable	21	32
30 September 1993		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	5
Constable	21	31
28 February 1994		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	5
Constable	23	32
31 August 1994		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	5
Constable	23	32
28 February 1995		
Chief Inspector	1	1
Inspector	1	1
Sergeant	5	5
Constable	23	34

It is not possible to provide forward projections in respect of manpower of particular branches.

Cross-border Councils

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what consideration he has given to funding for cross-border councils. [16709]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to receive the report of the planning inquiry into the electricity interconnector with Scotland. [16708]

Mr. Moss: As the scope of the public local inquiry is currently the subject of a judicial review, it is not possible to estimate when the Commissioner's report is likely to be received.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were employed in Northern Ireland *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in 1993, 1994 and 1995. [16860]

Mr. Ancram: Estimates of the number of employees in employment in Northern Ireland are not yet available for 1995. The information for 1993 and 1994 is as follows:

Employees in employment at June of each year

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1993	393,650	150,080	543,730
1994	394,450	156,240	550,690

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15238]

Sir John Wheeler: The current policy is that Departments can contribute to staff child care costs where this is justified on value for money grounds. The following facilities are currently available.

Department	*Facility*
Environment	Introduced a Nursery Subsidy Scheme in May 1994. Thirty places were made available where the Department met 35 per cent. of the costs for children attending a registered nursery. The scheme is greatly over-subscribed and places were allocated by means of a ballot. A review is due in May 1995.
Finance and Personnel	No child care or nursery facilities at present but, offer membership of the NI Childminding Association's "Parent Partnership Scheme" for staff applying for maternity/paternity leave.
Agriculture	An emergency childcare pilot scheme, which involved reserving a small number of places in private nurseries, commenced 30 January 1995 for a 3 month trial period. Staff are required to pay for this facility.
Northern Ireland Office (HCS)	A 50 per cent. subsidy on four places provided at a private day nursery in Westminster.
(NICS)	Nil.

The Departments of Education, Health and Social Services and Economic Development offer no child care or nursery facilities.

Department	*Facility*
Child Support Agency	On 1 September 1993 the CSA introduced a scheme to offer financial assistance to staff with child care costs. The assistance takes the form of a subsidy towards the cost of an employee placing a child in a nursery of the parents choice.

The breakdown of these schemes by grade and gender is listed in the following table:

The breakdown of these schemes by grade and gender is listed in the following table:

	Number
Grade	
Higher Executive Officer	3
Executive Officer	1
Social Security Officer 2	1
Social Security Officer 1	1
Superintendent Typist	1
Typist	1
Personal Secretary	2
Administrative Assistant	1
Administrative Officer	19
Executive Officer 2	9
Executive Officer 1	2
Staff Officer	1
Deputy Principal Officer	1
Senior Professional Technical Officer	3
Higher Professional Technical Officer	5
Professional Technical Officer	2
Senior Audit Assistant	1
Higher Scientific Officer	1
Gender	
Male	17
Female	38

The Northern Ireland civil service also financially assists eight holiday playschemes which cater for the children of staff during school holidays. A breakdown in their use by grade and gender could be provided only at disproportionate costs. However, approximately 290 children per day attended in 1994.

Irish Language Schools (Inspections)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what occasions in each of the past 16 years, any inspector who has reported on an Irish-medium school has not been fluent in the Irish language. [17352]

Mr. Ancram: The information is available only for the past five years and is as follows:

School	*Date of inspection*	*Number in inspection team*	*Number not fluent in Irish*
Gaelscoil na bhFal	May 1990	2	1
Bunscoil an Iuir	May 1990	2	1
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	October 1992	3	1
Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	February 1994	2	1
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	March 1994	3	1
Bunscoil Luraigh	March 1994	2	1

Social Fund Discretionary Budget

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the Northern Ireland social fund discretionary budget will be for 1995–96. [17951]

Mr. Moss: I am pleased to announce that the social fund gross discretionary budget for 1995–96 will be £31.84 million. £9.76 million will be allocated to grants, £21.98 million to loans and £0.1 million will be held as a contingency reserve. The new allocations represent an increase of almost £2 million over the gross budget set in April 1994.

Details of the individual district budget allocations, together with a note explaining the basis on which they have been made, will be placed in the Library today.

Cash Limits

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he plans to announce any further changes to cash limits within his responsibility. [17952]

Sir John Wheeler *[pursuant to his reply, 3 February, c. 919–20]:* The cash limit for class XVI, vote 1—the Northern Ireland Office—will be reduced by £3,000,000 from £928,905,000 to £925,905,000. The reduction in the cash limit reflects a projected underspend in police costs and will be used to offset increases elsewhere within the Northern Ireland block.

SCOTLAND

The Union

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the changes which have been made to the government of Scotland following the publication of "Scotland in the Union: A Partnership for Good".

Mr. Lang: The measures outlined in the Government's White Paper "Scotland in the Union: A Partnership for Good" were part of a new and continuing approach to the government of Scotland. They have all been implemented or represent continuing commitments and taken together have made government in Scotland more accountable; emphasised the distinct nature of government policy in Scotland; and ensured that within the Union there is a full recognition, as well as greater understanding, of Scotland's status as a nation.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [16095]

Mr. Lang: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state, and occasional general references are made to persons who are Members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold and at what price. [16624]

Mr. Lang: Some 1,400 copies of the Scottish Office departmental report, Cm 2814, were printed and published, the cost of which was borne by HMSO which aims to recover these costs from sales revenue.

In addition to those copies required by Parliament, Government Departments and agencies, just over 1,100 were produced to satisfy other sales at a price of £18.10 net.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16625]

Mr. Lang: The first Scottish Office departmental report was issued in March 1991. That and subsequent reports have been published as Command Papers by HMSO which has borne the printing and publishing costs with the aim of recovering these from the sales revenue.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16578]

Mr. Lang: At 1 April 1995, my Department, including all its executive agencies, employed 41 staff in the information officer grades. Of these, 21 were designated as "press officers". At 1 April 1979, there were 25 staff in information officers grades—the number designated as "press officers" was not recorded.

Dounreay

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will examine the safety implications for employees and the public of radioactive contamination on and around the Dounreay shore and within the perimeter fence. [16052]

Sir Hector Monro: Detailed investigations of radioactive contamination of soil within the Dounreay site and on the adjoining shore are currently being undertaken by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. The results of these investigations will be considered by Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate, which will have regard to safety implications for the employees and public.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* 16-year-olds and *(b)* 17-year-olds were in prison or young offenders's institutions (i) in 1993–94 and (ii) at the latest available date. [16055]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stewart to Mrs. Maria Fyfe, dated 30 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Chief Executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to reply to your Question relating to the number of 16 year olds and 17 year old in prisons or young offender institutions in 1993–94 and at the latest available date. I am replying in his absence.

Information on the age categories of the prison population is presently collected only on the basis of young offender (less than 21) and adult. In 1993–94 the average daily remand young offender population was 348 and the sentenced young offender population was 804. The corresponding figures for Friday 24 March were 343 and 744 respectively.

More disaggregate information on age is collected when an individual is received under sentence. In 1993–94 there were 182 sentenced receptions involving 16 year olds and 727 sentenced receptions involving 17 year olds.

It should be noted that sentenced receptions do not equate to "persons received". For example, where a person has several custodial sentences imposed on him by one court in one day this is counted as a reception. Where custodial sentences are imposed on person by two or more courts in one day, however, two receptions are recorded. Also, if a person is reconvicted while serving a custodial sentence and a further custodial sentence is imposed, this is also regarded as a reception.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend the areas to be covered by environmentally sensitive area schemes in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [16373]

Mr. Lang: There are no plans to designate any further areas at present.

Short-term Prisoners (Housing)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what financial provision is to be made to local authorities to provide for funding homes for released short-term prisoners and their families following housing benefit reductions imposed upon them; [16429]

(2) what guidelines he is issuing to local authorities regarding the reductions in housing benefit for short-term prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [16340]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for local housing authorities in the first instance to consider housing need within their areas in conjunction with other relevant bodies. Similarly, social work authorities should assess the need for social work support and residential accommodation. The Department of Social Security issued guidance to local authorities on 10 March on the new benefit regulations affecting, among others, short-term prisoners.

Psychiatric Beds

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the annual cost of a psychiatric bed in hospitals in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland in each of the past five years. [16431]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following table has been derived from the Scottish health service costs book and contains the annual cost of a psychiatric bed in hospitals in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* health boards within the Strathclyde region area and *(c)* all Scotland. Prior to financial year 1991–92 this information was not collected centrally. The health boards within Strathclyde regional council's boundaries are: Ayrshire and Arran, Argyll and Clyde, Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire.

£

		Annual cost per bed	
	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
a) Renfrewshire	26,607	28,111	29,871
b) Strathclyde	27,198	30,394	33,824
c) Scotland	28,340	32,010	36,035

Gas Pipeline

Dr. A. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place with Premier Transco concerning the trenching or burying in traditional demersal fishing grounds of the proposed gas pipeline between Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [16694]

Sir Hector Monro: Officials of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department have been party to discussions involving Premier Transco, representatives of the local fishermen's organisations and the Department of Trade and Industry concerning the issue of a DTI works authorisation for this proposed gas pipeline. I understand that Premier Transco has agreed to trench the proposed pipeline along its entire length and that in areas where trenching alone is regarded as insufficient, the pipeline will be covered with crushed rock profiled to reduce interference with fishing operations.

Well Woman Centres

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each well woman centre; and if he will indicate those that are presently part-funded by health boards and trusts. [16695]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally.

Local Government Reform

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff currently employed by Strathclyde regional council will be re-deployed to *(a)* the new Inverclyde unitary authority, *(b)* the new East Renfrewshire unitary authority and *(c)* the new Glasgow unitary authority. [16697]

Mr. Kynoch: This information is not currently available. Redeployment of staff presently employed by both regional and district councils to the new authorities will be for discussion between existing and new authorities in due course.

Mentally Ill Prisoners

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to create special prisons for mentally ill prisoners who do not warrant transfer to Carstairs hospital, which would be staffed by prison officers with the appropriate training skills and knowledge to deal with such inmates; and if he will make a statement. [16698]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 30 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the creation of special prisons for mentally ill prisoners who do not warrant transfer to Carstairs Hospital.

We have no plans to create special prisons for those prisoners suffering from mental illness. Prison medical officers are responsible for the medical treatment as necessary of such prisoners and can draw on the services of psychiatrists and psychologists. Prisoners may also be transferred to appropriate hospitals if necessary. The Scottish Prison Service is, however, conscious of the special needs of mentally disturbed offenders and will be drawing up guidance for their management in the light of best practice in the community.

Mental Health Treatment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assurance he can give that the resources currently allocated to mental health treatment and care will be retained and not allocated to other parts of the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [16818]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Allocations are made to health boards, as purchasers of health care services, on a weighted capitation basis to enable them to meet the care needs of their resident population. It is for individual boards to decide their priorities for expenditure within the amount available to them.

Chiropody Services

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average length of waiting time for a chiropody appointment in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland; what proposals he has to reduce (i) the waiting time for such appointments and (ii) the return dates for domiciliary visits by chiropodists; and if he will make a statement. [16817]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the staffing levels of departments of chiropody and podiatry in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland and the number of chiropody appointments carried out in each of these departments in the past three years. [16819]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on chiropody staffing levels in Inverclyde are not held centrally. Table A shows the staffing levels in departments of chiropody and podiatry in Strathclyde and Scotland in 1992–94.

Table B shows the numbers of chiropody appointments carried out in Iverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland over the last three years.

Table A: Staff working in chiropody departments[1],[2] by qualification; at 30 September

	1992		*1993*		*1994*[4]	
	Headcount	*WTE*	*Headcount*	*WTE*	*Headcount*	*WTE*
(b) Strathclyde[3]	282	253.5	295	265.4	306	271.6
Chiropodist	275	247.9	288	259.9	294	261.1
Footcare assistant	7	5.6	7	5.5	12	10.5
(c) Scotland	617	555.5	650	583.0	664	593.6
Chiropodist	596	536.4	624	559.1	632	564.5
Footcare assistant	21	19.1	26	23.9	32	29.1

[1] Staff of both hospital and community chiropody services are included.

[2] Footcare assistants are not qualified chiropodists.

[3] Comprises Greater Glasgow, Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran and Lanarkshire Health Boards.

[4] Data are provisional.

Table B: Chiropody Services number of attendances[1]

	1992	*1993*	*1994*[3]
(a) Inverclyde	n/a	27,370	32,968
(b) Strathclyde[2]	820,487	845,849	877,398
(c) Scotland	1,664,948	1,706,604	1,799,017

[1] Both hospital and community chiropody services are included.

[2] Comprises Greater Glasgow, Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran and Lanarkshire Health Boards.

[3] Data are provisional.

n/a = Not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with the chairman of the Renfrewshire health care national health service trust concerning the staffing of the department of chiropody and podiatry; and if he will make a statement. [16815]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None.

Prisoners (Release under Licence)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of prisoners eligible for release under licence were successful in achieving release in the last year for which figures are available. [16826]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is published annually in the reports of the Parole Board for Scotland, copies of which are available in the House Libraries.

Prisons

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisons are currently assessed to be overcrowded; and if he will list them, indicating the number of places by which they exceed their quota. [16827]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 30 March 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about those prisons currently assessed as overcrowded.

During any year a number of cells are unavailable for use for a variety of reasons, including redecoration or damage repair work, refurbishment (including, in some cases, to install night sanitation) or for other policy reasons (eg being retained in the event of an emergency). The position on utilisation of available places varies between establishments, taking into account, among other things, that "local" prisons require to hold prisoners for short periods on remand from the Courts; that some establishments are suitable only for low security categories; and that there is a need to house separately various prisoner groups (such as those serving long sentences, or young offenders).

Against that background the information you requested—reflecting the position as at Friday 17 March—is set out in the table attached.

Establishment	*Design capacity*	*Places available for use*	*Prisoner population*	*Excess (+)/shortfall (–) ((4)–(3))*
(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
Aberdeen	142	134	179	+45
Barlinnie	939	852	1,154	+302
Castle Huntly	144	144	79	–65
Dumfries	139	129	133	+4
Dungavel	135	135	119	–16
Edinburgh	508	508	637	+129
Friarton	56	56	80	+24
Glenochil	669	537	475	–62
Greenock	172	172	258	+86
Inverness	79	68	100	+32
Longriggend	177	177	186	+9
Low Moss	396	396	376	–20
Noranside	135	132	124	–8
Penninghame	85	85	50	–35
Perth	426	426	460	+34
Peterhead	271	209	204	–5
Polmont	414	366	398	+32
Shotts	535	452	451	–1
Cornton Vale	213	179	172	–7
Totals	5,635	5,157	5,635	+478

Psychiatric Hospitals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the costing of the closure programme for psychiatric hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [16814]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Closures of psychiatric hospitals normally result from a joint assessment of patients needs involving both the local authority and the health board. Where reprovision in the community is proposed, appropriate financial resources towards the cost of that provision transfer from the NHS to the local authority.

Value for money is, of course, taken into account in the health board's overall planning.

Mental Illness Specific Grant

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his proposed level of funding for the mental illness specific grant in the financial year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [16816]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The level of the grant in 1996–97 will depend on estimates of the need for services, the adequacy of existing levels of service, the capacity of organisations to arrange services, possible sources of alternative funding and what can be afforded. Estimates for planning purposes will be provided to local authorities in the summer. Final figures will be announced later in the year.

Water Authorities

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedures have so far been carried out regarding the appointment of chief executives for the three new Scottish water authorities; if the successful candidates have been offered appointments; if any of those offered an appointment are senior officials of the Scottish Office; when he expects to make a public announcement about the appointments; and if he will make a statement. [17300]

Mr. Kynoch: An executive search consultancy, Andrew Rait Ltd., was appointed in August 1994 to assist in identifying suitable candidates. Advertisements appeared in the Scottish and UK press in November 1994.

A short list of candidates has been interviewed and my right hon. Friend expects to make formal offers of appointment to the successful candidates in the near future. An announcement will follow.

Scottish Court Service

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions he has reached about executive agency status for the Scottish Court Service and what targets he will set for the Scottish Court Service. [17950]

Mr. Lang: I have decided that the Scottish Court Service will become an executive agency under the next steps initiative from 3 April 1995. I am arranging for copies of the framework document to be placed in the Libraries of the House. I shall remain accountable to Parliament for the activities of the Scottish Court Service. I am delegating to the chief executive full managerial authority for the agency and its day-to-day operation. For the future, I envisage greater flexibilities to help the Scottish Court Service meet increasingly demanding targets and further improve its standards of service.

Following consultation with the Lord President of the Court of Session and the Sheriffs Principal, I have set the following key performance targets for the Scottish Court Service for 1995–96:

1. That no cases should fall as a result of the statutory time limits being breached.

2. *Targets for Waiting Periods:*

— 80 per cent. of diets allocated in the Court of Session within waiting periods set by the Lord President;

— 80 per cent. of criminal and justiciary appeals allocated to a roll within waiting periods set by the Lord Justice General;

— 75 per cent. of Sheriff Courts to report summary criminal waiting periods agreed with the Sheriffs Principal, currently 12 weeks;

— 85 per cent. of Sheriff Courts to report waiting periods between request for ordinary civil proof or debate and diet agreed with the Sheriffs Principal, currently 12 weeks;

— 80 per cent. of Sheriff Courts reporting lack of time adjournments at 5 per cent. or lower.

3. *Targets for quality of service and provision:*

— To achieve 95 per cent. of the standards for administrative business in the Court of Session and the High Court of Justiciary set by the Lord President/Lord Justice General;

— 95 per cent. of Sheriff Courts to achieve the overall standards for administrative business agreed with Sheriffs Principal;

— 70 per cent. of courthouses to meet the "Coming to Court" standards set out in the Justice Charter for Scotland.

4. *Cost and efficiency:*

— staff, accommodation and administrative costs: to be kept within £1,060 per court sitting day;

— 70 per cent. of the total costs of civil business in the Court of Session and in the Sheriff Courts to be recovered through fee income.

Full details of the performance measures, including the agreed waiting periods, administrative standards and "Coming to Court" standards are set out in the Scottish Court Service framework document.

Cash Limits

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and external financing limits for 1994–95 within his responsibility. [17949]

Mr. Lang: The cash limit for class XIV, vote 3, training programmes, roads and transport services and industrial support, Scotland, will be reduced by £200,000 from £902,139,000 to £901,939,000. This decrease takes account of a reduced requirement for regional enterprise grant and will be used to make a contribution towards providing for an EFL for David MacBrayne Ltd. of £0.8 million which has arisen due to the transfer of surplus funds from DML to the Secretary of State. In addition, the provision for an EFL for DML will be offset by a reduction in the EFL for the Scottish Transport Group from zero to minus £0.6 million. These changes will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15236]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department makes available 167 nursery day care places for children under five and holiday playscheme places for children five to 12 years old, at a variety of locations. These arrangements generally involve a subsidy of about 50 per cent. of the running costs involved.

A breakdown of staff by grade and gender using these facilities is shown in the following table.

Grade	*Nursery users*[1]		*Holiday play scheme users*[2]	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Administrative Assistant	2	8	—	15
Administrative Officer	8	48	2	35
Industrial grade (Prison Service)	2	—	—	—
Personal Secretary	—	7	—	2
Executive Officer	9	25	2	20
Higher Executive Officer	19	22	2	2
Senior Executive Officer	6	5	1	6
Grade 7	6	1	4	8
Grade 6	2	—	—	—
Grade 5	2	2	—	—
Total	56	118	11	88

[1] Refers to the number of staff who are currently using nursery places. Includes 53 places used on a part-time basis and 33 places jointly by spouses/partners who both work for the Department.

[2] Refers to the number of staff who have used the holiday play schemes over the past financial year.

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column 795, what was the total expenditure on all forms of publicity by his Department and its agencies for *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94; and what is his estimate for 1994–95. [17292]

Mr. Howard: Total expenditure on all forms of publicity by my Department and its agencies in 1992–93 was £13,130,371. The total in 1993–94 was £14,486,094.

The estimate for 1994–95 is £15,206,903.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent to which the ethnic minority grant paid to South Thames TEC has been spent on the purposes for which it was provided; and if he will make a statement. [17246]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My officials are in touch with the Receiver about ethnic minority grant payments made to South Thames training and enterprise council. My right hon. and noble Friend will write to the hon. Member about this matter as soon as possible.

Animal Experiments (Tobacco)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many project licences have been granted for studies using animals to assess the safety or effects of environmental tobacco smoke or passive smoking since 1987; [16874]

(2) how many animals were used in research involving tobacco and/or its products in each year from 1987 to 1993. [16873]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Seven project licences permitting the study of tobacco or its constituents in conscious animals have been granted since 1987.

In the period 1987 to 1993, 3,077 animals were used in the safety testing of tobacco or its products. Prior to 1 January 1995, figures for the number of animals used in fundamental or applied research involving tobacco or its products were not separately recorded.

Crimes (Wildlife)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what central record is kept of criminal activity concerning wildlife; and if he will make a statement. [16936]

Mr. Maclean: None. The investigation of crime is a matter for individual chief officers of police.

Prisons (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Prison Service establishments he has visited since his appointment as Home Secretary; for what duration each visit lasted; and if he will make a statement on the discussions he had with the prison authorities in each prison establishment. [16761]

Mr. Howard: Since my appointment, I have visited the following Prison Service establishments:

Aldington
Aylesbury
Belmarsh
Blantyre House
Bristol
Brixton
Cardiff
Channings Wood
Dartmoor
Reading
Swinfen Hall
Wandsworth
Whitemoor
Wormwood Scrubs
Wymott

Each visit lasted for about two hours. During these visits I have spoken to a wide range of staff on a large number of subjects.

Victims Charter

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Department of Health concerning the introduction of a charter of rights for victims whose offenders are deemed to be mentally ill comparable to those set out in the victims charter; and if he will make a statement. [16865]

Mr. Maclean: The principles in the victims charter apply to all victims of crime. The Home Office and the Department of Health keep in close contact about matters affecting the interests of victims in cases where the offender is found to be mentally ill.

Young Offenders

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been initiated by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last three years utilising the powers contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 relating to the requirement of parents to pay fines, compensation orders or prosecution costs imposed on juveniles; and if he will make a statement. [16839]

Mr. Maclean: Information collected centrally by my Department identifies only the number of young offenders sentenced whose parents, or guardians, were ordered to pay fines and compensation. Table 7.27 of the Command Paper 2680, "Criminal statistics England and Wales 1993," refers to this. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he proposes to achieve the rehabilitation of young offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend published on 9 March the 1995 national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community. The new standards include a number of provisions which should reinforce the effectiveness of supervision orders and probation orders in preventing further offending by young offenders.

He published on 15 March the consultation document, "Strengthening Punishment in the Community," which invites views on the creation of a new, integrated community sentence and on its application to younger offenders. Under these proposals, the courts would be enabled to specify activities under a community sentence which are directed at the prevention of reoffending.

We expect to issue shortly the invitation to tender for the construction and management of the first two secure training centres. The secure training order will provide a new power for the courts to sentence persistent young offenders to custodial periods of between three months and 12 months, to be served in purpose-built establishments offering a high-quality regime of education and training, followed by a similar period of compulsory supervision. We shall bring this new and demanding sentence into force as soon as the new centres are available.

In addition, the Prison Service agency will be reviewing the use made by young offender institutions of sentence planning to meet the individual needs of each young offender and to ensure that work began in custody can be built on during the period under supervision in the community after release, so as to maximise prospects of rehabilitation.

We have also received a report from Prison Service officials on their visit to boot camps in the USA and have asked for proposals to be brought forward for an innovative, demanding regime for young offenders. If appropriate, the proposals will incorporate the more positive aspects of the American boot camps.

Prisoners (Visits)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the proportion of prisoners held in establishments where prisoners have the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement laid down in the prison and young offenders institution rules and standing orders for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales. [16269]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the proportion of prisoners held in establishments where prisoners have the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlements laid down in Prison and YOI Rules and Standing Orders.

In February and March 1994, 99% of prisoners were held in establishments which allowed prisoners the opportunity to exceed minimum visiting entitlements. From April 1994 up to and including the end of February 1995, all establishments have been providing prisoners with the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlements laid down in the Prison and YOI Rules and Standing Orders.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16220]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The executive agencies of my Department and other public bodies under its authority are subject to the guidance contained in "A Working Guide for Government Information Officers" issued by the Office of Public Service and Science. A copy is available in the Library. The guide covers proprietorial and value for money issues which relate to the use of public relations consultancies. Tendering procedures are set out in the Home Office procurement manual.

Prison Escapes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of escapes from prison establishments and from escorts for each of the past 12 months in England and Wales. [16259]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the total numbers of escapes from prison establishments and from escort for the past 12 months in England and Wales.

The information is shown in the table below:

	Escapes from prison	*Escort from escorts*[1]	*Sub-total*	*Escapes from court escort service (previously police responsibility)*	*Total*
1994					
March	5	9	14	1	15
April	15	6	21	0	21
May	10	9	19	5	24
June	9	5	14	4	18
July	21	8	29	1	30
August	21	2	23	2	25
September	24	2	26	0	26
October	10	6	16	0	16
November	10	4	14	1	15
December	9	2	11	1	12
1995					
January	11	1	12	0	12
February	5	3	8	1	9

Figures exclude prisoners recaptured within 15 minutes provided that no further offence has been committed.

[1] Includes escapes from the Court Escort Service which would have been the responsibility of the Prison Service in previous years (3 in 1993–94; Nil in April–January 1994–95.

Prison Costs

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will itemise where the costs fall for prisoners held *(a) in police cells and* (b) by the Prison Service. [16392]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking where the costs fall for prisoners held (a) in police cells and (b) by the Prison Service.

As a general principle, the Prison Service reimburses police authorities for all reasonable additional costs incurred by them as a result of the police holding prisoners, when these are duties which would normally be undertaken by Prison Service staff.

These costs are met from the provision voted by Parliament to cover the costs of the Prison Service, as are the costs of all prisoners held directly by the Prison Service.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per prisoner per night *(a)* of a prisoner held in a police cell and *(b)* of a prisoner held in the custody of the Prison Service. [16391]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on the average cost per night (a) of a prisoner held in a police cell and (b) of a prisoner held in the custody of the Prison Service.

In 1993–94 the average daily cost of holding a prisoner in a police cell was £250. The average net operating cost per prisoner place, for prisoners held within Prison Service establishments, was £22,712 per year, which produces a daily cost of approximately £62.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16642]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of production and circulation borne by the Home Office was £22,265. I understand from HMSO that, as at 24 March, 2,000 copies had been produced for sale. The cover price is £14.55. I am placing a copy of the circulation list in the Library.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of producing and circulating the departmental annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16643]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. Data for the five years of publication are as follows—costs borne by the Home Office, calculated at 1993–94 prices using the gross domestic product deflator:

Production and Circulation

Year	*£*
1991	44.175
1992	31.841
1993	20.360
1994	21.917
1995	21.828

Prison Assaults

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of offences relating to assaults proved in disciplinary proceedings, including attempted assaults, incitement and assisting other prisoners in an assault and excluding criminal proceedings relating to assaults for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales. [16267]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of proved offences of assault at disciplinary proceedings in each of the past 12 months.

The information requested is given in the attached table, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Table 1: Assaults proved at adjudication[1], March 1994 to February 1995 in Prison Service establishments, England and Wales

Month	*Number of proved assaults*[2]
1994	
March	497
April	449
May	494
June	433
July	462
August	532
September	494
October	495
November	468
December	469
1995	
January	479
February	415

[1] Includes attempt, incite or assist in an assault.

[2] Provisional figures.

Prisoners (Purposeful Activity)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of hours each week which prisoners spend in purposeful activity including work, education, training, physical education programmes and excluding association, visits, meals or time spent outside the establishment for each of the past 12 months in prisons in England and Wales. [16264]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average number of hours per week which prisoners spend in purposeful activity for each of the past 12 months.

The information is contained in the table below.

	Weekly average hours per prisoner in purposeful activity
February 1994	25.4
March	26.3
April	24.6
May	26.1
June	26.4
July	27.3
August	27.0
September	26.4
October	26.7
November	26.9
December	26.1
January 1995	23.9
February	26.6

Prison Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the average number of prisoners currently held per night in *(a)* police cells and *(b)* Her Majesty's prisons. [16393]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average number of prisoners currently held per night in (a) police cells and (b) Her Majesty's prisons in England and Wales.

The information for the week beginning 19 March 1995 is as follows:

	Number
Average number of prisoners held in police cells per night:	385
Average number of prisoners held in prisons per night:	50,940

Parole

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners eligible for parole was successful in achieving parole in the last year for which figures are available. [16689]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the proportion of prisoners eligible for parole who were paroled.

The parole statistics are published in the Annual Reports of the Parole Board. The latest issue is for 1993 (Cm 450), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The statistics for 1994 will be published in the 1994 issue of the Annual Report of the Parole Board. They comprise prisoners considered under the 1991 Criminal Justice Act and those under previous legislation. Provisional figures for 1994 show that 42 per cent of prisoners considered were paroled.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 31 March 1995

HEALTH

Nursing Staff

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of nursing staff were at any one time *(a)* on fixed-term contracts and *(b)* bank or agency staff (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last 10 years, in each regional health authority. [15368]

Mr. Sackville: Information on the percentage of bank and agency nursing and midwifery staff will be placed in the Library. Figures for 1994 onwards are not yet available.

Data on the percentage of nursing and midwifery staff on fixed-term contracts are not available centrally since this is a matter for local determination.

Speech Therapists

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists per 1,000 population are provided for children in *(a)* Southwark, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Lewisham and *(f)* England. [15325]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Dental Treatments

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the dental treatments currently available under the national health service, together with the amount paid by the Government to general dental practices for each treatment, for the five most recent years for which figures are available. [15402]

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Prescription Fraud

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to reduce the level of prescription fraud. [16887]

Mr. Malone: From 1 April 1995 patients who obtain dispensed items from community pharmacists or dispensing doctors will be asked to complete a written declaration stating the specific grounds for claiming exemption or remission of the prescription charge due, or the amount of the charge paid. The revised declarations will improve the effectiveness of confirmatory checks and are a significant first step towards reducing prescription fraud.

I am considering what further measures are necessary.

Birth Certificates

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the purpose of asking applicants for full and short birth certificates if they are the subject of the certificate or a relative of the subject. [17159]

Mr. Sackville: In their White Paper "Registration: proposals for change", Cm 939, the Government proposed new arrangements for the purchase of certificates of recent events and a different approach to the prevention of intrusions into privacy, personation and fraud. Statutory powers would be introduced to require applicants for certificates to identify themselves and complete a more comprehensive application form. They would also be required to state their relationship to the subject of the required certificate and the purpose for which the certificate was to be used. The application forms now in use by the Registrar General ask for this additional information, but applicants cannot, at present, be obliged to provide the answers.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how long application forms for full and short version birth certificates are kept after the certificates have been issued. [17161]

Mr. Sackville: The Registrar General currently retains application forms relating to the issue of birth certificates for a minimum of five years.

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the last 10 years the number of cases of thyroid cancer that have been reported in *(a)* North Western, *(b)* Mersey, *(c)* Northern, *(d)* Yorkshire, *(e)* Trent and *(f)* West Midlands regional health authorities; and what the national average was for each of the years. [17137]

Mr. Sackville: The information is published in tables 2 and 7 of "Cancer statistics, registrations, series MB1, Nos. 11–22", HMSO, copies of which are available in the Library.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to improve the quality of diagnosis and certification of deaths involving asbestos-related diseases. [17078]

Mr. Sackville: Diagnosis is a professional issue and we would look primarily to the health care professions to provide guidance on it.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are her current assumptions about the levels of asbestos-related deaths in the United Kingdom. [17080]

Mr. Sackville: The recorded numbers of deaths from asbestos-related diseases continue to grow. Such diseases are nearly always the result of occupational exposure to asbestos fibres, and are prescribed as industrial diseases. Asbestos-related diseases generally take a long time to develop. The deaths now occurring, and most of those expected to occur in the future, reflect past industrial exposure before the introduction of the controls whose enforcement is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Royal Liverpool University Hospital

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that the Royal Liverpool

University hospital obtains a fire certificate from the Merseyside fire brigade. [17221]

Mr. Sackville: Royal Liverpool University hospital is currently undertaking work agreed with the Merseyside fire brigade, due for completion by August 1995.

Helicopter Emergency Medical Service

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were conveyed by the London helicopter ambulance service for each year since 1991. [17239]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. William Wells, chairman of South Thames regional health authority, which is managerially responsible for the London helicopter emergency medical service.

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many herbal medicine products are currently being sold in Britain without a licence. [17130]

Mr. Sackville: All medicinal products on the market in the United Kingdom are subject to the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations 1994 unless otherwise exempt. The Medicines Control Agency will investigate any case which appears to breach this.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time for admission by region in each of the last five years. [13396]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* This information is shown in the table:

Region	*Estimated average time (in months) waited by patients still on waiting lists for inpatient and day case admission as at:*				
	March 1990	*March 1991*	*March 1992*	*March 1993*	*March 1994*
Northern	7.0	5.9	4.7	4.1	4.2
Yorkshire	7.2	7.1	5.2	4.5	5.1
Trent	7.4	6.3	5.5	4.7	4.4
East Anglian	9.0	8.4	5.4	4.7	4.5
North West Thames	9.4	9.2	6.4	5.3	5.3
North East Thames	10.9	8.7	5.7	5.0	5.6
South East Thames	10.1	8.8	5.7	5.0	5.1
South West Thames	10.2	7.2	4.1	4.1	4.4
Wessex	8.2	7.5	4.8	4.7	4.2
Oxford	8.9	8.0	5.7	4.4	4.2
S. Western	8.5	8.1	4.5	3.8	3.6
W. Midlands	8.7	7.7	4.7	4.2	4.5
Mersey	4.9	4.5	3.7	3.7	3.8
North Western	8.6	7.2	4.8	4.5	4.5

Source:
Derived from quarterly Körner elective admission list returns.

NHS Purchasing

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will respond to the first report of the Health Committee of Session 1994–95 on "Priority Setting in the NHS: Purchasing;" and if she will make a statement. [18207]

Mrs. Bottomley: I have today published the Government's response to the Select Committee report, Cm 2826. A copy has been placed in the Library.

The Government welcome the Committee's report on priority setting in the national health service. It sets out a thoughtful and wide-ranging investigation of the issues, from the Government setting national priorities to the choices faced by individual clinicians every day. The Government welcome the Select Committee's support for many of the policies that they are pursuing in this area.

EDUCATION

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the Internet electronic mail address of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* each Minister in her Department; and if she will make a statement on her Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17742]

Mr. Forth: The Department has a mailbox on the Internet—info@dfe.gov.uk—for general inquiries to the Department's public inquiry unit. This provides a service to those who have access to the Internet and prefer to use electronic mail as a method of communication.

The Government's consultation paper on broadband communications in education will be published after Easter.

Leicestershire Local Education Authority

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent on education by the county council in Leicestershire in each of the last five years; and how much is planned for this financial year. [17155]

Mr. Robin Squire: Total expenditure by Leicestershire local education authority from 1989–90 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available, is shown. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function. The figure for 1994–95 is drawn from Leicestershire LEA's revenue account return, and is not directly comparable with the outturn figures which have a different coverage.

Leicestershire LEA—total expenditure (in actual terms)

Year	*£ million*
Outturn	
1989–90	337.5
1990–91	372.8
1991–92	409.0
1992–93	440.8
1993–94 (provisional)	400.6
Planned	
1994–95	326.8

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the number of teachers employed in state schools in Leicestershire in each of the last five years. [17154]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in Leicestershire for January 1990 to January 1994.

Teachers—FTE—in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in Leicestershire

January	*FTE*
1990	7,886
1991	7,764
1992	7,830
1993	7,570
1994[1]	7,832

[1] Excludes sixth form colleges.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the amount of the salary bill for teachers in Leicestershire for each of the last five years; and how much is planned for this year. [17158]

Mr. Robin Squire: Expenditure by Leicestershire local education authority on salaries for teachers at its maintained schools from 1989–90 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available, is shown. Information on planned expenditure on teachers' salaries is not collected centrally.

Leicestershire LEA—expenditure on teaching staff (in actual terms)

Year	*£million*
Outturn	
1989–90	172.9
1990–91	185.0
1991–92	204.2
1992–93	224.9
1993–94 (provisional)	194.9

Publications

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the cost of the production and distribution of (i) the updated parents charter, 1994; (ii) the special educational needs information, 1994; (iii) the school governors' guides to the law, 1994; (iv) the private finance initiative, 1994; (v) the national school tests, 1993, 1994 and 1995, information leaflet; and (vi) the grant-maintained schools information, 1993 to 1995. [17107]

Mr. Forth: The costs in the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 of production and distribution were as follows:

	£000
Parents Charter (1994)	3,073
Special Educational Needs Information (1994)	1,137
School Governors' Guides to the Law (1994)	300
Private Finance Initiative	119
National School Test (1993, 1994 and 1995)	[1]673

[1] Estimated.

The estimated cost of the campaign on grant-maintained schools information in 1993–94 and 1994–95 is some £1.922 million. This includes the cost of press advertising, a video and a series of regional conferences.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the budget for the "Schools Update", 1993 to 1995, publication.

Mr. Forth: "Schools Update" is the Department's termly newsletter for school teachers and governors. Over the last two years, costs of producing and distributing copies are as follows:

Financial year	*£*
1993–94	169,000
1994–95	[1]219,000

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many responses she has had to the information booklet on the private finance initiative, 1994. [17108]

Mr. Forth: The booklet "Education Means Business" was published as part of a wider strategy to promote the private finance initiative in education. Although it is difficult to separate the impact of the publication from other aspects of the initiative, about 2,000 inquiries have been received within the Department specifically referring to the booklet.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, columns *732–34*, what estimate she has made of the individual or combined cost of the campaigns and publications *(a)* DFE summer roadshow, *(b)* European choice booklet, *(c)* grant-maintained schools information and *(d)* the updated parents charter. [17297]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* In the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95, the combined cost of these campaigns and publications is estimated at £5.616 million.

Devon Local Education Authority

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average figure for administration per school in Devon retained by the local education authority. [17282]

Mr. Robin Squire: For the financial year 1994–95, the Devon local education authority's planned expenditure on "management and administration" amounted to £10,163 per school. This figure relates to all county, voluntary and special schools maintained by the authority and is derived from the budget statement published by the authority under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

St. Philip's College

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was her response to the open letter to her from the staff of St. Philip's Roman Catholic sixth form college dated 22 March. [17160]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend is considering her response to the letter and will reply shortly.

Free School Meals

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will give the percentage of children in the secondary sector who are entitled to free school meals in *(a)* selective schools, *(b)* voluntary-aided schools and *(c)* grant-maintained schools, listed by local education authority; and what is the average in each local education authority for children in the secondary sector.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information—derived from schools' annual returns—about pupils known to be eligible for school meals is provided in the following table.

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in secondary schools in each local education authority in England

January 1994

	Selective schools[1,2,3]	*Voluntary-aided schools*[2]	*Grant-maintained schools*[3]	*All secondary schools*
Corporation of London	—	—	—	—
Camden	—	8.5	3.2	26.9
Greenwich	—	4.8	0.0	36.4
Hackney	—	19.1	0.0	59.2
Hammersmith	—	13.2	2.3	36.3
Islington	—	11.9	—	51.7
Kensington and Chelsea	—	6.2	2.8	40.6
Lambeth	—	—	21.7	51.4
Lewisham	—	6.8	—	40.4
Southwark	—	8.0	11.7	55.9
Tower Hamlets	—	11.0	1.8	64.0
Wandsworth	—	—	23.8	34.5
Westminster	—	14.0	—	44.1
Barking	—	2.1	—	18.5
Barnet	0.1	0.7	5.6	14.7
Bexley	0.8	—	1.8	10.9
Brent	—	—	17.9	27.4
Bromley	0.1	—	5.9	13.0
Croydon	—	2.0	3.4	18.7
Ealing	—	3.8	13.2	29.8
Enfield	0.1	1.2	4.9	18.5
Haringey	—	7.2	—	40.2
Harrow	—	0.8	0.7	13.8
Havering	—	0.5	1.6	10.4
Hillingdon	—	0.2	11.0	13.0
Hounslow	—	0.8	1.8	20.7
Kingston upon Thames	0.5	—	3.3	9.4
Merton	—	3.1	—	18.6
Newham	—	3.5	1.9	39.4
Redbridge	0.3	0.7	1.3	16.8
Richmond upon Thames	—	3.5	—	16.3
Sutton	0.5	—	2.2	8.7
Waltham Forest	—	1.9	2.2	34.1
Birmingham	0.5	2.7	4.4	31.6
Coventry	—	4.1	—	23.8
Dudley	—	2.0	4.0	16.7
Sandwell	—	0.5	1.3	25.3
Solihull	—[1]	2.8	—	12.0
Walsall	0.2	2.3	3.5	25.1
Wolverhampton	0.1	2.4	3.7	25.3
Knowsley	—	16.0	4.4	51.8
Liverpool	—	15.4	2.1	39.2
St. Helens	—	3.0	—	17.4
Sefton	—	6.0	—	20.7
Wirral	0.8	4.8	0.4	25.8
Bolton	—	1.9	1.5	16.4
Bury	—	2.2	—	13.5
Manchester	—	11.9	—	43.4
Oldham	—	32.8	—	53.5
Rochdale	—	4.9	1.4	28.9
Salford	—	4.5	0.6	26.3
Stockport	—	1.0	—	14.4
Tameside	—	1.9	2.0	19.8
Trafford	2.3	1.3	5.9	20.0
Wigan	—	3.7	—	17.5
Barnsley	—	—	—	22.8
Doncaster	—	1.2	—	22.5
Rotherham	—	0.7	—	18.5
Sheffield	—	—	1.2	24.2
Bradford	—	1.7	2.4	31.2
Calderdale	0.8	0.9	3.2	18.1
Kirklees	0.1	0.5	0.3	17.6
Leeds	—	2.2	0.2	18.7
Wakefield	—	0.7	—	17.3
Gateshead	—	4.6	—	24.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	3.7	—	27.4
North Tyneside	—	1.0	—	18.2
South Tyneside	—	3.9	—	25.8
Sunderland	—	2.5	—	25.8
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	35.8
Avon	—	0.6	0.3	15.5
Bedfordshire	—	1.3	2.5	16.6
Berkshire	0.4	0.4	1.3	8.5
Buckinghamshire	0.5	0.3	2.1	8.6
Cambridgeshire	—[1]	0.2	4.8	13.1
Cheshire	—	1.9	0.5	12.0
Cleveland	—	4.4	—	28.0
Cornwall	—	—	—	15.9
Cumbria	—	0.9	2.2	12.1
Derbyshire	—	0.6	2.8	13.5
Devon	0.5	0.5	0.8	12.9
Dorset	0.9	0.5	2.1	10.2
Durham	—	1.7	—	17.4
East Sussex	—	1.6	—	18.1
Essex	0.2	0.5	7.0	12.3
Gloucestershire	0.6	0.4	5.8	11.0
Hampshire	—	0.4	1.7	10.6
Hereford and Worcester	—	0.3	0.5	9.6
Hertfordshire	—	0.5	2.1	9.6

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in secondary schools in each local education authority in England

January 1994

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in secondary schools in each local education authority in England

January 1994

	Selective schools[1 2 3]	Voluntary-aided schools[2]	Grant-maintained schools[3]	All secondary schools
Humberside	—	0.9	—	17.3
Isle of Wight	—	1.2	—	21.0
Kent	1.1	0.7	5.5	13.2
Lancashire	0.1	2.2	0.6	19.7
Leicestershire	—	0.5	0.7	12.5
Lincolnshire	1.1	0.1	4.3	9.8
Norfolk	—	0.3	2.6	10.7
North Yorkshire	0.2	0.7	—	7.4
Northamptonshire	—	1.2	3.1	12.5
Northumberland	—	0.5	0.2	12.7
Nottinghamshire	—	1.7	0.7	20.0
Oxfordshire	—	0.7	—	9.8
Shropshire	0.0	0.4	2.1	13.6
Somerset	0.0	0.3	0.0	10.7
Staffordshire	—	0.7	0.9	13.3
Suffolk	—	0.4	—	11.7
Surrey	—	0.6	1.5	7.2
Warwickshire	0.2	0.6	1.8	8.7
West Sussex	—	1.1	—	9.2
Wiltshire	0.1	0.1	2.5	9.8
England	0.1	1.9	2.1	17.7

[1] Schools which admit pupils wholly or mainly with reference to ability or aptitude.

[2] Some voluntary schools are selective.

[3] Some grant-maintained schools are selective.

— There are no schools of this type in the LEA.

EMPLOYMENT

Union Carbide Corporation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now publish the safety report regarding the Union Carbide Corporation plant at Wilton, Teesside, submitted by ICI to the Health and Safety Executive in June 1989 and updated in June 1992.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive is currently discussing with the companies whether they would consent to the release of all or part of the report and I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Trade Unions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what representations he has received in favour of the trade union activity as a stabilising and helpful force in the workplace; [15657]

(2) what is his policy towards the retaining of union representatives experienced in understanding the employers' and employees' positions in a workplace; [15659]

(3) what assessment he has made as to the benefits for employers and employees of the maintenance of union facilities at workplaces; [15658]

(4) what action he takes to discourage employers from phasing out fair and legitimate union activity. [15660]

Mr. Oppenheim: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet trade union delegations periodically and listen to their views on their role. The Government believe that unions can make a useful contribution on issues close to the workplace, but to do so they must be accountable, well informed and able to speak with knowledge and authority. However, the Government also believe employers and employees should be free to conduct their own affairs with the minimum of interference. Individual workers must be free to decide whether to be members of trade unions and the law protects them from dismissal or acts of victimisation on grounds of trade union membership or activities. Employers must be free to decide whether or not to recognise trade unions for bargaining purposes.

Where an employer chooses to recognise an independent trade union, employees who are members of that union become entitled to reasonable time off during working hours to take part in any trade union activity. Employees who are officials of that union become entitled to reasonable time off with pay to carry out certain trade union duties and undergo training relevant to those duties.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17041]

Miss Widdecombe: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department and its predecessors since 1965 for any reference to the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. Frequent references are made to officers of state and occasional general reference are made to persons who are Members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Agencies

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of *(a)* building workers, *(b)* lorry drivers and *(c)* secretaries have been (i) directly employed or (ii) employed by agencies in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [17491]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested for 1991 to 1994 is provided in the following table. Comparable information prior to this is not available.

Employment status by occupation in Great Britain: Labour Force Survey at spring of each year

Percentage

	Building occupations	Drivers for road goods vehicles	Secretarial occupations
(i) Employed directly			
1991	100	99	97
1992	100	99	99
1993	100	100	98
1994	100	98	98
(ii) Employed via agencies[1]			
1991	0	1	3
1992	0	1	1
1993	0	0	2
1994	0	2	2

[1] Information based on temporary employees only.

South London Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts were issued by SOLOTEC to provide training for people with special needs in the financial year 1994–95; and how many are expected to be issued in 1995–96. [17431]

Mr. Paice: SOLOTEC issued 10 contracts providing training for special needs in the financial year 1994–95. Subject to final contracting, it is anticipated that there will be eight special needs contracts issued for 1995–96 for the current four boroughs. Provision for the boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham is still under discussion.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if elected local authority representatives are eligible for the expanded board of SOLOTEC. [17432]

Mr. Paice: The eligibility conditions for training and enterprise council directors are laid down in the Department's contract with TECs. These require that at least two thirds are top executives from the private sector and that all TEC directors from the public sector must be at chief executive level or its equivalent. Any new directors recruited to SOLOTEC's board must meet these requirements. Status as an elected authority representative does not disqualify someone from being a TEC director so long as the eligibility conditions are met.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training providers are currently under contract to SOLOTEC for the provision of *(a)* training for youth credits, *(b)* training for work courses and *(c)* investors in people on 1 March; how many are expected to be contracted as at 1 April; and what advice he has received about the size of the supplier base for SOLOTEC when it accepts responsibility for training provision in Lewisham and Greenwich post-24 April. [17433]

Mr. Paice: SOLOTEC had 20 training providers under contract for youth credits and 24 for training for work as at 1 March 1995. Subject to final contracting, it is anticipated that there will be 20 youth credits providers and 18 training for work contractors from 1 April. SOLOTEC does not contract with providers for investors in people as the training and enterprise council has an in-house team which works directly with employers. Provision for the boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham after 24 April 1995 is still under discussion.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many youth training guarantees were made in the financial year 1994–95 to young people in the area covered by SOLOTEC; and how many are expected to be made in 1995–96. [17430]

Mr. Paice: Some 2,335 youth training guarantees were made in 1994–95 to young people in the area covered by SOLOTEC. The figure for expected guarantee starts in 1995–96 in the current SOLOTEC area is 2,250.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training providers are under contract to the receiver for South Thames TEC for the provision of *(a)* training for youth credits, *(b)* training for work courses and *(c)* investors in people as at 1 March; how many are expected to be contracted as at 1 April; and how many of these contracts he expects to be renewed by SOLOTEC by 1 May. [17434]

Mr. Paice: As at 1 March 1995, South Thames training and enterprise council had 41 training providers under contract for youth credits, 45 for training for work and 25 for investors in people. It is not possible to estimate how many of these providers will still be under contract to the TEC at 1 April 1995 or how many of these providers may be offered new contracts by SOLOTEC by 1 May 1995.

It is for SOLOTEC to determine which providers it wishes to contract with to provide services in the boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed by the receiver for South Thames TEC on *(a)* 1 February, and *(b)* 1 March; and how many are expected to be employed on 1 April and 1 May. [17435]

Mr. Paice: I understand from the receiver that the number of people employed by him at South Thames training and enterprise council was 82 on 1 February and 70 on 1 March 1995. The figure is expected to be 46 on 1 April. I am unable to estimate what the figure will be on 1 May.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will provide a regional breakdown of the most recent labour force survey to identify separately the numbers of employed and self-employed people in part-time work who could not find full-time work, expressing the data by percentage, gender and age; [16103]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown by region and gender from the latest labour force survey of *(a)* the number of employees in temporary jobs because they could not find permanent employment and *(b)* the total number of employees in temporary jobs. [16105]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* This information is available from the labour force survey and can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

United States Wages

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information is held by his Department about the minimum wage levels operating in Washington DC and the 50 states of the United States of America. [16927]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 29 March 1995]:* The information is given is the following table. The federal minimum wage is currently $4.25 an hour and has been since 1 April 1991. Figures in the table set out the minimum hourly wage rates under state laws.

USA: minimum and subminimum hourly wage rates under state laws (subminimum wage rates applicable only to learners or apprentices)

*State**	*Minimum wage rate ($)*	*Subminimum wage rate ($)*
Alabama	none	none
Alaska	4.75	[1]75 per cent.
Arizona	none	none
Arkansas	4.5	none
California	4.25	[2, 3]85 per cent.
Colorado	[3]3.00	none
Connecticut	4.27	[4]85 per cent.
Delaware	4.25	none

USA: minimum and subminimum hourly wage rates under state laws (subminimum wage rates applicable only to leqrners or apprentices)

*State**	*Minimum wage rate ($)*	*Subminimum wage rate ($)*
District of Columbia*	5.25	[14]4.25
Florida	none	none
Georgia	3.25	none
Hawaii	6.25	[15]—
Idaho	4.25	[16]—
Illinois	4.25	[5]70 per cent.
Indiana	3.35	none
Iowa	4.65	none
Kansas	2.65	[15]—
Kentucky	4.25	none
Louisiana	none	none
Maine	4.25	[16]—
Maryland	4.25	none
Massachusetts	4.25	[6]—
Michigan	3.35	none
Minnesota	[7]4.25	[8]—
Mississippi	none	none
Missouri	4.25	[1]85 per cent.
Montana	[19]4.25	none
Nebraska	4.25	[1]75 per cent.
Nevada	4.25	none
New Hampshire	4.25	[1]75 per cent.
New Jersey	5.05	[15]—
New Mexico	4.25	none
New York	4.25	[15]—
North Carolina	4.25	[1]90 per cent.
North Dakota	4.25	[9]—
Ohio	[20]4.25	[10]—
Oklahoma	4.25	none
Oregon	4.75	none
Pennsylvania	4.25	[1]85 per cent.
Puerto Rico*	0.24–8.50	[17]—
Rhode Island	4.45	[11]—
South Carolina	none	none
South Dakota	4.25	none
Tennessee	none	none
Texas	3.35	none
Utah	4.25	none
Vermont	4.25	[12]85 per cent.
Virginia	4.25	none
Washington	[18]4.90	[1, 3]85 per cent.
West Virginia	4.25	none
Wisconsin	4.25	[13]75 per cent.
Wyoming	1.60	none

Notes:

* District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are not states of the USA.

1. Where a state is shown as having a lower rate than the federal minimum of $4.25 this would apply only to workers whose work involves no interstate commerce. In practice, such a condition will apply to only a small minority of workers. Most workers in these states will be covered by the federal rate.

[1] Percentage rate of the statutory minimum for learners and/or apprentices.

[2] Percentage rate for first 160 hours of employment.

[3] By state wage board order(s).

[4] Percentage rate, for first 200 hours of employment.

[5] Percentage rate, for up to six months.

[6] Scale of rates for specified occupations.

[7] $4 an hour for employers whose annual gross volume is less than $362,500.

[8] At minors rate, for first 300 hours of employment.

[9] Sub-minimum rate to certain students may be granted.

[10] 85 per cent. for apprentices for period of up to 90 days.

[11] At rate determined by director of labour for up to 90 days.

[12] Percentage rate for retail, wholesale and service establishment by wage order, for up to 240 hours or 30 days for learners.

[13] Percentage rate, for student learners aged 14 to 18, under wage order.

[14] For persons with less than 60 calendar days experience in laundry and dry-cleaning occupation.

[15] Sub-minimum rate may be prescribed by rules.

[16] Special licence or certificate may be issued authorising sub-minimum rate.

[17] Specific rates established by wage order for various categories of employees.

[18] $5.15 an hour for employees of certain contractors providing services to medical care recipients.

[19] $4 an hour, for employer whose annual gross volume is $110,000 or less.

[20] $2.80 an hour, for employer whose annual gross volume is less than $150,000.

Source:

The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

Health and Safety

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the details of the industrialists and insurance companies consulted by Touche Ross and the Health and Safety Executive in preparing HSC report 92/129. [17332]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* No. The basis on which the consultation was carried out did not include publicising the details.

TRANSPORT

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what outline contingency plans or policy options his Department has drawn up to provide for the reduction, by a range of percentages, of carbon dioxide emissions beyond 2000 from the United Kingdom transport sector. [16956]

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom climate change programme document—Cm 2427, published in January 1994—sets out the policy measures for meeting the United Kingdom commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases across the whole economy up to 2000. Chapter 10 looks at some of the policy options beyond 2000. UK policies and measures for beyond 2000 will need to be decided in the context of international agreement on future commitments. The first conference of parties to the framework convention on climate change is currently taking place in Berlin.

Railways

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce British Rail's and Railtrack's external finance contributions for 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [18277]

Mr. Watts: British Rail's external finance contribution for 1994–95 will be £310 million. Railtrack's EFC will be £316 million. The railway industry external finance limit for this year will be £1,560 million, made up as follows:

	£ million
OPRAF and MRG grants	2,009
British Rail EFL	–310
Railtrack EFL	–316
EPS EFL	177
Total EFL	1,560

In setting the overall industry EFL and those for the individual businesses, we have taken account of BR's needs for additional resources—£64 million—as a result of working capital movements which have an unfavourable impact on BR. A number of further factors have also been taken into account. These include the final apportionment, between BR and Railtrack, of the costs of the signalling dispute. The EFLs also reflect the latest forecast of the BR—Railtrack trading account; and they include upward adjustment of £87 million to grant paid by the franchising director. This adjustment to grant comprises claims submitted by BR and accepted by the franchising director to the value of £52 million, and a £35 million grant payment to BR carried over from 1993–94. There is also a £2 million downward adjustment to the total of metropolitan railway grants.

Rail Passengers

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was *(a)* the number of passengers travelling on sleepers from London to Fort William and Fort William to London and *(b)* the percentage of capacity for each month over the last three years for which figures are available. [17302]

Mr. Watts: The number of passengers travelling on the London–Fort William sleeper between 1991–92 and 1993–94 was:

1991–92: 13,500
1992–93: 14,600
1993–94: 14,600

The percentage of available capacity used during the 1993–94 winter season was 50 per cent. and during the summer season 60 per cent. Figures are not available for 1991–92 and 1992–93, or on a month-by-month basis.

Great Western Railways

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the tender document for the Great Western region includes a requirement to run services to and from Paddington to Castle Cary, Westbury and Pewsey, and a commitment that the Reading to Taunton rail link will remain in existence for the foreseeable future. [17529]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director's consultation document on Great Western includes a requirement to run services to and from Paddington to Castle Cary, Westbury and Pewsey. All services in both directions stopping at Castle Cary will also be required to stop at Taunton. The consultation period finishes on 31 March, and the franchising director will announce the Great Western passenger services requirement after consideration of the responses.

Sleeper Trains

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure that the West Highland sleeper trains to Fort William will be kept in service in accordance with section 37 of the Railways Act 1993 until the consultation procedures for line closure which Parliament has laid down for the protection of the travelling public under that section have been carried out. [17496]

Mr. Watts: Section 37 of the Railways Act 1993 applies where the person providing all railway passenger services on any line or from any station proposes to discontinue all such services on that line or from that station.

I understand that the franchising director has not received from British Rail any notice of a proposal under that section relating to the discontinuance of any railway passenger services in Scotland.

Air Safety (Leases)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to ensure that all aircraft granted approval for *(a)* wet and *(b)* dry leasing by United Kingdom operators are maintained to required International Civil Aviation Organisation standards. [16297]

Mr. Norris: The leasing of aircraft by EC airlines is governed by EC Council regulation (EC) No. 1407/92. Under article 10 of this regulation, an airline licensed by a member state has to obtain the approval of its own licensing authority in order to operate a foreign registered aircraft. For the purposes of this regulation, the Civil Aviation Authority is required to approve any application by United Kingdom operators to lease foreign aircraft.

Before granting approval to UK airlines for both dry leases—the lease of an aircraft without crew—and wet leases—the lease of an aircraft with crew—the CAA is required to satisfy itself that the aircraft will be operated to acceptable safety standards equivalent to UK national standards.

For short-term wet leases, it has been agreed that, provided the foreign aircraft is registered in a state that is a signatory to the Chicago convention, prior approval is not required. This is to meet the operational requirements of UK operators where, due to unforseen circumstances, they might be unable to use their own aircraft at short notice.

Aircraft Movements

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last year for which figures are available an aeroplane touched down on United Kingdom land having originated its journey *(a)* in a foreign country and *(b)* in a country outside the European Union. [16671]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has supplied the following in relation to full reporting airports for 1994: *(a)* 463,416 and *(b)* 141,766. These figures do not include business and private light aircraft and military movements, which are not available, or arrivals at smaller airports, for which the statistics do not separately identify flights originating outside the EU.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the statement contained in the air accidents investigation branch bulletin No. 3/95 concerning the lack of a system in place to allow the joint aviation authorities to respond as a body to safety recommendations raised by national investigating authorities; and what actions he is taking in response to this situation. [16901]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority will be raising this matter with the joint aviation authorities next month.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the number of roadside checks within the Greater London area on faulty exhaust emissions on motor cars and lorries in each of the last three months. [17233]

Mr. Norris: The number of vehicles checked at specific exhaust emissions roadside checks was as follows:

	December	*January*	*February*
a: heavy goods vehicles	46	27	22
b: cars (including light goods vehicles)	74	1	76

In addition, a visual assessment is made of vehicle emissions at other general roadside enforcement checks. The details for the last three months are:

	December	*January*	*February*
a: heavy goods vehicles	194	131	169
b: cars (including light goods vehicles)	75	28	53

Driving Licences

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to abolish the charge to motorists over 70 years of age required to renew their driving licences. [17649]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to abolish the £6 fee for renewing driving licences from age 70.

ENVIRONMENT

Pollution, Doncaster

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has available on air quality in south Yorkshire and Doncaster, with particular reference to quantities of black smoke, nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide. [16706]

Mr. Atkins: The Department of the Environment undertakes continuous automatic monitoring of the pollutants nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide at Sheffield. In addition, my Department, in co-operation with local authorities, operates a number of non-automatic national monitoring networks including those measuring the levels of black smoke and nitrogen dioxide. This includes monitoring of nitrogen dioxide in Doncaster, four sites, and Rotherham, four sites; and of black smoke at Doncaster, five sites; Barnsley, four sites; Sheffield, two sites; Grimethorpe, two sites; Brampton; Cudworth; Dinnington; Goldthorpe; Hoyland Nether; Maltby; Wath-upon-Dearne; Wombwell; and Worsbrough bridge.

A detailed summary of data covering the aforementioned pollutants at sites in south Yorkshire and Doncaster has been placed in the Library of the House.

High Sheriffs

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if high sheriffs will continue in counties proposed to be replaced by unitary authorities; what provision will be made in these counties for back-up staff for the lord lieutenant or the high sheriff; and if Berkshire will retain its title as a royal county. [16869]

Mr. Curry: In Berkshire, although the county council will be abolished, the county area will remain. Along with its lord lieutenant, it will retain its high sheriff and its title as a royal county. As regards other areas, we have yet to take decisions on Cleveland. High sheriffs will be appointed for the new counties of Bristol and the east riding of Yorkshire, and the remaining parts of Avon and Humberside will be associated variously with neighbouring counties for ceremonial purposes. We expect that local authorities will want to continue to provide support to their lord lieutenant and high sheriffs.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total level of *(a)* usable and *(b)* set-aside capital receipts for each local authority in England; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of set-aside receipts which remain available. [17042]

Mr. Curry: A list of the amounts of the total usable capital receipts held by each authority in England was placed in the Library of the House in response to the question of Thursday 9 February 1995 from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column *343*.

A list has also been placed in the Library of the amounts set aside by each authority as provision for credit liabilities and not yet applied. These include amounts set aside both from capital receipts and revenue. Separate figures are not available.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he makes of the amount by which carbon dioxide emissions in 2000 will exceed those in 1990, in the case of *(a)* the USA, *(b)* Canada and *(c)* Australia. [16951]

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has made no separate estimate of the carbon emissions of other countries in 2000. Estimates by each country are included in their national programmes submitted under the UN framework convention on climate change.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Government will be supporting the alliance of small island states' proposed target for the carbon dioxide emissions of industrial countries, of a reduction of 20 per cent. of the 1990 level in 2005. [16953]

Mr. Atkins: No. My right hon. Friend has called for developed countries to commit themselves to a challenging but achievable objective of reducing total greenhouse gas emissions to between 5 and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010 within the framework of the convention.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates his Department has arrived at, assuming current trends for global carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions continue, of the likely date of the disappearance of the islands of *(a)* Trinidad and *(b)* Tobago. [16954]

Mr. Atkins: We have made no such estimates.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether United Kingdom Government representatives at the first conference of the parties for the climate change convention will support the proposal for an interim report on the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change work on the cost-benefit analysis of global warming to be presented to and discussed at the meeting. [16957]

Mr. Atkins: There is no such proposal on the agenda for the first conference of the parties. The IPCC's second assessment report is not expected to be published until early 1996.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make arrangements to discuss with the high commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago the United Kingdom Government's stance at the first conference of the parties for the climate change convention. [16955]

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend expects to hold discussions with the representatives of many countries during the conference.

Allerton Outreach Team

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what future funding has been agreed to support the Allerton outreach team; and if he will make a statement. [17255]

Mr. Curry: The Allerton estate is the subject of a comprehensive programme of housing and environmental improvements costing £31.9 million. It is being supported by £20.75 million estate action commitment under the single regeneration budget. We approved the first phase of work in December 1994. The Employment Service undertook to fund jointly with Bradford council, and for a limited three-month period until March 1995, the cost of outreach work to help unemployed adults access the training and employment opportunities created by the estate action programme. Discussions have been taking place with the council to explore how the scheme might be extended into 1995–96. Bradford training and enterprise council has offered to contribute £10,000 towards the cost of an outreach worker in 1995–96, and to arrange for up to £10,000-worth of guidance vouchers to be ring-fenced for use by Allerton's residents. It is hoped that the local authority will also make a contribution. These discussions are continuing.

Cash Limits

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to his Department's cash limit for 1994–95. [18062]

Mr. Gummer: I propose to make the following changes:

a. The DOE/OES—other environmental services—non-voted cash limit will be increased by £15,828,000 from £30,390,000 to £46,218,000. This increase reflects the take-up of end year flexibility (£2,384,000), as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–34*; a transfer of £580,000 from the vote 5—central environmental services etc.—cash limit from savings there; and a technical transfer of £12,864,000 from the DOE/NT—new towns—cash limit.

b. The DOE/HC—Housing Corporation—non-voted cash limit, covering capital expenditure financed by the Housing Corporation in England, will be increased by £2,250,000 from £1,484,540,000 to £1,486,790,000. This increase reflects transfers from vote 5 and vote 8—revenue support grant, payment of non-domestic rates, Valuation Office services etc., England—and will be used to fund additional expenditure under the corporation's approved development programme.

c. The DOE/LACAP—local authority capital—non-voted cash limit will be increased by £44,000 from £2,221,200,000 to £2,221,244,000. The increase will be matched by a corresponding reduction in the DOE/NT cash limit. This results from the provision of additional supplementary credit approval resources to Wrekin district council to purchase residual rented housing stock from the Commission for the New Towns.

d. The DOE/RI—regeneration initiatives— non-voted cash limit will be increased by £321,000 from £1,298,357,000 to £1,298,678,000. The increase will allow the issue of an all capital purpose supplementary credit approval in respect of the East Manchester regeneration programme grant expenditure. The increase reflects the transfer of £321,000 from the cash limit for class VII, vote 5, which will be reduced accordingly.

e. The DOE/NT—new towns—non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £11,280,000 from—£123,346,000 to —£134,626,000. This net reduction is the result of an increase of £1,628,000, reflecting the take-up of end year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–34*; and the reductions of £44,000, being transferred to DOE/LACAP, and £12,864,000, being transferred to DOE/OES, resulting from additional receipts from local authorities.

f. The DOE/LGR—local government reorganisation—non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £4,435,000 from £44,660,000 to £40,225,000. The savings are due to lower than expected take-up of SCAs for the transitional costs of local government reorganisation and the delayed start-up of the Local Government residuary body, but partially offset by an increase in the granting of other SCAs.

g. The cash limit for class VII, vote 5—central environmental services, etc.—will be reduced by £2,601,000 from £437,145,000 to £434,544,000. This reduction, possible because of forecast savings will allow increases of £1,700,000 to the DOE/HC cash limit; £580,000 to the DOE/OES cash limit; and £321,000 to the regeneration initiatives cash limit to be made.

h. The cash limit for class VII, vote 8—revenue support grant, payments of non-domestic rates, Valuation Office services, etc. England—will be reduced by £550,000 from £29,633,432,000 to £29,632,882,000. This reduction is due to a £300,000 saving on valuation tribunals and a £250,000 saving on the Local Government Commission and will allow increases of £550,000 to the DOE/HC cash limit.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

EU Habitats Directive

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will commence consultations on special areas of conservation to be designated under the EU habitats directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce today that the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland and I are launching a wide-ranging public consultation on a list of areas which have been proposed as qualifying for designation as special areas of conservation under the EU habitats directive. The proposals constitute the advice of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, co-ordinated through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to ensure UK-wide consistency.

The habitats directive requires member states to submit national lists to the European Commission by 5 June 1995. The SACs will build on our existing framework of designations. I am looking at a simplification of that framework in preparing the rural White Paper. In Scotland, the Government have asked Scottish Natural Heritage to carry out a review of designations and look forward to receiving its advice.

The Government are committed to full and effective public consultation before deciding which areas to include in the United Kingdom national list. The consultation will be at both national and local level. My colleagues are writing today to national organisations inviting comments on the proposals. At the same time, site-by-site consultations of landowners and occupiers and other interests, including local authorities, are being undertaken at local level by the appropriate country nature conservation agency and DOE(NI). The views expressed in the consultation will be considered fully before any decisions are made about the list of sites to be put to the Commission.

The habitats directive, adopted in 1992, was one of the most important milestones for nature conservation in Europe. The Government played an active part in its negotiation and we have pursued implementation in accordance with its requirements. This latest step is the next phase of implementation which identifies those sites considered by the nature conservation agencies and DOE(NI) to represent an appropriate contribution from the UK to the Union-wide Natura 2000 network.

The consultation package, which I am making available in the Library of the House, includes a document which explains the way the scientific advice has been formulated. The directive requires that sites selected as SACs should be significant in terms of the biogeographical region. The habitat types and species listed for site protection are among the rarest or most threatened in Europe. The aim of the SAC network is to maintain or restore these habitat types and species at a favourable conservation status. The sites eventually selected will be those which make a significant contribution to that aim, to the coherence of the network or to the maintenance of biological diversity. The Natura 2000 network will therefore consist of sites which are the most precious in the European Union and these proposals should be considered in that context.

The sites on the list cover both land and marine areas. All land-based sites in Great Britain which are included in the consultation are already notified as sites of special scientific interest and in Northern Ireland all land-based sites are, or shortly will be, declared areas of special scientific interest. The nature conservation agencies advise that there are some habitat types and species for which SACs will, in due course, be recommended which are not yet SSSI. Further SSSI notifications are planned to cover, in particular, certain rivers and riverine species, active raised bogs and blanket bogs and some inter-tidal areas. This notification work will be undertaken before consultation on possible SAC designation for them takes place. The consultation list is also incomplete for certain species. Further scientific information is being sought on the freshwater pearl mussel, the great crested newt and the otter before a full range of possible sites is proposed and consulted on for these species. The Government also await further scientific advice on an additional estuarial site.

I look forward to receiving comments on the proposals. There is already a constructive dialogue between landholders on the one hand and the country agencies and DOE(NI) on the other. There is similar discussion between these statutory bodies and users of the marine environment. This present consultation continues and reinforces the dialogue which is fundamental to the co-operation and consensus we must have to secure effective and lasting conservation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to introduce compulsory retirement for judges *(a)* at age 65 and *(b)* at age 70 years. [16256]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993, which is coming into force today, establishes a compulsory retirement age of 70 for those first appointed to full-time judicial office on or after that date, subject to provision for the service of office-holders below the level of the High Court to be extended, up to an age limit of 75, for periods not exceeding one year at a time, where the Lord Chancellor considers it in the public interest to do so. He expects to exercise this power sparingly. There are no plans to reduce the compulsory retirement age for judges to 65.

Appeals Delays

Mr. Pike: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions he has had and what representations he has received in respect of delays in dealing with *(a)* social security benefit appeals, *(b)* immigration case appeals and *(c)* other appeals; and if he will make a statement. [16500]

Mr. John. M. Taylor: Information is not collated in the form requested, and the question can therefore be answered only at disproportionate cost. I can confirm, however, that I received 320 letters from hon. Members during the course of 1994 relating to tribunals. The great majority of these related to immigration appeals, and many of them expressed concern about delays.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what efforts his Department has made to reduce delays in dealing with *(a)* social security benefit appeals, *(b)* immigration case appeals and *(c)* other appeals; and if he will make a statement. [16499]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is as follows:

(a) Additional staff have been appointed to the Office of the Social Security and Child Support

Commissioners to deal with the increased work load. Further, the chief commissioner has introduced streamlined procedures for certain categories of appeal and a computerised case tracking system is being developed to improve administrative efficiency.

(b) In response to increased waiting times at certain centres of the immigration appellate authorities measures have been introduced to ensure that available court rooms are used as effectively as possible. Furthermore appellants at the London and Feltham centres are offered hearings at one of the regional centres, where waiting times are shorter.

(c) Additional staff have been recruited for the pensions appeal tribunals to give administrative support. Extra judicial members have also been appointed and additional tribunal sittings have been arranged to help reduce waiting times for a hearing.

Magistrates

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *346*, if he will take steps to bring the political balance among magistrates in Doncaster into line with the national political opinion. [16248]

Mr. John. M. Taylor: It is the wish of the Lord Chancellor that each lay bench should broadly reflect the community it serves. To that end, the Lord Chancellor has already asked his advisory committee for Doncaster to take appropriate steps to improve the political balance of the bench and that is being done. The Lord Chancellor would be grateful for any encouragement to this aim that the hon. Member can give locally.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many press officers there are in his Department currently, and what the figure was in 1979. [16576]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are currently six press officers in my Department. There were no press officers employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department in 1979.

Legal Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give in each of the last five years the number of cases where the defence legal aid costs have exceeded £1 million. [16245]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The numbers of cases where the defence legal aid costs have exceeded £1 million, including VAT, in each of the last five years, in criminal proceedings, were as follows:

1989–90: 1
1990–91: —
1991–92: 1
1992–93: 3
1993–94: 14

Mrs. Danielle Souness

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the cost to the legal aid funding of Mrs. Danielle Souness's case against Mr. Souness. [16417]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No moneys have been paid from the legal aid fund.

Tribunal Staff

Mr. Pike: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact of staffing shortages on the time taken to deal with *(a)* before and *(b)* after the appeal itself has been held; and if he will make a statement. [16501]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are presently five vacant posts from a total complement of 220 administrative staff for all the tribunals run by my Department. These vacancies have not had a significant impact on the time taken to deal with cases either before or after an appeal hearing.

SCOTLAND

Secondary Education

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future relationship between the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council in the light of the proposals he announced for the reform of upper secondary education in Scotland last year. [17948]

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that I am publishing a consultation paper entitled "Options for the Future Relationship between the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council" today. The paper looks at possibilities for the future relationship between the two bodies and seeks respondents' views on the way forward. Copies of the document have been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the targets he expects the Registers of Scotland executive agency to achieve in 1995–96. [18275]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have set the Registers of Scotland the following key targets for 1995–96:

to reduce the turnround time over the year for recording writs on the sasine register from 35 working days to 33 working days, with performance in any quarter not exceeding 36.5 working days;

to reduce the turnround time over the year for dealings on the land register not attached to a first registration or a transfer of part from 57.5 working days to 55 working days, with performance in any quarter not exceeding 60.5 working days;

to reduce unit costs in real terms by 4 per cent. against 1994–95 target for sasines and 7 per cent. against 1994–95 target for dealings;

to continue the land register extension programme and achieve the transfer of Aberdeen and Kincardine on 1 April 1996;

to achieve trading fund status by 1 April 1996;

to recover full operating costs; and

to achieve at least 97 per cent. of customers expressing themselves satisfied with the accuracy of work and helpfulness of staff for all parts of the business.

Caledonian MacBrayne

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to set targets for Caledonian MacBrayne for 1995–96. [18276]

Mr. Lang: I have decided to set the following targets for Caledonian MacBrayne for the year 1995–96. The company will be required to achieve as a financial target that fares income should meet at least 58 per cent. of operating costs, including depreciation charged on a replacement cost basis and provision for an 8 per cent. forgone rate of return on capital. As an efficiency target, the company will be asked not to exceed a maximum unit cost of 84p per passenger car unit capacity kilometre. As a quality of service target, the company will be asked to achieve a figure of 97 per cent. of sailings arriving on time, excluding sailings which are delayed or cancelled for safety reasons, for example, adverse weather conditions. I consider that the setting of these targets will provide a clear framework for the operation of the company in 1995–96, which is consistent with the Government's objectives of securing continued improvement in operational efficiency and standards of service.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to issue consistent advice through the Benefits Agency offices on how to treat men and women who receive training grants from the European social fund. [16841]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 30 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the advice issued to Benefit Agency offices when people are receiving training grants from the European Social Fund (ESF).

To ensure national consistency in the adjudication of benefit claims the Chief Adjudication Officer issues an interpretation of legislation in the form of the Adjudication Officer's Guide (AOG). The AOG is available in all Benefits Agency (BA) offices. AOG paragraphs 25468 to 25471 gives guidance on the meaning of training allowance.

BA Central Services issues operational guidance for all benefits to BA offices in the form of various manuals. An Income Support Handbook entitled "Directory of Training and Education Programmes", paragraphs 450–499, specifically covers the treatment of income from the ESF.

Staff in BA Central Services and Central Adjudication Services (CAS) are also available to discuss any queries staff in offices may have with any guidance that is issued.

Copies of the AOG and the Income Support handbook are available in the Library.

The Chief Adjudication Officer's view, reflected in the national guidance, is that payments from the ESF do not constitute a training allowance for the purposes of benefit entitlement because they are not paid out of public funds. Income from this is therefore taken fully into account in determining entitlement to Income Support (IS).

This is based on caselaw which says that where a regulation says public funds that means the public funds of Great Britain unless the draftsman explicitly states otherwise. He has not in the case of ESF payments. Therefore ESF payments do not receive the same special treatment that is given to other training allowances paid by or on behalf of Government Departments.

The Chief Adjudication Officer's view of these payments is however currently being tested in a case awaiting a hearing before the Social Security Commissioner.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances employed status participants in training for work, or in independent programmes supported by the European social fund, can claim in-work benefits including family credit and disability working allowance; and if he will make a statement. [15155]

Mr. Roger Evans: In general, any employee, including a participant in a training scheme supported by the European social fund, can claim family credit or disability working allowance, provided that he satisfies the other conditions of entitlement. However, because the Training for Work (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1993 and the Training for Work (Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise Programmes) Order 1993 specify that participants in those schemes shall not be treated as being employed, employed status trainees under those schemes are currently unable to qualify for family credit or disability working allowance although they may qualify for income support. My hon. Friends the Under-Secretary of State for Employment and the Minster with responsibility for industry and local government at the Scottish Office propose to lay new orders shortly in order to enable such trainees to qualify for family credit and disability working allowance on the same basis as other employees.

Participants in any training scheme can claim housing benefit and council tax benefit and will continue to be able to do so.

Residential Care and Nursing Homes

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those in residential care and nursing homes on 31 March 1993 were in receipt of *(a)* income support; *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* disability living allowance. [16263]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available for the date requested that includes attendance allowance or disability living allowance. In May 1993 the following number of residents were in receipt of:

(a) Income Support: 284,000

(b) Income Support and Attendance Allowance: 113,000

(c) Income Support and Disability Living Allowance: 31,000.

The number of residents in residential care and nursing homes in receipt of income support on the 27 March 1993 was 281,000.

Note:

The figures for income support for May 1993 are for preserved rights cases only.

Source:

"Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry, May 1993".

Residential Care and Nursing Home 100 per cent. scan March 1993.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the findings of the Health and Safety Executive-Peto report, "Continuing Increase in Mesothelioma Mortality in Britain", and its consequence for his Department's policy. [17073]

Mr. Hague: Diffuse mesothelioma is already included in the list of prescribed diseases for which industrial injuries disablement benefit is payable. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is advised on the list by the independent Industrial Injuries Advisory Council which is aware of the Peto report. The council monitors developments in the field of occupational disease, and intends to review asbestos-related diseases as part of its work programme for the current year.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral statement of 21 March, *Official Report*, column 259 what is the global figure for the number of people who have won their appeals against refusal of benefit under the habitual residence test. [17437]

Mr. Roger Evans: In the debate on 21 March I referred to certain global figures which had been supplied to the hon. Member. Unfortunately these figures relate to the application of the habitual residence test at the point of claim, not the appeal stage.

The position on appeals is as I have previously explained. The reasons for an appeal are not routinely identified and figures for past appeals could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. Department officials are looking at whether this type of information could be extracted without disproportionate cost for future appeals.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his latest estimates of the numbers of people who will receive *(a)* short-term incapacity benefit at the lower rate, *(b)* short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate and *(c)* the long-term rate of incapacity benefit, in each of the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and 1998–99. [17440]

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

Estimated number of people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit at the end of March in each year

Thousand

	1996	1997	1998	1999
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (lower rate)	145	145	145	145
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (higher rate)	110	110	110	115
Long-term Incapacity Benefit	1,545	1,430	1,380	1,340

Notes:

1. Estimates are provisional and as such will be subject to revision at a later stage.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
3. Figures take account of the estimated effect of the new medical test.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *83*, if he will explain how the 48 per cent. of savings resulting from the exclusion of existing claimants of incapacity benefit is to be achieved; and whether this 48 per cent. includes the 41 per cent. of savings arising from the exclusion of existing claimants by the medical test. [17436]

Mr. Hague: The answer was incorrectly printed in the *Official Report*. It should have read:

> "In 1995–96, 13 per cent. of the estimated savings are accounted for by the exclusion of new claimants as a result of the medical test of incapacity and 41 per cent. by the exclusion of existing claimants. In 1996–97, 17 per cent. of the estimated savings are accounted for by the exclusion of new claimants as a result of the medical test and 48 per cent. by the exclusion of existing claimants."

All the estimated savings to which the answer refers are to be achieved by the application of the medical test of incapacity.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16216]

Sir John Wheeler: No specific guidelines in respect of the employment of public relations companies have been issued. General guidance on the use of consultants, which covers public relations companies, was issued in 1989. A copy has been placed in the library.

The Northern Ireland Office, NI Departments and their agencies and public bodies can, and do, avail themselves of advice on purchasing issues, including tendering procedures, from the Government purchasing service, which is a specialist purchasing unit within the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16283]

Sir John Wheeler: Public relations and other forms of publicity within Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office fall primarily to departmental information officers and the information services. In addition, departmental staff carry out an extensive range of public relations activities. To disaggregate the total cost of these activities from their other duties would involve disproportionate cost.

The total cost of public relations contracts with the private sector in 1993–94 was £996,118. These involved the following projects:

Preparation of Department of Education's corporate image, including logo.

Department of Education (NI) stand at the ideal home exhibition.

Advertising and publishing of parents charter for Department of Education (NI).

Updating Department of Education's database (Touch screen exhibition equipment).

Promotional video for the Department of Education (NI).

Public relations contracts in the Industrial Development Board's (IDB) target markets of North America, Germany, Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

Consultant employed by the Department of Economic Development (DED), in the fair employment field.

Privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE).

New corporate identity for Making Belfast Work (MBW).

Best of Northern Ireland exhibition at Westminster.

Stormont castle publicity booklets and promotional material.

Launch of Valuation and Lands Agency.

Government purchasing service (NI) stand at HMT public procurement exhibition at Olympia.

Public Records Office publications.

Miss Shirley Robbins

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Government Department is responsible for paying the extra costs of electricity arising from the use, for medical reasons, of a new ventilator machine for Miss Shirley Robbins of Morpeth street, who suffered from polio as a child. [16715]

Mr. Moss: As this matter involves personal information relating to Miss Robbins, I will write to the hon. Member.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his Department will undertake a review of the application of all provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to all alleged offenders in the north of Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [16784]

Sir John Wheeler: The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 applies only to England and Wales. Virtually identical legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland in the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989. A number of amendments are currently being considered to the order and my right hon. and learned Friend will make an announcement shortly.

Police Authority

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the salary paid to the chairman of the Northern Ireland Police Authority; and to what other allowances he is normally entitled. [17046]

Sir John Wheeler: The chairman of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland presently receives a remuneration of £31,865 per annum. Travel and subsistence allowances in line with civil service rates are payable for official business.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Attorney-General how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979.

The Attorney-General: There are currently eight press officers employed in the departments for which I am responsible. There were no such officers in 1979, on which date the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office, which currently employ six press officers and two press officers respectively, were not in existence.

PRIME MINISTER

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)*, and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising, for each year since 1979–80 or for each year since 1979–80 or for each of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17632]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rupert Pennant-Rea

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether he approved the terms of the letter sent by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Mr. Rupert Pennant-Rea in answer to his resignation letter; and what is the Government's policy on standards of behaviour of senior public officials. [17120]

The Prime Minister: My approval was neither sought nor required to the letter my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer sent to Mr. Rupert Pennant-Rea. I have now read it and agree with it. The Government's policy is to uphold the highest standard in public life.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Sales

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Turkish Government to ensure that no arms given to Turkey by NATO are being used in the attacks now taking place against Kurdish safe havens in northern Iraq. [17234]

Mr. David Davis: None in this context. Proposed United Kingdom arms sales to Turkey, as to other countries, are considered on a case-by-case basis and are subject to stringent licensing procedures. In particular, we do not grant licences for the sale of equipment which we believe is likely to be used for internal repression.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what equipment Her Majesty's Government consider is covered by its ban on arms sales to China.

Mr. Goodlad: Since 7 June 1989 the United Kingdom has enforced an embargo on the sale to China of

> "weapons, and equipment which could be used for internal repression".

The EU introduced a ban on arms sales to China on 26 June 1989 but the scope of that ban has, in the absence of agreement on a common interpretations, been left for national interpretation. In the interests of clarity we have decided that henceforward the embargo will include:

lethal weapons such as machine guns, large calibre weapons, bombs, torpedoes, rockets and missiles;

specially designed components of the above, and ammunition;

military aircraft and helicopters, vessels of war, armoured fighting vehicles and other such weapons platforms;

any equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

All applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis in the light of these criteria as well as our usual criteria governing all defence exports.

EU Council Meetings

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union.

Mr. David Davis: The information meetings are planned:

3–4 April: Culture/Media
6 April: Fisheries
7 April: Industry
10–11 April: Foreign Affairs

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

3 April: Culture Council

14.30:

—Adoption of the provisional agenda

—Adoption of the list of "A" points

—Audiovisual policy:

—Proposal for a MEDIA II programme: orientation debate

—Co-ordination of legislative, regulatory and administrative measures in the member states concerning television broadcasting: presentation from the Commission of its proposal to modify the Council directive of 3 October 1989

—Financial mechanisms intended to permit the mobilisation of finance for audiovisual production: oral communication from the Commission

17.00:

—Joint meeting of the Council and the countries of central and eastern Europe concerning co-operation in the fields of both culture and audiovisual policy.

4 April: Culture Council

—European heritage and multimedia: draft resolution

—Co-operation with the countries of central and eastern Europe: draft resolution

—Proposal for a decision establishing a support programme for artistic and cultural activities (KALEIDOSCOPE 2000): orientation debate

—Proposal for a decision establishing a community support programme for the dissemination of literary, theatrical and reference works through translation and specialist training of literary translators (ARIANE): orientation debate

—Community support programme in the field of cultural heritage (RAPHAEL): information from the Commission

6 April: Fisheries Council

—Total allowable catches for the Greenland halibut

—Objectives and strategies for the period 1994 to 1997

—Additional conditions for year to year management of total allowable catches and quotas

—Technical conservation measures

—(possible) Guide prices

—(possible) Common marketing standards for shrimps, edible crabs and Norway lobsters

—(possible) Tariff quotas for certain fishery products

—(possible) Structural assistance—scale of premiums

—(possible) Structural assistance—early retirement

—Fisheries relations with Morocco.

7 April: Industry Council

—Industry and competition—an oral presentation by the Commission on its interim report on competition policy in 1994

—Industry and research—a joint presentation by Commissioners Bangemann and Cresson

—Industrial co-operation with central and eastern Europe discussion on Commission communication and adoption of Council conclusions

—Industrial competitiveness—adoption of Council conclusions on Commission communication on follow-up to previous Council conclusions on competitiveness

—High technology industries—adoption of Council conclusions

—Information society—Commission report on G7 conference and follow-up to Bangemann report

—Steel—report on monitoring of state aid

—Possible presentation of modification to aid code

10–11 April: Foreign Affairs Council

—Adoption of the agenda

—Approval of the list of "A" items

—Resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-sessions (Brussels, 28 February to 2 March, and Strasbourg, 13 to 17 March 1995)

—Preparation for the joint meeting with the associated CEEs

—Determination of the common position to be adopted for the first meeting of the Association Council with the Czech Republic

—Determination of the common position to be adopted for the first meeting of the Association Council with Romania

—(possible) Negotiating directives for the adaptation of the Europe agreements and free trade agreements with the Baltic countries, further to enlargement

—Relations with Russia

—Former Yugoslavia

—Relations with Croatia

—(possible) Stability pact: Follow-up to the concluding conference

—Nuclear non-proliferation: Preparation for the conference on the NPT

—Burundi

—(possible) EU supervision of elections in the Palestinian territories

—(possible) Union action concerning anti-personnel mines

—Mediterranean policy

a) Bilateral negotiations with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia

b) Preparation for the Euro-Mediterranean conference: Adoption of the summary report

—Relations with Malta

a) Action to be taken on the Commission report

b) Decision on signing the fourth financial protocol.

—Relations with Cyprus

—decision on signing the fourth financial protocol

—Relations with Latin America

a) (possible) Chile: Presentation by the Commission of its assessment report

b) Mexico: Strengthening of relations between the European Union and Mexico

—(possible) Japan

—Commission communication

—Trade questions

—establishment of the WTO and multilateral trade negotiations

—Mid-term review of the Fourth ACP-EC convention

—8th EDF

—(possible) South Africa

—negotiating directives

—Council report on the functioning of the treaty on European Union

—Transparency of Council proceedings

Obscene Publications

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will publish the text of his letter to the hon. Member for Congleton of 13 March in connection with the agreement for the suppression of the circulation of obscene publications; [16525]

(2) pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Congleton of 28 February, what inquiries have now been made of the United Nations by his Department in connection with the status and operative provisions of the agreement for the suppression of the circulation of obscene publications; what proposals there are to comply with those provisions of the agreement which require the five-yearly consideration of the desirability of calling a conference on the matters covered by the agreement; and if he will make a statement. [16523]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 27 March 1995]*: The United Nations treaty department has confirmed that an agreement for the suppression of the circulation of obscene publications was signed in 1910 and amended by a protocol in 1949, and a convention for the suppression of the circulation and traffic in obscene publications was concluded in 1923 and amended by a protocol in 1947. Article 16 of the 1923 convention, not the 1910 agreement, contains the provision for calling a conference at the end of each period of five years. As amended in 1947 it states:

> "Upon a request for a revision of the present Convention by five of the signatory or acceding Parties to the Convention, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations shall call a conference for that purpose. In any event, the Council will consider the desirability of calling a conference at the end of each period of five years".

There is no record of five members asking for a conference. The secretariat of ECOSOC has confirmed to us that it has come under no pressure from signatories to review the 1923 convention, nor has it opted to call a conference as provided for under article 16.

The convention is still active: the Czech and Slovak Republics succeeded to it—independently—on 28 August 1993. If there were a proposal by five member states signatory to the convention, the Economic and Social Council would call a conference. We are not aware of any current proposals to do so.

Copies of the texts of the 1910 agreement and the 1923 convention will be lodged in the Library of the House in due course.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Quotas

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the prosecutions pursued by his Department against fishermen for breaching non-sector quotas and what fines or other penalties were imposed in each successful case in each year since 1988 in England and Wales. [15590]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 March 1995]*: The number of prosecution cases involving breaches of non-sector quota limits is summarised in the table. Some of the vessels prosecuted may have belonged to producer organisations but fished against non-sector quota limits for certain stocks.

Year of offence	*Number of successful prosecution cases*	*Total fines incurred £*
1988	1	10,000
1989	3	35,095
1990	7	10,050
1991	14	75,803
1992	25	140,237
1993	13	97,086
1994	3	310,000

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16658]

Mr. Waldegrave: The circumstances in which a commercial public relations company may be employed by Government Departments are strictly limited. They are set out in central guidance, as are the procedures to be followed in respect of contract tendering. Agency framework documents explicitly reiterate the need to observe central Government requirements in purchasing of any external services.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16285]

Mr. Waldegrave: In the financial year 1993–94, my Department, excluding agencies, spent £4.3 million publicity, publications and pamphlets. Central rules specifically preclude the engagement of commercial consultants for direct representational tasks and none was so employed.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost of the common agricultural policy per citizen in the European Union in each year since 1973. [16131]

Mr. Jack: The only readily available estimates of the total transfers to agriculture from consumers and taxpayers in the European Community are those based on analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The information, which is available only on an annual basis from 1986 and as a three-year average back to 1979, is given in the table:

Year	*Total transfers billion ECUs*
1979–81	57
1983–85	58
1986	105
1987	104
1988	102
1989	92

Year	*Total transfers billion ECUs*
1990	104
1991	116
1992	111
1993	116

Notes:
The estimates relate to the EC Twelve except for the period 1979–85 when they relate to the EC10. The ex-GDR is included from 1990.
Source:
OECD, *Agricultural Policies and Trade*, annual.

It should be noted that these estimates are likely to overstate the true cost of the CAP because the consumer cost element is based on the difference between EC producer prices and world prices. In the absence of support, world prices would almost certainly be higher.

Estimates of population are given in the EUROSTAT's "Basic Statistics of the Community", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a comparison between the documents required in support of the integrated administration and control system in each member country; and if he will make a statement. [16146]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* Documentation relating to IACS produced by other member states is reviewed periodically. During our last review, we found that the explanatory literature produced in some other member states is short. But this is achieved in a number of ways. In some countries the booklet contains only general material, while instructions on completing the forms appear in separate leaflets. Some simply use much smaller print. Others give only basic information and instruct farmers to consult their local offices if they need more or refer back to EC or national rules. Others may rely on producer groups to help farmers with their applications, on the basis of software provided by the Government. We have preferred a comprehensive approach which takes the applicant step by step through the forms. This approach is also generally favoured by the industry whose views we sought this year and who have preferred not to change a format which is now familiar to farmers.

The EC rules on IACS recognise that there will be differences of approach between member states because of different administrative structures. Thus, the Commission's role in ensuring uniform adherence to the rules is a vital one.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Ministry has to review the allocation and method of allocation of milk quotas *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* between EU countries. [17015]

Mr. Jack: Milk quotas have been allocated to producers in the United Kingdom in accordance with current EC legislation. That legislation will be reviewed before 31 March 2000 when it is due to expire. In the meantime the Government are pressing, so far without success, for a change in the rules to permit the leasing of milk quotas across member state frontiers.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the UK's estimated milk production capacity; and what is the United Kingdom's total milk quota.

Mr. Jack: Conditions in much of the United Kingdom are ideal for producing milk. But we are prevented from making the most of our natural advantages by the EC milk quota system. The UK's total milk quota is currently 14,590,047 tonnes.

Milk Imports

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much milk is imported annually into the United Kingdom; and how much of this comes from the EU. [17020]

Mr. Jack: In 1993, the latest year for which figures are available, a total of 92,887 tonnes of milk were imported into the UK. This entire amount came from other EU member states.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17035]

Mr. Jack: An analysis of all legislation introduced by this Department since 1965 for any reference of the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member, although frequent references are made to officers of state.

Poultry

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of birds slaughtered under programme code PP2:02; and what was the cost of compensation for these birds. [17022]

Mrs. Browning: The total number of poultry birds compulsorily slaughtered in Great Britain because of salmonella infection and the compensation paid for these birds since the introduction of the policy in March 1989 are set out in the following table.

Type of bird slaughtered	*Total slaughtered*	*Compensation paid £*
Layer	2,340,254	3,717,952
Layer breeder	106,121	903,805
Broiler breeder	1,131,178	3,258,998
Total	3,577,553	7,880,755

Sheep (Salmonella)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what programmes his Ministry has to reduce the occurrence of salmonella in sheep. [17023]

Mrs. Browning: There are no formal programmes to reduce the occurrence of salmonella in sheep which remains relatively low. However, all isolations have to be reported to a veterinary officer of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who, on the basis of the information received, will decide the need for further action or advice.

Hormones

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evaluation he has made of the findings of the Consumers Association in respect of traces of EU banned hormones in United Kingdom meat samples; and if he will reconsider current monitoring standards in the light of the European test findings on hormones in meat. [17280]

Mr. Waldegrave: The concentrations of banned hormones found in the United Kingdom meat samples taken by the Consumers Association are unlikely to pose a threat to human health. Nevertheless, the findings are a cause for concern. Officials at the veterinary medicines directorate have been in contact with the Consumers Association which has provided some additional information on the samples, but, in view of the time that has elapsed since they were purchased and the results published, coupled with the absence of any packaging material, it is proving very difficult to establish the source.

Surveillance for banned hormones is carried out in the UK under the national surveillance scheme for residues in meat, which implements directive 86/469/EEC. The number of samples taken each year is based on a statistical analysis of the numbers of animals slaughtered in the previous year, so that within prescribed confidence limits, we can be satisfied that the results obtained are truly representative. The number of samples can be increased in the light of developments, but, although the position is being kept under review, we have no plans at this stage to change the level of monitoring as a result of these findings.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how his Ministry's tests on meat samples are carried out to monitor for the use of banned substances. [17281]

Mr. Waldegrave: Samples of bile, urine, serum and thyroid which have been collected from cattle, pigs and sheep at slaughterhouses and on-farm under the statutory national surveillance scheme for residues in meat are analysed for the presence of banned substances in accordance with the provisions of Commission decision 92/256/EEC. This lays down the methods to be used for detecting residues of banned substances having a hormonal or thyrostatic action.

Samples of meat and meat products purchased from retail outlets under the separate non-statutory surveillance programme, and covering both home-produced and imported meat and meat products, are also tested for the presence of banned hormonal and thyrostatic substances using similar procedures.

The results of both the statutory and non-statutory surveillance programmes are published annually in the veterinary medicines directorate's annual report and accounts and updated quarterly in its MAVIS newsletter.

Pig Producers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to give grant aid to pig producers for the replacement of sow stalls and tethers. [17063]

Mr. Jack: I have no such plans. Pig producers have been given an eight-year adequate transitional period to introduce the new arrangements and have a unique opportunity to supply British consumers with pork and bacon produced to a high welfare standard. A grant aid scheme would not be fair to those producers who have already made the change.

Spanish Fishermen

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which Spanish fishermen have been catching undersized fish, illegal fish, using undersize nets and or using illegal holds while fishing off Canada; and if he will make a statement. [17490]

Mr. Jack: Enforcement in the international waters off Canada regulated by the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation is the responsibility of NAFO members fishing there. The United Kingdom has no fishing vessels or national inspectors operating in these fisheries and therefore has no first-hand experience of fishing practices and enforcement there.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the framework document and performance targets for the Meat Hygiene Service. [18395]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Meat Hygiene Service will be launched on 1 April as an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I am arranging for copies of its framework document to be placed in the Library of the House.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have set the following targets for the Meat Hygiene Service in 1995–96.

Financial Performance

To recover from plant operators the full economic costs of providing the statutory health inspection and controls at fresh meat premises, taking account of any transitional financial arrangements which Ministers may agree.

To recover from Government Departments and agencies the full economic costs of providing agreed services or other work undertaken on their behalf.

To comply with budgetary controls resulting from PES and the Supply Estimates.

Efficiency

To work from the outset for gains in efficiency inter alia by:

(a) minimising the total number of hours and the associated costs of meat inspector and OVS time required to operate the service to the standards laid down and taking steps to adjust staffing levels wherever possible following the completion by end October 1995 of the audit of standards and staffing levels in all full throughout plants;

(b) holding overhead costs in 1995–96 within a limit of £8.115 million (before deduction of income from services provided to central Government).

Note: On this basis the MHS will deliver in 1995–96 an efficiency gain of approximately 10 per cent. in relation to the estimated total costs in 1994–95, and will establish a firm base for further gains in efficiency in future years.

Quality and Delivery of Service

To apply hygiene requirements in such a way as to raise levels of compliance by slaughterhouses and cutting premises progressively by:

(a) establishing a baseline in terms of HAS score where this has not already been done;

(b) in red meat slaughterhouses fully approved on 30 September 1995 which had a score of less than 65 at the last inspection by the state veterinary service in 1994–95, working with plant management to raise HAS scores by at least an average of 10 points by the end of 1995–96.

To complete a welfare audit by the plant OVS of all licensed slaughterhouses, and agree with plant management a timetable for any necessary corrective action, by the end of November 1995. To meet the standards laid down in the MHS customer service statement.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hampshire Police

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the additional police to be recruited by the Hampshire police force will be stationed on the Isle of Wight. [17422]

Mr. Maclean: It is for the chief constable to decide how his officers are to be deployed within the force area. I understand that decisions have not yet been taken about the deployment of extra officers to be recruited.

Closed Circuit Television

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who was on the judging panel which recommended to Ministers which bids should be successful under the closed circuit television challenge scheme; and how many of their recommendations Ministers accepted. [17441]

Mr. Maclean: The recommendations to Ministers were based on the assessments of a five-person panel comprising Home Office officials—including one with technical expertise—a business consultant and an academic consultant, both on secondment to the Home Office. Of the 480 bids received, 289 were assessed by the panel as being of good or very good quality. From that total, Ministers selected the 106 winners.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* unsuccessful and *(b)* successful bids for closed circuit television challenge funding fell into each of the four categories listed in the bidding guidance. [17443]

Mr. Maclean: A significant number of bids, both successful and unsuccessful, fell into more than one category. The total number of bids by main category as described in the bidding guidance was as follows:

	Number
Category A (Town Centre Schemes)	295
Category B (Neighbourhood Schemes)	40
Category C (Travel and Business Areas)	46
Category D (Community Centres)	99
Total	480

The number of successful bids by main category was as follows:

	Number
Category A	90
Category B	1
Category C	11
Category D	4

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many London bids were received for the closed circuit television challenge competition; and what amount those bids were for. [17445]

Mr. Maclean: Some 60 bids were received from the London region, seeking a total of £3,414,000.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful bids for the closed circuit television challenge scheme attracted private funding; and what was the average proportion of the total cost of each scheme to be financed by private funding. [17438]

Mr. Maclean: Some 103 of the 106 successful bids had pledges of private sector funding. The remaining three successful bids were for neighbourhood or community schemes where private sector funding was not a requirement. It is estimated that the total value of private sector funding pledged for all bids received was £10 million.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state for each of the successful bids in the closed circuit television challenge scheme *(a)* how much they will receive and *(b)* how much they bid. [17442]

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

CCTV competition: winners by government office region (and Wales)

Eastern Region

In this region each of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for.

Chelmsford Town Centre: £100,000.

Ely Town Centre: £8,300.

Peterborough Town Centre: £100,000.

Stevenage Town Centre: £100,000.

Hitchin Town Centre and Letchworth Business Park: £100,000.

Harlow Town Centre: £50,000.

Thetford Town Centre: £100,000.

Hadleigh and Sudbury Town Centres: £100,000.

East Midlands

In this region each of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for, except Mansfield which bid for £100,000.

Gainsborough—Industrial Estates: £90,000.

Scawsby Community Centre, Workshop: £4,250.

Boston Town Centre: £20,000.

Kirton Town Centre: £7,500.

Kettering Town Centre: £50,000.

Ilkeston Town Centre: £45,000.

Norris Hill, Moira: £8,500.

Donington Town Centre: £8,250.

Loughborough Town Centre: £48,100.

Mansfield Town Centre: £50,000.

Market Harborough Town Centre: £40,000

South West

In this region all but two of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for. The Crown Glass Centre bid for £58,000 and Boscombe bid for £32,500.

Crown Glass Centre, Nailsea: £40,000.

Tiverton Town Centre: £12,000.

Boscombe Town Centre: £20,000.

Berkeley Square Car Park, Bristol: £19,000.

Bodmin Town Centre: £12,000.
Cirencester Town Centre: £70,000.
Falmouth Town Centre: £25,000.
Newquay Town Centre: £50,000.
Truro Town Centre: £40,000.
Salisbury Town Centre: £100,000.
Torquay Town Centre: £50,000.
Wiltshire Mobile CCTV System: £10,000.
Gloucester City Centre: £10,000.
Tiverton Business Park: £7,400.

West Midlands

In this region all but two of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for. Worcester bid for £24,500. Tamworth bid for £75,000.

Worcester City Centre: £20,000.
Shrewsbury Town Centre: £100,000.
Tamworth Town Centre: £60,000.
Stratford upon Avon Town Centre: £50,000.
Rugby Town Centre: £70,000.
Hereford City Centre: £60,000.
Solihull Town Centre: £60,000.
Lichfield Town Centre: £93,300
Ledbury High Street: £10,000.

South East

In this region all but five of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for. Maidstone, Folkstone, High Wycombe and Wokingham each bid for £100,000. Addlestone bid for up to £100,000.

Fawcett Road Shipping Area, Portsmouth: £28,500
Maidstone Town Centre: £50,000.
Ashford Town Centre: £89,000.
Havant Town Centre: £50,000.
Dover and Deal Town Centres: £17,500.
Folkestone Town Centre: £70,000.
High Wycombe Town Centre: £50,000.
Newhaven Town Centre: £41,000.
Egham Town Centre: £65,000.
Eastbourne Town Centre: £50,000.
Sandwich Town Centre: £7,500.
Rochester Business Estate: £35,000.
Dartford Town Centre: £50,000.
Tonbridge and West Malling Town Centres: £36,000
Addlestone Town Centre: £50,000
Banbury: £60,000
Wokingham Town Centre: £50,000
Basingstoke Town Centre: £25,000
Chesham: £23,000

Merseyside

Kirkby Railway Station:
Received: £28,750. Bid: £28,750.

London

In this region each of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for.

Harrow Town Centre: £50,000
Hillingdon Mobile CCTV System: £14,000
Sunbury Cross Shopping Centre: £45,000
Archway Mall, Islington: 12,400
Hounslow Town Centre: £50,000
Erith Town Centre: £50,000
Webbs Industrial Estate, Higham Lodge Business Centre and Blackhorse Mews, North Walthamstow: £46,000
Richmond Town Centre: £50,000

Yorkshire and Humberside

In this region all but one of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for. York bid for £100,000.

Harrogate Town Centre: £50,000
Outwood Grange School, Wakefield: £22,000
Balby Street School, Doncaster: £5,000
Lower Don Valley, Sheffield: £53,000
Driffield Town Centre: £6,000
Keighley Town Centre: £34,700
Scarborough Town Centre: £100,000
Sutton Fields Industrial Estate, Hull: £50,000
York City Centre: £50,000
Boroughbridge Town Centre: £7,000
Brigg Town Centre: £49,900

North West

In this region each of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for.

Clitheroe Town Centre: £28,500
Neston Town Centre: £80,000
Carlisle City Centre: £60,000
Blackpool Town Centre: £50,000
Chester City Centre: £25,000
Hyde Town Centre: £21,000
Penrith Town Centre: £71,000
Rochdale Town Centre: £50,000
Wigan Town Centre: £80,000
Tameside Business Development Centre: £2,000
Bury Town Centre: £80,000
Lancaster City Centre: £58,500
Morecambe Seafront: £59,700

North East

In this region all but one of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for. Team Valley, Gateshead bid for £100,000.

Whitley Bay Town Centre: £100,000
Team Valley Estate, Gateshead: £50,000
Gateshead Town Centre: £65,000
Chester-le-Street Town Centre: £80,000
Bishop Auckland Town Centre: £75,000
Skippers Lane Industrial Estate, Cleveland: £80,000
Mill Lane Primary School, Cleveland: £6,000

Wales

In Wales each of the winners, as listed below, received the amount bid for.

Colwyn Bay Town Centre: £100,000
Cwmbran Town Centre: £100,000
West Glamorgan Mobile CCTV System £4,400
Rhondda Fawr Road, Ystrad £1,750
Haverfordwest Town Centre £16,000

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend closed circuit television funding. [17444]

Mr. Maclean: The recent CCTV challenge competition has injected £5 million into local CCTV schemes, generating up to £13.8 million in other funding. The possibility of further competitions in the future has not been ruled out, but it is too early to give a firm commitment.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful bids for closed circuit television challenge money were applications to extend or upgrade existing schemes; and what proportion of the funding this will represent. [17446]

Mr. Maclean: There were a total of 65 bids to extend or upgrade existing systems, of which 15 were successful. Funding for those 15 bids amounted to £487,000, representing 9.7 per cent. of the total made available.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers are currently detained under Immigration Act powers in HMP Rochester; and when use of the second wing within HMP

Rochester to hold Immigration Act detainees is likely to begin; [17690]

(2) how many asylum seekers are currently detained under Immigration Act powers; and if he will provide a breakdown of those detained, by length of detention and by location. [17689]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 29 March 1995, a total of 619 persons who had sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 171 had been in detention less than one month, 87 between one and two months, 171 between two and six months, and 190 had been in detention longer than six months.

Information on the location of these detained persons, as at 29 March 1995, is given in the table. The second wing of Her Majesty's prison, Rochester is due to become available to house Immigration Act detainees during May 1995.

Number of people detained on 29 March 1995 who had sought asylum, by location

	Number
Prisons	
Haslar RC	79
Rochester	54
Winson Green	42
Brixton	11
Manchester	10
Wandsworth	9
Greenock	8
Wolds RC	7
Bristol	6
Brinsford YOI and RC	5
Exeter	4
Hindley RC	4
Armley, Leeds	3
Belmarsh	3
Risley	3
Wormwood Scrubs	3
Birmingham	2
Norwich	2
Strangeways	2
Other	17
Other places of detention	
Campsfield House	147
Harmondsworth	86
Gatwick Detention Centre	35
Stansted	13
Gatwick Beehive	11
Queens Building	8
Dover Harbour Board	6
Newhaven	4
Birmingham Detention Suite	2
Manchester Airport Detention Suite	1
Police Cells	32
Total	619

Michael Grant

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) under what procedure and by whom the decision was made to transfer Michael Grant to Ford open prison; [17142]

(2) what factors were taken into account in determining Michael Grant's most recent security classification; [17144]

(3) what was the classification awarded to Michael Grant following his conviction; and when, and under what procedure, the original classification was lowered. [17143]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 31 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the security classification of Michael Grant and the decision to transfer him to Ford open prison.

Michael Grant was held as a provisional category A prisoner when he was convicted at Chelmsford Crown Court on 24 October 1988 of attempted murder. His case was considered by the Category A Committee at its meeting on 16 March 1989, and on 24 April 1989 the then Director General approved the recommendation that he should be confirmed in category A.

Michael Grant's security category was next reviewed during the following year. The case was considered by the Category A Committee and the Director General. On 5 June 1990 it was decided that Mr. Grant's security category should be reduced to category B.

On 28 January 1991 Mr. Grant was transferred from Gartree to Coldingley which was a category B training prison at the time. On 17 December 1992 the head of custody at Coldingley approved Mr. Grant's re-categorisation to category C. Mr. Grant had demonstrated his suitability through completing a number of escorted home visits. He was made a category C prisoner on 1 January 1993.

Mr. Grant was recommended for re-assessment of his security category at Coldingley prison on 30 May 1993.On 16 June 1993 Mr. Grant was the subject of a re-assessment board for reclassifying him from category C to category D, that is, the lowest security category. This is for prisoners who can reasonably be trusted to serve their sentences in open conditions. The Governor approved the Board's recommendation to reclassify Mr. Grant to category D on 21 June 1993.

The factors that were taken into consideration by the Board were good behaviour whilst in prison, completion of a successful period of home leave and a successful period of temporary release to attend his father's funeral. He had a sound prison employment record, and probation reports demonstrated that he had the backing of a supportive family. Although his earliest date of release was not until November 1997, the Board considered that he was a prisoner who could be reasonably trusted to serve the rest of his sentence in open conditions.

Mr. Grant was initially held as a category D prisoner at Coldingley. He was later accepted by Ford, who took into account his history of good behaviour in prison and the fact that he had successfully completed several periods of home leave. He was transferred to Ford on 23 May 1994.

Following Mr. Grant's recent failure to return from temporary release on time, he later returned voluntarily and will be recategorised to C and is now held in a segregation unit at Ford.

Murderers

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many murderers released on licence since the abolition of the death penalty have been convicted of a subsequent murder. [16395]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Some 11 persons convicted of murder and released on licence since the abolition of the death penalty in 1965 have been subsequently convicted of murder in England and Wales and a further four subsequently convicted of manslaughter.

In another case, one person committed suicide before being tried for the second homicide offence.

A further person was subsequently convicted of murder in Scotland and another in Northern Ireland.

In addition, three persons convicted of manslaughter for which they received a life sentence and released on licence since 1965 have been convicted of a subsequent murder in England and Wales.

Non-animal Experiments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of funding was given by his Department for the development of non-animal experiments in each year since 1985. [17062]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *828*.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sponsors, required to be interviewed following entry clearance applications, whose papers were referred initially to Leeds-Bradford airport, *(a)* have been interviewed and *(b)* are to be interviewed at other ports; and if he will list the numbers of sponsors (i) interviewed and (ii) to be interviewed, at each port since January. [17242]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is a follows:

Port	*Interview completed*	*Awaiting an interview*
Hull	14	4
Stockton	4	7
North Shields/Newcastle Airport	4	11
Total	22	22

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sponsors are, at the latest date, awaiting interview at Leeds-Bradford airport; and if he will appoint additional immigration staff at Leeds-Bradford airport. [17243]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Some 124 sponsors are awaiting interview at Leeds-Bradford airport. As a matter of routine, the immigration service is currently reviewing the work loads and staffing at a number of ports, including Leeds-Bradford.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or his predecessors, since 1965. [17032]

Mr. Howard: Statutory references to disqualification for membership of the House of Commons are contained in the House of Commons Disqualification act 1975, the Representation of the People Act 1981, schedule 7 to the British Nationality Act 1981, the Representation of the People Act 1983 and section 427 of the Insolvency Act 1986.

An analysis of other legislation introduced by this Department since 1965 for any reference of the type requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost since information is not held centrally.

Donkey Escape

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the donkey that escaped from Thorn Cross, Warrington young offender institution has been recaptured; how many personnel were involved in the search; what has been the cost of the search; and if he will make a statement. [16246]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 31 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about a donkey that went missing from the grounds of Thorn Cross Young Offender Institution.

On the morning of 13 March staff discovered that one of two donkeys held in a paddock near Thorn Cross was missing. Four members of staff spent approximately 30 minutes searching in and near the institution for the donkey but failed to find it.

The local police were informed as a precaution against the stray donkey becoming a hazard on the nearby motorway.

A short while later the police notified Thorn Cross that the donkey had been put into a field, earlier that morning, about one mile away from the prison by a passing motorist. The donkey was subsequently collected and returned to the paddock.

This incident involved five prison staff at an approximate cost of £75 plus the services of the local police.

The two donkeys are cared for by inmates on behalf of Sidmouth Donkey Sanctuary and are visited by local handicapped children and other school children.

Prisoner Places (Cost)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per prisoner place, as measured by the Prison Service's net current expenditure divided by the total number of prison places for each of the past 12 months in England and Wales. [16266]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 31 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average cost per prisoner place for each of the past 12 months.

Cost per place is calculated on an annual basis. Variations in the pattern of expenditure mean that monthly expenditure is not a meaningful indicator.

This information is published annually on a financial year basis once the Prison Service Audited Appropriation figures are available. The most recently available cost per place figures are those published in the Prison Service Annual Report for 1993–94.

Blackmail (Definition)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider amending the definition of blackmail to include the application of pressure to disclose publicly personal sexuality. [15959]

Mr. Maclean: I do not think it would be appropriate to amend the offence of blackmail in this way. Removing the requirement for there to be material gain or loss would widen the scope of the offence unacceptably, encompassing types of behaviour unsuitable for regulation by the criminal law.

Prisons (Attempted Suicides)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attempted suicides took place in each prison in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* the last year for which figures are available; and how many of those attempts resulted in death. [16199]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 31 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about attempted suicides and attempted suicides which resulted in deaths.

The information is set out in the table below:

Year	*1979*	*1984–85*[1]	*1989–90*[2]	*1991–92*
Self-harm with suicidal intent	300	402	398	805

I regret that detailed records on self-harm are not available centrally for individual establishments and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

It is difficult to distinguish between self-harm incidents with or without suicidal intent. For this reason, prisons have not been asked to make this classification since 1992 and the figures above should be treated with caution.

Year	*1979*	*1984–85*[1]	*1989–90*[2]	*1991–92*
Self-inflicted deaths	29	37	43	43

[1] In 1984 self-harm figures began to be collected in financial years and cannot be split into calender years. Therefore, the 1984–85 figure covers 15 months from 1 January 1984 to 31 March 1985. The last two figures in the table cover the same period.

[2] The figures for 1989–90 and 1991–92 cover the period 1 April to 31 March.

The attached tables give a breakdown of deaths for each establishment, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Breakdown of deaths resulting from self-harm by establishment, number of incidents and verdict for the year 1979

Establishment	*Number of incidents*	*Verdict*
Gartree	1	Suicide
Wormwood Scrubs	2	Suicide
Dartmoor	1	Suicide
Wandsworth	2	Suicide
Wandsworth	1	Open
Brixton	5	Suicide
Pentonville	1	Misadventure
Pentonville	1	Suicide
Haverigg	1	Misadventure
Lincoln	2	Suicide
Bristol	1	Misadventure
Brockhill	1	Open
Huntercoombe	1	Misadventure
Liverpool	2	Suicide
Liverpool	1	Accidental
Liverpool	1	Misadventure
Shrewsbury	1	Suicide
Winchester	1	Suicide
Leeds	1	Suicide
Lewes	1	Suicide
Stafford	1	Suicide

Breakdown of deaths resulting from self-harm, by establishment, number of incidents and verdict for the financial year 1984–1985 (1 April to 31 March)

Establishment	*Number of incidents*	*Verdict*
Wormwood Scrubs	2	Suicide
Swansea	1	Suicide
Swansea	2	Misadventure
Pentonville	3	Suicide
Brixton	5	Suicide
Durham	2	Suicide
Norwich	2	Suicide
Bristol	1	Misadventure
Exeter	3	Suicide
Leicester	2	Suicide
Shrewsbury	1	Suicide
Lewes	1	Suicide
Wakefield	1	Suicide
Wandsworth	1	Suicide
Birmingham	1	Suicide
Parkhurst	2	Suicide
Leeds	1	Suicide
Leeds	1	Open
Winchester	1	Misadventure
Preston	1	Suicide
Portsmouth	1	Suicide
Liverpool	1	Accidental Death
Holloway	1	Open

Breakdown of deaths resulting from self-harm, by establishment, number of incidents and verdict for the year 1989–90 (1 April—31 March)

Establishment	*Number of incidents*	*Verdict*
Littlehey	1	Suicide
Brixton	4	Open
Brixton	2	Accidental death
Brixton	2	Suicide
Lewes	1	Suicide
Dartmoor	1	Suicide
Winchester	1	Suicide
Winchester	1	Open
Risley	1	Open
Manchester	5	Suicide
Stafford	1	Suicide
Exeter	1	Suicide
Lancaster	1	Suicide

Breakdown of deaths resulting from self-harm, by establishment, number of incidents and verdict for the year 1989–90 (1 April—31 March)

Establishment	*Number of incidents*	*Verdict*
Rochester	2	Suicide
Wormwood Scrubs	1	Suicide
Garth	1	Suicide
Cardiff	1	Accidental death
Shepton Mallet	1	Suicide
Bristol	3	Suicide
Canterbury	1	Suicide
Hindley	2	Suicide
Swansea	1	Suicide
Leeds	1	Suicide
Long Lartin	1	Suicide
Liverpool	1	Open
Bedford	1	Suicide
Camphill	1	Suicide
Pentonville	1	Misadventure
Durham	1	Suicide
Glen Parva	1	Suicide

Breakdown of deaths resulting from self-harm by establishment, number of incidents and verdict for the year 1991–92 (1 April–31 March)

Establishment	*Number of incidents*	*Verdict*
Oxford	1	Accidental
Garth	1	Suicide
Leeds	1	Open
Leeds	1	Suicide
Liverpool	2	Suicide
Brixton	1	Suicide
Featherstone	1	Suicide
Wormwood Scrubs	1	Open
Durham	2	Suicide
Pentonville	2	Suicide
Pentonville	1	Open
Parkhurst	1	Suicide
Full Sutton	1	Misadventure
Grendon	2	Suicide
Manchester	1	Suicide
Birmingham	3	Suicide
Preston	1	Suicide
Dorchester	2	Open
Wakefield	1	Suicide
Feltham	2	Suicide
Feltham	1	Accidental death
Feltham	1	Open
Nottingham	1	Suicide
Glen Parva	2	Suicide
Cardiff	1	Suicide
Winchester	1	Suicide
Haverigg	1	Open
Stafford	1	Open
Norwich	1	Misadventure
Norwich	1	Suicide
Stoke Heath	1	Suicide
Long Lartin	1	Suicide
Hull	1	Suicide
Bristol	1	Suicide

Prisons (Offensive Weapons)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* firearms, *(b)* knives and *(c)* other dangerous weapons were found secreted in Her Majesty's prisons in (i) 1979, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1990 and (iv) the last year for which figures are available. [16687]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 31 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many (a) firearms, (b) knives and (c) other dangerous weapons were found secreted in Her Majesty's prisons in (i) 1979 (ii) 1985 (iii) 1990 and (iv) the last year for which figures are available.

Finds of knives and other related sharp instruments are not recorded centrally. Weapons such as firearms and CS gas canisters have been reported and recorded centrally since June 1988.

The information on firearms and CS gas canisters for 1990 and 1994 is contained in the table below:

	Firearms (all hand guns)	Other (all gas canisters)
1990	Nil	Nil
1994	5[1]	2

[1] Four incidents—one without ammunition. A gas canister was also found on 12 January of this year.

TREASURY

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16274]

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury does not have any agencies. Grants in aid are paid from the Treasury vote to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the British-American Parliamentary Group, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Private Finance Panel Executive. The conditions relating to the way in which these grants can be spent are set out in financial memoranda which do not include specific requirements in respect of public relations companies.

Alcohol Smuggling

Mr. Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue he estimates has been lost to Customs and Excise as a result of the smuggling of beers, wines and spirits in the last year. [16770]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is difficult to calculate the true extent of smuggling. Assuming a detection rate of one in 20 would suggest, for the 12 months to 31 January 1995, a revenue loss relating to alcohol in the order of £37 million.

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a sector breakdown for manufacturing showing for each sector the quarterly peak output since 1985 as a percentage of the figure for the fourth quarter of 1994 together with his forecast for 1995 and 1996. [17117]

Mr. Nelson: These figures are to be found in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics", published by the Central

Statistical Office and available in the House of Commons Library. The Treasury does not publish forecasts of the sectoral breakdown.

Health and Safety

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury building in Great George street, Whitehall, was last inspected by the relevant local authority for health and safety at work purposes; and whether it currently fully meets all the requirements of the current legislation in that respect. [17308]

Mr. Nelson: The Health and Safety Executive is the responsible authority for enforcing current health and safety legislation in the Treasury building in Parliament street. They last inspected the building in 1992. My staff regularly arrange health and safety inspections of the building by competent persons with a view to ensuring that it meets the requirements of the current health and safety legislation.

Mr. Rupert Pennant-Rea

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he made as to whether the previous deputy governor of the Bank of England should resign; and what was the reason for these representations. [17111]

Mr. Nelson: It was Mr. Pennant-Rea's own decision to resign. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made clear in his letter to Mr. Pennant-Rea, he felt Mr. Pennant-Rea had done an exceptional job as deputy governor and he was sorry that Mr. Pennant-Rea had decided to resign.

Price Increases

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he applies in deciding on whether an increase in prices is inflationary. [17112]

Mr. Nelson: Any price increase adds to the 12-month inflation rate for 12 months. Whether it affects the inflation rate after that depends on whether other prices rise in response.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the reasons for the changes in manufacturing output less food between *(a)* 1990 and 1994 and *(b)* the peak quarter of 1990 and the fourth quarter of 1994. [17138]

Mr. Nelson: There are a large number of reasons for changes in output which it is not possible separately to quantify.

National Savings

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publish a remit for sales of debt by the Department for National Savings. [18394]

Mr. Nelson: The remit for the Department for National Savings for 1995–96 is as follows:

Objectives

The Department for National Savings' declared aim is to support the Government's management of its debt and its policies for personal savings by attracting and retaining investments from the retail market efficiently and cost-effectively.

The Department's primary task is therefore to be an efficient and cost effective source of funding for Her Majesty's Government. It is also charged with maintaining a suitable range of schemes to encourage savings among the population.

Volume of Funding in 1995–96

The net contribution of National Savings to funding in 1995–96 is assumed to be around £2.5 billion.

Responsibilities

The Treasury is responsible, under the National Loans Act 1968, for setting the terms of National Savings products. DNS will normally take the lead in bringing forward proposals to Treasury Ministers on product terms, including rates.

Cost comparisons

The Government intend that National Savings' contribution to funding should offer value for money overall compared with its other sources of funding. Product terms will take account of the need for DNS to retain the capability and market presence to contribute to the Government's funding needs over the medium term.

Crown Estate Rents

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make representations to the Crown Estate Commissioners to keep rent rises for Crown Estate tenants to reasonable and affordable levels. [16923]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The Government are not involved in the setting of rent levels for Crown Estate tenants. The Crown Estate Commissioners act within the provisions of the Crown Estate Act 1961, and the requirements of housing legislation.

WALES

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning indicative grants for Welsh unitary authorities. [16771]

Mr. Redwood: Distribution formulae for calculating unitary authority standard spending assessments are being developed in consultation with the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. I will announce my provisional local government revenue settlement plans for 1996–97 as soon as possible after the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement.

NHS Administrative Costs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *153*, if he will list the administrative cost of the national health service in Wales for each year since 1979 in current prices.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *153*.

Asthma

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales who *(a)* are under the age of 18 years and *(b)* in total per health authority are known to suffer from serious asthmatic conditions. [16772]

Mr. Redwood: Information on the number of people suffering from diseases is not collected centrally. However, latest estimates of the number of completed consultant episodes for the hospital treatment of asthma to residents of Wales are as follows:

Health authority area of residence	*Age of patient*	
	Under 18	[1]*All ages*
Clwyd	356	790
East Dyfed	191	484
Gwent	475	993
Gwynedd	213	486
Mid Glamorgan	649	1,237
Pembrokeshire	131	267
Powys	35	144
South Glamorgan	475	1,000
West Glamorgan	164	408

[1] Includes age not known.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will make public the recently agreed action plan of the Countryside Council for Wales. [15964]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, (Mr. Morgan) on 27 March, *Official Report*, column *424*, by my right hon. Friend.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *192*, how many people requested assistance from the relevant family health services authority in registering for NHS dentistry during *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994. [17746]

Mr. Redwood: From the information supplied by family health services authorities, the numbers of people asking for assistance were as follows:

	1993	*1994*
Clwyd	1,592	2,187
Dyfed	1,359	1,168
Gwent	991	1,120
Gwynedd	8,365	7,792
Mid Glamorgan	337	298
Powys	977	1,034
South Glamorgan	2,408	1,250
West Glamorgan	130	160

This information was supplied for management purposes only and is not statistically validated.

Bryn Alyn Hall School

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West dated 10 March, what period of time was requested by the proprietors of Bryn Alyn Hall school, Clwyd, to enable them to remedy those matters referred to in the OHMCI Wales letter of May 1994 in relation to the school's approval to admit local education authority placements of special educational needs children; [17692]

(2) pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West of 10 March, if the Department has received the detailed plan of action from the proprietors of Bryn Alyn Hall school to remedy the matters pointed out in the OHMCI Wales letter to the school of May 1994; what further proposals he has made to inspect the school; and if he will make a statement. [17691]

Mr. Redwood: In line with the legislation, my Department agreed the request of the proprietors of Bryn Alyn Hall school to allow a period of time to remedy the shortcomings identified by OHMCI. The period of time requested was not specified, but in a letter 5 July 1994 to the school proprietors my Department allowed an extension of time in two phases: receipt of an action plan within four weeks and, subject to receipt of that plan, a period of four months to address the breaches in approval requirements; the action plan was received. It was also made clear in the Department's letter that OHMCI would be asked to carry out a further inspection of the school in November 1994 to assess progress. The Department is currently considering what, if any, action needs to be taken in the light of the information received from OHMCI following that inspection.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to introduce statutory guidelines for the non-departmental public bodies he sponsors to protect board members who take action to supply information to him regarding allegations of mis-spending of public money; and if he will make a statement. [17671]

Mr. Redwood: The code of best practice for board members of public bodies, sent to all NDPBs in July last year, already confirms that members of an NDPB board have corporate responsibility for ensuring that the body complies with all relevant statutory or administrative requirements for the use of public funds. Any individual member who has a particular concern should raise this in the first instance with the chairman or board. An individual member has the right to raise with Ministers any matter of importance relating to his or her duty as a member of the board. Any board member who has evidence of impropriety by others should make sure it is passed on to someone who can deal with it impartially and fairly.

Accident and Emergency Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to reserve the right to make the decision on the proposed transfer of regional accident and emergency services from the Cardiff royal infirmary to the University Hospital of Wales pursuant to section 57 of the June 1991 guidelines entitled "Substantial Changes in the Use of Health Buildings." [17748]

Mr. Redwood: I have not reserved the right to decide this matter. The next step is for the community health council to submit a constructive and realistic alternative proposal to the health authorities. The matter will be referred to me for decision only if the CHC and the health authorities are unable to reach agreement on the proposals.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has given to the South Glamorgan health authority and the Cardiff community health council concerning the time allowed for the health council to prepare alternative proposals for the future of regional accident and emergency departments and the financial and other resources required by the health council to prepare such proposals pursuant to paragraph 52 of the June 1991 "Guidelines on Substantial Changes in the Use of Health Buildings". [17747]

Mr. Redwood: The recommended period for the provision of alternative proposals is eight weeks from the end of the consultation period arranged by the health authority. Health authorities are expected to provide community health councils with reasonable assistance to help councils develop constructive and realistic alternative proposals for the delivery of effective and efficient health services.

Committee of the Regions

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what public indication he has given on whether he may be willing to provide financial support to the Welsh Forum. [17493]

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 28 November 1994, column *917*.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received asking him to consider giving financial support to Welsh representation on the Committee of the Regions; and if he will list those from whom these representations were received. [17495]

Mr. Redwood: Nine; three from the hon. Member, two from Councillor Eurig Wyn of Gwynedd county council and a member of the Committee of the Regions, one from J. H. R. Hughes Esq., central services manager of Rhymney Valley district council, two from Councillor J. R. P. Evans of Rhymney Valley district council and a member of the Committee of the Regions, and one from Councillor T. J. Mahoney of the Assembly of Welsh Counties.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received asking him to consider giving financial support to the Welsh Forum; and if he will list those from whom these representations were received. [17494]

Mr. Redwood: Five; two from the hon. Member, one from Councillor Eurig Wyn of Gwynedd county council and a member of the Committee of the Regions, and one from Councillor T. J. Mahoney of the Assembly of Welsh Counties.

Work Skills

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the skills gap in Wales; and what new steps he is planning to improve the numbers of qualified technicians in Wales and the supply of suitable applicants for apprenticeships on offer leading to technician-level qualifications. [17744]

Mr. Redwood: The 1994 Welsh employers survey, conducted by the independent researchers IFF, covered nearly 3,000 employers in Wales. It found that about 5 per cent. of manufacturing establishments in Wales had vacancies that were hard to fill because of a lack of skilled or qualified applicants. Improving the supply of qualified technicians has long been one of my priorities. In December 1993 I announced that support for new modern apprenticeships in Wales would concentrate in 1994–95 on manufacturing engineering, training people to NVQ levels 3 and 4. Nearly 500 people have started modern apprenticeships in manufacturing engineering in Wales in 1994–95. To support this, during 1994–95 I invested £5 million to update colleges' engineering facilities. This is in addition to the normal capital funding available to colleges through the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

A concerted action plan to strengthen the supply of technicians in manufacturing industry is set out on pages 12 and 13 of "People and Prosperity—an Agenda for Action in Wales", which I published on 20 March. I wrote to all the TECs on 8 March to tell them to take action ahead of any shortage of engineer, electronics specialists and construction trades appearing.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from National Panasonic concerning the adequacy of the supply of suitable applicants for apprenticeship to intermediate levels of skills between the craft and graduate engineer level. [17694]

Mr. Redwood: A copy of the press release that Panasonic issued on 16 March was obtained by the Welsh Office, and a Welsh Office official spoke to the company. No direct representations from the company have been received, but at my request South Glamorgan training and enterprise council is meeting the company to discuss the issue and to try to solve the problem.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from business leaders in Wales concerning the adequate supply of qualified *(a)* craftsmen and women, *(b)* technicians and *(c)* graduate engineers; and what consultations he has had with the educational establishments in Wales and with the Wales engineering centre concerning the supply and demand for engineering technicians in electronics and other branches of engineering. [17693]

Mr. Redwood: In the course of my visits to companies in Wales, business leaders have commented on these issues but no formal representations have been made recently to my Department. The Welsh Office issued a consultation paper on engineering skills in May 1993. Fifty-four responses were received. In the light of this, I announced in December 1993 a package of measures to improve the supply of engineering skills, linked to modern apprenticeships. I attach high priority to increasing the number of trained engineers and electronics specialists and have instructed the training and enterprise councils to do this.

Health Promotion

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he completed the ministerial review of the functions of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales; when he proposes to make his conclusions public; and if he will make a statement. [17670]

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales made his recommendations to me at the end of January. I agree with his conclusion that there is a need for a national body to help with health promotion work in Wales. I have asked my officials to look at the feasibility of alternative framework for this body before deciding on changes that may be required.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people in Wales were registered for, and in receipt of, mobility allowance in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement; [16775]

(2) how many people in Wales are registered for, and in receipt of, attendance allowance in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [16776]

Mr. Hague: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not available in the form requested. In April 1992 disability living allowance replaced and extended the existing provisions of mobility allowance and attendance allowance for people under the age of 65. AA continues for disabled people whose needs arise after the age of 65. The available information is in the table. Figures for 1993 reflect the fact that AA recipients aged under 65 were automatically transferred to DLA.

Number of people in receipt of attendance allowance in Wales

Date	*Number of people*
31 March 1992	70,000
31 March 1993	56,000
31 March 1994	67,000

Notes:

Source: Analytical Services Division based on a 5 per cent. extract.

1. No DLA payload figures are available for Wales.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales were registered for, and inreceipt of, invalidity benefit in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [16777]

Mr. Hague: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is in the table:

Number of Invalidity Benefit recipients in Wales

	Number
April 1992	[1]159,000
April 1993	[1]172,000
April 1994	[2]184,000
February 1995	[2]186,000

Notes:

[1] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand, at 4 April 1992 and 3 April 1993.

[2] Based on a 100 per cent. clerical count of cases in the Benefits Agency offices, rounded to the nearest thousand, on the last working day of the month. The figure will include some people who have claimed but are not actually receiving benefit: eg because they are in receipt of a higher overlapping benefit. Figures are provisional and are subject to amendment.

DEFENCE

Queen's Flight

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the Queen's Flight in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94. [16515]

Mr. Soames: The total operating cost of the Queen's Flight borne on class I votes was £7,590 in 1992–93 and £9,105 in 1993–94.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which members of the royal family used the Queen's Flight; and on how many occasions in 1993–94. [16769]

Mr. Soames: The number of occasions during the financial year 1993–94 on which the named member of the royal family was the principal passenger on an aircraft of the Queen's Flight is as follows:

Her Majesty the Queen: 39
HRH The Duke of Edinburgh: 84
Her Majesty The Queen Mother: 20
HRH The Prince of Wales: 112
HRH The Princess of Wales: 56
HRH The Duke of York: 38
HRH The Prince Edward: 66
HRH The Princess Royal: 190
HRH The Princess Margaret: 51
HRH The Duke of Gloucester: 33
HRH The Duchess of Gloucester: 25
HRH The Duke of Kent: 82
HRH The Duchess of Kent: 118
HRH Prince Michael of Kent: 12
HRH Princess Michael of Kent: 2
HRH Princess Alexandra: 40

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the exact dates of visits to Indonesia by officials in his Department since 1 January 1990 and the reasons for those visits in each case. [16514]

Mr. Freeman: Details of such visits are not held centrally. Officials have visited Indonesia from time to time since 1 January 1990 to discuss defence and security matters of mutual interest. Details of their discussions are confidential, as is usual.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Indonesia since 1 January 1990 *(a)* naming the Ministers and *(b)* the reasons for the visit in each case. [16507]

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited Indonesia in May 1993. His predecessor visited in September 1991, and the then Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces visited in March 1990 and May 1991. The purpose of these visits was to discuss defence and security matters of mutual interest. As is usual, details of these discussions are confidential.

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16555]

Mr. Freeman: The number of service personnel and civilians employed at present in complemented press and public relations and public relations support posts in London and districts and commands at home and overseas is 160. A figure for 1979 is not available.

Flying Training

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of flying training units which were active in the years *(a)* 1965 and *(b)* 1975 and the number which will be active after the "Front Line First" changes have been implemented and the number of training aircraft in use in each unit in each year. [17423]

Mr. Soames: The information requested, by individual service, is as follows:

Royal Navy

(a) The number of flying training squadrons in 1965 and the number of training aircraft could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(b) The flying training squadrons (Sqn) in 1975 were as follows:

705 Sqn. Gazelle[1]
750 Sqn. Sea Prince
706 Sqn. Sea King[1]
737 Sqn. Wessex/Sea King[1]
849 Sqn. Wasp[1]
Phantom training unit—Fixed Wing training squadrons
Buccaneer training unit—Fixed Wing training squadrons

Records are no longer available of the numbers of training aircraft in this year.

(c) Post "Front Line First" squadrons are:

750 Sqn. Jet Stream: 17 Aircraft
706/810. Sqn Sea King 5/6[1]: 20 Aircraft
849 Sqn. Sea King W (AEW)[1]: 2 Aircraft
848 Sqn. Sea King 4[1]: 4 Aircraft
702 Sqn. Lynx 8[1]: 12 Aircraft
899 Sqn. Sea Harrier FA2: 6 Aircraft

[1]Denotes helicopter squadrons.

[2]Airborne early warning.

Army

(a) and (b) all Army flying training in 1965 and 1975 was undertaken at Middle Wallop. The numbers of training aircraft could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(c) Following the establishment of the Defence helicopter flying school at RAF Shawbury in 1997, Army flying training will be conducted at both Middle Wallop and RAF Shawbury. The number of training aircraft at both sites has yet to be finalised.

Royal Air Force

(a) and (b) From the records available, the following flying training units and aircraft were operated by the RAF in 1965 and 1975:

	1965	*1975*
Flying School		
1 Flying Training School (FTS)	39	28
2 FTS	42	—
3 FTS	42	40
4 FTS	49	36
5 FTS	21	—
6 FTS	42	34
7 FTS	42	—
1 Air Navigation School (ANS)	24	—
2 ANS	22	—
Central Navigation School	36	—
Refresher Sqn.	38	—
Central Flying School (CFS)	50	38
CFS (Helicopter)	24	22
RAF College	77	23
Air Engineer School	13	—

(c) Once the "Font Line First" changes have been implemented, the active RAF flying training units and aircraft numbers will be as follows:

	Aircraft
Main Operating Bases	
RAF Cranwell	40
RAF Linton on Ouse (1 FTS)	54
RAF Valley (4 FTS)	73
Relief Landing Grounds	
RAF Barkston Heath	17
RAF Newton	[1]—
RAF Topcliffe	19

[1] To be decided.

Airfields

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of Royal Air Force airfields which were active in *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1975 and *(c)* which will be active after the "Front Line First" changes have been implemented. [17424]

Mr. Soames: There were a total of 216 RAF airfields in 1965 and 162 in 1975. It is currently planned that, following the implementation of the "Front Line First" initiatives, there will be 39 active RAF airfields in 1999.

Air Defence

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of Royal Air Force squadrons engaged in the air defence of the United Kingdom and the number of aircraft in each squadron in *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1975 and *(c)* 1985. [17425]

Mr. Soames: As of 31 March in 1965 and 1985 the squadrons and operational aircraft strengths were as follows:

	1965		*1985*
19 Squadron	12	5 Squadron	12
23 Squadron	12	11 Squadron	12
56 Squadron	14	29 Squadron	15
64 Squadron	[1]—	43 Squadron	17
74 Squadron	12	56 Squadron	13
92 Squadron	12	74 Squadron	14
111 Squadron	1	111 Squadron	16
Total	63		99

[1] No. 64 Squadron had no operational aircraft on strength in the UK. It is understood that they were deployed to the far east.

Individual figures for squadrons are not available for 1975. The overall strength of operational air defence aircraft on 31 March 1975 was 85 aircraft.

Air Cadets

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the air cadets in the last year. [17426]

Mr. Soames: My Department has received a number of representations about air cadets during the last year.

RAF (Overseas Postings)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that there will be adequate uniformed RAF technical personnel available for overseas posting at very short notice during periods of hostility or threatened hostility against United Kingdom interests. [17427]

Mr. Soames: The RAF has recently carried out an initial validation of its core requirement for uniformed regular manpower for operations. Detailed validation work is continuing to establish the service personnel required by rank, branch, trade and skill level to meet contingency operations and to protect United Kingdom interests. The RAF has sufficient technical personnel available for deployment to areas of tension as part of the immediate and rapid reaction forces.

Arm Exports

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards increasing arms exports to *(a)* Asia and *(b)* the Pacific region; and if he will make a statement. [17521]

Mr. Freeman: The Defence Export Services Organisation has decided to direct additional resources specifically towards Asia and the Pacific region with the objective of increasing the United Kingdom share of the defence market—within, of course, the restraints of governmental and international policy.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what forms of government support are provided to British arms exports. [17526]

Mr. Freeman: Within the Ministry of Defence, support for defence exports is provided, primarily, by the Defence Export Services Organisation which exists to help British manufacturers market and sell their products abroad, complementing the wider range of services offered by the DTI. In addition to the DESO/DTI support, the Export Credits Guarantee Department makes available its range of export credit facilities to support defence sales.

Fish Research

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what communications he has had with the Industrial Ecology research centre of the university of Liverpool in relation to arsenical traces discovered in fish in the proximity of munitions dumps in the Irish sea; [17530]

(2) if he will provide additional finance for the Industrial Ecology research centre of the university of Liverpool to undertake further research work on arsenical traces in fish in the vicinity of munition dumps in the Irish sea. [17531]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of any contact with the Industrial Ecology research centre of the university of Liverpool and we have no plans to fund any of its research activities.

Sea Dumping (Munitions)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will *(a)* list the quantity in tonnage and *(b)* specify the type of (i) chemical weapons and (ii) other munitions dumped in the sea surrounding the British Isles in each of the last 30 years; [17534]

(2) if he will make a statement about the sea dumping of *(a)* chemical weapons and *(b)* other munitions in British waters from 1965 to the present day; [17536]

(3) if he will make a statement about the sea dumping of *(a)* chemical weapons and *(b)* other munitions in international waters from 1965 to the present day; [17535]

(4) if he will list the names of operations undertaken by his Department regarding the sea dumping of munitions; if he will list the location of dump sites; and if he will specify the type and quantity of munitions dumped. [17652]

Mr. Soames: There has been no sea dumping of chemical weapons since 1957. My Department ceased all sea dumping of conventional ammunition and explosive stocks on 1 January 1993 in line with the Oslo and Paris conventions. Complete records do not exist for dumping before this date. Beauforts dyke operated as my Department's main conventional munitions sea dump site between 1920 and 1973, and Hurds Deep, a site 1,000 miles off Land's End, acted as the dump site of redundant or demilitarised munitions from 1973 until sea dumping was terminated. No records are available to cover more distant international waters.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the dumping on land of *(a)* chemical weapons and *(b)* other munitions from 1965 to the present day; [17532]

(2) if he will *(a)* list the quantity in tonnage and *(b)* specify the type of (i) chemical weapons and (ii) other munitions dumped on land in each of the last 30 years; and if he will specify the locations thereof. [17533]

Mr. Soames: It has never been my Department's policy to use land burial as a final disposal route for redundant munitions.

Deaths (Canada)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces have died on training courses in Canada in each of the last 10 years; what were the dates of the deaths and the name and regiments of those involved; and if he will list details of each incident together with the conclusions of any inquiries carried out into these deaths. [17523]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with its Irish counterpart concerning Operation Sandcastle. [17651]

Mr. Soames: The Irish Government have been given details about Operation Sandcastle. There have been no intergovernmental discussions about this operation nor has any request for a meeting been received from the Irish Government.

Departmental Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total value, at today's prices, of land, buildings and equipment sold by his Department in each of the last 10 years; and what are the forecast total receipts for the next financial year. [17522]

Mr. Soames: Due to the volatile nature of the property market it would not be possible to apply present day values to land and buildings which have been sold by my Department during the past 10 years. The actual receipts achieved for each of the years in question are as follows:

	£ million
1984–85	27.7
1985–86	60.2
1986–87	75.6
1987–88	77.8
1988–89	149.6
1989–90	74.0
1990–91	81.6
1991–92	102.2
1992–93	68.0
1993–94	70.7
1994–95	[1]62.0

[1] Projected.

The land buildings forecast receipts for the next financial year are £122 million. Any equipment associated with the sale of land and building is included in the figures.

Army Light Vehicles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *415*, what is the current operational availability of his Department's 846 RB44 Army light vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [17650]

Mr. Soames: All 846 vehicles have been taken out of service while a steering under braking defect is investigated. No vehicles will be returned to service until a satisfactory solution of the problem is achieved.

Vehicle Integrated Communications and Information Distribution System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date of his Department's vehicle integrated communications and information distribution system; what was the original total cost of this project at today's prices; what was the original in-service date; when the project is now due to be in service; and if he will specify the changes made to the project in the last two years. [17524]

Mr. Freeman: The total cost to date of the vehicle integrated communications and information distribution system—VICDS—is just over £5 million. The original estimated cost of developing VICDS to production standard at today's prices is £7.5 million; funding for production of VICDS is the responsibility of projects which require VICDS as their communications bearer. The original date for the completion of development was December 1994; VICDS development is now due to be completed in October 1997. VICDS will first enter service with Bowman whose in-service date is April 2000.

There have been no major changes to the VICDS requirement since the successful field trials in 1992. However, following a detailed project review in 1993, the Department revised the procurement strategy for VICDS to address the risks identified in the original programme and to align the VICDS timetable with that of project Bowman. Contracts for the current risk reduction phase were let with Racal Communications Systems Ltd. and Hunting Engineering Ltd. in August 1994.

World Defence Market

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what percentage he expects the world defence market to change over the next five years. [17528]

Mr. Freeman: My Department forecasts that the world defence market annual average value of new orders for the period 1995 to 1999 will be more than 20 per cent. lower than the annual average value in the previous five years.

Injuries Claims

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance is normally given to members of the armed forces in pursuing claims against third parties in foreign countries for compensation for injuries incurred in the course of their duties on service abroad. [17672]

Mr. Soames: There is no general provision for such assistance to service or civilian employees. Some advisory assistance to members of the armed forces serving abroad may be given by service legal officers where appropriate, but this would not extend to meeting the costs of any legal action that an individual might wish to pursue. My Department does however operate a discretionary ex-gratia criminal injury compensation scheme for members of the armed forces and their dependants who are the victims of crimes of violence while serving overseas.

Aircraft Accidents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations have been received from the Canadian Government in regard to the possible toxic or radioactive contamination caused by any accident of RAF aircraft en route from the Pacific to the United Kingdom on a flight path over Canada. [17537]

Mr. Soames: I am not aware of any such representatives.

Recruits, Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many recruits to the armed forces were from Wales in 1993–94; and if he will make a statement. [16780]

Mr. Soames: During financial year 1993–94 the number of recruits enlisted into the armed forces from Wales were as follows:

Royal Navy: 71
Army: 587
Royal Air Force: 41

The figures for the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force represent personnel recruited through careers information offices located in Wales, while the Army figure represents the number of recruits who gave their normal place of residence as Wales. No central records are maintained of the country of origin of officers, or airmen aircrew in the Royal Air Force, and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action was taken by Her Majesty's forces to warn off rescue workers at Lockerbie from looking at objects under a red tarpaulin. [16707]

Mr. Soames: My Department is not aware of any such action or incident.

Nuclear Materials (Transport)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to ending the use of airflights for the transportation of radioactive nuclear material over Britain. [16787]

Mr. Soames: Arrangements for the transportation of defence nuclear materials are kept under review, but in some circumstances RAF aircraft will continue to be the most appropriate means of transportation.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what precautions his Department adopts to minimise the risk of an air disaster involving air flights carrying radioactive nuclear material over Britain. [16789]

Mr. Soames: There are stringent regulations and procedures governing all aspects of the movement of defence nuclear material by air.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policies his Ministry adopts to minimise the flight of radioactive nuclear waste over urban areas. [16788]

Mr. Soames: As matter of long-standing policy, the transportation of all defence nuclear material is kept to a minimum consistent with conduct of business. Route selection criteria for flights include the avoidance of population centres wherever possible.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the progress that is presently being made towards the introduction of full competition in the supply of electricity in 1998. [17966]

Mr. Eggar: The Government attach great importance to the successful introduction of full competition in electricity supply in 1998. Consumers in the existing competitive market have already seen the substantial benefits that competition can bring. Customers with a maximum demand above 1 MW have been able to choose their electricity supplier since April 1990, when the electricity industry was vested, and the latest figures released yesterday show that average electricity price paid by manufacturing industry in Great Britain fell by nearly 11 per cent. in real terms between 1989 and 1994. Evidence suggests that some smaller industrial and commercial customers have achieved price reductions of up to 10 to 15 per cent. since the competitive market was further widened to cover all premises above 100 kW last year.

We want small consumers, including domestic consumers, to be able to share in these benefits after 1998. The broad objective is therefore that the industry should establish practical arrangements for 1998 that will enable customers to change their electricity supplier cheaply and easily, while continuing present levels of customer protection. This is a major undertaking with implications for every household. It requires careful planning if consumers and suppliers are to have confidence in the new market.

The Director General of Electricity Supply issued a consultation paper in January of this year in which he set out his initial views on the trading and licensing arrangements that will be appropriate for 1998 and beyond, and in which he announced that he was setting up a 1998 co-ordination group for England and Wales under his chairmanship and with the participation of my Department. A separate co-ordination group for Scotland has also been set up. He has now held the first meetings of these groups. I welcome that initiative. The duty to promote competition is written into the Electricity Act 1989 and it is appropriate for the director general to take the lead in ensuring that all parties are working together.

I understand that the director general will shortly set a timetable for the 1998 process, which identifies each of the key issues to be addressed, those responsible and the deadlines that need to be met. Many decisions need to be taken as soon as possible this year and I encourage the electricity industry to work with Offer to ensure that the opening up of the market to full competition in 1998 takes place smoothly and delivers benefits to consumers.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent the timing of the sale of shares in the electricity generators was a consideration in determining the date of the publication of "Energy Paper 65". [16952]

Mr. Eggar: "Energy Paper 65" was published as soon as it was ready. The timing of the sale of shares in the electricity generators was not a consideration in determining the publication date. The prospectus for the sale of shares in National Power and PowerGen included a reference to the new projections.

British Coal

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will make a statement on the future of British Coal's ex-employee liabilities. [17965]

Mr. Heseltine: Acting on behalf of my Department, British Coal and the trustees of the British Coal pension schemes, Touche Ross yesterday invited applications from potential bidders to pre-qualify to tender for the services undertaken by British Coal's Centris division in administering pensions, concessionary fuel entitlements, personal injury claims and other benefits. As well as ensuring value for money, a key objective in the tender process will be to ensure continuity in the high-quality services provided to beneficiaries. The tender will not affect the security of the pension and concessionary fuel entitlements of former British Coal employees and their dependants which the Government are committed to safeguarding.

Post Office

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the performance targets for the Post Office. [18274]

Mr. Eggar: The Government have in recent years set the Post Office performance targets on a three-year basis. The current three year targets expire at the end of the 1994–95 financial year. I therefore need to set the board new targets.

During the current target regime, the Government carried out a review of the structure and organisation of the Post Office. But it is now several years since there was a detailed external study of the operational efficiency of the Post Office. A performance review would clearly be desirable before setting further three-year targets and my Department will be appointing consultants shortly to carry out such a review.

This review will not, however, be completed until the autumn. In order to ensure that the Post Office has targets applying from the beginning of the financial year, I have agreed with the Post Office board that the existing three year targets should be extended on an exceptional basis to create a four-year set of targets to cover the period 1992–93 to 1995–96.

I therefore propose to set the board the following targets:

Annual return on capital employed

Royal Mail	*Post Office Counters*	*Parcelforce*
18 per cent.	9.5 per cent.	Break even (before exceptional items)

Reduction in Unit Costs (financial years 1992–93 to 1995–96)

Royal Mail	*Post Office Counters*
5.5 per cent.	6.5 per cent.

This RUC target compares to a three-year target for Royal Mail and Post Office Counters of 4 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively for the three years to 1994–95. They take account of progress towards those targets in the three years to date, which both Royal Mail and Post Office Counters are likely to over-achieve in the three years to 1994–95. Parcelforce is not set an RUC target as it is subject to the competitive marketplace.

I believe these performance targets are realistic and will continue downward pressure on the Post Office's costs in the interest of taxpayers and consumers. They will continue to be matched by stretching quality of service targets for both Royal Mail and Post Office Counters which are set after consultation with the Post Office Users National Council.

Business Links

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the internal audit by his Department on business links; and if he will make a statement. [15182]

Mr. Heseltine: It is not the practice to publish internal audit reports.

Gas Bill

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to seek to amend clause 1 of the Gas Bill to provide, in the event of an agreement being reached at the first conference of the parties for the climate change convention to negotiate a protocol to the treaty establishing targets for carbon dioxide emissions beyond 2000, for the promotion of energy efficiency to become one of the regulator's duties and objectives. [17001]

Mr. Eggar: The Gas Bill will provide new opportunities for companies to market energy efficient services and packages. In a competitive market, this strategy can allow a supplier to gain business from other firms, while saving energy.

The Bill provides that the Secretary of State and the director shall each have a duty to exercise his functions in the manner he considers best calculated to promote the efficient use of gas conveyed through pipes. No amendment to clause 1 is therefore needed to enable energy efficiency to be one of the regulator's duties.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16222]

Mr. Heseltine: Guidance on Government use of public relations companies is contained in "A Working Guide for Government Information Officers", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Overseas Licensing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role Her Majesty's Government have in the procedure for licensing the manufacture of equipment, with special reference to Land Rover vehicles, in countries other than the United Kingdom; what account it take of those countries' human rights records when making the licensing arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [17141]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* It is a matter for manufacturers' commercial judgment as to whether they wish to have their products manufactured overseas under licence. Vehicles and related equipment, specially designed or modified for military use and components therefore specially designed or modified for military use are controlled under schedule 1, part I, group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, category ML6. Exports of equipment and technology for the production of all goods specified in group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order are also controlled (category ML18). Any application for licence to export such vehicles, equipment or technology would be considered against internationally agreed criteria governing the control of exports of military equipment. These criteria include consideration of the human rights record of the country to which the goods would be exported. There are military equipment embargoes imposed by the European Union against Burma and China which were put in place as a result of those countries' record on human rights.

Energy Charter

Mr. Elletson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about funding for the energy charter secretariat. [17210]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In common with many other international organisations, the energy charter treaty secretariat will be funded by contributions from contracting parties according to a scale agreed in the course of negotiation. Depending on the final number of signatories, the United Kingdom contribution is likely to be about 7 per cent. of the budget which is expected to be agreed at the provisional charter conference on 5 and 6 April.

The United Kingdom approach to funding international organisations is to require them to produce budgets which, while meeting clearly defined objectives, also reflect the need for value for money and recognise the financial constraints on all Governments.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representation he has received about proposals to site the energy charter secretariat in London; and if he will make a statement. [17208]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have received no representations seeking to locate the energy charter treaty secretariat in London.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his Department's plans to promote the energy charter. [17209]

Mr. Ian Taylor: In December 1994, when the energy charter treaty was signed, my Departmental issued a press notice and sent a briefing note, "The Energy Charter Treaty: Key Points For British Business", to about 500 companies and organisations with energy interests. I have today placed copies of this publication in the Library of the House. We will be discussing future plans for promoting the Treaty with UK energy organisations after the provisional charter conference on 5 and 6 April.

British Embassy, Washington

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reports the British embassy in Washington DC has made on the Democrat party administration's deregulation activities. [17089]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* The most recent report on the deregulation activities of the Democrat party administration from the British embassy in Washington DC was made in September 1993. The report concerned the national performance review report "From Red Tape to Results: Creating A Government that Works Better and Costs Less", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17621]

Mr. Heseltine: Expenditure from my Department's centrally managed publicity budgets has been as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*£000* *1994–95*[1]
(a) TV Advertising	0	0	0
(b) Radio Advertising	1	2	2
(c) Press Advertising	1,138	782	554
(d) Other Promotional Materials and Activities	8,784	7,684	7,337
(e) Total	9,923	8,468	7,893
(f) Proportion of (e) that was Spent on Recruitment Advertising percentage.	0	0	0

[1] Estimated forecast outturn.

The budgets for 1995–96 have yet to be finalised.

Recruitment advertising is not funded from the Department's centrally managed publicity budgets.

Departmental Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of producing and circulating the last departmental annual report; what was the circulation list; how many copies were produced; how many copies were sold; and at what price. [16620]

Mr. Heseltine: The cost to my Department of producing and circulating DTI's most recent departmental report—"Trade and Industry 1995", Cm 2804—was £43,378.67, including VAT, but not including staff time. In addition, £25,627.30 was the cost to DTI of the copies it purchased for internal and external circulation from Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The costs of printing and publishing, were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which aims to recover these costs from sales revenue, including revenue from the copies sold to DTI, referred to above.

The report was circulated to the top 1,000 companies in the United Kingdom, to other companies which seconded staff to the Department during 1994 or which supported such secondments; to trade associations, chambers of commerce, training and enterprise councils, business links and other key opinion formers in the business community. Copies were also sent to members of the Trade and Industry and of the Science and Technology Committees of the House of Commons and to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

Five thousand five hundred copies of Cm 2804 were printed and published. In addition to those required by Parliament and the Department, nearly 1,550 copies were produced to satisfy sales at a price of £16.80 net.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of producing and circulating the Department annual report for each of the last 10 years in real terms. [16621]

Mr. Heseltine: Departmental reports were published for the first time in 1991. The external costs to the Department of production and circulation in real terms, including VAT, for the five years of publication were as follows:

Year	*Cost at 1994–95 prices*[1] £
1991	[2]10,560.98
1992	[2]8,109.82
1993	[2,3]17,300.00
1994	28,061.99
1995	43,378.67

Notes:

[1] The figures do not include the costs of copies purchased by the Department from HMSO.

[2] The departmental report was not widely circulated externally by the Department in 1991, 1992 and 1993. In addition, much of the production work was carried out in-house in these years and is not included in the figures. In 1994 and 1995, this work was increasingly contracted out.

[3] The figure for 1993 is an estimate.

Patent Office, Newport

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost of the consultants employed to examine if the marketing section at the Patent Office in Newport is to be contracted out. [17413]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Patent Office will be looking at the feasibility of contracting out its marketing activities and consultancy advice may be sought. However, so far no consultants have been appointed.

Pergau Dam

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent changes have taken place in the cost of the Pergau dam; and what is now the total cost of the dam. [17081]

Mr. Heseltine: Whilst I am aware of press reports about possible additional costs arising in connection with the Pergau dam project, these would be matters of a commercial nature for discussions between the contracting parties. Unless made public by those parties, any revision of costs would be subject to normal considerations of commercial confidentiality.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 April 1995

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the waiting time for initial interview in Pakistan of applicants seeking settlement here as spouses. [17767]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The waiting time to first interview for spouses applying for entry clearance for settlement in Islamabad was three months at the end of December 1994. Information is not centrally available on waiting times in Karachi but all applicants are expected to receive a first interview within three weeks.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the waiting time for initial interview in India of applicants seeking settlement here as spouses. [17766]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The waiting time to first interview for spouses in Bombay and New Delhi applying for entry clearance for settlement was three months at the end of December 1994. In Madras, all applicants seeking settlement are placed in the same queue with a waiting time to first interview of three quarters of a month at the end of December 1994. There is no queuing system in operation in Calcutta.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising, for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then: and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17624]

Mr. Howard: I am accountable for four executive agencies—HM Prison Service, the Forensic Science Service, the UK Passport Agency and the Fire Service College—and for some 38 non-departmental bodies which are listed in "Public Bodies 1994", which is available in the Library.

Information on spending on advertising and other promotional materials and activities by each agency and non-departmental public body for which I am responsible is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Maastricht

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the information provided by his Department to Select Committees of the House in respect of developments on the third pillar of Maastricht. [17211]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The following documents with explanatory notes have been made available to the Select Committees on Home Affairs and on European Legislation.

Documents	*Explanatory Notes*
ASIM 104	Council resolution on limitations on admission of third country nationals to the member states for employment. (7139/94)
ASIM 90	Guidelines for the harmonised application of the definition of refugee status in article 1A of the Geneva convention. (6675/94)
ASIM 115	Council resolution relating to limitations on the admission of third country nationals to the territory of the member states for the purpose of pursuing activities as self-employed persons. (7572/94)
ASIM 122	Travel facilities for third-country nationals resident in a member state. (7737/94)
ASIM 124	Draft Council resolution on burden sharing with regard to the admission and residence of refugees. (7773/94)
ASIM 127	Draft Council resolution on the admission of third-country nationals to the territory of the member states of the European Union for study purposes. (7996/94)
ASIM 130	Joint action for a further improvement, in security at external borders. (8031/94)
ASIM 152	Minimum guarantees for asylum applicants. (8713/94)
ASIM 242	Proposal for a joint action on harmonizing means of combating illegal employment and improving the relevant means of control. (12336/94)
ASIM 244	Proposal for a joint action on the status of third country nationals residing legally in the Union for a long period. (12338/94)
Unnumbered	UK proposal for a joint action by the Council of the European Union regarding the protection of the financial interests of the European Communities.
Unnumbered	European Information System (EIS)—draft convention text.
Unnumbered	European Police Office (Europol)—draft convention text.
Unnumbered	Customs Information System (CIS)—draft convention text.
CK4 98	Joint action concerning the Europol Drugs Unit. (12321/1/94)
JUSTPEN 25	Council Act drawing up the convention on simplified extradition procedure between the member states of the European Union. (5130/95)

In addition, a number of documents relating to title VI issues have been made available under normal parliamentary scrutiny procedures with explanatory memoranda:

Documents	*Explanatory Memoranda*
(15080) 11287/93	Communication covering: a. Draft decision based on article K3 of the treaty on European Union, establishing a convention on the crossing of the external frontiers of the member states: and b. Draft regulation based on article 100c of the treaty establishing the European Community, determining the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external borders of the member states.
5187/94	Commission communication on immigration and asylum policies.
8076/94	Protection of the Community's financial interests.
8077/94	Communication from the Commission on a European Union action plan to combat drugs.

The outcome of each Justice and Home Affairs Council is reported to Parliament by means of an answer to a parliamentary question. Since the Council held on 20 June 1994 we have also submitted to the Select Committees a memorandum previewing the likely discussion at each Council, and subsequently a memorandum of evidence on the main conclusions reached. All texts adopted at a Justice and Home Affairs Council are deposited in the Library.

The then Home Secretary gave oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 21 April 1993 on intergovernmental co-operation in justice and home affairs. A memorandum of evidence of work carried out under title VI was submitted to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 7 December 1993 in advance of oral evidence by officials on 15 December. On 24 January 1994, my officials provided two further papers on police co-operation and answers to a number of supplementary questions which the Committee did not reach at its oral evidence session.

Most recently I appeared before the Home Affairs Select Committee on 21 January 1995 to give evidence on criminal justice matters, including organised crime and intergovernmental co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs.

Everthorpe Prison

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made on the reports of the disorder at Everthorpe prison; and if his conclusions have changed his policy in respect of illegal drugs in prisons. [17351]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Everthorpe prison.

A task force has been established to consider and progress the recommendations of the report on the disorder at Everthorpe prison. One of these recommendations is the introduction of a coordinated drug reduction policy at Everthorpe. This policy will be introduced this year.

There has been no change to the Prison Service's policy on tackling drug misuse in prisons as a result of the disturbances at Everthorpe. A strategy of controlling supply and providing support and treatment is being pursued, underpinned by mandatory drug testing for prisoners.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Armenian Orthodox Church

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take to urge the Turkish authorities to withdraw their requirement that, apart from regularly scheduled worship services, the Armenian orthodox church obtains special written permission for any function or meeting held in church facilities with more than 10 people in attendance. [17773]

Mr. David Davis: The Turkish public order decrees which require notification in advance of gatherings over a certain size apply generally and are not directed specifically at the Armenian orthodox church.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take to urge the Turkish authorities to allow the Armenian orthodox church in Turkey to hold its representative assembly so that it can elect delegates to participate in the election for the Supreme Patriarch in Armenia. [17772]

Mr. David Davis: Our consulate-general in Istanbul discussed this with the Turkish authorities and with representatives of the Armenian orthodox church. The church has now decided not to hold the assembly. The views of the Armenian orthodox church in Turkey will be represented at the elections for the Supreme Patriarch by a number of bishops chosen by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17737]

Mr. Goodlad: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on 29 November 1994 at column *250* and 10 January 1995 at column *63*.

The FCO and ODA do not at present use the Internet for e-mail. However, both wings are currently considering how to implement a public inquiry Internet e-mail address, for launch later in the year.

A project is underway to establish an FCO world-wide web service on the Internet which should come on stream before the summer recess. A further announcement will be made at that time.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17457]

Mr. Baldry: Consular Department operates a public information telephone service for travel advice. Because of increased demand—staff were handling as many as 600 calls per day—and in order to improve our service to the public a new automated telephone answering system was introduced on 27 February 1995. The service offers travel advice for the 11 countries most in demand and is available on 0374-500900.

Call costs to the public are at standard or local rate. The new service involved no capital expenditure. Its running costs are £500 per month. The national and local media, the travel industry and other existing customers have received information about the service. No publicity costs have been incurred. It is still too early to assess the effectiveness of the new service.

Irish Nationals

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the Irish Republic will sign the appropriate convention enabling it to receive Irish nationals serving custodial sentences in prisons in the United Kingdom. [17660]

Mr. Hurd: This is a matter for the Irish Government. At the recent plenary meeting of the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Spring, confirmed that legislation to ratify the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons was being prepared by the Irish Department of Justice, and was expected to be introduced in the Dail after the Easter recess.

Death Penalty

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to stop the execution of a British citizen in the electric chair in the United States of America on 6 April; and what assessment he has made of the applicability of the international covenant on civil and political rights. [17899]

Mr. Baldry: None. There are no special grounds for a plea for clemency by us on Mr. Ingram's behalf. The death penalty is permitted in certain circumstances under international human rights law. Mr. Ingram, who is a dual British–US national was convicted of a "most serious crime" as specified in article 6 of the international covenant on civil and political rights. Mr. Ingram received both a fair trial and a lengthy appeals process.

EU Ottawa Representative

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the name of the senior representative of the European Union or Community representing its interest in Ottawa; for how long that envoy has held this post; and if he will give their personal and occupational curriculum vitae. [18034]

Mr. David Davis: The head of delegation of the Commission of the European Communities in Ottawa is Mr. John R. Beck. Mr. Beck has held this position since April 1993. Mr. Beck has been working for the European Commission since 1973. He had previously worked at the Economist intelligence unit and the London chamber of commerce.

Fisheries, Canada

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which article of which treaty enables him to prevent, or vote against, any proposal for retaliatory action by the European Union or Community in respect of their dispute with Canada relating to fisheries. [18035]

Mr. David Davis: We believe that the best way to resolve the fisheries dispute between the EU and Canada is by negotiation. There is no formal proposal to impose sanctions. A proposal under article 228a of the treaty of Rome to interrupt or reduce, in part of completely, economic relations with Canada would require the adoption of a common position or joint action according to the provisions of the treaty on European Union relating to common foreign and security policy, which would be subject to unanimity.

Overseas Posts

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many labour attachés and labour reporting offices there are in each embassy or overseas posts; and at what annual cost. [18079]

Mr. Goodlad: At FCO posts overseas there are at present eight United Kingdom-based and five locally engaged officers with a formal labour reporting responsibility. Five of the UK-based officers are full-time labour attaches. As the following table shows, the 13 officers expect to devote, each year, a total of 10 man-years to labour reporting, at a total cost of £683,000.

Post	*UK-based officers*	*Man Years Labour reporting*	*LE Officers*	*Man Years Labour reporting*	*Cost £*
Bonn	1	1	2	1.3	133,058
Brussels	1	1	1	1	116,624
Dublin	1	0.1	0	0	8,597
Madrid	1	1	0	0	116,102
Paris	1	1	0	0	112,768
Pretoria	1	1	0	0	53,272
Rome	2	0.6	1	1	107,492
Washington	0	0	1	1	35,050

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising, for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17628]

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotions material and activities *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17627]

Mr. Goodlad: The figures requested are as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95 (Estimate)* £	*1995–96 (Estimate)* £
(a) Television	0	0	0	0
(b) Radio	0	0	0	0
(c) Newspaper	370,979	505,430	847,000	885,465
of which recruitment	370,979	505,430	847,000	885,465
(d) Others	1,724,228	1,624,834	1,570,000	1,942,000
of which recruitment	190,262	43,739	—	200,000
(e) Total	2,095,207	2,130,264	2,417,000	2,827,465
of which recruitment	561,241	549,169	887,000	1,085,465
(f) Percentage of total on recruitment	27	26	37	38

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Commission Report

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who are the members of the inter-departmental working party established by the Lord Chancellor to prepare the Government's response to the Law Commission report on mental incapacity; what specific remit the working party has been given; whether the working party will be taking further written or oral evidence; what steps are being taken to ensure that the working party endorses the Government's policy of opposition to euthanasia and if he will make a statement. [17754]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The working group is made up of officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Department of Health, the Home Office, the Department of Social Security, the Welsh Office and the Treasury. The terms of reference of the group are:

To co-ordinate the Government response to the Law Commission report on mental incapacity published on 1 March 1995.

To produce an initial report by 1 September 1995.

No decisions have yet been taken as to whether the group will take further written or oral evidence.

The Government consider euthanasia to be unacceptable and the working group has no remit to consider any change to this policy.

PRIME MINISTER

Malaysia

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Malaysian authorities about trade relations between the United Kingdom and Malaysia. [18579]

The Prime Minister: I welcome Dr. Mahathir's positive remarks, during his recent visit to Britain, that Malaysia wants to continue building the strongest possible ties with Britain, and is putting behind her the two countries' recent trade problems. This was a constructive initiative. Britain has close and long-standing links with Malaysia. We look forward to working with Malaysia to develop these to their full potential in the future.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss during his visit to Washington, the United States' experience of deregulation and the lessons learnt by the administration which can be applied to the United Kingdom. [17900]

The Prime Minister: I am always interested to hear new ideas to take forward the Government's deregulation initiative.

EMPLOYMENT

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17636]

Miss Widdecombe: Information about the spending on advertising and promotional activity by non-departmental public bodies and agencies is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The publication entitled "Public Bodies 1994" is held in the Library and lists the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Employment Department.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17635]

Miss Widdecombe: The expenditure by the Employment Department on advertising and other promotional activities between 1992–93 and 1993–94 is shown in the following table:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
(a) Television advertising	Nil	Nil
(b) Radio advertising	1,034	194,554
(c) Newspaper advertising	4,674,390	7,120,535
(d) Other promotional materials	3,209,309	3,654,466
Total	7,884,733	10,969,555

None of the above expenditure was on recruitment advertising.

The expenditure figures to date for 1994–95 are shown in the following table:

	£
(a) Television advertising	3,199,260
(b) Radio advertising	409,534
(c) Newspaper advertising	4,438,393
(d) Other promotional materials	2,763,979
Total	10,811,166

The budgeted figure for advertising and publicity for 1995-96 is £10.6 million. Further information broken down by type of publicity is not yet available.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information superhighway. [17743]

Miss Widdecombe: Officials within the Department are currently investigating the possibility of establishing links to the Internet electronic mail service. The Department's approach to the information super-highway is to regard it as a potential vehicle for improving services to the Department's customers and as an additional publication medium for promoting open government.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the number of new directors each year that have joined the board of directors and *(b)* the percentage annual turnover of directors in respect of each training and enterprise council in England and Wales since their creation. [17052]

Mr. Paice: I am unable to give the information that the hon. Member is asking for as it is not collected in that form. However, the total turnover for board members for training and enterprise councils in England and Wales is shown in the following list:

March 1992 to February 1993: 20 per cent.
March 1993 to February 1994: 25 per cent.
March 1994 to February 1995: 19 per cent.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amounts are available under objective 4 of European structural funds for the retraining of existing employees in 1994–95; and how much has been applied for and spent in 1994–95. [17342]

Miss Widdecombe: A total of 3,377 million ecu is available for spending in Great Britain under objective 3 and 4 of the structural funds between 1994 and 1999. The Government announced their intention last year to concentrate available funding on helping unemployed people under objective 3. Therefore, nothing was applied for or spent under objective 4 in Great Britain in 1994–95.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17459]

Miss Widdecombe: Details about the public information telephone inquiry lines operating throughout the Department are not held centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if planning approvals granted since January where the application used imperial units of measurement, are valid; and if he will make a statement. [16766]

Sir Paul Beresford: All planning permissions granted are valid unless and until declared invalid by a court. As far as this Department is aware, no planning permissions have been declared invalid on the grounds that the application for permission used imperial measurements nor are we aware of any applications to the courts to declare permissions invalid on these grounds.

Local Government Finance, Leicestershire

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the standard spending assessment for Leicestershire; how much was spent in each of the last five years; and what is the planned standard spending assessment for this year. [17157]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures are:

£ million

	Standard spending assessment	*Net revenue expenditure*[1]
1990–91	458.828	484.585
1991–92	539.740	545.463
1992–93	579.013	581.405
1993–94	548.651	545.528
1994–95	560.740	567.888
1995–96	531.173	—

Notes:

[1] All figures are at outturn with the exception of 1994–95 which is budget.

The figures have not been adjusted for changes of responsibility or function. On a comparable basis, the standard spending assessment for 1995–96 is a £3.206 million increase from 1994–95—£527.966 million.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was budgeted by the county council for education in Leicestershire in each of the last five years; and how much is planned for this year. [17156]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information on the planned budget for 1995–96 has not yet been received. Budgets set for the previous five years were as follows:

Leicestershire budgeted[1] *education net current*[2] *expenditure*

	£ million
1990–91	340
1991–92	375
1992–93	416
1993–94[3]	374
1994–95	375

Note:

[1] Final outturn expenditure figures would be different.

[2] Net current expenditure is defined as employee plus running expenses less sales, fees and charges, and other non-grant income. It is not consistent with the definition of net revenue expenditure to compare with SSA.

[3] Further education colleges were removed from local control on 1 April 1993.

County Council Reserves

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the most recent information is on the current reserves held by the county councils of *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Essex, *(c)* Cambridgeshire and *(d)* Norfolk; and what the figures were 12 and 24 months previously.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available information is as follows:

Local Authority Reserves 1 April 1992 to 1 April 1994

The latest available estimates of the level of reserves as at 1 April 1992 to 1 April 1994 are attached. These are split, where possible, into schools' reserves ('LMS'), and other ('Non-LMS'). Non-LMS reserves include funds, which may be substantial, held for specified purposes which may not be available to the council for general use—for example, funds to finance capital projects to which the authority is committed; and insurance funds where the authority is bearing its own insurance risks.

These estimates are subject to amendment as authorities finalise their accounts. Compatible data on the use of balances in 1994–95 which would be needed to derive an estimate of the level of reserves at 1 April 1995 is not yet available.

	1 April 1992[1] *£000*	*1 April 1993*[2] *£000*	*1 April 1994*[3] *£000*
Suffolk			
LMS	n/a	13,120	13,120
Non-LMS	n/a	21,388	14,982
Total	16,051	34,508	28,102
Essex			
LMS	n/a	25,039	25,039
Non-LMS	n/a	20,311	49,465
Total	39,373	45,350	74,504
Cambridgeshire			
LMS	n/a	8,469	7,930
Non-LMS	n/a	45,343	48,602
Total	48,119	53,812	56,532
Norfolk			
LMS	n/a	9,059	9,059
Non-LMS	n/a	21,915	24,791
Total	13,109	30,974	33,850

Sources:

[1] Level of reserves (outturn) at 1/4/92 (RS returns for 1992–93).

[2] Level of reserves (outturn) at 1/4/93 (RS returns for 1993–94).

[3] Level of reserves (outturn) at 1/4/93 +/- appropriations to/withdrawals from reserves 1993–94 (RS returns for 1993–94).

National Parks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people both live and work in each of the national parks; and, in each case, what this is as a percentage of the economically active population. [17165]

Mr. Atkins: The Department does not maintain statistics specifically relating to those people both living and working in national parks, and it could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what ethical guidelines exist in respect of the development of genetically modified organisms; what structures there are for the control of (i) development and (ii) release of genetically modified organisms; and how many genetically modified organisms have been (1) developed and (2) released in each year since 1989. [17064]

Sir Paul Beresford: There are no specific ethical guidelines in respect of the development of genetically modified organisms which may subsequently be released to the environment. The structures for the control of development and release of GMOs include the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the GMO (Contained Use) Regulations 1992; the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the GMO (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 and 1995, and the GMO (Contained Use) Regulations 1993. Records are not kept each year of how many GMOs have been developed. Prior to the regulations requiring a consent for the release of GMOs coming into force on 1 February 1993, there had been about 50 releases of GMOs in the United Kingdom. Since that date, consents to release GMOs to the environment have been issued as follows: 15 in 1993, 24 in 1994, and to date, 15 in 1995.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)*, and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Sir Paul Beresford: The figures for central publicity expenditure by my Department in each of the financial years/categories requested is detailed below. These figures exclude recruitment advertising expenditure. Budgets for financial year 1995–96 are still being prepared and are not yet available.

	TV	*Radio*	*Press*	*Other*	*£000* *Total*
1992–93	3,545	Nil	3,324	7,828	14,697
1993–94	2,774	347	2,028	6,959	12,108
1994–95	2,698	477	1,295	4,408	8,878

These figures include VAT, agency fees where relevant and all other levies as paid.

Spent on recruitment advertising during financial year 1994–95 was approximately £38,200. Figures for previous years are not readily available and cannot be provided within the acceptable cost limits.

Emissions

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he had to monitor PM_{10} in rural areas. [15717]

Mr. Atkins: My Department plans to begin monitoring PM_{10} at a small number of rural locations this year.

Minicab Offices

Mr. John Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue jointly with the Secretary of State for Transport, guidance on the siting of minicab offices and their effect on traffic flow. [15692]

Sir Paul Beresford: Traffic flow may be a material consideration in determining an application for planning permission for a minicab office. We have no plans to issue guidance on this.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17451]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department does not keep central records of the information requested on usage of public information telephone lines.

Water companies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what agreements were entered into with water companies at the time of privatisation regarding charging bills at a scale which would accumulate money for future use; if he will make it his policy to require use of surplus funds to be devoted to reduction of water bills; and if he will make a statement. [17254]

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 21 March 1995]:* No agreements were entered into at the time of privatisation regarding accumulation of funds for future use. Initial price limits were set at a level to ensure water companies were able to finance the proper carrying out of their functions, in accordance with the requirements of legislation. This function is now the responsibility of the Director General of Water Services who, in his recent periodic review of price limits, has set new limits for future increases in charges which assume improved efficiency and lower rates of return by the companies. He has stated that any additional savings should be shared with customers through increased spending on discretionary service improvements or lower charges.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Green Paper on Drugs Misuse

40. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will comment on submissions made on the Government Green Paper on drugs misuse. [15731]

Mr. Newton: Over 400 detailed responses were received from individuals and organisations during the consultation period on the Green Paper "Tackling Drugs Together". The great majority of respondents have very much welcomed the Government's initiative in developing a three-year strategy for tackling drug misuse and supported the main proposals. A number of issues on which clarification has been sought are being addressed in the preparation of a White Paper, which we intend to publish shortly.

Procedural Reform

41. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report,* columns 19–20, what timetable he envisages for reviewing recent reforms in parliamentary procedure and for considering further reforms; and if he will make a statement. [15732]

44. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), of 20 February, *Official Report,* columns 19-20, what timetable he envisages for reviewing recent reforms in parliamentary procedure and for considering further reforms; and if he will make a statement. [15736]

Mr. Newton: As I explained in the debate on 19 December, *Official Report,* columns 1456–65, the reforms which the House has agreed to are in operation as an experiment for the remainder of the Session, and will be reviewed towards the end of the Session. If the hon. Member wishes to suggest further reforms, he might like to submit them to the Procedure Committee.

Divisions

42. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many votes there have been in the House since January; and what was the equivalent figure for 1994. [15733]

Mr. Newton: The number of Divisions in the House for the period from Tuesday 10 January 1995 to Tuesday 21 March 1995 inclusive was 76. This period represented 50 sitting days, with one "constituency Friday" not included in the total. During the first 50 sitting days of 1994, covering the period of Tuesday 11 January 1994 to Monday 21 March 1994 inclusive, there were 116 Divisions.

Standing Committee Membership

43. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent representations he has received on the proprietary of hon. Members with registered interests serving on Standing Committees discussion issues relating to those interests. [15735]

Mr. Newton: In the course of business questions, I have received oral representations from five hon. Members.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Phone Numbers

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government current and future policy regarding portability of phone numbers between BT and cable companies. [17126]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Responsibility for number portability falls to the Director General of Telecommunications. He and I agree that the introduction of portability is essential to the development of effective competition. Oftel has made proposals for a regime to govern portability, and I expect progress to be announced shortly.

Konver Programme

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the projects for which assistance under the Konver programme has been sought but for which no decision has been made; [17757]

(2) if he will list the projects for which assistance under the Konver programme has been refused; [17755]

(3) what is his assessment of the success of the projects funded by the Konver programme since it began; [17768]

(4) if he will list the projects which have been funded by the Konver programme since it began, the total value of each such project, and the value of the contribution made in each case by the Konver programme. [17756]

Mr. Eggar: Lists of both the successful and unsuccessful applications for Konver I were placed in theLibraries of both Houses in December 1993. There are no outstanding decisions on the Konver I projects.

It is too early in the life of the programme to assess how successful the projects are going to be. Many projects still have a year to run. As is usual with all programmes, an independent evaluation will be undertaken.

For Konver II, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, (Mr. Fatchett) on 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns 796–97.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16289]

Mr. Heseltine: There was no expenditure on public relations under the Department's central publicity budget in 1993–94.

Carriage Charges

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had about the increased level of carriage charges imposed by the Royal Mail for the delivery of newspapers to small shop outlets; and if he will make a statement. [17488]

Mr. Eggar: None. I understand from the Post Office that the Royal Mail does not currently provide a service for delivery of newspapers to small shop outlets.

Car Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the level of import penetration in the car market in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* Italy; and if he will make a statement. [17125]

Mr. Page: The information is in the table.

Import penetration in the car market 1994[1]

	Car registrations (000 units)	*Imports (000 units)*	*Import penetration per cent.*
UK	1,911	1,090	57.0
Germany	3,209	1,161	36.2
France	1,973	766	38.8
Italy	1,647	886	53.8

Source

[1] Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

Export Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the percentage change in United Kingdom export unit values relative to those of the EEC Six for each quarter since the fourth quarter of 1986. [17163]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is given in the table:

Percentage change on previous quarter in UK export values relative to those of the EEC six

	Change on previous quarter
1987q1	0.3
1987q2	4.9
1987q3	1.3
1987q4	1.8
1988q1	2.6
1988q2	2.0
1988q3	–0.5
1988q4	–1.7
1989q1	–1.5
1989q2	–2.5
1989q3	–0.6
1989q4	–4.3
1990q1	–3.1
1990q2	1.6
1990q3	4.5
1990q4	–2.2
1991q1	2.3
1991q2	1.4
1991q3	1.4
1991q4	–1.4
1992q1	0.2
1992q2	0.9
1992q3	–3.3
1992q4	–7.8
1993q1	7.4
1993q2	3.0
1993q3	6.0
1993q4	1.6
1994q1	–0.2
1994q2	–2.4

Note:

Unit value indices in $US for EEC(6) are weighted together using total trade weights.

Limestone

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much United Kingdom quarried limestone was used in the United Kingdom steel industry for each year since 1979. [17229]

Mr. Page: The information is in the table.

UK consumption of limestone in blast furnaces and sinter plants[1]

Year	*Tonnes (000)*
1979	1,206
1980	618
1981	1,032
1982	890
1983	1,165
1984	1,144
1985	1,562
1986	1,496
1987	1,827
1988	1,948
1989	2,062
1990	1,991
1991	2,124
1992	2,033
1993	2,077

Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Note:

[1] Steel industry as defined by the Standard Industrial Classification (1980), Groups 221, 222 and 223.

Sarin

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his time scale for the banning of the manufacture of Sarin in the United Kingdom. [17166]

Mr. Heseltine: Sarin is one of a number of chemicals, the production of which will be permitted under the chemical weapons convention only for research, medical, pharmaceutical or protective purposes. The legislation to implement the CWC in the UK and to enable the UK to ratify it will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time permits. The CWC will enter into force for participating states 180 days after 65 countries have ratified it. So far, 27 states have done so.

Chernobyl

Mr.Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent communications he has received from the Ukrainian Government in regard to technological assistance required at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. [17552]

Mr.Page: No such approach has been received.

Patent Office

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how long it has been the policy to offer staff recruited to work at the Patent Office in Newport two-year contracts; what benefits the Patent Office has derived from this policy; and if people employed on two-year contracts are afforded the same rights as Patent Office staff not on fixed-term contracts. [17414]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Patent Office does not have a policy of recruiting staff on two-year contracts and currently has no such employees. However, the office does employ staff on renewable six-month contracts and has done so since March 1991 when it became clear that there has been a considerable reduction in demand for trade marks. A number of staff were therefore recruited on short-term contracts in order to retain the flexibility to reduce staff numbers quickly if market pressures so required. Although those pressures remain significant, reductions required to reflect efficiency improvements and changes in demand have so far been accommodated by normal staff turnover.

Staff on fixed-term contracts do not have all the rights of established civil servants. As well as terms of employment, there are differences between conditions of service, including amounts of sick leave entitlement.

Copyright Offences

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce regulations to give effect to enforcement procedures under the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988. [17687]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Enforcement of copyright offences already falls within the responsibilities of the police. The Copyright, Designs and Patents Acts 1988 contains provisions facilitating both civil and criminal proceedings under that Act. These provisions which re-enacted and improved upon earlier legislation have been in force since 1 August 1989. Section 165 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 additionally makes it a duty of local weights and measures authorities to enforce copyright offences. However, when agreeing to introduce that provision, the Government made it clear that it would not be brought into effect until there had been an opportunity to carry out full consultations with local authority associations on the possible resource implications. Those consultations are not yet complete.

Companies House

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to date of the report by SRU Ltd. into the future of Companies House; and what estimate he has made of the final cost of all consultancy work on the subject of contracting out Companies House. [17228]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The cost of consultancy advice from SRU Ltd. on the future of Companies House was £283,000, exclusive of VAT.

At this stage it is not possible to say what the final cost of all consultancy work on contracting out companies House services will be.

Land Rover

Mr. Wray: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what Government regulations apply in respect of the licencing for manufacture in other countries of Land Rover vehicles; and to what extent human rights are taken into account in respect of the licencing arrangements. [17787]

Mr. Ian Taylor: It is a matter for manufacturers' commercial judgment as to whether they wish to have their products manufactured overseas under licence. Vehicles and related equipment specially designed or modified for military use and components therefore specially designed or modified for military use are controlled under schedule 1, part 1, group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (category ML 6). Exports of equipment and technology for the production of all goods specified in group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order are also controlled under category ML18. Any application for a licence to export such vehicles, equipment or technology would be considered against internationally agreed criteria governing the control of exports of military equipment. These criteria include consideration of the human rights record of the country to which the goods would be exported. There are military equipment embargoes imposed by the European Union against Burma and China which were put in place as a result of those countries' record on human rights.

TREASURY

Civil Service (Privatisation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil service functions are currently being considered for privatisation; and who the consultants are in each case. [16972]

Sir George Young: An activity is identified as a possible candidate for privatisation either in the Department's annual efficiency plan, or as part of a prior options review process under which activities are reviewed to see whether they should be abolished, privatised, strategically contracted-out, market tested or given agency status. Prior options reviews are announced in the monthly "Market Testing Bulletin". Decisions on possible candidates for privatisation are announced by departmental Ministers as and when appropriate.

Information on the consultants used by departments and agencies in cases currently being considered is not held centrally.

Income Tax (Welsh Authorities)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which tax offices in Wales are responsible for processing the income tax of the employees of *(a)* the Welsh local authorities and *(b)* the Welsh health authorities; how many staff at each office are engaged in this work; what proposals he has to alter these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [17545]

Sir George Young: Details of the tax offices in Wales which are responsible for processing the income tax of the employees of the Welsh local authorities and Welsh health authorities together with the approximate number of staff engaged on this work are as follows:

Tax office	*Approximate staff deployed on local authority work*	*Approximate staff deployed on health authority work*
Aberystwyth	0.2	—
Bangor	5.5	1.5
Brecon	2.5	0.8
Bridgend	0.4	—
Carmarthen	7.0	4.25
Colwyn Bay	7.4	—
Llanelli	0.25	—
Merthyr Tydfil	1.0	—
Neath	2.3	—
Newport 1	7.5	3.0
Newport 2	0.6	—
Pontypridd	0.8	3.0
Wrexham 2	0.9	—
Cardiff 1	12.5	—
Swansea	12.0	3.4

The current reorganisation of local authorities in Wales will necessitate some changes to the organisation of the employee's tax records. Full details of the local authority changes and the resulting impact on each tax office are not yet clear

Barings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the activities of Mr. Christopher Heath in future markets were first drawn to the attention of the Bank of England.

Mr. Nelson: Mr. Heath joined the Barings group in June 1984 and left in March 1993. Prior to leaving he was the managing director of Barings Securities Ltd. and a director of Baring Brothers and Co. Ltd. His role in the activities of Baring Securities, particularly in the far east and in the Japanese equity warrant market, were known to the Bank of England. As for his involvement, if any, in futures markets and the Bank of England's knowledge of such activities, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor told the House on 27 February, he has asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of the Barings episode and to report back to him. He expects to publish the full report subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16291]

Mr. Nelson: Total expenditure was £1.6 million of which just over £1 million was for contracts with the private sector including the cost of press handling and marketing advice on the BT2 final instalment and BT3 share offer.

Exchange Rates

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will state the £/Irish Punt exchange rate in *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1985, and *(d)* currently; [16711]

(2) if he will state the £/deutschmark exchange rate in *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* currently. [16710]

Mr. Nelson: The exchange rates requested are:

	DM/£	*Irish £/£*
1965 (average)	11.17	1.00
1975 (average)	5.45	1.00
1985 (average)	3.78	1.22
30 March 1995	2.25	1.00

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by rank order of import penetration for the manufacturing industries listed in table 15.10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" the percentage increase in output in the fourth quarter of 1994 compared to *(a)* 1973 and *(b)* 1979; and if he will make a statement. [17113]

Mr. Nelson: Comparative output data for 1973, 1979 and the fourth quarter of 1994 are not available at the requested level of disaggregation.

Imports and Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in the value and volume of imports and exports of *(a)* manufactures, *(b)* North sea oil and gas, *(c)* food, drink and tobacco, *(d)* other goods, *(e)* travel and tourism, *(f)* financial services and *(g)* other services between 1990 and 1994. [17188]

Mr. Nelson: Information relating to changes in the value and volume of imports and exports between 1990 and 1994 can be derived from data available on the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library. The CSO is unable separately to identify North sea oil and gas.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account his Department's definition of export-led growth takes of imports; and if he will list the change in the value and volume of imports and exports of *(a)* manufactures, *(b)* North sea oil and gas, *(c)* food, drink and tobacco, *(d)* other goods, *(e)* travel and tourism, *(f)* financial services and *(g)* other services between 1992 and 1994. [17164]

Mr. Nelson: Changes in both gross and net exports are considered when assessing the sources of GDP growth. Figures for export and import value and volumes are available on the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed through the Library of the House.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each quarter since the fourth quarter of 1986 the percentage increase or reduction in the rate of exchange between sterling and the ecu currencies other than the deutschmark. [17115]

Mr. Nelson: Information on sterling's exchange rate against the ecu currencies other than the deutschmark can be found in table 7.1 of "Financial Statistics" published by the Central Statistical Office.

Investments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list United Kingdom earnings from (i) overseas investment and (ii) investments by United Kingdom manufacturers overseas for each quarter since 1989. [17123]

Mr. Nelson: The information available is given in the table. Figures are available only on an annual basis. The information is classified according to the activity in which the investment is made rather than the activity of the investor.

Direct investment by UK companies overseas: net earnings[1] (£m)

	Manufacturing industry[2]	*Total all industries*
1989	7,477	16,608
1990	7,130	15,526
1991	6,532	12,688
1992	6,368	13,285
1993	6,983	16,367

Notes:

[1] Earnings from branches, subsidiaries and associate companies. Earnings are defined as profits net of losses, plus interest receipts net of claims.

[2] Classified by main industrial activity of overseas affiliate.

Source:

Central Statistical Office.

Pig Producers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to *(a)* give 100 per cent. first-year allowance to pig producers for any costs associated with the replacement of sow stalls and tethers, *(b)* change capital allowances to allow buildings with a short life span to be written off for tax over their useful life and *(c)* allow losses for the pig industry to be carried back for three years for income tax. [17065]

Sir George Young: *(a)* I have no such plans;

(b) The net cost—less any receipts on disposal—of agricultural buildings can already be written off for tax

over their actual life, however short, under the capital allowances code as it now stands;

(c) I have no such plans.

Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will resume publication in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" of the four ratios in table 15.10 of the April 1991 issue on an annual or quarterly basis. [17114]

Mr. Nelson: Ratios for divisions 17, 18 and 24 of the standard industrial classification 1992 will be published on a quarterly basis in the "Monthly Digest of Statistics". The remaining divisions will be published on an annual basis.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the state of the balance of trade in manufactured goods in 1994; and what this balance was *(a)* in 1994 prices and *(b)* as a percentage of gross domestic product relative to that in (i) 1970, (ii) 1977 and (iii) 1979. [17118]

Mr. Nelson: A recent assessment of factors affecting the balance of trade in manufactures was published in the November 1994 "Financial Statement and Budget Report", based on data available at that time. Estimates for the balance of trade in manufactures up to and including 1994, both in 1994 prices and as a percentage of gross domestic product, can be calculated from series on the Central Statistical Office database. This can be accessed through the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the reason for the change in the deficit in the balance of trade with the EC Twelve in manufactured goods between 1992 and 1994; and what was the contribution to that change of monetary and exchange rate policies. [17162]

Mr. Nelson: The balance of trade with the EU in manufactures depends on a variety of factors, including competitiveness, domestic demand and mainland European demand. By keeping inflation low, monetary policy has contributed to British industry's ability to compete in both overseas and domestic markets.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by rank order of import penetration for the manufacturing industries listed in table 15.10 of the April 1991 "Monthly Digest of Statistics" the percentage change in the volume of output, exports and imports in (i) 1994 and (ii) the fourth quarter of 1994 since the 12 months ended in 1989 and the implied increase in import penetration. [17116]

Mr. Nelson: Comparative data for 1994 and 1989 are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the balance of trade with the EC Twelve in manufactures between 1992 and 1994 of the increase in United Kingdom export unit values for manufactures relative to those of the EC Six between the third quarter of 1992 and the first half of 1994. [17124]

Mr. Nelson: The balance of trade with the EU in manufactures depends on a variety of factors, including competitiveness, domestic demand, and mainland European demand.

Council Tax Appeals

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what timetable guidance he has given to local valuation officers in respect of setting council tax appeals. [17681]

(2) if he will take measures to accelerate the processing and settlement of council tax appeals. [17669]

Mr. Nelson: Targets for settling council tax appeals in England were announced by the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration on 31 January 1995, *Official Report,* column *580.*

Referring to initial appeals, he said that it was hoped that all but a handful would be settled by the summer. By 28 February, the last date for which statistics are available, 88 per cent. had been cleared. When the bulk of initial appeals have been settled it is expected that any further new appeals will generally be settled within 12 months of their being received.

Local valuation offices are expected to deal with appeals within these targets, having regard to when the appeal was made and giving priority to cases where hardship is identified.

Given these arrangements, I do not intend to take any further measures to accelerate the processing and settlement of council tax appeals but will continue to keep the matter under review.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many council tax appeals submitted from the borough of Basingstoke and Deane in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95 are outstanding. [17668]

(2) how many council tax appeals were submitted from the borough of Basingstoke and Deane in *(a)* 1993–94 *(b)* 1994–95; and what percentage has been settled. [17682]

Mr. Nelson: The number of council tax appeals submitted from the borough of Basingstoke and Deane in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95, and the numbers outstanding and the percentages settled are as follows. The figures for 1994–1995 are for the period from 1 April 1994 to 28 February 1995, the last date for which statistics are available.

Year	*Appeals submitted*	*Appeals outstanding*	*Percentage settled*
1993–94	2,940	634	78
1994–95	285	230	19

VAT

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from which date the value added tax changes will be introduced which stem from the EC seventh VAT directive and which specifically affect *(a)* importers of works of art, *(b)* antiques, *(c)* collectors' pieces and cars and *(d)* agents. [18578]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The provisions in the Finance Bill introducing many of these changes will take effect following Royal Assent, which is a moveable date. I am aware, however, that businesses would find it of assistance to have a firm date by which they should amend their procedures in order to be able to take account of changes. In view of this, it has been decided that the changes which affect importers of certain works of art, antiques, collectors' pieces and cars, and agents who act in their own names will be introduced with effect from 1 June 1995. I am sure that the affected businesses will welcome this decision.

Software Licences

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount was paid to Computer Associates for it to transfer software licences to EDS as part of the Inland Revenue's outsourcing programme. [17320]

Sir George Young: *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* EDS and Computer Associates have a universal enterprise agreement which allow EDS to use all the Computer Associates products for which the IR had licences. It was not therefore necessary to transfer the IR/Computer Associates software licences to EDS, and nothing was paid to Computer Associates.

EDUCATION

Teachers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each of the past five years, the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* auxiliary school staff in England who are employed on a temporary basis, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17761]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table gives information about types of contract for teachers employed in local authority-maintained schools; this was first collected in 1992. Information collected on non-teaching staff in schools does not distinguish between permanent and temporary staff.

Teachers employed in local education authority maintained[1] schools in England in the nursery, primary and secondary sector

	Full-time teachers in regular service[2] with:			*Part-time teachers in regular service[2] with:*			
	Fixed term or temporary contracts	*Permanent contracts*	*Fixed term/ temporary as percentage of total*	*Fixed term or temporary contracts*	*Permanent contracts*	*Fixed term/ temporary as percentage of total*	*Teachers employed on an occasional[3] basis*
January 1992	19,155	328,085	5.5	27,655	24,462	53.1	11,526
January 1993	18,222	322,824	5.3	27,928	24,220	53.6	11,373
January 1994[4]	18,909	299,603	5.9	25,198	24,720	50.5	11,377

[1] Information for self-governing (GM) schools is not collected.

[2] Teachers in regular service are those employed at the time of the survey on a contract of a month or more.

[3] Occasional teachers are employed for the whole of the survey date on a contract of less than one month.

[4] Excludes sixth form colleges.

Non-teaching Staff

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list by local education authority all categories of non-teaching staff employed *(a)* in schools and *(b)* outside schools indicating which are considered to be administrative staff; and what is the ratio to teachers. [17654]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows, for each local authority in England, the full-time equivalent numbers of selected categories of non-teaching staff employed in LEA maintained schools. This information is taken from the department's 1994 annual schools' census.

Information about non-teaching staff employed in the local authority education service is collected by the Local Government management board. This information covers all non-teaching staff whether employed in or outside of schools. This source does not distinguish between staff employed in schools and those employed elsewhere, nor does it separate administration from other staff. Further details of the data available together with data for each local authority were provided in my letters dated 21 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), in answer to his question, *Official Report*, 21 February column *181*, and to my hon. Friend the member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) in answer to his question, *Official Report*, 28 February column *534*. Copies of the letters are available in the Library.

Full-time equivalent of non-teaching staff[1] in LEA maintained schools in each LEA in England

		Education support staff			*Administration/Clerical staff*				
LEA	*Nursery assistants*	*Special needs support staff*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Secretaries*	*Bursars*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Total*
Corporation of London	2	[2]—	3	5	1	0	[2]—	1	6
Camden	52	48	171	270	94	5	8	107	377
Greenwich	126	26	232	385	124	11	33	168	553
Hackney	102	25	191	318	101	6	9	116	434
Hammersmith	82	24	118	225	75	1	10	86	310
Islington	113	41	150	304	87	4	8	100	404
Kensington and Chelsea	61	19	82	162	41	2	14	57	218
Lambeth	110	38	244	392	105	4	27	136	528
Lewisham	94	47	227	368	110	6	22	139	506
Southwark	128	66	211	406	111	4	21	136	542
Tower Hamlets	200	39	252	490	138	6	18	161	651
Wandsworth	165	27	305	497	88	10	12	109	606
Westminster	61	18	152	231	63	10	38	111	342
Barking	80	81	116	277	90	3	11	104	381
Barnet	94	100	234	428	105	13	14	132	560
Bexley	37	38	121	196	108	6	13	127	323
Brent	122	11	117	250	81	13	21	115	365
Bromley	32	59	107	197	113	4	14	130	328
Croydon	131	54	272	456	146	4	35	186	642
Ealing	181	69	183	433	108	4	16	128	561
Enfield	87	11	213	311	99	4	26	129	440

Full-time equivalent of non-teaching staff in LEA maintained schools in each LEA in England

		Education support staff			*Administration/Clerical staff*				
LEA	*Nursery assistants*	*Special needs support staff*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Secretaries*	*Bursars*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Total*
Haringey	209	33	207	448	107	4	9	121	569
Harrow	52	116	170	338	83	6	32	121	459
Havering	39	41	134	213	117	1	31	149	362
Hillingdon	68	64	146	278	65	4	16	85	363
Hounslow	156	39	164	359	99	8	46	152	511
Kingston upon Thames	61	9	58	129	38	29	37	104	233
Merton	77	57	82	216	15	55	73	143	360
Newham	120	44	192	355	63	1	87	151	506
Redbridge	48	25	192	265	131	10	48	190	455
Richmond upon Thames	31	15	110	157	72	6	22	99	256
Sutton	45	27	48	121	4	25	67	96	216
Waltham Forest	91	26	279	396	120	7	47	173	569
Birmingham	937	141	732	1811	534	30	37	601	2,411
Coventry	295	26	220	541	178	16	56	250	791
Dudley	193	20	114	328	134	2	13	149	477
Sandwell	328	33	177	538	203	2	14	220	757
Solihull	135	29	129	293	114	18	16	148	440
Walsall	204	51	272	527	152	1	12	165	692
Wolverhampton	245	23	152	420	144	6	8	158	578
Knowsley	98	2	165	265	85	16	46	147	411
Liverpool	179	56	420	654	279	14	36	329	983
St. Helens	126	65	146	338	95	10	8	112	450
Sefton	174	44	186	404	143	32	25	200	605
Wirral	133	47	183	364	130	20	30	180	544
Bolton	189	24	109	323	127	12	6	144	467
Bury	113	53	80	246	81	2	2	85	331
Manchester	475	29	406	910	257	16	25	299	1,209
Oldham	201	18	228	446	30	8	124	161	608
Rochdale	146	14	95	255	114	19	15	148	403
Salford	240	26	131	397	117	18	17	152	548
Stockport	138	84	226	448	133	15	47	195	643
Tameside	190	29	87	307	90	17	8	115	421
Trafford	62	26	84	171	88	9	8	105	276
Wigan	127	22	210	359	133	24	30	187	546
Barnsley	95	197	146	439	88	14	31	133	572
Doncaster	103	118	248	469	196	26	40	262	731
Rotherham	84	88	216	388	123	14	22	158	546
Sheffield	296	50	344	689	208	28	76	312	1,001
Bradford	372	428	493	1,294	246	43	87	376	1,669
Calderdale	95	96	181	371	91	3	3	97	468
Kirklees	140	150	378	668	183	16	39	238	906
Leeds	456	547	509	1,513	330	32	83	445	1,958
Wakefield	178	124	213	515	175	23	30	228	743
Gateshead	134	11	80	225	94	1	24	120	345
Newcastle upon Tyne	194	8	195	398	154	2	7	163	560
North Tyneside	128	18	123	269	92	3	32	127	396
South Tyneside	114	5	56	176	69	[2]—	2	72	247
Sunderland	235	45	187	467	154	0	9	163	630
Isles of Scilly	[2]—	1	1	2	3	[2]—	[2]—	3	6
Avon	614	168	653	1,434	557	55	60	672	2,107
Bedfordshire	274	150	412	836	272	23	162	457	1,294
Berkshire	260	220	574	1,054	258	162	108	528	1,582
Buckinghamshire	191	196	638	1,024	268	51	102	421	1,445
Cambridgeshire	216	476	578	1,271	297	32	94	423	1,694
Cheshire	550	252	578	1,380	419	73	150	642	2,022
Cleveland	292	74	398	765	286	3	76	364	1,129
Cornwall	115	452	414	981	196	12	102	310	1,291
Cumbria	196	246	191	633	192	6	37	234	868
Derbyshire	460	374	627	1,462	369	44	111	523	1,985
Devon	185	437	921	1,543	584	48	88	720	2,264
Dorset	85	116	447	647	230	41	93	364	1,011
Durham	323	204	301	829	307	10	7	323	1,152
East Sussex	139	186	558	884	301	62	97	459	1,343
Essex	143	406	831	1,381	504	31	381	916	2,297
Gloucestershire	186	130	219	534	211	24	34	269	804
Hampshire	510	965	1,370	2,846	765	73	394	1,231	4,077

Full-time equivalent of non-teaching staff[1] in LEA maintained schools in each LEA in England

		Education support staff			*Administration/Clerical staff*				
LEA	*Nursery assistants*	*Special needs support staff*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Secretaries*	*Bursars*	*Other*	*Sub total*	*Total*
Hereford and Worcester	101	130	410	641	343	20	68	431	1,073
Hertfordshire	361	232	947	1,541	546	85	73	704	2,245
Humberside	407	290	670	1,367	424	50	115	588	1,955
Isle of Wight	30	50	150	230	49	2	49	101	331
Kent	371	590	1,007	1,968	745	38	89	872	2,840
Lancashire	786	152	948	1,886	632	110	161	902	2,788
Leicestershire	297	218	903	1,418	394	136	179	709	2,127
Lincolnshire	188	210	356	754	250	9	25	284	1,038
Norfolk	143	243	494	880	376	18	38	432	1,312
North Yorkshire	182	160	414	757	395	44	43	482	1,238
Northampton	190	166	486	842	272	87	93	452	1,295
Northumberland	159	70	119	348	180	10	10	200	548
Nottinghamshire	678	248	578	1,505	612	15	39	666	2,171
Oxfordshire	199	359	544	1,101	280	74	61	414	1,515
Shropshire	93	209	308	610	203	16	45	264	874
Somerset	120	326	491	936	197	30	111	338	1,274
Staffordshire	557	209	639	1,406	488	15	252	755	2,161
Suffolk	108	184	516	808	298	79	94	472	1,279
Surrey	172	341	551	1,064	392	142	210	744	1,808
Warwickshire	178	120	425	722	284	18	30	332	1,054
West Sussex	130	198	694	1,021	236	203	165	604	1,626
Wiltshire	18	308	455	782	196	38	134	368	1,149
England	20,820	14,152	35,223	70,195	22,277	2,777	6,127	31,181	101,375

[1] Excludes premises related to staff, kitchen/canteen staff and lunchtime supervisors.

[2] Less than 0.5.

Correspondence

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she expects to answer the question table by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley for answer on 6 March on the percentage of secondary school children entitled to free school meals. [17753]

Mr. Robin Squire: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on Friday 31 March.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by her Department, in each case stating the costs of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment her Department has made of their effectiveness. [17461]

Mr. Forth: A dedicated public inquiry unit was established within the Department's information bureau and library in 1987. With the advent of a new switchboard in 1991 a single number—0171 925 5555—was established to handle public inquiries. In September 1994 a voice processing system with automatic call routing capabilities was added to the telephone line at a cost of £18,477. The unit's annual staffing costs are estimated at £127,000. The telephone number appears on all departmental press releases, in entries in directories and year books and in appropriate departmental publications. No extra costs have been incurred in publicising the number.

It is estimated that 65 per cent. to 70 per cent. of all inquiries are made by telephone. The total number of inquiries handled by the public inquiry unit as a result of telephone calls, letters and personal callers to the Department's inquiry room at its headquarters are as follows:

1987: 30,633 (April–December only)

1988: 51,468

1989: 55,674

1990: 49,553

1991: 58,103

1992: 51,866

1993: 51,327

1994: 63,974

The introduction of the call routing system has increased the effectiveness of the public inquiry unit by enabling telephone callers to be automatically directed to staff able to handle specific queries or to the publication ordering service.

National Youth Agency

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will withdraw central Government-funded support from the National Youth Agency; and if she will make a statement. [17147]

Mr. Boswell: Central Government grants to the National Youth Agency have already been agreed for 1995–96. Funding from the Department for Education for future years will be decided in the light of the outcome of the policy review of the agency currently taking place.

School Capital Grants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what capital grants were *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted for 1995–96 for each grant-maintained school. [18078]

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

GCSE

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the GCSE average point scores for *(a)* each twentieth group and *(b)* for the cumulative twentieth groups of 15-year-old pupils ranked according to their average point scores for (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994, in respect of (1) all pupil, (2) pupils in the grant-maintained sector, (3) pupils in the independent sector, (4) pupils in the whole maintained sector and (5) pupils in the local education authority maintained sector giving the numbers of each group of the whole cohort in each case. [18033]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is shown in the table. The total number of pupils are divided into 20 groups of equal size. The cumulative number of pupils in each of the 20 groups and their cumulative average point score are listed in the table. The numbers and average point score of individual groups can be derived from the listed figures.

GCSE average point scores by each twentieth of the 15 year olds 1993–94

All schools		*Grant maintained*		*Independent*		*Maintained*		*LEA maintained*	
Average GCSE points	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*
0.0	26,614	0.2	4,303	0.0	2,303	0.0	24,311	0.0	20,008
0.7	53,227	3.5	8,607	1.8	4,605	0.7	48,622	0.5	40,015
2.9	79,841	7.3	12,910	8.9	6,908	3.1	72,933	2.0	60,023
5.4	106,455	9.7	17,214	16.1	9,210	5.8	97,245	4.3	80,031
8.5	133,068	12.5	21,517	20.4	11,513	8.1	121,556	7.4	100,039
11.1	159,682	15.9	25,821	25.9	13,815	9.6	145,867	8.9	120,046
12.8	186,296	16.5	30,124	27.6	16,118	12.5	170,178	11.6	140,054
14.6	212,909	18.7	34,428	32.6	18,420	14.4	194,489	13.4	160,062
16.5	239,523	20.9	38,731	35.3	20,723	16.4	218,800	15.4	180,069
19.8	266,137	23.1	43,035	34.9	23,025	18.4	243,112	17.4	200,077
20.5	292,750	23.8	47,338	38.2	25,328	19.2	267,423	18.1	220,085
22.5	319,364	26.2	51,641	41.2	27,630	21.2	291,734	20.1	240,092
24.5	345,977	27.0	55,945	41.1	29,933	23.2	316,045	22.1	260,100
25.2	372,591	29.3	60,248	41.2	32,235	24.0	340,356	22.8	280,108
27.0	399,205	30.0	64,552	44.7	34,538	25.8	364,667	24.6	300,116
28.7	425,818	31.9	68,855	45.5	36,840	27.4	388,978	26.2	320,123
30.2	452,432	33.5	73,159	45.3	39,143	28.8	413,290	27.6	340,131
31.3	479,046	34.7	77,462	46.9	41,445	29.8	437,601	29.4	360,139
33.0	505,659	35.6	81,766	48.2	43,748	31.8	461,912	30.6	380,146
34.5	532,273	37.0	86,069	48.6	46,050	33.1	486,223	32.3	400,154

GCSE average point scores by each twentieth of the 15 year olds 1992–93

All schools		*Grant maintained*		*Independent*		*Maintained*		*LEA maintained*	
Average GCSE points	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*	*Average GCSE points*	*Number 15 year olds*
0.0	26,122	0.7	3,540	0.0	2,301	0.0	23,822	0.0	20,282
0.9	52,245	3.5	7,080	1.8	4,601	0.9	47,644	0.6	40,564
2.9	78,367	6.2	10,619	7.9	6,902	3.1	71,465	2.5	60,846
5.4	104,489	9.5	14,159	14.9	9,202	4.9	95,287	4.3	81,128
7.5	130,612	12.4	17,699	21.1	11,503	7.1	119,109	6.4	101,410
10.0	156,734	14.2	21,239	24.3	13,804	9.6	142,931	8.8	121,692
11.6	182,856	16.2	24,779	28.7	16,104	11.3	166,752	10.4	141,974
14.5	208,979	18.4	28,318	30.6	18,405	13.1	190,574	12.2	162,256
16.4	235,101	19.1	31,858	33.0	20,705	15.0	214,396	14.0	182,538
17.0	261,224	21.4	35,398	35.5	23,006	17.0	238,218	16.0	202,820
19.0	287,346	23.7	38,938	35.1	25,307	17.8	262,039	17.9	223,102
21.0	313,468	24.5	42,478	37.9	27,607	19.8	285,861	18.7	243,384
22.9	339,591	25.4	46,017	40.3	29,908	21.7	309,683	20.6	263,666
23.6	365,713	27.6	49,557	40.0	32,208	22.4	333,505	22.5	283,948
25.4	391,835	28.2	53,097	42.8	34,509	24.2	357,326	24.2	304,230
27.0	417,958	29.9	56,637	43.1	36,810	25.8	381,148	25.7	324,512
28.3	444,080	31.4	60,177	44.0	39,110	27.0	404,970	26.9	344,794
30.1	470,202	33.4	63,716	45.5	41,411	28.8	428,792	27.0	365,076
31.4	496,325	34.9	67,256	47.3	43,711	30.4	452,613	29.4	385,358
33.1	522,447	35.6	70,796	47.4	46,012	31.7	476,435	31.1	405,640

"Education Means Business"

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost to his Department of the printing and distributing of the booklet "Education Means Business". [17785]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) on 28 March, *Official Report*, column 572.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many copies of "Education Means Business" have been printed; what was the cost of publication excluding distribution; what was the distribution cost; how many copies of "Education Means Business" have been distributed; and if he will identify the nature of recipients. [17841]

Mr. Forth: Fifty thousand copies of "Education Means Business" were printed at a total production cost of £101,000. Twenty-nine thousand copies have been distributed to the business community, colleges, universities, schools and local education authorities at a cost of £18,400.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what top-slice percentage was held-back by each local education authority for the administrative services undertaken on behalf of grant-maintained schools for the last year for which figures are available. [17370]

Mr. Robin Squire: Grant-maintained schools are themselves responsible for their own administration. Local education authorities have certain continuing responsibilities for all pupils, whether at grant-maintained or LEA schools. These include home-to-school transport, the education welfare service, and support for pupils with statements of special educational need. The cost of these services in relation to GM school pupils is not collated centrally. However, in the areas where GM secondary schools' budgets are determined by the common funding formula, the percentage of the schools' standard spending assessment attributed to LEA continuing responsibilities in 1995–96 is set out in the table.

	Per cent.
Barnet	16.36
Brent	18.12
Bromley	16.87
Calderdale	13.55
Cambridgeshire	16.54
Croydon	18.23
Cumbria	16.17
Ealing	23.03
Enfield	18.99
Essex	16.97
Gloucestershire	20.73
Hertfordshire	15.64
Hillingdon	17.42
Kent	17.10
Kingston	18.61
Lambeth	25.62
Lincolnshire	23.90
Surrey	18.30
Sutton	17.26
Walsall	14.52
Wandsworth	23.60
Wiltshire	16.10

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will calculate how much extra money per pupil would reach schools in each local education authority if all schools in that local education authority were grant-maintained compared with the position in which none is grant-maintained, in the most recent year for which information is available. [17148]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested cannot readily be calculated. However, the Government remain committed to ensuring that grant-maintained schools receive funding to reflect their additional responsibilities compared with local education authority schools.

In the case of annual maintenance grant, individual secondary LEA schools in authorities in which the common funding formula operates can obtain from the Funding Agency for Schools detailed information on what their budgets for 1995–96 would have been as grant-maintained schools.

Other LEA secondary schools, and all LEA primary schools, can calculate very closely what their budgets for 1995–96 would have been as grant-maintained schools by increasing their budget shares resulting from their LEA's local management of schools scheme by the relevant percentage for central costs, and estimating a level of subsidy for the provision of school meals consistent with the LEA's policy.

Details of this and of the arrangements for special purpose and capital grants to grant-maintained schools are included in the Department's "Grant-Maintained Schools Funding Worksheet," the 1995–96 version of which will be circulated to schools later this month.

Schools Expenditure

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the unit cost net of institutional expenditure per primary and secondary school pupil for each of local education authority for 1993–94. [17371]

Mr. Robin Squire: Provisional information on net institutional expenditure per pupil in 1993–94 on LEA-maintained schools is shown in the table. Data for some LEAs are not yet available centrally.

Cost per pupil net institutional expenditure 1993–94	*Pre-primary and primary education*	*Secondary education*
Corporation of London	3,587	0
Camden	2,047	2,721
Greenwich	2,009	2,583
Hackney	—	—
Hammersmith	2,534	3,329
Islington	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—
Lambeth	2,666	3,296
Lewisham	2,058	2,614
Southwark	1,806	2,421
Tower Hamlets	—	—
Wandsworth	2,139	2,795
Westminster	2,592	2,739
Barking	1,790	2,355
Barnet	2,006	2,952
Bexley	—	—
Brent	1,633	1,835
Bromley	1,525	2,280
Croydon	1,793	2,309
Ealing	1,915	2,575
Enfield	1,768	2,531
Haringey	2,236	3,041

Cost per pupil net institutional expenditure 1993–94	*Pre-primary and primary education*	*Secondary education*
Harrow	—	—
Havering	1,636	2,290
Hillingdon	—	—
Hounslow	1,784	2,282
Kingston upon Thames	1,728	2,284
Merton	1,853	2,463
Newham	1,708	2,563
Redbridge	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	1,794	2,280
Sutton	1,639	1,978
Waltham Forest	—	—
Birmingham	1,678	2,434
Coventry	1,684	2,469
Dudley	1,490	2,098
Sandwell	1,681	2,349
Solihull	—	—
Walsall	1,672	2,279
Wolverhampton	1,357	2,300
Knowsley	1,485	2,243
Liverpool	—	—
St. Helens	—	—
Sefton	—	—
Wirral	1,552	2,299
Bolton	—	—
Bury	—	—
Manchester	1,547	2,328
Oldham	—	—
Rochdale	1,307	1,974
Salford	1,505	2,215
Stockport	1,466	2,310
Tameside	—	—
Trafford	1,428	2,156
Wigan	1,437	2,141
Barnsley	—	—
Doncaster	1,425	2,022
Rotherham	1,723	2,271
Sheffield	1,573	2,119
Bradford	1,654	1,969
Calderdale	1,607	2,162
Kirklees	1,579	2,207
Leeds	1,647	2,164
Wakefield	—	—
Gateshead	1,664	2,252
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,697	2,187
North Tyneside	1,469	1,995
South Tyneside	—	—
Sunderland	1,509	2,114
Isles of Scilly	2,401	4,415
Avon	1,571	2,288
Bedfordshire	1,639	2,103
Berkshire	1,592	2,214
Buckinghamshire	1,735	2,286
Cambridgeshire	—	—
Cheshire	1,604	2,206
Cleveland	1,461	2,129
Cornwall	1,535	2,160
Cumbria	1,667	2,216
Derbyshire	1,600	2,214
Devon	1,503	2,157
Dorset	1,485	2,065
Durham	1,664	2,114
East Sussex	1,643	2,270
Essex	1,724	2,286
Gloucestershire	1,523	2,084
Hampshire	1,583	2,180
Hereford and Worcester	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	—
Humberside	1,621	2,257
Isle of Wight	1,598	2,027
Kent	—	—
Lancashire	1,669	2,347
Leicestershire	1,734	2,346
Lincolnshire	1,496	2,322
Norfolk	1,585	2,309
North Yorkshire	1,555	2,187
Northamptonshire	1,522	2,125
Northumberland	1,686	2,083
Nottinghamshire	1,653	2,381
Oxfordshire	1,765	2,191
Shropshire	1,577	2,354
Somerset	1,583	2,138
Staffordshire	1,534	2,078
Suffolk	1,673	2,190
Surrey	1,701	2,215
Warwickshire	1,555	2,420
West Sussex	1,579	2,467
Wiltshire	1,521	2,379

— LEA returns are being processed.

0 Corporation of London has no secondary schools.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction if she will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by her Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are her latest estimates for the years 1994- 95 and 1995–96. [17603]

Mr. Forth: The actual costs for the Department's spend on advertising and other publicity—1992–93 and the estimated costs for 1994–95—are given in the table.

£000

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*[1]1994–95*
Television advertising	0	0	0
Radio advertising	0	29.2	0
Newspaper advertising	1,086.4	1,413.0	159.3
Other promotional material and activities	5,800.1	8,551.3	8,360.7
Total	6,886.5	9,993.5	8,520.0

[1] Estimate.

The budget for departmental publicity in 1995–96 is estimated at £5,530,000. Decisions on media have yet to be made.

The costs for advertising do not include recruitment advertising. The Department's spend on recruitment and recruitment advertising is set out in the following table.

£000

	1992–93	*[1]1993–94*	*1994–95*
Recruitment and recruitment advertising	150.8	296.5	218.9

[1] Estimate.

The Department's budget for recruitment and recruitment advertising in 1995–96 is estimated at some £145,000.

Special Needs (Research)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what research her Department has funded into the differing levels of children with special educational needs in different areas; and if she will make a statement. [17218]

Mr. Forth: No academic research on variations in the incidence of special educational needs has been funded by the Department for Education. The Department has, however, sponsored research into aspects of several types of learning difficulty, although not their incidence.

The Office for Standards in Education also monitors special educational provision and practice in schools throughout the country.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Police Authority

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the chairman of the Northern Ireland police authority has communicated directly with individual members of the RUC in respect of his community consultation. [17050]

Sir John Wheeler: I understand that the chairman has written to every serving officer in the regular RUC and the RUC reserve, full-time and part-time, to explain the police authority's community consultation process and its view of the future. He has also written to the civilian staff.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what formal invitations to present oral or written evidence to his community consultation the chairman of the Northern Ireland police authority has issued to Northern Ireland's constitutional political parties, the various RUC staff associations, the trade unions, the churches and employers' organisations. [17049]

Sir John Wheeler: I understand that the chairman of the authority has written to each Member of Parliament and each local council in Northern Ireland seeking their written views on the future of policing in the Province, by 2 May 1995. Written views have also been sought from the staff associations and organisations referred to, together with a wide range of community groups. In addition, the authority is in the process of holding a series of informal discussion seminars on policing, at venues throughout Northern Ireland, which all locally elected representatives and representatives from local businesses, churches, schools, charities and community groups have been invited to attend.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the requirement by the chairman of the Northern Ireland police authority in terms of full-time and part-time staff engaged in his community consultation exercise; what has been the total number of man days expended; and whether he is eligible for extra remuneration or allowances in respect of the exercise. [17047]

Sir John Wheeler: I understand that three members of staff within the authority's existing personnel complement have been deployed directly on the community consultation programme. A number of tasks have been undertaken by other authority personnel as part of their existing overall remit. No additional staff have been employed by the police authority as a result of the community consultation exercise.

It is not possible to calculate precisely how many man hours have been expended on the project to date by all staff in the authority; however, the three units of staff directly employed on the project have expended a total of 67 working days up to 17 March 1995.

The chairman does not receive extra remuneration or allowances in respect of the exercise.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has received from the chairman of the Northern Ireland police authority on how the evidence given during his community consultation is to be verified, collated and assessed; when the exercise is to be completed; and what is the next stage in the process. [17051]

Sir John Wheeler: The chairman of the authority has kept my officials fully informed about each stage of the consultation process. I understand that the first stage of the consultation process ends on 2 May 1995, by which date all submissions should be received in writing by the authority.

The second stage involves the submissions being examined and, where appropriate, organisations or individuals being invited to expand or explain their submissions in further detail, either in writing or in an oral submission. The second stage should be completed by October or November. However, this stage of the process will be dependent, to a large extent, on the total number of submissions received and their content. Submissions are currently being analysed by authority officials and information is being collated. Once all the submissions have been reviewed, the third stage of the process will be implemented; this will involve preparing a written report for the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State. The authority hopes to issue a report by the end of this year or at the beginning of 1996.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total cost of the various elements in the chairman of the Northern Ireland police authority's community consultation exercise, including all printing, postage, administration and public hearings, up to 17 March. [17048]

Sir John Wheeler: The cost of the community consultation process up to 17 March amounts to £72,012.11, excluding VAT. This does not include staff costs, as the authority did not recruit additional personnel for the exercise.

Anaphylaxis

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients in Northern Ireland, have been diagnosed as suffering from food-induced anaphylaxis, peanut allergy. [17013]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested. During the year 1993–94, there were 32 admissions to hospital of patients suffering from anaphylactic shock. This figure would include any cases induced by peanut allergy.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* auxiliary school staff in

Northern Ireland who are employed on a temporary basis, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17764]

Mr. Ancram: The information regarding teachers is as follows:

Year	*Teachers employed in a temporary capacity*	*Percentage of total teachers*
1993–94	258	1.3
1992–93	205	1.1
1991–92	186	1.0
1990–91	152	0.8
1989–90	154	0.8

Figures for auxiliary school staff in controlled and maintained schools are available for 1994–95 only and comprised 1,446 temporary staff—29 per cent. of the total.

Information for auxiliary staff in voluntary grammar schools is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of NHS staff in Northern Ireland who are employed on a temporary basis, breaking the date down into *(a)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(b)* medical and dental staff, *(c)* ambulance staff, *(d)* ancillary staff and *(e)* managers and administrative staff, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17759]

Mr. Moss: The information is set out in the following table.

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Mr. Moss: The information is set out in the following table.

Number of NHS staff in N.I who are employed on a temporary basis

Staff group	*September 1990*		*September 1991*		*September 1992*		*September 1993*		*September 1994*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Nursing and General	1,165	5.7	1,314	6.6	1,505	7.7	1,733	9.2	2,121	11.2
Medical and Dental	394	18.6	387	17.0	337	17.0	334	13.7	371	14.9
Ambulance	18	3.0	7	1.2	4	0.7	1	0.2	8	1.4
Ancillary and General	2,148	18.3	2,041	18.5	1,588	16.0	1,334	14.4	1,586	17.4
Managers and Administrative	919	12.0	996	12.6	1,034	11.9	993	11.3	1,110	12.3

Prisoners (Irish Nationals)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Irish nationals are serving custodial sentences in Her Majesty's prisons in Northern Ireland; and what obstacles are preventing them from being transferred to prisons in the Irish Republic. [17661]

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not readily available as statistics are not kept on Irish nationals. The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what area of Northern Ireland is designated as being environmentally sensitive, how much Government funding is spent annually on environmentally sensitive areas; how this formula is calculated; and if he will make a statement. [17794]

Mr. Ancram: There are five ESAs in Northern Ireland covering 220,000 hectares or about 20 per cent. of the agricultural land area. Payments covering agreements with participating farmers will build up over the next three years. The financial provision for 1997–98 is £5.104 million which reflects anticipated maximum uptake of 65 per cent. of the designated land area. Payment rates reflect income forgone and costs incurred by participating farmers in meeting the requirements of the scheme.

HEALTH

Day Care Services

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's latest estimate of the total level of public expenditure on day care services by local authority area for children under the age of five; and what this sum is per child. [16130]

Mr. Bowis: Information on expenditure per child, by authority, is published in "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services", copies of which are available in the Library.

The latest available information on total expenditure by local authorities covering 1992–93 on day care, child minding facilities and playgroups will be placed in the Library. These figures do not give an indication of the true level of services in a particular area as such services have historically developed in different ways in different authorities.

Table: Gross expenditure on daycare services for children under 5[1]*, 1992–93*

	Total expenditure £000
Shire Counties	
Avon	3,860
Bedfordshire	870
Berkshire	365
Buckinghamshire	800
Cambridgeshire	613
Cheshire	1,247
Cleveland	1,666
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	104
Cumbria	517
Derbyshire	2,559
Devon	186
Dorset	48
Durham	638
East Sussex	141
Essex	1,874
Gloucestershire	0
Hampshire	355
Hereford and Worcester	580
Hertfordshire	599
Humberside	91
Isle of Wight	31
Kent	109
Lancashire	5,942
Leicestershire	1,840
Lincolnshire	475
Norfolk	137
Northamptonshire	895
Northumberland	199
North Yorkshire	23
Nottinghamshire	3318
Oxfordshire	156
Shropshire	406
Somerset	718
Staffordshire	2,052
Suffolk	254
Surrey	264
Warwickshire	45
West Sussex	182
Wiltshire	0
Metropolitan Districts	
Bolton	956
Bury	384
Manchester	11,590
Oldham	28
Rochdale	2,046
Salford	1,472
Stockport	24
Tameside	1,929
Trafford	1,369
Wigan	1,223
Knowsley	224
Liverpool	4,188
St. Helens	181
Sefton	977
Wirral	1,790
Barnsley	29
Doncaster	38
Rotherham	111
Sheffield	1,722
Gateshead	619
Newcastle Upon Tyne	1,749
North Tyneside	1,159
South Tyneside	34
Sunderland	46
Birmingham	10,090
Coventry	1,925
Dudley	168
Sandwell	91
Solihull	0
Walsall	301
Wolverhampton	124
Bradford	2,010
Calderdale	420
Kirklees	971
Leeds	7,134
Wakefield	461
Inner London	
Camden	2,917
Greenwich	1,833
Hackney	8,621
Hammersmith	3,273
Islington	3,542
Kensington	2,970
Lambeth	6,463
Lewisham	3,790
Southwark	5,004
Tower Hamlets	2,154
Wandsworth	2,599
Westminster	4,803
City of London	203
Outer London	
Barking	899
Barnet	1,856
Bexley	257
Brent	2,985
Bromley	549
Croydon	1,253
Ealing	1,517
Enfield	113
Haringey	4,227
Harrow	463
Havering	726
Hillingdon	985
Hounslow	1,200
Kingston Upon Thames	542
Merton	609
Newham	2,140
Redbridge	79
Richmond Upon Thames	984
Sutton	560
Waltham Forest	1,782

Source:

Revenue Outturn returns for Personal Social Services (RO3).

Note:

[1] The figures may include some expenditure on child minding for 5-7 year olds.

General Practitioner Working Hours

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of hours worked on average by general practitioners since 1979. [16422]

Mr. Malone: The earliest available information is for 1985–86 and the most recent for 1992–93. Over this period, average general practitioners' working hours increased by 13 per cent., from 34.4 to 38.8 hours a week. Some of this increase is attributable to the reclassification of time spent attending educational courses as general medical services.

If time spent on-call but not working is included, the average commitment has reduced by 5 per cent., from 61.9 hours a week in 1985–86 to 58.8 hours a week in 1992–93.

General Medical Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she will inform the House when next she intends to seek nominations for lay members of the General Medical Council. [16223]

Mr. Malone: I will consider how best to proceed at the appropriate time.

General Practitioner Pay

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change in general practitioners' salaries there has been in real terms since 1979. [16423]

Mr. Malone: For 1994–95, the average general practitioner will earn £41,890 for the provision of general medical services— a real terms increase of 40 per cent. over 1978–79. The average GP also receives an extra £3,150 for achieving higher target levels of coverage for childhood immunisations and cervical cytology screening.

NHS Directors of Finance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health is she will list the health authorities and trusts whose directors of finance do not hold a recognised accountancy qualification. [16243]

Mr. Malone: Such information about individuals employed in national health service health authorities and trusts is held only on a management-in-confidence basis. In early 1994, guidance was issued by the then national health service management executive on "The Role of the Director of Finance in the NHS". Among other things, that guidance commended appointment of future directors of finance from those holding qualifications recognised by the Consultative Committee of the Accounting Bodies. Copies of that guidance are available in the Library.

Cancer Research

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of health service funds are dedicated to cancer research; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on appeals by health research charities for funds from the public. [16940]

Mr. Malone: Figures are not collected centrally on the proportion of health service funds dedicated to cancer research.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment.

In 1992–93, the MRC spent a total of £13.5 million on cancer research. These figures would rise by a considerable amount if a proportion of the MRC's spend on basic medical research, that may yield results relevant to cancer, were included.

The Department of Health spends some £7.7 million annually on research into cancer. This supports a programme of work on radiation protection, work at the National Radiation Protection Board, the small area health statistics unit and the cancer screening evaluation unit.

The Government support the work of the medical research charities and recognise that charities are important funders of health and medical research. The Department is working with the Association of Medical Research Charities to promote a better understanding of the charities' strategies and priorities. In cancer research, the Department is funding research in collaboration with research charities, such as the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the Cancer Research Campaign.

Advisory Group on Direct Payments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the membership of her technical advisory group on direct payments. [17061]

Mr. Bowis: This informal group will be a source of practical expertise, to assist the Department in progressing this important issue. The membership may therefore need to vary to reflect the issues being discussed. Its initial membership will include relevant Government Departments, local authorities' associations, social services directors, potential users of direct payments and their representatives.

Hospital Closures

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospitals for the mentally handicapped have closed since 1966; [17189]

(2) how many hospitals for the mentally handicapped are due to close in the next five years. [17190]

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not routinely collect information on hospital closures. Information is available centrally on proposals to close, or change the use of, health service facilities which are referred to Ministers for decision following objections from a community health council.

A recent report of a survey by Inter-Authority Comparisons and Consultancy showed that of 106 mental handicap hospitals with 100 or more beds at December 1960, 62 had been closed or replaced and 44 remained open in March 1994. The report identified a further 11 hospitals with 100 or more beds and four with 75 to 100 beds which had opened during the period. Of the total of 59 hospitals with over 75 beds at March 1994, 42 had plans to close by 2000 as alternative community-based health and social services are developed. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library.

Local Pay Bargaining

Mr. Dafydd Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will suspend for 12 months any decision on local pay bargaining in the NHS, to allow further negotiations with representatives of affected parties; and if she will deliver a full 3 per cent. pay increase across the board to all NHS staff who were subject to local pay bargaining proposals for the year 1995–96. [17225]

Mr. Malone: No.

Message Handling Service

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress has been made in the testing of the message handling service being offered by BT Syntegra scheduled to take place between August and December 1994; [17683]

(2) when she expects the message handling service being provided by BT Syntegra to be fully available to the NHS; and what are the expected cost savings; [17684]

(3) what is the cost to her Department of the procurement of the message handling service; [17686]

(4) how the message handling service of the NHS is currently being provided; which company provides this service; and how many users subscribe to this network. [17685]

Mr. Sackville: There are currently two message handling services available to the national health service: one provided by Syntegra and the Healthlink service provided by Racal Data Networks Ltd. The cost of procuring the Healthlink service in 1989–90 by single tender negotiations is estimated at £450,000. The cost of the competitive procurement which resulted in the award of a contract to Syntegra in 1994 is estimated to be £517,000.

As at 1 March 1995, there were about 6,500 subscribers to Healthlink, the majority being general practitioners and dentists. At present, there are about 350 subscribers to Syntegra's MHS.

The Department has successfully completed technical testing of the main components of Syntegra's MHS. User acceptance testing is currently taking place and is scheduled to be completed by the end of April 1995. This activity will therefore be completed approximately 12 weeks after the agreed target date. A number of technical issues were encountered early in the testing which has caused the original timetable to be extended.

The various elements of Syntegra MHS are being introduced over the coming months. The basic messaging service is currently undergoing user acceptance trials, and early users of messaging services will be able to connect to it from April 1995 onwards. Use of the service by family health services authorities will be piloted in May and June, installed in early sites in July to September, then become generally available from October 1995 onwards. Electronic data interchange will become progressively available from the summer of 1995. The Syntegra MHS is an advanced system, offering the latest standards in messaging. The Department and Syntegra have insisted on all aspects of the service being thoroughly tested and piloted before being made available for general use. This policy means that a reliable operational service will be made available at the planned dates.

It is anticipated that cost savings to the NHS from use of Syntegra's MHS, based on the best current projections of service usage and the costs of the two services at August 1994, will be in the range of £70 million to £130 million over seven years compared with the existing Healthlink service.

Community Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the proposal for a minimum standard of mental health services in the Community Care (Rights to Mental Health Services) Bill. [17361]

Mr. Bowis: The introduction of prescriptive legislation for a minimum standard of mental health services is not the right approach as decisions about the provision of appropriate care in the community are best made locally in the light of local needs, priorities and resources rather than dictated centrally.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the professional bodies to the Community Care (Rights to Mental Health Services) Bill. [17362]

Mr. Bowis: We have received representations from the Royal College of Nursing.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the outcome of the consultations between the NHS and local councils on the need for each aspect of community care; and if she will make a statement. [17407]

Mr. Bowis: As a precondition for receiving their community care special transitional grant in 1993–94 and 1994–95, local social services authorities have been required to reach agreements with health authorities on a number of community care issues. For 1995–96, the pre-conditions include taking into account the continuing care guidance issued in February 1995.

Health authorities and social services departments are required to work together to develop services in the community based on individual assessment of need. Many local authorities and health authorities produce joint community care plans.

Dental Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of people taking dental examinations since the abolition of the free dental examination. [17363]

Mr. Malone: The information available centrally is the number of courses of treatment for adults that either consist of, or include, dental examinations. This information is shown in the table.

General dental service: number of national health service dental examinations for adult patients in courses of treatment claimed for in the financial years 1987–88 to 1993–94 in England

Year ending	*Examinations (thousands)*
1987–88	19,889
1988–89	20,904
1989–90	19,402
1990–91	18,951
1991–92	19,548
1992–93	20,000
1993–94	19,488

Source:

Dental Practice Board.

Notes:

1. The Charge for dental examinations was introduced for courses of treatment commencing on or after 1 January 1989. The table relates to courses of treatment claimed for by dentists in the financial year. Because of the time lag between courses of treatment starting and finishing a large number of free examinations will be included in the financial year 1988–89. Some free examinations will be included in later years' figures.

2. The figures for examinations are the totals of items 1a and 1b in the statement of dental remuneration.

3. Numbers estimated from a 5 per cent. sample of courses of treatment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made on the effect of the introduction of a sessional fees system for dentists on the number of dentists leaving the NHS system. [17364]

Mr. Malone: The sessional model was one of the options outlined in the Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry". We are considering the responses from the consultation, and hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to include dental policy and practice as part of "The Health of the Nation" planning and documents. [17365]

Mr. Malone: Oral health has been considered alongside the strategy for improving health set out in "The Health of the Nation". "An Oral Health Strategy for England", published in July 1994, reviewed the present state of oral health in England, identified problem areas and suggested in broad terms how these might be tackled. Both the contents of this document and decisions taken following the consultation of the Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry" will inform policy on how best to achieve future improvements in oral health.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to her answer of 17 March, *Official Report,* column *741*, if she will place in the Library the correspondence relating to her proposal to reduce Manchester's AIDS support programme. [17580]

(2) if she will now rescind her proposal to reduce Manchester's AIDS support programme. [17507]

Mr. Sackville: Copies of the correspondence will be placed in the Library. Having considered Manchester's request for additional funding, I have decided to make an extra £100,000 available to Manchester city council in excess of the indicative allocation of £75,000 notified earlier this year.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the Internet electronic mail addresses for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* each Minister in her Department; and if she will make a statement on her Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17730]

Mr. Sackville: The Department and Ministers do not have Internet electronic mailboxes. Although officials are using the Internet to retrieve information and to communicate with the research, medical and scientific community, public electronic mail access is still under consideration. The Department is considering how best to exploit the information super-highway to disseminate and retrieve information and to communicate with external organisations and members of the public without risking the security of confidential or personal information and at minimum administrative cost.

Teenage Pregnancies

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are her policies for ensuring that progress is made in meeting "The Health of the Nation" targets on teenage pregnancies. [17409]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 14 February, *Official Report,* columns *640–41.*

The Government continue to work closely with health authorities and voluntary organisations towards achieving "The Health of the Nation" target to reduce under-16 conceptions by 50 per cent. by 2000.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will call for a report from the Hillingdon hospital trust on the ease of road access to the hospital from the surrounding areas of West Drayton, Yiewsley, Hillingdon and Uxbridge; and if she will satisfy herself that the construction of road humps in many streets is not leading to the death of patients admitted in emergency cases. [17421]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Transport recently issued a code of practice—Traffic Advisory Leaflet No. 3-94—setting out arrangements for consultation between highway authorities and the emergency services when traffic calming measures are proposed. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Martin Gorham, chief executive of the London ambulance service to establish what consultation was carried out before the recent introduction of traffic calming measures in the area around Hillingdon hospital.

Long-term Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 13 December 1994, *Official Report,* columns *615–16,* if she will collect information of the savings made since April 1993 by the national health service by transferring the funding of continuing care of elderly people to local authorities. [17508]

Mr. Bowis: Local and health authorities are responsible for agreeing their responsibilities for continuing care. They should agree the information which they need locally to identify and monitor respective financial commitments in this area. Health authorities can transfer funds to local authorities under section 28a of the National Health Service Act 1977 but it is not clear how this would result in savings to the NHS.

Junior Doctors' Hours

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the average and maximum weekly number of hours on duty and on call for junior hospital doctors. [17384]

Mr. Malone: Junior hospital doctors contract to work a standard week of 40 hours. The majority of them also contract for a number of additional duty hours, which may vary from contract to contract.

The maximum weekly hours of duty including additional duty hours are laid down in "The New Deal", copies of which are available in the Library. Since 1 January, these are 56 hours for those on full shifts, 64 hours for those working partial shifts, 72 hours for those in hard-pressed on-call posts and 83 hours for those in non-hard-pressed on-call posts. Maximum average hours of work are, regardless of the contracted working pattern, 56 a week.

The medical and dental work-force census for England and Wales shows that at 30 September 1993, the average contracted hours of full-time junior doctors and dentists who contract for additional duty hours was 75.2 a week.

Average hours of work, as opposed to contracted hours, are not held centrally. However, the 23rd report of the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration, copies of which are available in the Library, contained the results of an independent survey of junior doctors and dentists in Great Britain which show that average hours of work were, in October 1993, 53.4 a week.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by her Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment her Department has made of their effectiveness. [17379]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate costs. There are a number of such lines to help the public with advice on health issues.

Hospices

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities met the target for joint funding of hospices in the last three years; and if she will make a statement; [17550]

(2) what was the total expenditure by health authorities in England on hospices in each of the last three years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* in constant 1995 prices. [17549]

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested. Funding allocated centrally for hospices and specialist palliative care services for the three years 1992–93 to 1994–95 is shown in the table. These figures do not include additional funding of specialist palliative care by health authorities from their general allocations. Information on the number of health authorities who have met the target of matched national health service and voluntary funding for hospices is not available centrally.

Region	*1992–93 cash prices (000s)*	*1992–93 constant prices[1] (000s)*	*1993–94 cash prices (000s)*	*1993–94 constant prices[1] (000s)*	*1994–95 cash prices (000s)*
Yorkshire	2,892	3,040	3,446	3,515	3,788
Northern	2,329	2,448	2,712	2,766	3,012
Trent	3,443	3,619	4,019	4,099	4,304
Mersey	1,940	2,039	2,356	2,403	2,489
Oxford	1,737	1,826	1,966	2,005	2,128
East Anglia	1,589	1,670	1,922	1,960	2,129
Wessex	2,513	2,642	2,861	2,918	3,025
N.E.Thames	2,807	2,951	3,410	3,478	3,864
N.W.Thames	2,469	2,595	2,848	2,905	3,240
S.E.Thames	3,233	3,399	3,664	3,737	4,000
S.W.Thames	2,473	2,600	2,913	2,971	3,145
N.Western	3,105	3,264	3,846	3,923	4,099
S.Western	2,835	2,980	3,408	3,476	3,648
West Midlands	3,828	4,024	4,560	4,651	4,858
Total (million)	37.2	39.1	43.9	44.8	47.7

[1] Figures shown at constant 1994–95 prices.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the banning of the use of electro-convulsive therapy on children under the age of 16 years; what reply she is making; and if she will make a statement. [17471]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on 9 March, column *319*.

NHS Staff

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the past five years, the number of NHS staff in England who are employed on a temporary basis, breaking the data down into *(a)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(b)* medical and dental staff, *(c)* ambulance staff, *(d)* ancillary staff and *(e)* managers and administrative staff, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17760]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 31 March, column *815*, which gave information on nursing and midwifery bank staff. Information is not available centrally about other staff employed on a temporary basis.

Sight Tests

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received calling for the reintroduction of free tests for pensioners; what her response has been; and if she will make a statement. [17979]

Mr. Malone: We have received and are considering a copy of the Association of Optometrists and British Medical Association's joint document "Free Eye Examinations For the Over-65s", which calls for the re-instatement of national health service eye examinations for that group.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *131*, whether she will make it her policy to continue to place in the Library information about the number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in London that took *(a)* 14 minutes and *(b)* each subsequent minute up to 70 minutes in February and subsequent months as they become available. [17864]

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Member should contact Mr. Martin Gorham, chief executive of the London ambulance service, for this information.

Accident and Emergency Services, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the accident and emergency services in Liverpool hospitals. [17980]

Mr. Sackville: Substantial investment is being made reorganising and improving accident and emergency services in Liverpool. In the transition, arrangements are being made to ensure that safe and effective services are maintained. The provision of such services is a local matter and the hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. Tod, chairman of Liverpool health authority, for details.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the objects and property accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax during the financial year ended 31 March; and if he will specify *(a)* the amount of tax satisfied in each case, *(b)* whether any offers carried conditions as to destination, *(c)* the date in each case of the recommendations received by him from the Museums and Galleries Commission for the acceptance of objects, *(d)* the total for the financial year of the tax thus satisfied and *(e)* how much of this total was covered in the public accounts by means of resort to the reserve in accordance with the Government policy announced on 2 July 1985, *Official Report*, column, 779. [16753]

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Item	*Tax satisfied £*	*Conditions as to destination*	*Date of MGC recommendation*
Drawing, 'Contraholz Solo' by Paul Klee	59,048	Wish	12.08.93
Drawings 'Tête de Femme, 1924' and 'Tête de Femme, 1937' by Picasso. Vase 'The artist at his easel' by Picasso	325,952	Wish	12.08.93
Fairfax Archives	24,500	Unconditional	23.08.93
George I silver kettle and stand	130,000	Wish	21.01.94
Painting 'The Council of Horses' by Ferneley	350,000	Conditional	01.05.93
Collection of riding tack	1,700	Conditional	17.02.94
The Acland Archive	42,000	Conditional	16.08.93
'Black Painting 1958' by William Scott	35,000	Conditional	06.09.93
Collection of architectural drawings	79,093	Conditional	13.01.94
Chattels at Castle Fraser	107,709	Conditional	17.01.94
Number 2 Willow Road by Erno Goldfinger	203,111	Hybrid purchase with National Trust	n/a
'Dido and Aeneas' by Jacopo Amigoni	207,030	Unconditional	21.01.93
Benthall Hall chattels	25,540	Wish	28.03.94
Busts of Matthew Bolton by John Flaxman and James Watt by Sir Francis Chantrey	122,500	Wish	28.03.94
Fitzherbert papers	49,000	Conditional	25.05.94
Studio and contents of F E McWilliam	35,000	Conditional	11.08.93
'Stonehenge' by J M W Turner	192,000	Conditional	28.03.94
Collection of Islamic books	3,500	Conditional	26.08.94
Calke Abbey chattels	143,473	Conditional	03.12.93
Chattels at Nymans	176,055	Conditional	18.04.94
Musical automation clock by Thomas Weekes	59,147.26	Unconditional	06.09.94
Florentine terracotta roundel by Foggini	26,600	Unconditional	26.07.94
Study for a portrait by Francis Bacon	680,000	Wish	01.05.93
Silver gilt wine-fountain	770,000	Conditional	11.06.93
Six sculptures by Naum Gabo	979,616	Conditional	28.03.94
Paintings 'L'Artiste dans son Atelier' by Marc Chagall and 'La Condition Humaine' by René Magritte	665,000	Conditional	26.07.94
Paintings 'A Village Wedding' by Jan Steen, 'The Castle of Bentheim from below' by Jacob Van Ruisdale and 'The Bird Trap' by Nicholas Berchem	665,000	Conditional	05.12.93

The total expenditure for the financial year 1994–95 was £6,160,116. This includes an additional payment of £2,041.74 for the painting, "Weeping Woman" by Picasso which was accepted in 1986–87. Five offers costing £3,759,616 were met by calls on the reserve.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will publish the attendance figures for the financial year ended 31 March reported by the national museums and galleries for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions, but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for the preceding year. [16754]

Mr. Dorrell: I list forecasts for the number of visits to the 11 national museums and galleries in England for which I am responsible for the financial year ended 31 March 1995 and the actual figures for the financial year 1993–94. More accurate figures for 1994–95 will be available in July.

	Number of visits in 1993–94 (million)	*Forecast number of visits in 1994–95 (million)*	*Provisional percentage increase/decrease over the previous year*
British Museum	6.03	6.32	+4.8
Imperial War Museum	1.19	1.23	+3.4
National Gallery	4.02	4.00	–0.5
National Maritime Museum	0.53	0.54	+1.9
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1.34	1.38	+3.0
National Portrait Gallery	0.79	0.85	+7.6

	Number of visits in 1993–94 (million)	*Forecast number of visits in 1994–95 (million)*	*Provisional percentage increase/decrease over the previous year*
Natural History Museum	1.74	1.54	−11.5
National Museum of Science and Industry	2.67	2.48	−7.1
Tate Gallery	2.75	2.80	+1.8
Victoria and Albert Museum	1.58	1.60	+1.3
Wallace Collection	0.15	0.16	+6.7
Total	22.79	22.9	+0.5

It is not possible to identify the number of visits to the Royal Armouries because it at present forms part of the Tower of London.

National Lottery

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the distribution mechanisms for the proceeds of the national lottery. [17223]

Mr. Dorrell: The distribution mechanisms are as set out in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 and can be changed only by Parliament.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to instruct Oflot to examine the profits of Camelot. [17222]

Mr. Dorrell: I have no such plans.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pig Research Unit

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the cost of market testing his Department's pig unit; [16962]

(2) which consultants were employed to advise on the market testing of his Department's pig unit; and at what cost; [16963]

(3) how many *(a)* pig and *(b)* staff were included in the scope of his Department's market test of the pig unit; [16964]

(4) how many bids from the private sector were received following the issuing of the invitation to tender for his Department's pig unit work; [16965]

(5) if the market testing of the Government's pig research unit falls within the remit of his "Competing for Quality" initiative; and if he will make a statement. [16958]

Mr. Waldegrave: I have asked the chief executive of the Central Veterinary Laboratory to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from T.W.A. Little to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 3 April 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the Department's Pig Unit. I am also replying to your question to the Prime Minister concerning the Government Pig Research Unit.

I should perhaps begin by explaining that there is no single Government Pig Research Unit. However, at CVL the Animal Services Unit is responsible for the procurement, housing and welfare of animals used on site in connection with the work of the Laboratory on animal health and welfare. In 1993 it was decided to market test that part of the operation responsible for the supply of animals of known health status. This involved the supply of pigs as well as other animals. The planned approach was to invite potential tenderers to either run the service on site, using CVL's existing facilities, or to supply from their own facilities off-site.

The response to advertisements for expressions of interest for the supply of animals was disappointing. Too few organisations replied who had sufficient track record to meet all the Laboratory's needs. Against this background the market test was not pursued in favour of an internal management review which concluded that supplies should continue to be arranged in-house but with occasional use of out-sourced suppliers.

Turning to your specific questions, I am unable to provide you with a cost for that aspect of the exercise which related to the supply of pigs since these costs were not kept separately. I can confirm no consultants were involved at any stage of the market testing exercise.

That part of the unit supplying pigs comprised approximately 3 boars, 30 sows and followers. Two members of staff were involved for most of their time with limited supervisory input. As explained above, no bids were invited since the exercise did not reach the stage of inviting tenders.

Meat Hygiene Service

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the setting up of the national meat hygiene service. [17276]

Mr. Waldegrave: Secondary legislation has been laid before the House which would, among other things, make Ministers, acting through the meat hygiene service responsible for enforcement of meat hygiene and welfare at slaughter legislation. The necessary arrangements have been made to allow the meat hygiene service to carry out its responsibilities with effect from 1 April when these regulations come into force.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the total administrative cost of setting up the national meat hygiene service to date and if he will indicate any further expenditure that will be necessary in establishing this agency. [17272]

Mr. Waldegrave: Provision was made for a total of £5.2 million in the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 to meet the set up costs of the meat hygiene service. In addition, a small project team was established within the Ministry between 1992 and March 1995 at an estimated total cost of £626,000.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the representations he has received concerning the national meat hygiene service. [17278]

Mr. Waldegrave: My ministerial colleagues and I have had frequent meetings with hon. Members and organisations representing the meat industry to discuss the meat hygiene service. We have also received letters from hon. Members and others both supporting and opposing the creation of the MHS.

I met 11 representative organisations on 27 March; 10 of them confirmed their continuing support for the creation of a single organisation to be responsible for meat hygiene enforcement and inspection.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the methods by which the national meat hygiene service will be held accountable to the House. [17274]

Mr. Waldegrave: The meat hygiene service will be an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and its staff will be civil servants. I will be accountable to Parliament for the activities of the agency. Full authority for the day to day operation of the agency rests with the chief executive who will be responsible to me for the agency's overall operation and performance. The MHS will operate in Scotland and Wales on behalf of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State.

Ministers will usually ask the chief executive to write to hon. Members in response to written Parliamentary questions and letters about matters delegated to him. The chief executive's letters in reply to parliamentary questions will be published in the *Official Report.*

The agency's annual report and accounts will be laid in the House.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the senior officers, *(b)* the salaries of the senior officers and *(c)* the salaries of each grade of staff in the national meat hygiene service. [17277]

Mr. Waldegrave: The meat hygiene service is headed by a chief executive supported by four heads of Department. There are six regional managers. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 March 1995 to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), *Official Report*, column *500*, for details of the chief executive's remuneration. Meat inspectors and other staff transferring from local authorities will do so on terms and conditions broadly equivalent to those of their previous employment. The salaries given for these grades are those which will be offered to new staff on appointment.

Grade	*Range (£s)*
Heads of Department	38,000—50,000
Regional Manager	37,500—43,000
Official Veterinary Surgeon	22,000—35,000
Headquarters Manager	16,000—30,000
Area Resource Manager	19,000—28,000
Meat Hygiene Inspector	11,000—23,000
Executive Assistant	7,500—13,000

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the annual total cost to public funds of the national meat hygiene service. [17273]

Mr. Waldegrave: The estimated net cost of the meat hygiene service in 1995–96 is £15.4 million. This includes provision for the transitional assistance which I announced on 29 March and elements, such as start-up costs and normal delays in payment, which are not relevant to the agency's operational costs. The estimated net cost in 1996–97 is £1.4 million.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provisions he has put in place to assist with maintaining operations in small abattoirs following the setting up of the national meat hygiene service. [17279]

Mr. Waldegrave: We have always recognised the importance of local abattoirs to the rural economy and have taken a number of measures to ensure that single market rules are applied sensibly and flexibly. These arrangements will continue. The transitional assistance which I announced on 29 March will be of particular benefit to the smaller operator.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the national meat hygiene service will have for the training requirements of environmental health officers; and if environmental health officers will continue to be required to gain qualifications in meat inspection.

Mr. Waldegrave: The meat hygiene service will assist in providing training for environmental health officers.

Environmental health officers authorised to exercise powers under the Food Safety Act 1990 to examine and seize meat must hold one of the qualifications listed in the schedule to the Authorised Officers (Meat Inspection) Regulations 1987.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the necessary qualifications for appointment to each grade of staff in the national meat hygiene service.

Mr. Waldegrave: Management and support staff are required to have the appropriate skills and experience. The head of operations post requires a veterinarian with substantial professional experience of meat hygiene and regional managers must have substantial practical experience of meat hygiene. Official veterinary surgeons must be members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and be designated by Ministers as official veterinary surgeons having completed the appropriate refresher training in fresh meat or poultry meat hygiene. Meat hygiene inspectors must have the qualifications specified in the regulations governing meat hygiene.

Fishing Boats

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to verify the size of fishing fleet claims of other member states of the European Union, where such claims have an effect on the size of the fleet the United Kingdom is permitted to run under EU rules; and if he will make a statement. [17091]

Mr. Jack: Each member state has agreed binding multi-annual guidance programme targets. Responsibility for compliance with these targets and the enforcement of Community regulations and verification of the data supplied by member states is the responsibility of the Commission.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food if he will discuss with his Spanish counterpart and with the European Fisheries Commissioner the regulations of the common fisheries policy governing declarations of fishing boat engine size; and if he will make a statement. [17092]

Mr. Jack: Responsibility for ensuring compliance with Community regulations rests with the Commission. However, my officials are drawing the recent press reports on these matters to the attention of the Commission. Evaluation of effort is sometimes discussed in the Council when all member states can contribute to the proceedings.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17454]

Mr. Jack: MAFF has set up two public telephone helpline services with local call rate charging facilities. The general MAFF helpline, launched in May 1993, provides a one-stop point of contact for individuals or organisations seeking information about or advice from the Ministry. The more specialist consumer helpline was set up in April 1990 to act as a focal point for enquirers needing information from the food safety directorate. Both units also handle written and faxed public enquiries, and in the case of the MAFF helpline, those received by e-mail. The start-up costs for these services were approximately £21,000, and annual running costs are estimated at £90,000. Since the introduction of both services, over 62,000 calls have been received. The effectiveness of the helpline services are measured by regular annual increases in the volume of calls dealt with, by the high proportion of calls handled directly without onward referral and by their success in meeting citizens charter targets on the way in which they deal with inquirers and the time limits for response.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many environmentally sensitive area agreements were concluded in 1994-95 in the *(a)* zero to £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 to £20,000, *(e)* 20,001 to £25,000 *(f)* £25,001 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 to £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 to £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 to £150,000, *(j)* 150,001 to £200,000 and *(k)* over £200,000 bands; [17674]

(2) how many environmentally sensitive area agreements were concluded in 1993–94 in the *(a)* zero to £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 to £20,000, *(e)* 20,001 to £25,000 *(f)* £25,001 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 to £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 to £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 to £150,000, *(j)* 150,001 to £200,000 and *(k)* over £200,000 bands; [17673]

(3) how many environmentally sensitive area agreements he estimates will be concluded in 1995–96 in the *(a)* zero to £5,000, *(b)* £5,001 to £10,000, *(c)* £10,001 to £15,000, *(d)* £15,001 to £20,000, *(e)* 20,001 to £25,000 *(f)* £25,001 to £50,000, *(g)* £50,001 to £75,000, *(h)* £75,001 to £100,000, *(i)* £100,001 to £150,000, *(j)* 150,001 to £200,000 and *(k)* over £200,000 bands. [17675]

Mr. Jack: Records of the number of agreements concluded in 1993–94 are not kept in the form requested. The total number of agreements on which payments were made in English ESAs in each band is as follows:

£	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
0–5,000	3,554	4,206
5,001–10,000	543	653
10,001–15,000	146	185
15,001–20,000	52	65
20,001–25,000	28	42
25,001–50,000	56	75
50,001–75,000	10	10
75,001–100,000	3	5
100,001–150,000	2	0
150,001–200,000	0	0
Over 200,000	0	0

Entry to the ESA scheme is voluntary and it is not possible to predict the number of new agreements that will be concluded in 1995–96 in the form requested.

Live Exports

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the approximate cost to the Exchequer of subsidies to United Kingdom producers of live animals for export for slaughter in the latest convenient period for which figures can be calculated. [17462]

Mr. Jack: For live animals exported for slaughter from the United Kingdom in the period 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1994, nil.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an assessment of the consequences for farming and the countryside, including the budgetary and trade implications, if the United Kingdom were to withdraw from the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement. [17969]

Mr. Jack: There can be no question of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the common agricultural policy, participation in which is an integral part of our membership of the European Union.

Sow Stall Conversions

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are available to pig farmers in Northern Ireland to assist with sow stall conversions. [14798]

Mr. Ancram: I have been asked to reply.

There are currently no grants available in Northern Ireland to assist in sow stall conversion.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Order Prosecutions

Mr. Wray: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been under (i) section 18, (ii) section 19 and (iii) section 23 of the Public Order Act 1986 in each year since 1990. [17860]

The Attorney-General: Since 1990, 12 prosecutions have been commenced under part III of the Public Order Act 1986. Information on each of the prosecutions is as follows:

	Year	*Offence(s)*	*Result*
1.	1990	Sections 19 and 23	Convicted
2.	1990	Section 23	Convicted
3.	1991	Section 19	Convicted
4.	1991	Section 18	Died before trial
5.	1991	Section 23	Discontinued
6.	1992	Section 23	Convicted
7.	1992	Section 23	Convicted
8.	1992	Section 18	Acquitted
9.	1993	Sections 19 and 23	Convicted
10.	1993	Section 23	Convicted
11.	1993	Section 23	Convicted
12.	1994	Section 23	Convicted

Date-rape Cases

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General what consultations he has had with the Director of the Crown Prosecution Services concerning the numbers of date-rape cases dropped on Crown Prosecution Service advice after a full police investigation, as a proportion of all date-rape cases arriving at court. [17994]

The Attorney-General: I have routine meetings with the DPP to discuss departmental issues, including aspects of prosecutions policy. The particular information sought by the hon. Member is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Data and Video Network

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what financial provision is being made for installing the parliamentary data and video network; when this will be completed; and if the Commission will be providing funds for terminals and computers. [15725]

Mr. Channon: By the end of the summer recess *550* Members, including all those with offices in the outbuildings, will have access to the video network. Remaining Members' offices in the Palace will be cabled progressively over the next five years. In accordance with the recommendations of the Information Committee approved by the House last June, terminals and computers will not be funded from the House votes.

Visitors' Refreshment Facilities

36. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what plans he has to provide increased refreshment facilities within or adjacent to Westminster Hall for members of the public visiting the House. [15727]

Mr. Channon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell).

Members' Accommodation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is his latest estimate of the total cost of hon. Members moving office within parliamentary buildings during the current Parliament.

Mr. Beith: No figures are available to identify separately the total cost of moving hon. Members between offices but the cost of removal for an individual Member has been estimated at approximately £50 plus VAT, together with any extra costs caused by new furniture, furnishings or redecoration.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the number of staff years which have been used by Departments in order to progress market testing since April 1992. [16971]

Mr. Horam: None.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what considerations underlie his decision to publish information on service quality following a market testing exercise only when the quality has risen. [16970]

Mr. Horam: There has been no such decision.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the costs of operating the *(a)* 0800 100101 and *(b)* 0345 300130 telephone services to the citizens charter unit; what was the total number of calls made to each line during its operation; what were the costs of establishing, publicising and operating each service; and what assessment his Department has made of these services. [17797]

Mr. Horam: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the costs of operating the citizens charter publication line; what was the number of calls made to it for each month of its operation; what were the costs of establishing, publicising and operating this service; and what assessment his Department has made of this service. [17799]

Mr. Horam: The citizens charter publication line on 0345 22 32 42 was set up on 16 March to send out copies of the guide to the citizens charter White Papers; details of how to obtain the follow-up charters; the code of practice on access to Government information; charter mark award scheme information; "Charter News"; and complaints task force information. The service remains in operation; calls are charged at a local rate. Initially the service was managed by IBM national call centre. When the contract expired the service was run directly by the charter unit until 17 October 1994, then a new contract was awarded to Inform Communications who have managed the publications line since then.

The costs of operating the publication line and the number of calls up to 16 March 1995 are:

Period covered	*Number of calls*	*Operating costs (excluding VAT) £*	*Set up costs*[1] *£*	*Managed by*
16 March 1994–10 July 1994[2]	5,160	23,204.59	1,420.00	IBM National Call Centre
11 July 1994–16 August 1994	405	absorbed within Charter unit running costs		Citizen's Charter Unit
17 August 1994–16 September 1994	132			
17 September 1994–16 October 1994	145			
17 October 1994–16 November 1994	432	1,654.22	640.00	Inform Communications
7 November 1994–16 December 1994	250	1,044.12		
17 December 1994–16 January 1995	120	753.55		
17 January 1995–16 February 1995	451	1,453.55		
17 February 1995–16 March 1995	480	1,394.35		

Note:

[1] One-off costs.

[2] The time period covers the IBM management of the Publication Line.

The telephone number for the publication line was publicised in the citizens charter second report, 1994 and other internal newsletters and magazines; no specific publicity costs have been incurred.

The service is kept under continuous review, and decisions about continuation and contractual arrangements are made accordingly.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the costs of operating the charterline telephone information service; what was the number of calls made to it for each month of its operation; what were the costs of establishing, publicising and operating this service; and what assessment his Department has made of this service. [17798]

Mr. Horam: The cost of operating the charterline information service from 19 May 1993—the setting up of the pilot scheme—to 19 March 1994, the ending of the evaluation of the pilot scheme was £1,130,991.

During this period, charterline received 5,603 calls. A month-by-month breakdown of this number is not available.

The breakdown of the costs of the pilot scheme until 19 March 1994 is as follows:

	Developmental costs (£)	*Ongoing costs (£)*
Initial research	67,000	—
Set up charges	749,000	—
System Design	119,918	—
Project planning and management	19[illegible],[illegible]00	—
Selection of pilot region	[illegible]5,000	—
Regional seminars	[illegible]1,000	—
Data collection	57,000	—
Detailed requirements, acceptance testing and financial modelling	50,520	—
CCTA contractual advice	47,761	—
Advertising	—	602,922
Research during pilot study	—	61,239
IBM operational costs	—	403,579
Charterline language service (set up and operational charges)	—	34,951
CACI use of ACORN data	—	28,300
Totals	1,332,199	1,130,991

This information, together with other data on the charterline pilot is contained in the document "Charterline Evaluation Report", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Paragraphs 41–44 of the evaluation report set out the conclusions at the end of the study. The evaluation showed what information people wanted to know about their public services but also that there were problems with doing this through charterline because of the lack of awareness of the service. In the light of these conclusions, it was decided that charterline should not be continued, and the pilot scheme ended on 6 May 1995. Subsequently, the charter unit has worked with Yellow Pages and Thomson Directories to develop the information on public services that they provide in their directories.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17038]

Mr. David Hunt: Any analysis could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member.

Charter Marks

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the budget for the 1995 charter mark award scheme. [17110]

Mr. Horam: We have provisionally set aside a sum of £1.65 million to cover the cost of the award assessment, the new scheme for public nominations and the wider promotion of the award scheme. But final costs will be heavily dependent on the number of applications received and on the number of public nominations. We will therefore be refining the budget as the year progresses.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much of the budget for the 1995 charter mark award scheme has been spent on (i) publications and (ii) distribution of information. [17109]

Mr. Horam: We think it very important this year to involve the public in the operation of the charter mark award scheme. We also wish to involve a larger proportion of public service organisations in this scheme. We have spent £111,900 of the £1.65 million provisionally set aside for the 1995 charter mark award scheme on publications and £58,500 on distributing those publications.

Cabinet Office

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the Cabinet Office was last inspected by the relevant local authority to ensure that it fully complies with health and safety at work legislation; and what steps have been taken to implement any necessary improvements relating to space standards, toilets, rest rooms, canteens and asbestos removal, for staff employed there. [17312]

Mr. Horam: The Cabinet Office and its agencies occupy a number of buildings throughout the country. The buildings concerned are, therefore, subject to different inspection regimes by the respective local council, local fire authority and local environmental health authority. The responsibility for ensuring compliance with the health and safety at work legislation, however, lies with the Health and Safety Executive.

Listed are the latest recorded inspections, since January 1993, for buildings where the Cabinet Office is the major occupier. Good working relations are maintained with all relevant local authorities and a number of informal inspections also take place. Except as noted, there are no outstanding actions still to be taken following any of the inspections listed.

Inspections	*Date*
London, 70 Whitehall	
Environmental Health Officer's visit	November 1994
Portable electrical appliance testing	August 1994
Water quality test	December 1994
Hepburn House and 53 Parliament Street	
Portable electrical appliance safety testing	March 1994
Fire Safety Inspection	January 1995
Belgrave Road	
Home Office Fire Safety Inspection	September 1994
Fire Brigade Inspection	January 1995
Ascot, Sunningdale Park	
Inspection of kitchens and bedroom accommodation	January 1995
Fire Safety Inspection	November 1994
Asbestos Inspection	September 1994
Portable electrical appliance safety test	March 1995
Water quality sampled	February 1995
Edinburgh Hill Street	
Electrical circuit safety check	September 1994
Water quality check	March 1995
Fire safety check	September 1994
Basingstoke Alençon Link	
Asbestos check	February 1995
Work is ongoing to meet recommendations	
Norwich Rosebury Court	
The CCTA moved to a new building constructed in July 1994 that fully complies with all extant Health and Safety, etc, legislation.	
Chessington	
Government Buildings, Leatherhead Road	
Kitchen Inspection	February 1993

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what considerations led to the continued advertising of posts within the civil service to work in the Cabinet Office for two hours a week longer than the proposed European Community directive on maximum hours of work. [17311]

Mr. Horam: The working time directive is not in force. The United Kingdom's challenge to it has yet to be considered by the European Court of Justice. Working hours in the Cabinet Office are agreed between management and staff in the light of particular circumstances, under the guiding principles set out in the civil service management code.

SCOTLAND

Taxation

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the sources and calculations behind his statements in a television interview on 12 February on *(a)* the extra cost to each Scot in income tax of the Labour party's plans for a Scottish Parliament, *(b)* the Scottish share of the United Kingdom population and Government expenditure and taxation and *(c)* the amount raisable by 3p on income tax leviable only in Scotland and *(d)* the change if Scotland were funded to the same level as the rest of the United Kingdom. [14918]

Mr. Lang: I have arranged to place in the House of Commons Library the sources and calculations behind my statements in my interview with Jonathan Dimbleby on ITV on Sunday 12 February.

Clinical Outcome Indicators

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish on an annual basis health service clinical outcome indicators for individual *(a)* health boards and *(b)* NHS trusts, similar to those published in December 1994. [15867]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions about future publication will be taken in the light of continuing development work and full discussion of the indicators already published.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on public relations during the financial year 1993–94; how much contracts with the private sector cost; and if he will list the activities covered by these contracts. [16284]

Mr. Lang: The running cost of the Scottish Office information directorate in 1993–94 was £1.4 million. No public relations companies were employed by my Department during that period.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines his Department has issued to its agencies and other public bodies under its authority in respect of the employment of public relations companies and the procedures to be adopted in relation to requesting tenders for public relations companies. [16213]

Mr. Lang: Guidelines on the employment of public relations companies are contained in the central Government conventions on publicity and advertising which have been recognised by successive Governments.

Detailed guidance on tendering procedures is regularly issued to agencies and passed to other public bodies on request.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the official cell capacity and *(b)* the inmate prison population in each prison in Scotland on 24 March. [17235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stewart to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 3 April 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to reply to your Question relating to (a) the official cell capacity and (b) the inmate prison population in each prison Scotland on 24 March. I am replying in his absence.

The table shows the design capacity and number of prisoners in each penal establishment in Scotland on 24 March 1995.

Establishment	*Design capacity*	*Number of prisoners*
Aberdeen	142	171
Barlinnie	939	1,185
Castle Huntly	144	70
Cornton Vale	213	167
Dumfries	139	129
Dungavel	135	116
Edinburgh	508	645
Friarton	56	80
Glenochil	669	484
Greenock	172	252
Inverness	79	108
Longriggend	177	191
Low Moss	396	381
Noranside	135	124
Penninghame	85	50
Perth	426	465
Peterhead	271	205
Polmont	414	394
Shotts	535	450
Scotland	5,635	5,667

In Scotland design capacity is based on single occupancy. The measure of certified normal accommodation used in England and Wales, however, allows, in some instances double occupancy in cells.

Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the individual members of the Lomond Healthcare NHS trust; and what criteria applied in respect of each appointment. [17415]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *582*.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 28 March, how many days per week Mr. Stephen J. Newall is expected to work as chairman of Lomond Healthcare NHS trust. [17644]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Trust chairmen are expected to commit two to three days per week to trust work.

Temporary Teachers

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* auxiliary school staff in Scotland who are employed on a temporary basis, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17763]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested on the number and percentage of teachers employed on a temporary basis in Scottish education authority schools for the years which data are available in the most recent five-year period is as follows:

Year at September	*Number (full time equivalents)*	*Percentage of all teachers*
1990	1,838	3.7
1992	1,942	3.9

These figures include teachers employed in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. Figures for years subsequent to 1992 are not yet available.

Information is not held centrally in respect of auxiliary school staff employed on a temporary basis.

Higher Education Institutions

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those higher education institutions which are discussing private finance for upgrading or developing facilities with private sector firms; and which firms are involved in these discussions. [17474]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Higher education institutions are free to enter into discussions on private finance with the private sector as they consider appropriate. The names of the institutions or the private sector firms involved are matters of commercial confidence to the institutions concerned.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to refuse to approve any capital projects in higher or further education unless private finance options have been explored. [17473]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We would expect institutions to consider the private finance option. However, projects may proceed to procurement without a private finance option being considered if it is clear that transfer of control and risk is not feasible. It is for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to approve capital projects in higher education using criteria based on guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a list of those invited to attend the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council conference on the private finance initiative; and what specific developments, if any, arise from this conference. [17472]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council was responsible for organising the conference on the private finance initiative. Attendance was not by invitation but by application. I have asked the funding council to write to the hon. Member and provide details of those who attended.

It is now for higher education institutions and the business community to decide on the feasibility of specific developments.

Highland Railway Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the social and economic assessments which he has made over the impact of proposed rail service changes to the highlands. [17751]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the railways rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. No such assessments have been undertaken by the Scottish Office.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of all representations, which he has received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise since autumn 1994, in respect of rail connections to the highlands. [17752]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise wrote to me on 22 March about sleeper services to Fort William and Motorail services. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Racial Incidents

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many racial incidents have been recorded in Scotland in each year since 1991. [17858]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of racial incidents recorded by the police in Scotland in each year since 1991 are as follows:

1991: 678
1992: 663
1993: 756
1994: 791

Prisoners (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison population in Scotland are from ethnic minority groups. [17859]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stewart to Mr. Jimmy Wray, dated 3 April 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked the Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to reply to your Question about the percentage of the male and female prison population in Scotland from ethnic minority groups. I am replying in his absence.

Information on the ethnic origin of persons received into Scottish penal establishments has not been collected. The new Scottish Prison Service Prisoner Records Database which is currently being implemented across the Service, however, will enable us to provide such information after the Summer.

NHS Staff

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of NHS staff in Scotland who are employed on a temporary basis, breaking the data down into *(a)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(b)* medical and dental staff, *(c)* ambulance staff, *(d)* ancillary staff and *(e)* managers and administrative staff, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17758]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on the number of NHS staff in Scotland employed on a temporary basis are not maintained centrally.

Water Authorities and Customers Council

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications he has received for membership of *(a)* the three new water authorities and *(b)* the consumer bodies; when he expects to announce the full membership of each of them; and if he will make a statement. [17301]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* We have received 759 applications for membership of the new water authorities; 384 for membership of the Customers Council; and 103 for chairmanship of the Customers Council.

Membership will be announced in the late spring or early summer.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the total number of patients in Scotland registered with a dentist; and what was the number of patients that ceased to be registered with a dentist for each financial year since 1985–86; [15539]

(2) if he will list for each health board area in Scotland the number of patients registered with a dentist and the number of patients who ceased to be registered with a dentist for each financial year since 1985–86. [15540]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* Registration of patients with a dentist was introduced in October 1990. Patients may cease to be registered with a dentist for a number of reasons, including lapse of registration owing to non-attendance, transfer to another dentist, agreement between patient and dentist to enter private arrangements, or decision by a dentist no longer to provide NHS treatment to a patient. Patients whose registration lapses may subsequently register with the same or another dentist and cannot be separately identified. The information available is shown in the tables.

Table 1: Dental patients registered at 31 March—by health board in Scotland

	Financial year			
Health board	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Scotland	1,710,947	2,502,684	2,548,095	2,514,816
Argyll and Clyde	146,481	213,990	212,219	207,647
Ayrshire and Arran	170,743	221,072	200,998	198,376
Borders	38,118	52,771	53,897	53,238
Dumfries and Galloway	50,535	74,290	71,220	68,292
Fife	116,263	167,285	171,475	170,690
Forth Valley	84,505	129,146	133,441	131,571
Grampian	175,734	246,479	259,362	260,173
Greater Glasgow	296,476	458,557	474,592	464,351
Highland	69,124	102,894	99,161	92,670
Lanarkshire	150,452	233,418	242,743	240,001
Lothian	252,816	374,659	389,764	385,702
Orkney	3,535	5,525	7,267	7,961
Shetland	4,710	7,034	7,004	7,823
Tayside	146,881	207,270	216,441	217,565
Western Isles	4,574	8,294	8,511	8,756

Table 2: Dental patient registrations ended prematurely[1]*—by health board in Scotland*

Health board	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
	Financial year			
Scotland	[2]n/a	3,027	11,336	15,391
Argyll and Clyde	n/a	338	1,208	426
Ayrshire and Arran	n/a	236	1,264	1,050
Borders	n/a	69	286	1,531
Dumfries and Galloway	n/a	92	3,791	3,025
Fife	n/a	133	217	1,172
Forth Valley	n/a	156	298	301
Grampian	n/a	227	719	335
Greater Glasgow	n/a	563	475	1,500
Highland	n/a	255	132	2,393
Lanarkshire	n/a	170	563	340
Lothian	n/a	474	2,216	3,178
Orkney	n/a	66	2	0
Shetland	n/a	16	0	5
Tayside	n/a	273	165	128
Western Isles	n/a	4	0	7

[1] Registrations ended prematurely either by dentist without patient's agreement, or by agreement between dentist and patient. This does not include registrations which lapse because the patient does not re-attend during the registration, or registrations which end automatically when the patient registers with another dentist.

[2] n/a = not available.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Fraud

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what he estimates is the value of extra alternative benefits claimed by recipients of fraud savings and of the extra benefit entitlement in cases where there were no fraud savings. [16164]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is not available.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if statistics kept by his Department on fraud savings include savings arising from non-fraudulent irregularities; what is his estimate of such non-fraudulent savings; and if he will make a statement. [16163]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Statistics kept by the Department on fraud savings do not include savings arising from non-fraudulent irregularities.

Retirement Pensions Forecasting Unit

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account he has taken in conducting a market test of his Department's retirement pensions forecasting unit of the proposed pensions legislation currently before Parliament. [16983]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The effect of the changes proposed by the Pensions Bill on the work of the Benefits Agency's retirement pensions forecasting unit will be taken fully into account when deciding on the feasibility of a market test.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instigate an urgent inquiry to advise on the security implications of ensuring that private firms do not have direct or indirect access to the confidential national insurance information handled by the retirement pensions forecasting unit, in connection with the market testing exercise. [16984]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The study into the feasibility of market testing the work of the retirement pensions forecasting unit will take the security of confidential information fully into account.

Market Testing

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the number of staff years allocated since 1992 to his Departmental market testing programme. [16978]

Mr. Roger Evans: This Department has allocated some 306 staff years in support of the market testing programme since 1992.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what delays there have been to the commencement of contracts let to the private sector, following the market testing of accommodation and office services; and if he will make a statement. [16959]

Mr. Roger Evans: This Department has awarded 23 accommodation and office services contracts to external contractors as part of the "Competing for Quality" initiative. Of the five that were subject to minor delays, three were at the request of the Department.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which firms have requested and received permission to delay the commencement of the provision of contracted-out services to his Department; and what were *(a)* the reasons for each delay and *(b)* the financial penalties imposed on each firm. [16960]

Mr. Roger Evans: Two companies have requested and received permission to delay the provision of some accommodation and office services to the Benefits Agency. Procord and BET both experienced unexpected staffing difficulties and payments have been adjusted accordingly.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what extra costs his Department incurred over the past 12 months as a result of private sector companies that were unable to provide contracted-out services at the scheduled contract start date. [16961]

Mr. Roger Evans: None. The prices for five contracts have been adjusted to take account of minor delays.

Pensions (Overseas Residents)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of uprating the retirement pensions payable to present or former United Kingdom citizens living in those countries where uprating has not hitherto been payable *(a)* to restore them to the level at which the pension would have been payable if they had remained resident in the United Kingdom (i) with and (ii) without full backdated payments and *(b)* as if the only uprating payable to them since leaving the United Kingdom were that coming into payment in the current year; and if he will estimate separate totals in each case for British pensioners resident in (1) Australia, (2) Canada and (3) New Zealand. [17344]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Such information as is available is in the table:

£ millions

Country	*(a) Estimated cost of paying fully indexed pensions*	*(b) Estimated cost of paying April 1994 uprating only*
Australia	110	7
Canada	60	4
New Zealand	20	2
Rest of the world	45	3
Total	235	16

Notes:

1. The estimated costs relate to all state retirement and widow pensioners living abroad whose benefits are not uprated. Separate figures are not available on the cost of uprating benefits only for retirement pensioners or those who are, or were, citizens of the United Kingdom.

2. An estimate of the cost of backdating payments to make good upratings forgone in the past is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women opted to remain on invalidity benefit on reaching retirement age in the latest year for which figures are available; [17347]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women over the age of retirement are in receipt of invalidity benefit at the latest date for which figures are available. [17346]

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the tables.

Table 1: The number of recipients who reached pension age in the year ending 3 April 1993 who opted to remain on invalidity benefit and were receiving invalidity benefit on 3 April 1993

Gender	*Number*
Men	53,000
Women	14,000

Notes:

1. Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claims rounded to the nearest thousand

2. The figures exclude people who reached pension age in the year ending 3 April 1993 but whose claim to invalidity benefit terminated before the end of that year.

Table 2: The number of people over retirement age receiving Invalidity Benefit on 3 April 1993

Gender	*Number*
Men	229,000
Women	53,000

Note:

Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claims rounded to the nearest thousand.

Child Support

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he intends to meet the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to discuss the release of personal details about Marc Calder of Plymouth; [17094]

(2) if he will make a statement concerning the release of the personal details of Mr. Marc Calder from Plymouth to a local newspaper by the Child Support Agency in Plymouth; and what action he proposes to take. [17096]

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been kept fully appraised of the incident but has no plans to meet the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on the matter.

I understand that the agency immediately instigated an investigation into the incident and as a result a member of staff at the Plymouth Child Support Agency centre was suspended from duty the same day pending further inquiries. Staff disciplinary action is a confidential matter between management, personnel and the member of staff involved. At this stage of the investigation, I cannot provide the hon. Member with any further details of this case which would not breach that confidentiality.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17458]

Mr. Hague: The full information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available information is as follows.

The public inquiry office is available to members of the public at national call rate. The number of calls taken from January to December 1994 was 86,355. This service is monitored routinely to establish how many incoming calls are presented to the system; the number answered and the average waiting time for answers. This line is not intended to provide a full public enquiry service for the Department, only for members of the public who need to contact the administrative headquarters in London. Other public information lines are available in the Department's agencies, as follows:

	January—December 1994 Calls handled
Benefits agency	
Freeline	2,688,000
Benefit inquiry line	930,000
Family credit advice line	2,173,000
Disability living allowance line	2,206,000
Pensions advice line, introduced June 1994	60,392

An assessment of effectiveness is included as part of a national customer service survey undertaken on behalf of the Benefits Agency by Public Attitudes Survey Ltd. It is intended that this will continue annually.

Contributions agency	
Social security advice line for employers	240,000

Independent research has predicted the demand for this service will increase by 30 per cent. during the next two years.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

War pensions agency	
War pensions help line	Approximately 600,000 calls sincestart up in January 1992

A customer perception survey started six months after set up has been started on a rolling basis to assess customer satisfaction.

Child support agency	
National inquiry line	356,569 calls answered since June 1994 when a centralised service was established. This was previously administered from individual agency centres.

TRANSPORT

Sleeper and Motorail Services

16. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had on the future of sleeper and Motorail services from Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [15705]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend and I have had a number of discussions about Anglo-Scottish sleeper and Motorail services with, among others, the franchising director, the chairman of British Railways Board, and the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee.

Ship Crew Safety

17. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to modify the legislation and regulations governing the occupational safety of the crews of both United Kingdom registered merchant vessels and fishing vessels. [15706]

Mr. Norris: Domestic legislation governing the occupational safety of crews in United Kingdom merchant ships and fishing vessels is under continuous review through the Marine Safety Agency. In addition, further modification to United Kingdom legislation is being undertaken through the implementation of EU directives in consultation with the shipping and fishing industries.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

18. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will authorise the fast rail link between *(a)* the channel tunnel and London, *(b)* the channel tunnel and Scotland, *(c)* the channel tunnel and the north of England and *(d)* the channel tunnel and Wales. [15707]

Mr. Watts: The construction of the channel tunnel rail link between the channel tunnel and the London terminus at St. Pancras will be authorised by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill when it becomes law.

The rail link will provide access for direct international trains to Wales, Scotland and the north of England and also convenient connections to domestic services to those countries and regions.

Rail Franchises

19. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising to discuss the award of franchises; and if he will make a statement. [15709]

Dr. Mawhinney: I last met the franchising director to discuss franchising on Wednesday 22 March. I welcome his recent announcement that 37 organisations have applied to pre-qualify for the first group of eight franchises. This is a vote of confidence in railway privatisation.

Public Transport, London

21. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans next to meet the chairman of London Transport to discuss improvements to public transport in London. [15711]

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the chairman of London Transport regularly to discuss a variety of issues including improvements to LT's services.

M1

22. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to complete the lighting of the M1. [15712]

Mr. Watts: Current plans are to light a total of 155 miles of the M1.

Railway Station Platforms (Accessibility)

23. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations in Britain have platforms which need raising to allow access to trains for wheelchair users or others with mobility difficulties. [15713]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available. Facilities for disabled passengers vary from station to station. Government proposals to improve accessibility at stations for disabled passengers are included in the Disability Discrimination Bill, published in January.

Rail Services

25. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of rail services in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales. [15715]

Dr. Mawhinney: Railway privatisation can be expected to bring benefits to Wales as well as other parts of the United Kingdom by delivering better services more closely attuned to customers' needs.

Seat Belts

26. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the cost to local education authorities of introducing seat belts and other safety requirements pertaining to the transportation of children, as stipulated in the draft regulations announced on 15 March. [15716]

Mr. Norris: Costs to individual local authorities have been taken into account in the local government settlement for 1995–96.

Motorway Facilities

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve the standards and frequency of rest and recreation facilities on motorways; and if he will make a statement. [15694]

Mr. Watts: In 1992 we deregulated the provision of new motorway service areas with the aim of providing more services more quickly.

British Rail

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many parts of British Rail have been sold since November 1993. [15714]

Mr. Watts: Since November 1993, sales of the following British Rail businesses have been completed:

Meldon Quarry
Special Trains Unit.

In addition, since November 1993 British Rail has offered for sale some 20 other businesses, the sales of which are now under way.

Traffic, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the flow of traffic in London; and if he will make a statement. [15965]

Mr. Norris: Traffic conditions in London are a frequent theme of discussions and correspondence with a wide range of interested organisations and individuals on topics such as bus priorities, parking management, facilities for cyclists, pedestrian safety, road improvements and investment in public transport. We are currently funding initiatives, including red routes, the London bus priority network, the London cycle network and other improvements on trunk and local roads, to ease the flow of traffic, reduce pollution and improve safety.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17450]

Mr. Norris: My Department set up a public inquiry unit in 1990. It has six staff and annual running costs of £105,000. It has received 487,000 calls since it was set up. Robin Verney and Associates have completed a review of the service and improvements will be made when we move to Great Minster house later this year. My Department does not monitor central inquiry services provided by its executive agencies.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of all representations which he has received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise since autumn 1994 in respect of rail connections to the highlands. [17750]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 27 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *511*. I have no record of receiving any other representations on rail connections to the highlands from Highlands and Islands Enterprise since autumn 1994.

Second Severn Crossing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the comparative cost-benefit analysis of the Portskewett-Severn beach and the Cardiff-Weston alignment for the second Severn crossing. [17995]

Mr. Watts: The alignment of the second Severn crossing was fully debated during the passage of the Severn Bridges Bill.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *454*, if he will place in the Library the text of the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of the Secretary of State for Transport *v.* Colonel Owen and Barbara Owen. [18077]

Mr. Watts: Yes.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *153*, what was the *(a)* total expenditure and *(b)* percentage of gross domestic product for (i) buses without coaches, (ii) trains and (iii) all public transport, inclusive of grants, subsidies and receipts for 1993 and 1994. [17856]

Mr. Norris: Total expenditure on various transport modes, including grants and subsidies, in financial year 1993–94, is as follows:

Mode of transport	*Total expenditure £ billion*	*Per cent. of GDP*
Buses and coaches[1]	3.7	0.7
Railways[2]	4.7	0.8
All public transport[3]	9.9	1.8
All GDP[4]	554.8	100

[1] For licensing purposes bus operators are not distinguished from coach operators.

[2] Excludes Tyne and Wear Metro.

[3] Buses, coaches, railways and taxis. The estimate for taxis excludes business use.

[4] Gross domestic product for public transport contains expenditure on personal travel rather than business travel.

A41

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the date on which he received the inspector's report on the proposed A41 Aston Clinton by-pass, following the public inquiry held in November 1994; and when he expects to publish that report and his decision. [18073]

Mr. Watts: The inspector's report was received on 6 January and is being considered by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport. They will announce their decision and publish the report as soon as possible.

Driving Standards Agency

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who was consulted before the decision to transfer the Driving Standards Agency (Scotland) to Newcastle was taken; what was the level of dissent from the final position; what further measures were undertaken to ensure this decision was accountable; and if the transfer decision is open to further negotiation. [16941]

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for the Driving Standards Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Sir David Steel, dated 3 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your questions about the transfer of the Driving Standards Agency (Scotland) to Newcastle.

As I explained in my letter to you of 17 February, in reply to correspondence you had received from the Chief Executive of the Ettrick and Lauderdale District Council, the office in Edinburgh currently undertakes the booking of driving tests and the management and deployment of driving examiners at test centres in Scotland. However, following the recent market test of the booking of driving tests, and the success of an in-house team, the booking work for the north of England and for Scotland will be based in a single office at Newcastle. In reaching this conclusion the in house team has to address whether this solution was cost effective and whether service delivery could be maintained.

The conclusions reached by the bidders about how they might organise the work are their own and it is implicit that the evaluation of their tendered price is dependant upon acceptance of their proposals. My letter of 17 February also explained that there is no requirement under Market Testing guidance to undertake a consultation exercise during the evaluation of the bids.

In determining where to site the work of management and deployment of driving examiners, the Agency took account of the space and staff remaining available at each of its offices to establish the most cost effective location for the work. Siting the work at the DSA office in Newcastle, where both staff and space was available meant the Agency could relinquish its expensive accommodation in Edinburgh and achieve a saving in property rentals.

I should add that whilst the location of the booking office will change the Agency will retain it's driving test centres across Scotland.

Since the result of the Market Test was announced some 27 items of correspondence have been received opposing the decision. These have, in the main, been from MPs on behalf of constituents who are concerned that the level of service will deteriorate with the move. In these cases I have replied advising that the Agency does not expect the closure to have an adverse effect on the published service standards.

The potential impact on service standards was one of the factors considered by the Agency during the evaluation process. The in house team will be subject to a Service Level Agreement which will specify the service targets they must meet and procedures will be in place to monitor their performance against these standards.

The Agency, together with the In House team are planning the timetable and the tasks required to implement the result of the market test. Until such time as the implementation is put in train DSA will continue to consider views.

Signalling Equipment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the signalling equipment in the rail network is now *(a)* up to 10 years old, *(b)* 10 to 20 years old, *(c)* 20 to 30 years old, *(d)* 30 to 40 years old, *(e)* 40 to 50 years old and *(f)* over 50 years old. [17360]

Mr. Watts: Information is not kept by Railtrack in this form and it would involve a disproportionate cost to provide this information.

A6 Bypass

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date it is expected that work will commence on the A6 bypass of Rushden and Higham Ferrers. [17185]

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Sir Peter Fry, dated 3 April 1995:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, on what date it is expected that work will commence on the A6 Bypass of Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

Subject to the satisfactory completion of the remaining statutory procedures the start of construction will be dependent upon the availability of funding.

Registry of Seamen and Shipping

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on what grounds staff working within the Registry of Seamen and Shipping were asked to volunteer to do maintenance and cleaning work in addition to their normal duties as civil servants; [16968]

(2) on what grounds managers within the Registry of Seamen and Shipping were allowed to issue an official communication to staff requesting them to bring into work building materials with which to repair their new accommodation; [16967]

(3) for what reasons he allowed the Registry of Seamen and Shipping, following a market test, to move into a building which had no window frames and was in a very poor state of repair. [16966]

Mr. Norris: The request was in fact a notice issued by local management in a misguided attempt to economise on funding provided for alternative accommodation and to promote team spirit through self help. The notice was subsequently withdrawn. The new accommodation for the registry was initially lit by artificial lighting which fully met health and safety standards. However, additional windows were put into the buildings some three months after staff moved in.

Airmiss

Mr. Redmond: To as the Secretary of State for Transport if he will send the hon. Member for Don Valley a copy of the Civil Aviation Authority's report into the airmiss on 22 March involving four Royal Air Force Tornados and an Air UK Fokker 50, 20 miles east of Ottringham, Humberside when it is published; and if he will make a statement. [17132]

Mr. Norris: An airmiss has been reported which involved four American F-15s and an Air UK Fokker 50, 20 miles north-east of Ottringham on 21 March. The joint airmiss working group will review this incident at its June meeting. I have asked the Civil Aviation Authority to send a copy of the working group's report on this incident to the hon. Member for Don Valley as soon as it is available.

DEFENCE

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17618]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to "Public Bodies 1994" issued by the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science, pages 7 and 8 of which detail MOD non-departmental public bodies and "Next Steps Agencies in Government-Review 1994" (Cmd 2750), which details MOD's agencies.

The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Procurement and Industrial Policy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the joint inquiry into aspects of United Kingdom defence procurement and industrial policy will be completed; and if this inquiry will look specifically at areas which have been affected by a decline in defence spending; what was the cost of previous inquiries into this area in the last five years; and what is the projected cost of the current inquiry. [17376]

Mr. Freeman: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the recent joint inquiry set up by the House of Commons Defence Select Committee and the Trade and Industry Select Committee into aspects of defence procurement and industrial policy. The timing, scope and costs of such inquiries are matters for the Committees.

Research and Development

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of investment in defence research and development in each of the last five years; and what proposals he has to increase defence research and development expenditure. [17378]

Mr. Freeman: The trend in expenditure on defence research and development is set out in the annual publications "Defence Statistics" and "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology". As the 1993 White Paper "Realising Our Potential" noted, direct expenditure on defence research and development is planned to fall somewhat over the remainder of the decade, though this will be offset to a considerable extent by efficiencies arising out of "Front Line First", including through the formation of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency on 1 April.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total amount spent by his Department on research and development in each of the last 10 years at today's prices. [17542]

Mr. Freeman: The figures, based on table 1.4 of "Defence Statistics 1994" are as follows:

Year	*Total amount (£ million)*
1983–84	3,293.5
1984–85	3,452.3
1985–86	3,521.6
1986–87	3,297.8
1987–88	3,088.1
1988–89	2,850.1
1989–90	2,888.7
1990–91	2,715.0
1991–92	2,795.0
1992–93[1]	2,142.4
1993–94[2]	2,317.4

All figures £ million, VAT inclusive and are at 1994–95 prices.

[1] Figures from 1992–93 onward subject to revision to accord with Frascati definitions. Futher details in Table 1.4 of "Defence Statistics 1994".

[2] Provisional estimate only.

Dr David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards defence research and development collaboration with European partners; and if the percentage of this collaboration will increase over the next 10 years. [17544]

Mr. Freeman: My Department participates in a large number of international research collaboration programmes both bilateral and multilateral. The primary objective of IRC is to obtain value for money by sharing the costs of necessary research programmes and facilities with allied nations. The overall strategy is to maintain a balance between our involvement with Europe and the US. While every endeavour will be made to increase the amount of defence research undertaken on a collaborative basis, there is no policy intention to change this balance. We have had considerable experience of collaborative development and in the future expect that the opportunities for collaboration of reducing cost will be further exploited.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of defence research and development was spent on collaboration with *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* European Union members in each of the last 10 years. [17543]

Mr. Freeman: The primary objective of international research collaboration is to obtain value for money by sharing the costs of necessary research programmes and facilities with allied nations. The information requested concerning the proportion of defence research that was carried out collaboratively over the last 10 years, is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, for financial year 1991–92 and 1992–93 the figures for collaborative research joint programmes are 5.5 per cent. and 6 per cent. respectively, and I anticipate this ratio continuing to rise in the future.

No equivalent figures are held relating to development expenditure.

Military Assistance

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on military assistance for non-NATO countries in each of the last five years. [17341]

Mr. Soames: The primary responsibility for funding military assistance lies with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. On occasion, however, and where the aims serve defence interests, the MOD agrees to waive the costs of training provided to foreign Governments.

The total of these waivers for non-NATO countries in the last five years for which records are available is as follows:

Year	£
1993–94	4,900,000
1992–93	5,600,000
1991–92	4,000,000
1990–91	4,200,000
1989–90	5,800,000

In addition, some £70,000 was spent in 1993–94 in support of the United Kingdom's programme of bilateral defence contact with central and eastern Europe.

Details of the assistance provided are confidential between Governments.

Attack Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the RAF's front-line attack aircraft possess a precision capability; and how many will have this capability by 2000. [17538]

Mr. Freeman: All front-line attack aircraft—Tornado GR1, Harrier, Jaguar—are capable of delivering precision weapons. We have in hand a series of programmes which will substantially improve our precision capabilities by the turn of the century. We plan to extend the provision of TIALD—thermal imaging airborne laser designator—pods and a contract has been placed for the supply of a new low level laser-guided bomb. We have issued an invitation to tender for conventially-armed stand-off-missile. This weapon is planned to come into service by the end of the century.

Armoured Vehicle Programme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to consider joining the Franco-German armoured vehicle programme; and if he will make a statement. [17540]

Mr. Freeman: We have made clear our interest in participating in a collaborative programme for armoured utility vehicles as one of the projects in a new European armaments structure. We are pursuing this with France and Germany.

Property Management

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his Department's policy for the continuation of construction and property management work on sites proposed for closure under the defence costs study. [17989]

Mr. Soames: My Department's policy is that property management work, which may involve construction, on sites proposed for closure will continue as appropriate depending on the needs of the occupants up to the date of closure. Any subsequent maintenance work to make buildings wind and weather proof as appropriate and to satisfy health and safety obligations will be carried out up to the date of disposal.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the financial cost of *(a)* construction and property management work done and *(b)* any other expenditure on each site since 1994 owned by his Department and proposed for closure under the defence costs study; [17990]

(2) what is the financial value of contracts for construction work on bases proposed for closure under the defence costs study which have been awarded in each of the months since July 1993. [17991]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Procurement

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average time taken by his Department to assess procurement tenders and decide on contract awards in each of the last five years. [17551]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what undertakings he is seeking from United States manufacturers for offset work in the United Kingdom, in relation to orders placed with United States manufacturers of defence equipment. [18074]

Mr. Freeman: It is our policy to seek offset work in the United Kingdom whenever we make a major procurement—over £10 million—from the United States. Letters of agreement, underpinning the offset commitment, are concluded between ourselves and the contractor and form the basis for monitoring progress in meeting the offset obligations.

Arms Sales

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the receiving of commission payments by *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* members of the government, *(c)* hon. Members and *(d)* relatives of hon. Members involved in the sale of arms to overseas governments; and if he will make a statement. [17548]

Mr. Freeman: MOD civil servants are bound by departmental instructions which forbid them to make use of their official position to further their private interests or lay themselves open to suspicion of dishonesty. Furthermore the acceptance of a gift or other consideration by a Crown servant as an inducement or reward can be a criminal offence.

Members of the Government are bound by "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" which states that no Minister or member of a Minister's family should accept gifts which might place him or her under an obligation.

I cannot answer for other Members of the House or their relatives.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17455]

Mr. Soames: My Department's public inquiry office was established many years ago. Calls are routed to it either via the main switchboard or as a result of inclusion of the contact numbers in various commercial publications. Since 1988, the earliest date for which records are available, an annual average of 41,000 calls have been handled. Although the cost breakdown requested would not be available without disproportionate cost, the staff costs involved are less than £50,000 a year. No recent assessment of the effectiveness of this office has been undertaken.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment at present at RAF Finningley is required by the RAF; and what equipment is surplus to the RAF's future needs. [17863]

Mr. Soames: Following the announcement of the closure of RAF Finningley, the RAF's requirement for the equipment based at the station will be reviewed. At present, no equipment has been declared surplus to the RAF's requirements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the uses to which RAF Finningley can be put by *(a)* the Ministry of Defence and *(b)* other Government Departments. [17862]

Mr. Soames: The decision to close RAF Finningley has only recently been taken, and no detailed assessment of alternative uses has yet been made. If no alternative defence use is identified, however, the site will be disposed of in accordance with our normal procedures. These would include detailed discussions with the local planning authority and an assessment of alternative uses. Other Government Departments will have an opportunity to express any interest they may have.

Government Contracts

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the report by the review board for Government contracts on its 1995 annual review of the profit formula for non-competitive Government contracts. [17547]

Mr. Freeman: The Government have accepted the overall target rate of return on capital employed as recommended by the review board in its report. The new rate will be 18.5 per cent. compared with the current rate of 18.2 per cent., both on the basis of historic costs. It will be effective from 1 April this year. There are other points arising from this report and from the board's report on the seventh general review in 1993 which officials will be discussing with the CBI as part of our continuing drive to secure maximum value for money from our defence contracts. The report has been printed and copies have been placed in the Library.

Mine Clearance

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the British companies, which manufacture or have manufactured mines, which have received finance from Her Majesty's Government or the United Nations to clear minefields, together with the number of occasions on which each company has received such funding. [16822]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

No British mine-manufacturing companies have received finance for mine clearance from us. The UN on one occasion financed Royal Ordnance, a company which has in the past manufactured mines, to undertake a mine clearance project. I understand that Royal Ordnance has not manufactured mines for the past 10 years.

WALES

Drug Misuse

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what initiatives he will take to assist professionals engaged in combating drug abuse in Wales; [16835]

(2) what progress is being made concerning drug abuse in Wales. [16833]

Mr. Richards: We are preparing a Welsh drug and alcohol strategy which I hope to issue for consultation in April.

Class Sizes

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average class size *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools in Dyfed in each year from 1979 to the present. [16864]

Mr. Richards: Data for 1979 in respect of primary schools are not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. For secondary schools, comparable information is not available before September 1987.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 17 March, *Official Report*, column 766, if he will give a breakdown according to age of the children in Dyfed who received statements of special educational needs for the first time, for each year since 1987. [16863]

Mr. Richards: The number of children by age, for whom statements of special educational needs were made for the first time, for each calendar year since 1991, are shown in the following table. Data were not collected by age before 1991.

	Under 5	*5–16*	*Over 16*	*Total*
1991	21	251	0	272
1992	21	374	2	397
1993	32	403	2	437

Dental Problems

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh school children had serious dental problems in each year since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [16778]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not available centrally. However, two publications concerning, in part, child dental health in Wales have recently been issued by Office of Population Censuses and Surveys:

(i) The National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Children aged one-and -half to four-and-half years. ISBN 0-11-691612-5

(ii) Children's Dental Health in the United Kingdom 1993. ISBN 0-11-691607-9

In addition, directors of dental public health produce annual reports which include epidemiological data relating to the dental health of children in their districts. These are available from district health authorities.

Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the mileage of dual carriageway at present; and what it was in 1985. [17403]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Figures for the length of dual carriageway for years prior to 1987 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Excluding motorways, the length of dual carriageway in Wales was 153 miles at 1 April 1987 and/or 183 miles at 1 April 1994.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the National Museum of Wales. [17396]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The National Museum of Wales employed 507 people at 31 March 1995.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning north and south Wales rail links with the channel tunnel. [17404]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the channel tunnel services between the continent and locations beyond London on 14 October. European Passenger Services Ltd. may refine these services to suit demand.

Suicides (Farming Community)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths there were through suicide among the farming community for each year since 1988 up to the most recent figure available; and if he will make a statement. [17483]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table.

Suicides in the farming community of Wales

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Deaths registered as suicide[1]:						
Farmers[2]	9	7	10	8	4	9
Farm workers	2	—	1	2	—	2
Total	11	7	11	10	4	11

[1] The figures relate to deaths registered in the years shown. Deaths are recorded according to the date of registration and not the date of occurrence.

[2] Farmers, horticulturists and farm managers.

Source:

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Motorways

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is *(a)* the current mileage of motorway in Wales and *(b)* what was the mileage in 1985. [17402]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The current length of motorway in Wales is 78 miles and was 74 miles at 1 April 1985.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in securing more apprenticeships in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17406]

Mr. Redwood: The departmental report—Cmnd 2815—sets out in paragraphs 4.13 and 4.14 my intentions for expanding modern apprenticeships in Wales.

Negotiations are currently taking place with the training and enterprise councils to agree the numbers and occupational areas in which modern and accelerated modern apprenticeships will be offered.

Temporary NHS Staff

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of NHS staff in Wales who are employed on a temporary basis, breaking the data down into *(a)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(b)* medical and dental staff, *(c)* ambulance staff, *(d)* ancillary staff and *(e)* managers and administrative staff, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17765]

Mr. Richards: Complete and reliable information is not available centrally.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the cost of establishing, operating and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17447]

Mr. Redwood: A freephone citizens charter inquiry line has been provided since July 1991. Total costs incurred to date are in the region of £1,500. Over 400 calls have been received providing a valuable service to members of the public needing information on charter-related matters in Wales.

Departmental Report

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake an exercise reconciling in detail appendix 1 from his departmental report, Cm 2815, with table 127 from "Welsh Economic Trends No 15 1994"; if he will place a copy of the exercise in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [17546]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Table 127 of "Welsh Economic Trends No 15 1994", is taken from figure 1.02 of the Welsh Office departmental report 1994—Cm 2515. The difference between these tables and the equivalent data in the 1995 departmental report are mainly due to revisions to the outturn and estimated outturn for the years up to

1994–95 together with the changes to expenditure plans for 1995–96 and onwards following the 1994 public expenditure survey. Appendix 1 of Cm 2815 is itself a disaggregation of the programme totals of figure 1.01 of the same document.

Temporary Teachers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the past five years, the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* auxiliary school staff in Wales who are employed on a temporary basis, also expressing the data as a percentage of the total numbers in each respective staff group. [17762]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many responses he has received to date to his consultative exercise on the licensing of houses in multiple occupation; how many of these were broadly in favour of a national comprehensive licensing system; what action he now proposes to take in the light of these representation; and what is his timetable for action. [17469]

Mr. Redwood: I received 47 replies to my letter of 8 December 1994. Eighty per cent. were broadly in favour of licensing, but there was no clear consensus on the way in which a licensing system should operate. The replies raised a wide range of issues for further consideration and I will make an announcement about the outcome in due course.

Health and Social Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales; when he expects to make an appointment to the vacant post of the head of research and development for the NHS in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [18075]

Mr. Redwood: The new office of research and development for health and social services in Wales is to be established in the University of Wales, college of medicine. I hope that the college will be in a position to advertise the post of director shortly.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what area of Wales is designated as being environmentally sensitive; how much Government funding is spent annually on environmentally sensitive areas; how this formula is calculated; and if he will make a statement. [17792]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In Wales 519,800 hectares, representing around a quarter of the total land area has been designated under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme. Gross expenditure in the financial year 1993–94 was £1.542 million. Financial provision is planned to rise to £6.941 million in 1996–97. Payments are calculated on the basis of income forgone and in recognition of farmers following prescribed management practices.

The environmentally sensitive areas scheme in Wales positively promotes the co-existence of conservation and efficient farming by offering payments to farmers willing to maintain or introduce environmentally beneficial farming methods.

New GPs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Official Report*, column *385*, what was the level of new entrants to general practice in Wales in each of the past three years. [18001]

Mr. Redwood: Over the past three years there have been approximately 90 new entrants to general practice per year in Wales.

Laundry

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the South Glamorgan health authority and the Welsh health common services authority concerning the closure of the Lansdowne road central laundry, Cardiff; [18004]

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh health common services authority and the South Glamorgan health authority concerning laundry charges for communal laundering of terry towel nappies; and what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of the increased use of disposable nappies on sewerage treatment expenditure.

Mr. Redwood: None. This is an operational matter for the authorities concerned.

Green Belt Guidance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish his decision with reference to planning guidance on green belts in Wales. [18029]

Mr. Redwood: I will shortly issue for consultation draft planning policy guidance for Wales; this guidance will cover green belts.

Menai Straits

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to announce his decision on whether the Menai straits should become a designated marine nature reserve. [18031]

Mr. Redwood: The matter is presently under consideration. I will announce my decision at the earliest opportunity.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS trusts in Wales hold their monthly board meetings in public. [18002]

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Derelict Land

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what target for the reclamation of derelict land in Wales he has set for 1995–96; and what progress has been made on reclaiming 600 hectares of derelict land in 1994–95 in accordance with "This Common Inheritance: The UK Report 1995". [18030]

Mr. Redwood: A target of 850 hectares has been set for 1995–96. Outturn figures are not yet available for 1994–95 but the WDA is forecasting the completion of 550 hectares.

Ely Community Survey

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the joint survey of all residents in Ely, Cardiff by the authority and the South Glamorgan county council; what estimate he has made of the cost of the health authority's share of the survey; and what assessment he has made of the health related purposes of such a survey. [17997]

Mr. Redwood: None.

A48

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on grant-aiding the private access road to the University Hospital of Wales from the A48 Eastern avenue; when he anticipates making a decision; and if he will make a statement. [17998]

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales met councillors and officials from Cardiff city council recently. A decision about funding for the road will be made once a satisfactory business case has been submitted by UHW Healthcare NHS trust and once private finance opportunities have been explored.

Examination Achievements

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students gained A-level qualification, or GNV2 equivalent, last year, and what percentage that was of the year group normally sitting for this qualification. [17993]

Mr. Richards: The following table shows the number of students gaining at least one pass at A-level in the 1994 summer examinations and the numbers gaining a vocational qualification at level 2 or above. Individual students may have gained both A-levels and vocational qualifications and so may be counted twice.

Age of student [1] [2]	*Number gaining at least one pass at A-level* [3]	*Number gaining vocational qualification at level 2 or above*	*Percentage of age group in education* [4] *gaining A-level pass or vocational equivalent*
Col 1	*Col 2*	*Col 3*	*Col 4*
16	255	1,767	8.2
17	9,006	2,097	51.9
18	1,729	2,066	41.3

Notes:

[1] As at 31 August 1993.

[2] Students of other ages gained qualifications also but are not shown in this table.

[3] Includes all students, irrespective of the type of institution, if any, at which they studied.

[4] Full and part time students in school or Further Education colleges.

Source:

Welsh Examinations Database.

There is no information about the number of students taking examinations by year group. The figures in columns 2 and 3 have been expressed in column 4 as a percentage of the number of students of that age in education at school or further education colleges only, in 1993–94.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the compulsory purchase order for the proposed Bute avenue and any such advertised in the compulsory purchase order not within the designated area of the corporation; and if he will make a statement. [17749]

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 31 March 1995]:* I have had no consultation with the chairman of CBDC over this issue.

The corporation is empowered to acquire land by agreement, or with my authorisation, compulsorily, outside its designated area under the terms of section 142 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 April 1995

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomats (Background)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many current ambassadors, deputy ambassadors and high commissioners have graduated from *(a)* Oxford and *(b)* Cambridge universities; and how many from universities in (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales, (iii) Northern Ireland and (iv) other universities. [17968]

Mr. Goodlad: The current numbers of ambassadors, deputy ambassadors and high commissioners who have graduated from the listed universities are as follows:

(a) Oxford—63

(b) Cambridge—55

Universities in:

(i) Scotland—12

(ii) Wales—3

(iii) Northern Ireland—1

(iv) Others—84 (of whom 63 attended universities in England).

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many current overseas ambassadors, deputy ambassadors and high commissioners have originated from *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland or *(d)* Northern Ireland. [17967]

Mr. Goodlad: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Turkey

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Turkey. [17785]

Mr. David Davis: Our concerns about human rights form a major part of our dialogue with Turkey, both bilaterally and with our EU partners. The Turkish Government have undertaken to make a number of reforms in this area. We look forward to seeing these put into effect.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the total number of people who applied for visas at each British post in Turkey; and how many *(a)* were accepted, *(b)* were rejected and *(c)* resulted in re-application in each of the last 24 months. [18307]

Mr. Baldry: In 1993 and 1994—the last two years for which full figures are available—the total number of applications made at entry clearance issuing posts in Turkey was:

	1993	*1994*
Ankara	4,840	3,371
Istanbul	47,390	39,257
Total	52,230	42,628

Of these a total of 47,971 were issued and 2,744 were refused in 1993; and 38,130 were issued and 2,881 were refused in 1994.

Records are not kept of the numbers of applicants who reapply.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held at the United Nations involving Britain concerning the Turkish military action in Iraq. [18308]

Mr. David Davis: None.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what direct representations have been made to the Government of Turkey concerning the invasion of the Kurdish areas of Iraq; and what response he received. [18418]

Mr. David Davis: We have made a number of representations to the Government of Turkey, both bilaterally and together with our EU partners. The Turkish Government have stated that the operation will be of limited duration and their forces withdrawn immediately Turkish objectives have been met.

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific actions still need to be taken before UNAVEM III peacekeeping forces are ready to respond to a call to be deployed in Angola. [17826]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Preparations for the deployment of UNAVEM III infantry units to Angola are proceeding in accordance with the UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council of 27 March.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said to the House on 29 March, *Official Report*, column *1017*, the deployment which is envisaged can be completed and fulfilled only if the parties on the ground fulfil their commitments.

Anglo-American Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the purpose of the further proposed amendment of the 1958 Anglo-American mutual defence agreement. [17477]

Mr. David Davis: There are no further proposed amendments to the 1958 UK/US mutual defence agreement. The hon. Member may be referring to Cm 2785. This is the same amendment which was laid before the House in October last year in the country series of Command Papers. Its appearance in the treaty series simply records that it has entered into force for the United Kingdom.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has in regard to *(a)* a fissile material production freeze, *(b)* the strengthening of safeguards on plutonium and enriched uranium, *(c)* the reduction of the number of United Kingdom nuclear warheads deployed and in store, *(d)* the banning of the stockpiling of surplus plutonium and *(e)* the completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty for presentation on behalf of Her Majesty's Government at the review and extensions conference for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to be held in New York from 17 April.

Mr. David Davis: The UK supported the UN General Assembly resolution in 1993 calling for the negotiation of a convention to ban the production of fissile material for explosive purposes. Since then we have supported efforts in the conference on disarmament in Geneva to set up an ad hoc committee to begin negotiation of such a convention. On 23 March the CD agreed the mandate for the ad hoc committee. We hope negotiations will begin soon.

The UK has full confidence in the effectiveness of the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards system and its ability to detect diversion of nuclear material from the purposes declared for it. Events in Iraq in recent years have already lead to a number of initiatives, which the UK has supported, to strengthen IAEA systems in regard to undeclared nuclear activities.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18325]

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Taiwan

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what equipment the Government consider is covered by his Department's arms export policy to Taiwan.

Mr. Goodlad: We restrict the export to Taiwan on licensable defence-related equipment. Applications for export licences to supply defence-related equipment and technology are considered case by case. In scrutinising applications, we shall in future give greater weight to the implications for regional security tension, rather than focusing narrowly on Taiwan's military capability as hitherto. This is the result of a regular review of our policy. It does not amount to any substantial relaxation.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Competing for Quality Initiative

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to review the "Competing for Quality" initiative. [18695]

Mr. David Hunt: The Government confirmed in the Command Paper "Taking Forward Continuity and Change" in January their intention to conduct such a review. From the results reported by Departments I believe that the initiative has already achieved significant efficiency improvements in public services while maintaining or improving quality. In seeking further improvements in value for money, it is important that we learn from the full range of experience gained in the last three years, and from both public and private sector participants in the programme. I have today commissioned the review to ensure that, in developing their future strategies for improving value for money, Departments and agencies can apply these techniques where they are most effective.

The review will be run along the lines of a multi-departmental scrutiny by a team drawn from a range of Government Departments and the private sector; it will commence on 24 April 1995, and will report in the autumn. The review will focus on the main change associated with the initiative: the development of a large programme of market testing and contracting out in central Government. The team will scrutinise the results of the programme, analysing the experience gained in the application and management of the process to identify how far the objectives of the initiative have been achieved and how the techniques of market testing and contracting out should best be developed for the future.

The full terms of reference are as follows:

Terms of Reference:

To evaluate the Government's competing for quality initiative—market testing and contracting out—as a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services.

In particular, to identify to what extent, through the introduction of competition, Government have been able to:

—Obtain better value for taxpayers' money in the provision of public services;

—Deliver quality of service within Government and to users of public services;

—Provide users of public services with a wider variety of facilities and services;

—Enable managers to concentrate on their core activities;

—Generate innovative ways of providing public services;

—Enable staff to operate at higher levels of performance and with a greater sense of job satisfaction;

—Encourage the identification of new opportunities for private sector involvement in the delivery of public services.

The study will also examine the methods by which the initiative has been managed and implemented within Government and communicated to other interested parties in order to identify those factors which have affected the extent to which the various objectives of the initiative have been achieved.

Publicity

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)*, and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spend on recruitment advertising, for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17614]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each years of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17613]

Mr. Horam: Details of expenditure on advertising and other promotional materials and activities by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the Office of Public Service and Science and its agencies for each year since 1992–93 are as follows:

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
	Cabinet Office	*COI*	*Cabinet Office*	*COI*	*Cabinet Office*	*COI*
(a) Television advertising	—	—	—	—	—	—
(b) Radio advertising	—	—	—	—	—	—
(c) Newspaper advertising	£653,700	£11,000	£1,039,700	£13,000	£404,600	£16,000
(d) Other advertising and promotional materials and activities	£681,400	—	£8,41,472	—	£960,700	—
(e) Total *(a)* to *(d)*	£1,335,200	£11,000	£1,881,100	£13,000	£1,365,300	£16,000
(f) Proportion of *(e)* spent on recruitment advertising as a percentage of *(e)*	7.4 per cent.	100 per cent.	5.4 per cent.	100 per cent.	7.2 per cent.	100 per cent.

Notes:

1. Cabinet Office expenditure is mostly on the citizens charter and the Civil Service College's promotional material.
2. Figures for 1994–95 are provisional.
3. Estimates for 1995–96 are not available.

Corresponding figures for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which assembles its figures by calender year, are:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995 (estimated)*
(a) Television advertising	—	—	—	—
(b) Radio advertising	—	£11,000	£8,000	—
(c) Newspaper advertising (d) Other advertising and promotional materials and activities	£1,457,000	£2,567,000	£2,773,000	£3,733,000
(e) Total (a) to (d)	£1,457,000	£2,578,000	£2,781,000	£3,733,000
(f) Proportion of (e) spent on recruitment advertising as a percentage of (e)	7.4 per cent.	9.1 per cent.	5.7 per cent.	3.2 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the estimated costs for the current year and the next two years of the royal publicity services. [18311]

Mr. Horam: Estimated expenditure by COI in 1994–95 on publicity services for the royal household is £350,000. The estimates for 1995–96 contain provision for £471,000 and the survey for 1996–97 is the same.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to increase the resources allocated to the promotion and advertising of the code of practice on access to Government information over its second year of operations from 4 April. [17903]

Mr. Horam: Expenditure on publicity for the code of practice on access to Government information is kept under constant review to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and cost-effectively. The Office of Public Service and Science is preparing a second edition of its explanatory leaflet, including an ethnic minority language version. Opportunities for further publicity will be taken as they arise.

Information Super-highway

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17741]

Mr. Horam: There is no single electronic mail address to cover the whole of the Cabinet Office and the Office of Public Service and Science.

My Internet electronic mail address is jhoram@ccta.gov.uk, and that of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is dhunt@ccta.gov.uk.

The Office of the Public Service and Science is leading and co-ordinating the use of information superhighways by Government Departments, stimulating public discussion of super-highway issues; and, at an international level, leading a G7 pilot project on "Government On-Line". The CCTA Government information service on the Internet provides information from all parts of the Department, including the Office of Science and Technology, the citizens charter unit, the machinery of Government division, the Civil Service College and HMSO.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18332]

Mr. Horam: This question concerns operational matters and I have asked the chief executives of agencies in my Departments to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. Paul Flynn, Dated 3 April 1995:

No Jobs have been taken over by contractors since April 1993 at Chessington Computer Centre (an Agency of the OPSS).

69 jobs have disappeared through efficiency and productivity initiatives since April 1993.

Letter from S. H. F. Hickey To Mr. Paul Flynn, Dated 31 March 1995:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply for the Civil Service College to your Question about job losses in agencies (Ref PQ18332)

Over the past two years no jobs at the Civil Service College have been newly taken over by contactors. There has been a small increase in the overall numbers of staff employed at the College due to a substantial increase in the amount of training and related consultancy that we have undertaken.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

You asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he would list the number of jobs that have been lost by his agencies in the last two years that have been (a) taken over by contractors and (b) disappeared.

As this is an operational matter I have been asked to reply for the Central Office of Information.

In March 1995 there were 493 permanent staff in COI against 583 in April 1993.

No jobs have been lost as a direct result of market testing. The reduction in staff numbers is the result of:

a) improvements in efficiency

b) increase in the employment of contract staff to cope with the volatility of volume and nature of work.

a) cessation or reduction of function

COI does not maintain a staff complement and cannot realistically identify individual jobs lost or gained. Managers are constantly reviewing job functions and reassigning work in the light of current needs. The services provided to government by COI are constantly changing and there is no way of telling whether jobs now are the same as those that existed two years ago.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from Paul Freeman to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question tabled on 30 March (N 95) regarding jobs lost in Agencies insofar as HMSO is concerned.

HMSO trades in a dynamic environment and jobs are frequently changing as a result of business imperatives. Some jobs disappear as a consequence of greater IT sophistication, changing technology, reorganisation or because contracts are lost; others are formed to meet new requirements, to progress new initiatives, to enhance service or to service new contracts.

In the provision of printing services, in particular, some work is performed in-house and some is contracted out. This balance is constantly changing, and it is not possible to identify particular jobs.

The overall position is that on 31 December 1992, the total staff employed by HMSO (including temporary staff) was 3,174 and by 31 December 1994, this had fallen to 2,906.

Letter from Dr. Elizabeth McCloy to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 31 March 1995:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to reply to your question about jobs lost in the past two years.

In that period, the Civil Service Occupational Health and Safety Agency has lost three jobs. They were at the Atomic Weapons Establishment where my Agency was unsuccessful in retaining the provision of occupational health services. Only one of the posts was filled on a permanent basis and that incumbent has secured employment with the successful contractor.

Letter from Craig Muir to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question of 30 March asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster:

> "if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have (a) been taken over by contractors, and (b) disappeared.

I have been asked to write in reply in relation to Recruitment and Assessment Services.

In the last two years, 6 posts have been taken over by contractors due to the market testing exercise of Reprographics won by HMSO.

We have also reduced staffing by 45 posts as a result of rationalisation of the Agency's working methods. A detailed breakdown of staffing numbers is attached.

Grades	*31 March 1993*	*31 March 1994*	*31 March 1995*
G6	4	3	3
G7	15.5	16.5	15
SEN PSYCH	3	2	1
SEO	7	3	3
HEO	9	7	7
EO	31.5	25	25
AO	46	38	36
AA	24	20	16.5
TYPIST	9	5	5
SIO	1	0.5	0.5
IO	1	0	0
SM2	1	0	0
SG1	8	3	3
SG2	14.5	11.5	8.5
Totals (exclusive causals)	174.5	134.5	123.5

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Salaries

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Lord President of the Council what has been the change in real terms in hon. Members' salaries since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The real terms increase in the parliamentary salary between mid-June 1979 and end December 1994 was 28 per cent.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he communicated to the Government Actuary's Department Her Majesty's Government's decision in respect of the SSRB's current recommendations; and if he will state the precise terms in which the decisions were conveyed to the Government Actuary's Department and his method of communicating them.

Mr. Newton: My officials wrote to the Government Actuary's Department on 23 March 1995 asking it to complete its report on the basis that the Government would propose acceptance of the recommendation for an increased death-in-service benefit. A copy of the letter was sent to the fund secretary at the same time. I have also sent the right hon. Member a copy.

PRIME MINISTER

Members of Parliament (Contacts)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what central record is kept of requests by groups of hon. Members seeking to discuss issues with Ministers. [18153]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. So far as my right hon. Friend is aware, none.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government policy on official contact between civil servants and spokespersons in Her Majesty's official Opposition. [18138]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. Opposition spokesmen may request briefings on departmental organisation or policies, or in advance of overseas travel. Ministers would expect to be asked to give their authority for such meetings, and to be present if sensitive matters of public policy are to be discussed. Civil servants may also on occasions have dealings with Opposition spokesmen on Ministers' behalf; again, Ministers would expect to authorise such meetings.

The conventions relating to confidential pre-election contacts between senior civil servants and opposition parties are described in a memorandum submitted to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee by the Cabinet Office in November 1994, printed at page 29, vol II of the Committee's Fifth Report, Session 1993–94. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has agreed that such contacts should be permitted from early 1996 in advance of the next general election.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that all of the documents *(a)* seized by Ministry of Defence police from the offices of British Manufacture and Research Company in April 1990 and *(b)* held by the receivers of Astra Holdings and British Manufacture and Research Company are made available to the Scott inquiry. [18243]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. All the documents taken from the offices of the British Manufacture and Research Company were sent to the receivers for Astra on 22 June 1993. The question of the provision of any of these documents to the Scott inquiry is one for the receiver and the inquiry.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to introduce legislation to ratify the chemical weapons convention. [18162]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. The legislation needed to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the chemical weapons convention will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time and the Government's other legislative priorities permit.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, column *823*, which other countries he had in mind as pursuing the same model of rail privatisation as Her Majesty's Government; and what were the points of similarities he was referring to in each case. [18163]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. A number of other European countries including Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Holland have restructured or are restructuring their railways to split responsibility for track and infrastructure from the operation of services. Both Germany and Holland plan to privatise some or all of their railways on this basis.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to an hon. or right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question. [18434]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. The information as requested is not available.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18435]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18436]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. None.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18431]

(2) To ask the Prime Minister how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18432]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*. [18433]

The Lord President: I have been asked to reply. The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94 separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, (d) other promotions materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17631]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply. For this purpose, the Prime Minister's Department is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

EDUCATION

Asbestos Survey

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what access headteachers in London have to the results of the 1983 Inner London education authority survey of asbestos in London schools. [17865]

Mr. Robin Squire: The responsibilities of the former Inner London education authority for health and safety in schools are now exercised by individual inner London boroughs. It is not known whether ILEA made available the results of any asbestos survey to those authorities. The Department does not hold a copy of such a survey.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in her Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18322]

Mr. Boswell: The Department has only one next steps agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency, which was established on 1 April 1992. Changes in staffing numbers in the agency over the last two years have been as a result of internal efficiency improvements.

Teachers Pensions Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teachers' employers are provided with services by the Teachers Pensions Agency. [16969]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Teachers Pensions Agency currently provides services to 3,368 teachers' employers.

Smoking

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what facilities are provided and arrangements made for the comfort and well-being of staff who *(a)* smoke and *(b)* do not wish to be affected by smoking at (i) the work station and (ii) rest, recreation and refreshment facilities at Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith street, London. [18281]

Mr. Forth: From 1 April 1995 smoking in sanctuary buildings is permitted only in three workrooms designated for this purpose.

Pupil Ratios

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current ratio of *(a)* pupils to teachers and *(b)* pupils to other education staff in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) other major competitor countries. [18067]

Mr. Robin Squire: The readily available information on pupil-teacher ratios is shown in the table. Information on non-teaching staff is not held centrally.

Pupil teacher ratios, public and private, 1991

	Primary[1]	*Secondary*[1]
Australia	18.5	18.6
Austria	10.8	10.0
Belgium	[2]9.7	7.7
Denmark	11.1	10.7
Finland	18.8	n/a
France	22.8	14.0
Germany	20.5	16.5
Ireland	26.9	17.2
Japan	20.3	17.3
Netherlands	19.7	15.9
Norway	10.8	8.9
Portugal	13.4	11.6
Spain	22.0	16.9
Sweden	10.4	10.7
Turkey	30.4	23.9
United Kingdom[3]	21.5	14.7
United States	15.2	15.5

Notes:

[1] Primary and secondary levels are defined in terms of the international classification for education. Thus the secondary level figures for the UK include pupils and teachers in the further education sector as well as secondary schools.

[2] Excludes preprimary pupils, but includes their teachers.

[3] The figures used to calculate the PTR's for both primary and secondary include maintained special education pupils, but exclude special education teachers.

Source:

[4] Education at a Glance, OECD, December 1993.

Administration Costs

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average cost per local education authority school in Essex for administration in the last year for which statistics are available. [17840]

Mr. Robin Squire: For the financial year 1995–96, the Essex local education authority's planned expenditure on management and administration amounts to £9,925 per school. This figure relates to all county, voluntary and special schools maintained by the authority and is derived from the budget statement published by the authority under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Funding Agency for Schools

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the total budget for the Funding Agency for Schools in each of the years it has been in operation. [17986]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Funding Agency for Schools was established on 1 April 1994. Total grant paid to the agency in the financial year 1994–95 for its running costs—revenue and capital expenditure—was £10.927 million.

Union Jack

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the number and percentage of schools that fly the Union Jack on a daily basis since her predecessor called for more flag flying. [17855]

Mr. Forth: None.

Teachers

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many teachers were employed in Essex maintained schools in each of the last five years. [17838]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in Essex for January 1990 to January 1994.

Teachers (FTE) in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in Essex

January	*FTE*
1990	12,407
1991	12,274
1992	12,251
1993	12,033
1994[1]	11,616

[1] Excludes sixth form colleges.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the salary bill for Essex teachers in maintained schools in each of the last five years; and how much is planned for the current year. [17839]

Mr. Robin Squire: Expenditure by Essex local education authority on salaries for teachers in its maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools from 1989–90 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available, is shown in the table. Information on planned expenditure on teachers' salaries is not collected centrally.

Essex LEA—Expenditure on teaching staff (in real terms)

Year outturn	*£ million*
1989–90	286.3
1990–91	276.8
1991–92	291.5
1992–93	294.0
1993–94[1]	215.6

[1] Provisional.

Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what representations she has had from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the levels of university pay; [17789]

(2) what representations she has had from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on difficulties of recruitment to particular departments and specialisms; [17790]

(3) what discussion she has had with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the number of university staff on short-term contracts. [17788]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend meets the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals regularly and receives representations from them on a number of subjects. The issue of difficulties in recruitment to particular departments and specialisms was raised when she met the CVCP in September. The issue of university pay was raised when she spoke to the CVCP conference in December 1994. She has had no discussions with the CVCP about short-term contracts.

A-level Courses

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to reduce the number of students dropping out of GCE A-level courses before taking their examinations. [17791]

Mr. Boswell: The Government attach great importance to this matter across 16 to 19-year-old education. If drop-out rates are to be reduced it is essential that young people choose the school or college, and the type of course which best suits their needs. Recent Government initiatives should increasingly help students and schools and colleges to achieve this. We have taken steps to: establish a range of high-quality vocational options to stand alongside the more established GCE A-levels and increase the choice of qualifications available to 16 to 19-year-olds; publish more and better information about the performance of schools and colleges at this phase of education; increase and improve careers education and guidance in schools and colleges; and provide colleges with a direct financial incentive to improve initial guidance and retention.

Essex Local Education Authority

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time equivalent employees were employed by the Essex local education authority other than those engaged within schools, in each of the last four years. [17837]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on staff employed by local authorities is collected by the local government management board on behalf of the joint staffing watch group. The table shows the total number of staff employed within the education service of Essex local authority for the years 1991 to 1994. The survey does not distinguish between staff employed in schools and those employed elsewhere. As full-time equivalents of the part-time staff are not available, separate head-counts for both full-time and part-time staff are provided.

	Teacher and lecturers		*Education—Other*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
March				
1991	12,539	6,692	3,157	15,058
1992	12,270	6,887	3,064	14,861

	Teacher and lecturers		*Education—Other*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1993	11,303	5,607	3,287	13,887
1994	7,119	4,901	2,134	11,627

Notes:

1. The table covers all manual and non-manual staff in the LEA maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector, the special and further education sectors and central services. Staff employed by self-governing (GM) schools are not included. The 1994 figures exclude colleges which transferred to the new FE sector in April 1993.

2. "Education—other" includes education support, clerical, school meals and premises related staff employed in schools and colleges, together with central services and administration within the education service.

Students

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what regard she has and what consideration she gives in calculating student loans to students who are expected to continue their academic studies for considerable periods of the summer vacations and who are therefore excluded from being able to seek work; and what distinction she draws between students who are undertaking long courses financed by Erasmus or by commercial undertakings and students on medical courses who do not have access to this funding. [17515]

Mr. Boswell: An additional week's allowance, which forms part of the means-tested mandatory award, is available to students who attend their courses for longer than 30 weeks and three days in the academic year. The full-year loan rate is intended to provide support throughout the year. Any payments made to a student under the terms of the Erasmus scheme are disregarded as income for the purposes of calculating his award. Where a student receives payments by way of a bursary or remuneration from a commercial undertaking his award for the year may be reduced or extinguished, depending upon the value of the payments.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students in higher education are on courses which extend beyond the average academic year; how many would be regarded as being on long courses within the meaning of the rules for student loans; and what percentage of these are medical students. [17513]

Mr. Boswell: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for what reason she declined to meet the chairman of the British Medical Association's medical student representatives. [17516]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Ms Jones) on Tuesday, 28 March 1995 *Official Report*, column *577*.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what extra weeks allowances have been made available to medical students during 1994–95; by what percentage they were uprated; if the calculation on which the uprating has been based refers to the entire academic year or to the calendar year; what is the level of student finance available for a medical student during extra weeks and during ordinary weeks; why the distinction is made in the amount of money available over those two periods; what is the amount of money available in real terms for extra weeks and ordinary weeks; and if she will make a statement. [17514]

Mr. Boswell: Under the current Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations, the additional allowances in respect of extra attendance are: £74.05 per week for students living away from the parental home and studying in London; £55.45 per week for students living away from home and studying elsewhere; and £38.90 per week for students living at home. These rates were uprated by 4 per cent. over the 1993–94 allowances and the regulations apply to the year which began on 1 September 1994. The normal main rates of grant and additional allowances, as well as full and final year rates of student loans, are available to eligible medical students in the same way as for all other students. The extra weeks allowance is available for students who are required to attend their courses over and above a period of 30 weeks and three days in any academic year—25 weeks and three days in the case of courses at Oxford and Cambridge universities. There is no arithmetical connection between the extra weeks allowances and the corresponding main grant rates when those rates are expressed in weekly terms.

Science Courses (Women)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of women taking introductory courses in technology-based subjects; [16842]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to encourage women to pursue science courses in universities. [16386]

Mr. Boswell: The Government are committed to encouraging more young people, both men and women, to study science and technology. The proportion of women among undergraduate students in these subjects has risen from 31 per cent. in 1990–91 to 34 per cent. in 1992–93.

By requiring all pupils to study mathematics, science and technology to age 16, the national curriculum should lead to greater interest in these subjects among all pupils, including girls.

The new science general national vocational qualifications have widened the options available to all pupils, including girls. The latest available evidence suggests that 35 per cent. of GNVQ science students are female.

My right hon. Friend is not at present convinced that further special measures are needed specifically to increase recruitment of women and girls into the study of science and technology. She will, however, keep the matter under review.

Student Loans

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of students took up student loans in the last year for which figures are available. [15951]

Mr. Boswell: Some 430,000 students took out loans in the academic year 1993–94, which represents 47 per cent. of all eligible students.

EMPLOYMENT

Temporary Work

12. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the work force is engaged in temporary work; and what was the figure 10 years ago. [16024]

Mr. Paice: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey for Great Britain show that in spring 1994, 6.4 per cent. of employees were in temporary jobs, compared with 5.9 per cent. in spring 1984.

Minimum Wage

13. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to conduct research into the effects of a national minimum wage. [16025]

Mr. Oppenheim: I have looked at unemployment among young people in France at 23 per cent.—a country which has a national minimum wage—and concluded that no further research is necessary.

Low Pay

14. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many individuals in the United Kingdom earn less than £3 per hour. [16026]

Mr. Oppenheim: The results of the latest New Earnings Survey show that some 42 full-time and part-time employees per 1,000 in Great Britain earn less than £3 per hour.

Training and Enterprise Councils

15. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the future funding of TECs. [16029]

Mr. Paice: A variety of representations.

25. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for further developing the role of the TECs in developing employment opportunities. [16019]

Mr. Paice: I press training and enterprise councils continually to achieve further improvements in effectiveness and value for money in all the activities that they are contracted to undertake.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest available information on the number of male and female directors of training and enterprise councils; how many are from *(a)* ethnic minority backgrounds and *(b)* the private sector; what information he has about which industrial sectors they come from; and how many of the non-private sector directors are from (i) local authorities, (ii) local education authorities, (iii) other educational organisations, (iv) trade unions, (v) voluntary organisations, (vi) ethnic minority organisations, (vii) employers' associations and (viii) others. [17868]

Mr. Paice: There are currently 814 male directors and 118 female directors on training and enterprise council boards. There are 79 chairmen and two chairwomen.

I am unable to provide the ethnic minority and industrial sector information as it is not held centrally. However, there are 704 directors from the private sector.

The total number of non-private sector directors is 309, and is broken down in the following table:

	Number
(i) Local authorities	110
(ii) Local education authorities	29
(iii) Other education authorities	32
(iv) Trade unions	58
(v) Voluntary organisations	37
(vi) Ethnic minority organisations	2
(vii) Employers associations	11
(viii) Others	30

Employment Agencies

16. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his objectives in the abolition of employment agency licensing. [16030]

Miss Widdecombe: Our objective in abolishing employment agency licensing was to reduce the financial and administrative burdens on the industry, while maintaining controls for the protection of agency users.

Objective 1 Funding

17. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what role his Department is playing in the application of objective 1 funding on Merseyside to the provision of employment and training. [16031]

Miss Widdecombe: The Department plays an important role in the partnership which is taking forward the objective 1 programme. This includes helping to ensure that European social fund funding is targeted at those people who are most in need of support.

Small Businesses (Disabled Employees)

18. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to encourage and assist small businesses of under 20 employees to employ disabled people. [16032]

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he has taken to assist disabled people to obtain work in small companies; and if he will make a statement. [17405]

Mr. Paice: The Government encourage the recruitment of disabled people through its policy of educating and persuading employers to recognise the abilities of disabled people and by the promotion of good employment practice.

This is backed by practical help to both individuals and employers, including small employers, through a wide range of services and programmes. For example, the Employment Service's placing, assessment and counselling teams—PACTs—offer a comprehensive and local specialised service to help disabled people obtain and retain employment. PACTs also give advice to employers about recruitment and general practices relating to the employment of disabled people and promote the code of practice on the employment of disabled people. The disability symbol is now used by more than 1,200 employers of all sizes, all of whom have given a commitment to interview any disabled job applicant who meets the minimum criteria for a particular job vacancy.

In addition the access to work programme provides disabled people with a wide range of flexible help to overcome barriers to employment including employment in small companies. It can pay for a communicator at a job interview or at work for people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment; a reader or assistant for people who are blind or have a visual impairment; adaptions to vehicles or help towards taxi fares or other transport costs and equipment to suit particular needs and alterations to premises or working conditions.

Young People

19. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are taking to improve the employment prospects of young people. [16013]

23. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are taking to improve the employment prospects of young people. [16017]

Mr. Paice: Modern apprenticeships will add to the comprehensive range of education and training initiatives enabling young people to develop skills relevant to jobs now and in the future.

Unemployment

20. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are classified as long-term unemployed; and if he will make a statement. [16014]

Mr. Oppenheim: In January 1995 on the unadjusted basis there were 927,078 people claimant unemployed for over a year—more than 150,000 fewer than a year ago.

22. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest unemployment figure;and if he will make a statement. [16016]

Mr. Oppenheim: United Kingdom seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment was 2,364,700 in February 1995—a fall of 607,000 since December 1992.

26. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those major countries in the European Union where the level of unemployment is on a clear downward trend. [16020]

Mr. Oppenheim: The United Kingdom is the only major European Union country where the unemployment rate on the internationally recognised International Labour Organisation basis has been falling steadily.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the long-term unemployed are benefiting from the Government's policies. [16407]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's economic and labour market policies are increasing employment opportunities for everyone. The number of jobs increased by 262,000 last year. Long-term unemployed people are sharing the benefits. Last year the number unemployed for a year or more fell by 150,000. We are determined to continue this trend. This year we are making jobfinder's grant, workwise and 1-2-1 available nationally. We are extending community action and work trials. We are asking training and enterprise councils to focus training for work more sharply on getting people into jobs. And we are piloting jobmatch and extending workstart pilots. With the help of these measures we are confident that the Employment Service will meet its new target for 1995–96 of placing 560,000 people unemployed for six months or more into work.

Working Parents

21. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's policy on promotion of working practices which enable men to take an active role in the care of their children. [16015]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government encourage the introduction of flexible working arrangements including, for example, part-time work and job sharing which can help men and women combine employment with their family responsibilities.

24. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of lone mothers with dependent children are in work; and what were the equivalent figures in 1979. [16018]

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey for autumn 1994 show that the numbers of lone mothers in work has risen from 350,000 to 460,000. This represents 39 per cent. of lone mothers of working age with dependent children. The equivalent figure for spring 1981—the earliest date available—is 45 per cent.

28. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his response to the Employment Select Committee's first report of Session 1994–95 on mothers in employment. [16022]

Miss Widdecombe: We are considering the report and will respond to the Committee in due course.

Take-home Pay

27. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the levels of real take-home pay currently and in 1979. [16021]

Mr. Oppenheim: Real take-home pay has increased significantly at all levels since 1979. For example, the average take-home pay of a single man at the bottom 10 per cent. of the earnings distribution has risen by 23 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Older Workers

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Government's "Getting On" campaign has resulted in increased recruitment and retention of older workers; what figures are available; what plans he has to commission an independent evaluation of the campaign; and if he will make a statement. [17270]

Miss Widdecombe: When I launched the campaign on behalf of older workers a primary aim was to raise the profile of older workers and get the message across to employers that discrimination on the grounds of age was wasteful, shortsighted and bad business practice. I am pleased to say that we have placed older workers very clearly and firmly on the agenda.

I am glad to say that employers' attitudes are changing and that there is a greater recognition of the value of older workers. The "Getting On" booklet has attracted considerable interest since its launch in March 1993. Some 16,500 copies were issued to employers at that time, and over 8,000 have been requested subsequently by employers, researchers and individuals. Nearly 2,000 copies have been dispatched this year alone. In January this year I launched a booklet aimed at individuals, "Too Old . . . who says?". In addition to the copies being made available through Employment Service jobcentres, some 25,000 booklets have been requested.

The campaign which is still on-going will be evaluated in due course. However, it is too early to do so or to obtain reliable detailed measurements of its specific effects on recruitment and retention.

Employment Service Client Advisers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what way the pay or additional remuneration of employment service client advisers is related to the number or proportion of new or existing claimants whose applications for benefits payments are turned down or scaled back; and what direct link there is between client adviser remuneration and success in placing clients in work. [17818]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 4 April 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the extent to which the pay of Employment Service (ES) Client Advisers is related to the number of claimants whose applications for benefits payments are turned down or scaled back; and whether there is any direct link between Client Adviser remuneration and their success in placing clients in work.

Client Advisers are paid within a salary range which reflects the responsibilities of their posts. In keeping with Government policy, that pay and reward systems in the public sector should demonstrate a regular and direct link between a person's contribution to standards of service delivered and their reward, annual performance pay awards are determined by an individual's performance against a range of annual objectives.

The ES's overall operational objectives are set out in an Annual Performance Agreement and are translated into standards of performance which are set for Local Offices. An individual Client Adviser's objectives cover a range of expected outcomes, including placing clients into work and ensuring the accurate and timely payment of benefits, to those clients who meet the conditions for receiving them. Their objectives therefore contribute to the delivery of the Local Office standards of service, and hence the overall objectives of the ES, as set out in the Annual Performance Agreement.

Performance against those objectives is reviewed regularly and assessed annually, resulting in an Overall Performance Mark which reflects the degree to which an individual has exceeded, met, or not met the full range of objectives that they have been set.

In arriving at an overall assessment of a Client Advisers performance, no single objective is given greater prominence. It is therefore not possible to draw a direct correlation between the pay a Client Adviser receives and the number of clients whose applications for benefits payments are turned down, or scaled back, nor their success in placing clients in work.

I hope this is helpful.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the letter from Mr. Rimington CB of the Health and Safety Executive to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 25 January, what visits have taken place since 1989 to the Forth rail bridge by the Health and Safety Executive; what inspection the Health and Safety Executive has undertaken of the improvements suggested in 1989; if he will place in the Library the Health and Safety Executive's assessment of the use of water-based paint on the Forth rail bridge; and what evidence the Health and Safety Executive can adduce for its belief that Railtrack is fully committed to the well-being and preservation of the bridge and its attitude to safety. [16201]

Mr. Oppenheim: Health and Safety Executive inspectors made a number of visits to the bridge between 1989 and February 1995 to assess the precautions taken to protect workers and to confirm the safety of trains crossing the bridge. The Director General of HSE, Mr. Rimington CB, has asked Her Majesty's railway inspectorate to undertake a full assessment of the structural integrity of the bridge from the point of view of its continued safety and integrity. To the extent that the use of water-based paint has a bearing on these issues,it will be taken into account. HSE's assessment will be published.

Part-time Students

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many part-time students have lost their benefits through the present review by the employment offices. [16432]

Miss Widdecombe: There is no such review. Guidance was recently issued relating to the existing rules on part-time study. I have asked the chief executive of the Employment Service Agency to write to the hon. Member on this point; a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18323]

Miss Widdecombe: The number of posts lost to the Employment Service between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1995 as a result of work being taken over by external contractors totalled 574.

The total reduction in posts within ES over the same period was 3,280. The main factor in this drop has been falling levels of unemployment, to which much ES staffing is related.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Household

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Natrional Heritage what was the cost at 1994 prices of *(a)* furnishing and *(b)* decoration, fixtures and fittings for the accommodation of each of the directors of the royal household.

Mr. Sproat: The following sums have been spent since 1 April 1991 on furnishing and equipment including furniture, curtains and soft furnishings, light fittings, refrigerators, washing machines, crockery and so on.

	Cash £	1994–95 prices £
The Master of the Household	30,000	31,287
The Comptroller, Lord Chamberlain's Office	112,000	121,754
The Director of Finance and Property Services	115,000	115,000
The Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps	53,000	55,839

Following a decision in 1994, furnishings and equipment are no longer paid for from public funds.

Decoration, fixtures and fittings are included in building contracts which, depending on the particular circumstances, may also cover modernisation of accommodation, rewiring, renewal of plumbing, fire alarms and so on. The total of these costs is:

	Cash £	1994–95 prices £
The Master of the Household	68,000	69,913
The Comptroller, Lord Chamberlain's Office	195,000	211,477
The Director of Finance and Property Services	142,000	143,380
The Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps	68,000	71,211

VAT and fees are included.

Costs incurred before the creation of the Royal Household Property Services Department in April 1991 would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Bosman *v.* UEFA et al

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect the outcome of the Bosman *v.* UEFA et al case in the European Court of Justice will have on association football in Great Britain. [17955]

Mr. Sproat: It is not possible to predict the verdict of the European Court of Justice in this case, and it would therefore be premature to seek to predict the consequences for association football. The Government are monitoring the position closely.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what submissions his Department presented to the European Court of Justice on behalf of Her Majesty's Government with regard to the case of Bosman *v.* UEFA et al. [17954]

Mr. Sproat: None.

Ground Safety

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to help fund sports ground safety work outside the Football League. [18912]

Mr. Sproat: I am pleased to announce that the trustees of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts have agreed to dedicate up to £8 million a year for sports ground safety work in rugby league, rugby union, cricket and, where appropriate, non-league football, from 6 May 1995. This follows the Government's decision to reduce pool betting duty by 5 per cent., which the pools companies have agreed should enable them to maintain their contributions to the foundation.

Grant aid will be distributed using the well established and effective machinery of the Football Trust. Further details will be announced shortly following consultation between the trust and the relevant sports governing bodies.

For smaller sports clubs with limited finances this is a significant development. For the first time, clubs outside football will be able to apply to the Football Trust for a contribution to carry out important safety work.

I have had many representations from other sports, and from football clubs in the Vauxhall Conference, who feel that they should be able to seek greater financial support from the trust for stadium redevelopment work.

Public Libraries

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he has made in creating, in consultation with local authorities, a new council to advise him on his English public library responsibilities. [18813]

Mr. Dorrell: I announced on 7 October 1994 that I would be creating a new council to advise me on my specific responsibilities for libraries in England and principally on public library issues. I also said that I would be inviting local authorities to nominate members of the council.

Consultation with the local authority associations is now complete and I am establishing the new council, to be known as the Advisory Council on Libraries. It will take over with immediate effect the statutory responsibilities set out in the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The Library and Information Services Council (England) will be dissolved.

The council will initially have 11 members, including its chairman. All members will be appointed until 31 December 1996, when arrangements will be reviewed. The first chairman will be Mr. Michael Messenger, county librarian of Hereford and Worcester. The other members will be:

Councillor Lyn Brown—London Borough of Newham
Councillor Chris Heinitz—Wakefield Metropolitan Council
Councillor Elgar Jenkins—Bath District Council
Councillor Fanny Lines—Surrey County Council
Councillor Sally Marshall—Norfolk County Council
Mr. Keith Crawshaw—Director of Leisure Services and Head of Libraries, Sheffield City Council
Mr. John Hicks—County Librarian, Royal County of Berkshire
Dr. Bob McKee—Director of Libraries and Arts, Solihull Metropolitan Borough
Mr. Brian Burch—Librarian, University of Leicester
Dr. Gillian Cross—Author

The council's terms of reference will be as follows:

> "To advise the Secretary of State upon such matters connected with the provision or use of library facilities as set out in Section 2 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

In particular, to advise the Secretary of State on:

> matters which fall directly within his responsibilities for English public libraries or which, through the direct responsibility of other Departments of Government, have a significant impact on those responsibilities;
>
> the allocation of direct grants and awards to English public libraries, or to other bodies or persons, so as to benefit and improve the provision of library facilities to members of the public;

> issues affecting providers and users of English public library services, and how consultation and co-operation between users and providers may be effectively promoted;
>
> which aspects of public library services in England require detailed investigation and how such aspects might be examined and debated."

The council will be separate from the new Library and Information Commission, which will act as a forum for Government policy on library and information provision in general.

I am confident that, as a body in effect jointly owned by the Government and by those directly responsible for providing public library services, the advisory council will carry significant authority, and I wish it well in its work.

Burial Places (Monarchs)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the burial places of each reigning monarch since and including Alfred the Great, where they are known. [17489]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 31 March 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Alfred: Winchester Cathedral[1]
Edward the Elder: Winchester Cathedral
Athelstan: Malmesbury Abbey
Edmund I: Glastonbury Abbey
Eadred: Winchester Cathedral
Eadwig: Winchester Cathedral
Edgar: Glastonbury Abbey
Edward the Martyr: Shaftesbury Abbey[2]
Aethelred II: Old St. Paul's Cathedral[3]
Sweyn: Roeskild Cathedral, Denmark
Edmund Ironside: Glastonbury Abbey
Cnut: Winchester Cathedral
Harold Harefoot: probably St. Clement Danes[4]
Harthacnut: Winchester Cathedral
Edward the Confessor: Westminster Abbey
Harold Godwinson: Waltham Abbey[5]
William the Conqueror: St. Stephen's Abbey, Caen France[6]
William II: Winchester Cathedral
Henry I: Reading Abbey
Stephen: Faversham Abbey
Henry II: Fontevrault Abbey, France
Richard I: Fontevrault Abbey, France
John: Worcester Cathedral
Henry III: Westminster Abbey
Edward I: Westminster Abbey
Edward II: Gloucester Cathedral
Edward III: Westminster Abbey
Richard II: Westminister Abbey
Henry IV: Canterbury Cathedral
Henry V: Westminster Abbey
Henry VI: St. George's Chapel, Windsor[7]
Edward IV: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
Edward V: Westminster Abbey[8]
Richard III: Greyfriars Chapel, Leicester
Henry VII: Westminster Abbey
Henry VIII: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
Edward VI: Westminster Abbey
Mary I: Westminster Abbey
Elizabeth I: Westminster Abbey
James I: Westminster Abbey
Charles I: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
Charles II: Westminster Abbey
James II: St. Germain en Laye, France
William III and Mary II: Westminster Abbey
Anne: Westminster Abbey
George I: Herrenhausen,Germany[9]
George II: Westminster Abbey
George III: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
George IV: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
William IV: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
Victoria: Windsor (Frogmore)
Edward VII: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
George V: St. George's Chapel, Windsor
Edward VIII: Windsor (Frogmore)
George VI: St. George's Chapel, Windsor

[1] Originally New Minster, Winchester; then Hyde Abbey, Winchester; now thought to be in mortuary chest in the Cathedral.

[2] Originally Wareham Abbey.

[3] Tomb lost in Great Fire 1666.

[4] Originally probably at Old Abbey Church of St. Peter's, Westminster.

[5] Originally on the seashore at Hastings.

[6] Tomb subsequently disturbed.

[7] Originally buried at Chertsey Abbey.

[8] Thought to have been buried originally at the Tower of London. Bones thought to be his were subsequently reburied at Westminster.

[9] Originally buried in the Leineschlosskirche, Hanover, Germany.

Lottery Scratch Cards

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with Camelot concerning the impact of the introduction of the national lottery scratch cards on the raising of money for medical research by charities using scratch cards; what review he will undertake of the overall funding of medical research by charitable fund-raising methods analogous to those used by national lottery; and if he will make a statement. [17999]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Camelot Group plc has always intended that the instant win game cards would be introduced as part of its overall promotion of the lottery. This development was included in its application for the licence to run the lottery and is expected to be an important factor in its achievement of the forecasts of revenue for the national lottery development fund which underlay its bid.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from the Tenovus medical charity concerning compensation for lost medical research income from the operation of the national lottery; if he will make a statement on the compensation procedure available to charities adversely affected by the lottery; and what consultations he has with Oflot and Camelot concerning the impact of the lottery on charitable fund raising. [18037]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* During the passage of the National Lottery etc. Bill, the Government undertook to monitor charitable income once the national lottery was established.

Telephone Inquiry Lines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17449]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Department of National Heritage does not operate any special public information inquiry services of this kind.

Privacy

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of National Heritage (1) what plans he has to introduce legislation to create new criminal offences to prohibit certain types of physical intrusion, harassment and covert surveillance; and if he will make a statement; [17256]

(2) what plans he has to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations for criminal offences and for new civil wrongs which were contained in the report of the committee of privacy and related matters chaired by Sir David Calcutt QC; and if he will make a statement. [17258]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Government's conclusions on proposals for new measures to prevent intrusion and protect privacy will be set out in our response to the National Heritage Select Committee's report on privacy and media intrusion. This will be published when we have completed our consideration of the issues relating to the proposed criminal and civil remedies.

Press Complaints

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to introduce a statutory regime for dealing with complaints against the press; and if he will make a statement. [17257]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Government believe that self-regulation is preferable to a statutory regime for dealing with complaints against the press. We look to the newspaper industry and the Press Complaints Commission to vindicate their claim that self-regulation can be made effective. We will announce our conclusions in our response to the report of the National Heritage Select Committee on privacy and media intrusion.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the legislation governing eligibility for concessionary television licences. [17408]

Mr. Dorrell: As indicated in the White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", published last July, the concessionary television licence scheme was thoroughly reviewed in 1988, prior to the introduction of the current regulations. The Government have no plans for any further review of the scheme.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17729]

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of National Heritage is currently setting up a Internet electronic mail pilot and the arrangements for handling electronic mail to Ministers and the Department are under consideration. Electronic mail addresses have not yet been created.

The Department is monitoring developments in the area of the information super-highway and is involved in the DTI multimedia forum, the G7 information society activity, and with developments in the areas of broadcasting and other media services. A number of the Department's sponsored bodies are working on information super-highway issues and applications, and the Department is liaising with them, other interested Departments such as CCTA, and our partners in the European Union.

National Lottery

Mr. Orme: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the forecast for Camelot's profit for the first year of operating the national lottery; and if he will make a statement. [17801]

Mr. Dorrell: This is an operational matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect of the national lottery on the demand for goods; what forecast he has made of the amount which will be spent by consumers on the lottery in 1995–96 and the percentage taken in taxation; and what forecast he has made of the number of prizes and the income to Camelot in 1995–96. [17186]

Mr. Dorrell: Lottery duty is set at 12 per cent. Forecasts of sales of national lottery tickets, the number of national lottery prizes and the income to Camelot in 1995–96 are all matters for the licensed operator, Camelot Group plc. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer published his economic forecast in the Red Book.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives of the agencies are best placed to provide answers. I have accordingly asked the chief executives of HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office to reply direct. The Court Service was not an agency in the period covered by the question but became an executive agency on 3 April 1995.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question relating to jobs taken over by contractors or that have disappeared in the last two years in the Public Record Office.

16.5 posts were taken over by contractors in the last two years.

No jobs have disappeared.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning jobs that have been lost to agencies in the last two years that have (a) been taken over by contractors, and (b) disappeared. I can provide the following information:-

Her Majesty's Land Registry, which is a separate government department of the Lord Chancellor, was established as an Executive Agency in July 1990. Because of the slump in property market activity since the boom in the 1980s the Registry has consistently reduced its staff in post since 1989.

(a) 15 posts have been taken over by contractors or been redeployed as a result of the Registry's market testing programme.

(b) the number of staff employed by the Land Registry has reduced by 893 through natural wastage and voluntary early retirement.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from S. Hutcheson to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary question, listed on 30 March 1995, regarding jobs which have either been taken over by contractors or disappeared.

The Public Trust Office had a total of 585 staff when it became an Executive Agency on 1 July 1994 and since then has not had any posts taken over by contractors.

As a result of the market testing of the Typing Services in the Public Trust Office in 1993, prior to our move to Agency status, there was a reduction of two typing manager and six typing posts.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Private Detective Agencies

Mr. Denham: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his reply of 23 March, if he will list all private detective agencies, other than Brays Detective Agency, which have been retained by the Treasury Solicitors since 1993, in each case giving the Government Department concerned, the purpose of the contract with the detective agency and the total expenditure to date. [17355]

The Attorney-General: The agencies listed in the table have been used by the Treasury Solicitor on a case by case basis in the financial year 1994–95. The main services provided by the agencies have been: service of process, investigation of the whereabouts and financial status of debtors and other defendants, collection of evidence, and inquiries relating to personal injury claims.

Agency	*Department*	*Amount £*
Wallington Reid	Ministry of Defence	9,950
Gordon-Moores Investigation	Home Office Charity Commission Department of the Environment Department of Trade and Industry Department of Transport HM Treasury Ministry of Defence Office of Fair Trading Lord Chancellor's Department	18,175
Harding Evans	Department of the Environment	3,260
Strange, Strange and Gardner	Department of Trade and Industry Department of Transport Home Office	3,755
Euro-Tec	Department of Trade and Industry Department of Transport Department for Education Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministry of Defence Department of the Environment	16,025
Austin and Scott	Department of Transport HM Treasury Ministry of Defence Department of the Environment Home Office Treasury Solicitor's Department	11,695
Nathan and Co.	Department of Transport	295
Finlays Bureau of Investigation	Department of Transport	170
Ian Snipe and Co.	Department of Transport	650
J. S. Knott Investigation Agency	Department of Transport	170
Laurenson Bureau of Investigation	Department of Transport Ministry of Defence Home Office	1,420
R. D. Denman	Department of Transport	305
Cox Greenwood Investigations	Ministry of Defence	165
European Research and Investigation	Ministry of Defence Prime Minister's Office	360
Hogan and Co. International	Ministry of Defence	175
Chimera International	Ministry of Defence	210
Rees, Jones, Huntbach and Phoenix	Ministry of Defence	815
Sharp Investigations	Ministry of Defence	3,900

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Agency	*Department*	[1]*Amount £*
Slater Heelis	Office of Fair Trading	295
Alan H. Jones Investigations	Home Office	620
Peter Hough Investigations	Home Office	745
Sharp Investigations	Home Office	875
David N. Bartlett	Home Office	175
Island Investigations	Lord Chancellor's Department	155

[1] Amounts paid to the agency in the financial year 1994–95.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the jobs that have been lost to the agency in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18329]

The Attorney-General: No posts have been lost to the Government Property Lawyers' Agency since it was established in April 1993, whether as a result of contracting out or otherwise.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bus Deregulation

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice he has received from the Director General of Fair Trading about the bus industry since deregulation, and what particular advice he has received with regard to Stagecoach plc and Mainline. [18319]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty under the Fair Trading Act 1973 to advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade whether or not to refer mergers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and, where mergers have been referred, on action to take after the MMC has reported. He also gives advice on action to take following MMC monopoly and Competition Act reports. He has advised accordingly on all MMC reports involving the bus industry since deregulation in October 1986. The DGFT's advice on the MMC report on the Stagecoach Holdings plc/Mainline Partnership Ltd merger was that Stagecoach should be required to divest its 20 per cent. shareholding in Mainline.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigations there have been involving Stagecoach plc since bus deregulation; and on how many occasions he has accepted, rejected or altered the recommendation from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; [18317]

(2) how many Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigations there have been into the bus industry since bus deregulation; and on how many occasions he accepted, rejected or altered the recommendation from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. [18318]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Since bus deregulation in October 1986, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has undertaken 15 enquiries relating to the bus industry, including one case where the MMC has yet to report and two where their reports have not yet been published. Eight of these inquiries involved Stagecoach. In all cases so far published Ministers accepted the MMC's findings but in three merger cases, all involving Stagecoach, Ministers asked the Director General of Fair Trading to negotiate undertakings which went further than the MMC recommended; these cases were Stagecoach/Portsmouth Citybus, Stagecoach/Formia and Stagecoach/Mainline Partnership Ltd.

Directors (Disqualification)

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons he would not proceed with a recommendation to disqualify an individual as a company director. [18315]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Secretary of State would not proceed with a recommendation to disqualify if he felt that there was insufficient evidence to show that the director's conduct made him unfit to be concerned in the management of a limited company. Proceedings would also not be instituted where it was felt that it would not be in the public interest to do so.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many recommendations he has received in the past year to disqualify individuals as company directors; how many he has approved; and how many he has rejected. [18314]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: During the year ended 28 February 1995 the Secretary of State has in respect of England and Wales dealt with the following:

	Official receiver	*Insolvency practitioner*
Reports received in the past year (companies)	273	3,238
Proceedings authorised (directors)	307	470
Reports not accepted (companies)	22	2,715

Although some of the reports received in any given year will be dealt with in that year there will be cases carried over to the next year. Accordingly the numbers of reports received, not accepted and proceedings authorised will not correlate.

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria he uses in deciding whether to disqualify an individual as a company director. [18316]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Secretary of State when deciding whether to institute disqualification proceedings has regard to the matters for determining unfitness of directors as detailed in schedule 1 to the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, and also those matters which the courts have held to constitute unfit conduct in numerous judgments since 1986.

Having established that there is evident of unfit conduct, proceedings will then be taken if it is in the public interest to do so.

Non-fossil Fuel Option

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the timetable for NFFO 4 bids. [18265]

Mr. Page: I am currently considering the arrangements for the fourth Renewables Order, in consultation with the renewables generation industry, and I hope to be able to make an initial announcement about the order later this year.

Scotch Whisky Exports (South Africa)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent negotiations his Department has held with brandy producers in South Africa in respect of the level of duties being levied against Scotch whisky. [16374]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The British High Commission in South Africa has supported the representations made to the Board on Tariffs and Trade by Scotch whisky producers and the Scotch Whisky Association pressing for rejection of the application made by domestic brandy producers for increase of duty on imported spirits. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade raised the issue with the Government of South Africa during his visit to South Africa last week. We have had no direct contact with South African brandy producers.

Electricity and Telephone Lines

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his Department does to encourage the siting underground of new and existing power lines for electricity and telephone infrastructure. [17894]

Mr. Page: The placing of electricity lines above ground or below ground is in the first instance a matter for the licence holder concerned. The Government expect such lines to be placed underground whenever it is safe and practicable to do so at a cost which would not lay too heavy a burden on the general body of consumers. This applies particularly to the low voltage network, about 80 per cent. of which is already underground. Electricity companies have a policy of placing cables underground where economically possible and schemes to underground existing overhead lines have been implemented in various villages. With certain limited exceptions, Telecommunications Act licences require that new telecommunications lines and apparatus, the siting considerations for which are broadly equivalent to those for low voltage electricity lines, shall be installed underground other than in the case of emergency work. Telecommunications operators are also required to consider carefully requests to resite existing lines underground.

Coal

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tonnage of coal was imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [17831]

Mr. Page: The total quantities of coal imported into the United Kingdom over the past 10 years were:

Year	*Thousand tonnes*
1985	12,732
1986	10,554
1987	9,781
1988	11,685
1989	12,137
1990	14,783
1991	19,611
1992	20,339
1993[1]	18,400
1994[1]	15,850

[1] Figures for 1993 and 1994 are provisional and include a small element of estimation. The latest figures on coal imports are available in the Department of Trade and Industry's bulletin "Energy Trends".

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tonnage of coal was *(a)* deep mined and *(b)* opencast mined in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [17832]

Mr. Page: The quantities of coal produced in the United Kingdom in the past 10 years were:

	Thousand tonnes		
Year	*Deepmined*	*Opencast*	[1]*Total*
1985	75,289	15,569	94,111
1986	90,366	14,275	108,099
1987	85,957	15,786	104,533
1988	83,762	17,899	104,066
1989	79,628	18,657	99,820
1990	72,899	18,134	92,762
1991	73,357	18,636	94,202
1992	65,800	18,187	84,493
1993	50,457	17,006	68,199
1994[2]	31,102	16,614	48,030

[1] Includes an estimate for slurry.

[2] Figures for 1994 are provisional. The latest figures on coal production are available in the Department of Trade and Industry's bulletin, "Energy Trends".

Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what is the latest information available about the condition of the Chernobyl nuclear plant including assessment of the risks of further accident; and what progress has been made to secure international action to finance a programme to make secure and then decommission the site. [17478]

Mr. Page: The safety of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is the responsibility of the relevant authorities in Ukraine. Only they would be able to provide full details on the current safety status of the plant. A European Union funded feasibility study has recently reported on options for dealing with the shelter over the remains of the destroyed unit 4. This was not an in-depth safety assessment of the Chernobyl plant as a whole.

In the light of international concerns over the safety situation at Chernobyl, G7 Heads of Government proposed an action plan at the 1994 Naples economic summit. The plan aims to secure early closure of the remaining units at Chernobyl within the framework of a sound long-term energy sector strategy for Ukraine. G7 leaders agreed to provide $200 million to support the action plan. The EU has promised 100 million ECU from its TACIS technical assistance programme and 400 million ECU from the Euratom loans facility. Work on the action plan is currently being taken forward by a G7/Ukraine task force which is due to report shortly.

EC Trading Restrictions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers enable him to initiate, approve, disapprove, or prevent executive action by the European Community or Union to restrict or vary trading arrangements with third countries *(a)* where no treaties or other agreement schemes exist and *(b)* when they do. [18036]

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Trading arrangements with third countries are governed by EC Council Regulations 3030/93, 517/94, 519/94 and 3285/94, made under article 113 of the EC treaty in implementation of the common commercial policy. They may be amended by qualified majority in the EC Council, but any amendment must be consistent with the EC's bilateral and multilateral obligations to third countries, including GATT. They all provide for the taking of measures to safeguard EC interests against import surges in specific circumstances. Any member state may initiate the procedures for such measures; the procedures vary, but in all cases the measures may be either approved or disapproved by qualified majority in the EC Council. The position is essentially the same in respect of third countries with which the EC has preferential trading agreements.

TREASURY

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17030]

Mr. Nelson: The analysis sought of all legislation introduced by the Departments responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1965 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member. References are frequently made in legislation to officers of state and general references are occasionally made to persons who are Members of one or other of the Houses of Parliament.

Overtime Payments

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each Government Department the total amount paid in overtime payments for each of the last three years. [18064]

Sir George Young: This information is not held centrally. Each Department is responsible for determining its own overtime payment schemes for eligible grades within its running cost limits.

Bank of England

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what qualifications by examination were held by Mr. Pennant-Rea at the time he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Bank of England; [17829]

(2) what posts were held by Mr. Pennant-Rea in the 10 years before he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Bank of England; and what assessment he has made of Mr. Pennant-Rea's suitability for the post of Deputy Governor; [17827]

(3) on whose recommendation Mr. Pennant-Rea was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Bank of England. [17828]

Mr. Nelson: At the time he was appointed Deputy Governor, Mr. Pennant-Rea held a BA degree in economics from Trinity college Dublin and MA degree in economics from Manchester university.

Mr. Pennant-Rea is an experienced economist who has managed a leading international economics newspaper. From 1977 to 1986, he was a journalist on *The Economist*. This included spells on secondment to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development as editor of "World Development Report". From 1986 until 1993 he was the editor of "The Economist" and a director of The Economist Newspaper Group Inc.

Mr. Pennant-Rea was appointed Deputy Governor on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. As with all appointments at this level, it was made following wide consultation.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established, and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17452]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* No specific public information telephone inquiry lines operate in the Treasury. Calls are handled by the public inquiry room or the press office as appropriate.

VAT (Services)

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration has been given to the fixing of different VAT thresholds for businesses supplying services as opposed to those supplying goods; and if he will make a statement. [17696]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The application of different thresholds for businesses supplying services as opposed to businesses supplying goods has been considered on a number of occasions. Where mixed supplies are involved the introduction of different thresholds would create significant operational problems and therefore the preferred option is to maintain the simplicity of a single threshold.

Income Tax

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) of

3 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1283–84* on the tax liabilities of taxpayers in different income bands, giving figures for 1995–96 and estimates for 1996–97 based on the assumption of statutory indexation and including measures announced in the 1994 budget. [15677]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* I regret that the earlier reply contained an incorrect table for 1995–96. An updated version of this table is as follows. The 1987–88 income tax regime has been indexed to 1995–96 levels by reference to the statutory formula and allowing for the effect of independent taxation of husbands and wives. Average earnings have increased by nearly 15 per cent. in real terms since 1987–88. Etimates for 1996–97 are not available.

Average reduction or increase (–) in 1995–96 compared with 1987–88 indexed regime

Range of individuals income in 1995–96 (£)	*Income Tax (£)*	*Income Tax and National Insurance (£)*
Under 5,000	50	60
5,000 to 10,000	140	180
10,000 to 15,000	150	220
15,000 to 20,000	160	180
20,000 to 25,000	210	180
25,000 to 30,000	250	170
30,000 to 40,000	–190	–280
40,000 to 50,000	–180	–270
50,000 to 70,000	1,040	940
70,000 to 80,000	3,440	3,330
Over 80,000	17,300	17,200
Average	280	290

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesian Police

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *84*, on what date he asked for assurances prior to scholarship awards being granted to officers of the Indonesian police force that none of those officers had previously served in East Timor. [16661]

Mr. Baldry: No assurances were sought.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *367*, regarding his Department's funding of training and scholarship awards for members of the Indonesian police force if the biographical details required by his Department reveal as a matter of routine (i) whether the applicant has ever served in East Timor and (ii) whether the applicant will serve East Timor after training; on which date officials in his Department last conducted an assessment of the work performance of applicants; to what extent this assessment was dependent on information provided by the Indonesian police force; on which date officials in his Department last conducted interviews with applicants prior to their leaving Indonesia to test their suitability to take part in the Indonesian police training project; and what specific questions applicants were asked about their past activities with regard to human rights considerations. [16513]

Mr. Baldry: Candidates for United Kingdom scholarships under the police project submit biographical details which cover their employment history. These would normally but not invariably include the locations in which the officer has served, but would not include the locations of prospective employment once involvement in the project is complete.

Interviews are conducted by the UK project consultants at the outset when applicants join the consultancy unit. Their approach to policing and commitment to public service is assessed. Candidates for UK training are subsequently and independently re-assessed by the consultants in further interviews on the basis of work performance. The last date that this was done was during the visit by the UK consultants between 8 and 28 January 1995.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *84*, if the commitment given by the Indonesian police force to his Department that officers who receive scholarship awards under the police project will remain with the project for a minimum of five years includes the assurance *(a)* that no such officer will be eligible to serve in East Timor during that time and *(b)* that no such officer will be eligible to serve in East Timor after their five years in the project is complete. [16663]

Mr. Baldry: It does not.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *111*, what sources other than the Indonesian national police force have provided information that no officer who has received any form of training paid for or provided with assistance from his Department has subsequently gone on to serve in East Timor either during that period of training or after it has concluded. [16509]

Mr. Baldry: The project managers have also provided this information about trainees financed under the police project.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, column *85*, if the biographical material provided to his Department about Indonesian police officers who have received scholarship awards or other training paid for by his Department reveal the dates when officers served in East Timor; and if they were based within that country. [16662]

Mr. Baldry: This information is no longer available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *85*, what sources other than the Indonesian national police force provided information to the United Kingdom managers of the Indonesian national police project that Indonesian police officers who have received scholarships or training paid for by his Department have not subsequently served in East Timor. [16660]

Mr. Baldry: From their own knowledge of the project and the trainees, the UK managers of the police project were able independently to confirm this information about trainees financed under the police project.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Secretary General of the Commonwealth about actions that should be taken to improve the situation in Sierra Leone. [17821]

Mr. Baldry: While we have received no representations, we are in regular contact with the Commonwealth Secretariat and strongly support the efforts of Chief Anyaoku to encourage peace talks between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what joint discussions have taken place with other European Governments about action that should be taken to improve the situation in Sierra Leone. [17823]

Mr. Baldry: We keep in close and regular contact with our EU partners about developments in Sierra Leone. EU aid to Sierra Leone covers a wide range of humanitarian and development projects. In addition 15 million ECU has been allocated so far this year for democratisation, rehabilitation of war-affected areas, and demobilisation of soldiers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recommendations he has received from the UN Secretary-General about action that should be taken to improve the situation in Sierra Leone. [17822]

Mr. Baldry: While we have received no recommendations, we are in regular contact with the UN Secretariat to discuss the situation in Sierra Leone. We are also providing some logistical support for the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Freetown.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to ensue that *(a)* British aid for Sri Lanka designated for the north and the east of the island is able to get through; and *(b)* aid is used for the rehabilitation of refugees and repair of the infrastructure. [16755]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* UK aid for the north and east is being delivered as intended. A consignment of medical equipment was delivered to Jaffna hospital at the end of last year and equipment for the University of Jaffna is due to arrive there this week. UK support for the relief and rehabilitation of displaced communities from the north and east is managed by Oxfam and the Save the Children fund using local Sri Lankan non-governmental organisations. Contributions have additionally been made through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the Government of Sri Lanka about the restoration of transport systems, gas and electricity supplies for the whole country and about the lifting of the economic embargo by the Sri Lankans on food and medicines. [16756]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, was briefed on the peace process, including relief measures for the people of Jaffna, by President Kumaratunga when she visited London in March. Many items have been removed from the embargo list. Food and medicines are not on the list. We have said that the British Government could offer consultancy assistance regarding power reconstruction requirements for Jaffna to help identify the scope of work likely to be necessary.

European Development Fund

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Foreign Ministers meeting on 18 and 19 March in relation to the size of the eighth European development fund for 1995 to 2000. [18212]

Mr. Baldry: EU Foreign Ministers had a short discussion on 18 and 19 March on the size of the eighth European development fund, but reached no decision. There will be further discussions at the Foreign Affairs Council on 10–11 April.

Nuclear Reactor, Slovakia

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government has made of whether the European bank for reconstruction and development has established that detailed and satisfactory plans have been made for the safe storage of radioactive waste produced during the proposed operation of the nuclear power plant at Mochovce, Slovakia. [16108]

Mr. Baldry: The bank's project documentation indicates that adequate technical, environmental and financial provision has been made for the short and medium-term safe storage of spent fuel and other radioactive wastes. The Slovak Government are considering plans for final storage facilities, provision of which would be covenanted in a project agreement between the bank and Slovenske Elektrarne, the Slovak power utility.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's position on the projections for gas prices, decommissioning costs, discount rates and variable currency exchange rates for Mochovce nuclear power plant in Slovakia contained in the least cost study prepared for the European bank for reconstruction and development's directors. [16109]

Mr. Baldry: We are examining the least cost study and comments made on it by a number of organisations.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the recurring problems relating to fire protection and essential operational, emergency and control systems associated with Soviet VVER-440/213 nuclear reactor design can be resolved by superimposing other technologies as proposed for the completion of the Mochovce nuclear power plant in Slovakia. [16110]

Mr. Baldry: The safety review of the Mochovce plant undertaken by Riskaudit examined these aspects and made recommendations for their improvement. It confirmed that the standards applied for the management and operation of the plant are fully in line with the fundamental principles set out in relevant International Atomic Energy Agency documents. It also confirmed that the proposed project safety measures, including the recommendations included in the safety review, would make the Mochovce plant acceptable under good western practices.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made as to whether the specification for the proposed Mochovce nuclear plant would satisfy the environmental and safety standards required for equivalent plant operating in the United Kingdom. [16111]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 21 February at column *130*.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conclusions the Government's review of its policy on the European bank for reconstruction and development's proposed funding for the Mochovce nuclear power plant in Slovakia, has reached; and what assessment he has made as to whether the completion of the plant or alternative supply and demand-side measures represent the least cost option. [16112]

Mr. Baldry: We have not yet finalised our position on this project.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Patrol Vehicles (Accidents)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road traffic accidents involving police patrol vehicles have been reported to the Metropolitan police for each year since 1991; and how many people have sustained injuries as a result. [16408]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner that the following is the information requested.

Year	*Number of accidents*	*Number of injuries*
1991	4,150	1,037 (366)
1992	4,143	1,028 (710)
1993	4,246	1,203 (831)
1994	4,063	1,179 (855)

The figures shown in parenthesis in the last column are the numbers of civilians injured; the remainder of the total in each case are police officers.

Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women who are currently imprisoned have their babies with them in prison. [18007]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many women who are currently imprisoned have their babies with them in prison.

On 31 March 1994 51 women had their babies with them in the three prison mother and baby units.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the rules applying at Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton allow prisoners and relatives to talk in *(a)* Irish and *(b)* their first language; [17663]

(2) what rules apply in Her Majesty's prisons in the United Kingdom about prisoners, whose first language is not English, being allowed to converse in their first language with visitors. [17666]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Max Madden, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the rules which apply to prisoners, whose first language is not English, being allowed to converse in their first language with visitors and if the rules applying at Full Sutton Prison allow prisoners and relatives to talk in Irish and their first language.

Under the provisions of Prison Service Standing Order 5, which applies to all prisons in England and Wales, prisoners and their visitors may speak in the language of their choice. If it is necessary to do so for security reasons, the Standing Order provides either for communication to be in English or for an interpreter to be present or for communications to be tape recorded.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received about prisoners at Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor complaining about verbal and physical abuse. [17664]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Max Madden, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about complaints made by prisoners of physical and verbal abuse.

Prisoners make allegations about verbal or physical abuse from time to time in many prison establishments. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the allegations these are investigated either by the police or internally within the Prison Service, and where they are substantiated, appropriate action is taken.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 15 March, *Official Report*, column *573*, in which adult female Prison Service establishment the females under 18 years of age were being held. [18003]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question (following my answer to the honourable member for Nottingham South of 15 March, Official Report, column 573) in which adult female Prison Service establishments the females under 18 years of age were being held.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

Females aged under 18 years held in adult female establishments on 31 January 1995, by Prison Service establishment

Establishment	*Number*
Remand	
Holloway	5
Low Newton	3
New Hall	2
Pucklechurch	2
Risley	2
Sentenced	
Askham Grange	1
Holloway	5
Low Newton	5
New Hall	3
Pucklechurch	1
All establishments	29

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are currently imprisoned in British prison service establishments. [18032]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many (a) women and (b) men are currently imprisoned in British prison service establishments.

On 24 March 1995 there were 57,254 persons (55,068 men and 2,186 women) in prison establishments in England, Wales and Scotland.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men served custodial sentences in each year since 1989, broken down by type of offence committed. [17207]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 4 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many men served custodial sentences in each year since 1989, broken down by type of offence committed.

Information for 1989 to 1992 is published in Prison Statistics England and Wales [Cm 2581, Tables 3.7 (young offenders) and 4.9 (adults) of the 1992 edition] a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Provisional information for 1993 and 1994 is contained in the attached table.

Number of men received into Prison Service custody for immediate custodial sentences in 1993 and 1994, by type of offence[1]

Offence group	*1993*	*1994*
Violence against the person	7,213	8,275
Sexual offences	1,882	1,888
Burglary	9,441	10,624
Robbery	3,067	2,800
Theft and handling	8,314	10,098
Fraud and forgery	1,573	1,794
Drugs offences	2,890	3,091
Other offences	11,879	15,605
Offence not recorded	3,445	4,131
All offences	49,704	58,306

[1] Excluding fine defaulters.

Child Prostitutes (Bosnia)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce measures to make it a criminal offence for citizens of the United Kingdom to make use of child prostitutes in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement. [17695]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Government condemn the sexual exploitation and abuse of children wherever it occurs. There would, however, be considerable practical difficulties in implementing any system of extended jurisdiction over such offences.

British Transport Police

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussion his department has had with the Department of Transport on extending the powers and jurisdiction of the British Transport police and if he will make a statement. [17470]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Transport Police (Jurisdiction) Act 1994 confines the jurisdiction of the British Transport police to railway property or to railway matters. During the passage of the legislation, an undertaking was given that officials from the Department of Transport and the Home Office would look again at this issue. This is being pursued.

Irish Prisoners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what obstacles there are preventing Irish nationals, convicted to serve custodial sentences in United Kingdom prisons, from being transferred to prisons in the Irish Republic; how many such prisoners there are in Her Majesty's prisons in Britain; how many have been transferred to prisons in the Irish Republic since 1 September 1994; and if he will make a statement. [17662]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* There are 703 prisoners currently imprisoned in England and Wales who gave their nationality on reception into prison as Irish. The transfer of prisoners between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland is not possible. The United Kingdom ratified the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons in 1985. The Republic of Ireland is a signatory to the convention but has yet to ratify it.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that his ministerial management information system for establishing objectives for his Department includes deregulation objectives *(a)* for him and *(b)* for each of the Ministers within his Department. [15566]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I am the Minister responsible for deregulation in the Home Office, and as such ensure that progress is maintained on deregulation. In the last 12 months, changes have been made to legislation affecting shopping hours, liquor licensing, charities, and betting and gaming and further changes are planned.

Against this background, the Department's planning systems give proper prominence to our deregulation programme.

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Turkish Asylum Applicants

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the total numbers of asylum applications received from Turkish nationals for each of the last 24 months; and what was the outcome of these applications. [18306]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on asylum applications by Turkish nationals and on decisions made, for the last 24 months, is given in the table.

Decisions on applications for asylum(1) received from nationals of Turkey in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, March 1993 to February 1995

number of principal applicants

	Applications[2]	*Total decisions*[2,3]	*Granted asylum*	*Granted ELR*[4]	*Refused*[5]
1993					
March	130	255	60	150	45
April	105	210	50	115	45
May	150	130	15	55	60
June	125	160	30	65	60
July(6)	125	100	20	35	45
August	85	70	15	5	55
September	115	80	10	*	70
October	105	60	5	5	50
November	115	105	25	15	65
December	135	105	10	0	95
1994					
January	175	95	15	15	65
February	120	135	25	10	95
March	160	95	15	5	75
April	205	100	5	*	95
May	190	90	5	*	85
June	185	90	5	*	85
July	155	95	10	*	85
August	165	115	5	*	110
September	165	80	5	5	70
October	220	90	5	10	75
November	180	95	0	*	95
December	125	70	5	*	65
1995					
January	100	110	5	5	100
February	165	80	*	0	80

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.

[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.

[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same month.

[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

[5] Refusals include those made after full consideration, refusals under para 180F for failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, and refusals on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.

[6] The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force on 26 July 1993.

Passport Requirements (Ireland)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to review the common travel area between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic with a view to requiring those travelling between both countries to show their passports; and if he will make a statement. [18423]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have no plans to review the operation of the common travel area between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to require those travelling between Britain and Northern Ireland to show their passports; and if he will make a statement. [18424]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: None.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic about the effects on the future of the common travel area between the United Kingdom and the Republic following the Republic signing the Schengen agreement; and if he will make a statement. [18422]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: None. The Republic of Ireland is not a signatory to the Schengen agreement.

Prison Rules

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make a statement on his proposed changes to the prison rules. [18767]

Mr. Howard: I have today tabled amendments to the prison and young offender rules which, subject to the negative resolution procedure, will come into force in 21 days.

The amendments cover three areas: governors' disciplinary powers; the arrangements for the temporary release of prisoners; and contact between convicted and unconvicted prisoners.

The amendments will increase by 50 per cent. the maximum level of all governors' disciplinary punishments for prisoners, except for the maximum period of cellular confinement, which was increased from three to 14 days in 1994. The new maximum punishments with figures for young offenders in brackets where different, will be:

	Present	*Proposed*
Additional days	28	42
Cellular confinement (days)	14 [7]	no change
Stoppage of earnings (days' earnings)	28 [14]	42 [21]
Forfeiture of privileges (days)	28 [14]	42 [21]
Exclusion from associated work or activity (days)	14	21
Extra work—young offenders and adult females only (days)	14	21
Removal from wing—young offenders only (days)	14	21

These increases will act as a greater deterrent to prisoners; allow governors to punish the more serious offences properly; reduce the number of cases which need to be referred to the police; and maintain confidence in the disciplinary system.

The amendments will also introduce new criteria under which prisoners may be released temporarily. Under the new rules those prisoners who are eligible may be temporarily released only in the following circumstances:

(i) on specified compassionate grounds *(compassionate licence)*;

(ii) to enable prisoners to undertake education, training or work experience and for specific official purposes, such as to appear as police witnesses *(facility licence)*;

(iii) to allow prisoners who are near the end of their sentence to maintain their family ties and to re-integrate into the community *(resettlement licence)*.

The new rules will also ensure that prisoners are not released too early in their sentence nor too frequently. In order to protect the safety of the public, governors will undertake in each case a rigorous risk assessment before deciding whether to release a prisoner temporarily. Eligible prisoners will be released only if the governor is satisfied that they will comply with the conditions of their licence.

Transitional arrangements have been made for some categories of prisoners. For example, those who have already successfully completed periods of home leave, and who are within a year of eligibility for parole, will continue to be eligible for resettlement licence. Prisoners who have been granted temporary release for work, education and training courses will generally continue to be eligible for facility licence to continue their courses, provided that the courses cannot be provided within the prison.

The amendments will also relax the current restriction on contact between convicted and unconvicted prisoners, which will allow accommodation and regime facilities to be used more flexibility.

Crime Prevention Schemes (Wales)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on crime prevention schemes by his Department in Wales last year. [17972]

Mr. Maclean: The Merthyr Tydfil safer cities project supported 29 crime prevention schemes during 1994–95 with £100,000 of Home Office grant funding. This figure does not include the contractor's costs for managing the project.

Police Establishment (Gloucestershire)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received over police establishment levels in Gloucestershire. [17645]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no specific representations about Gloucestershire's approved establishment. Since the beginning of the year, correspondence about policing levels has been received from one hon. member and five members of the public.

Licensed Premises

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish regulations relating to trading on Sundays in licensed premises holding off-licences. [17485]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Licensing (Sunday Hours) Bill will amend the licensing law in England and Wales to permit the sale of alcohol at off-licensed premises from 10am to 10.30pm on Sundays. Large shops with off-licences, which are subject to limits on their hours of trading under the Sunday Trading Act 1994, will be entitled to sell alcohol throughout the time the 1994 Act permits them to open. We do not at present plan to publish any special regulations for businesses whose trade and customers will benefit from the Bill.

Housing Benefit (Prisoners)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Social Security about his plan to reduce housing benefit to prisoners and on how this would affect the number of offences committed by these individuals. [17504]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposal has been the subject of routine exchanges between Ministers and officials of the two Departments about its implementation.

Gloucestershire Fire Services

Mr. George Howarth : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received over the standard spending assessment settlement for the Gloucestershire Fire Authority; and if he will list them. [17647]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a letter from an hon. Member enclosing one from a constituent who was concerned about provision for the fire service in Gloucestershire.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the numbers of jobs which will be lost in *(a)* the Gloucestershire fire brigade and *(b)* the Gloucestershire police as a result of the funding formula. [17648]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend is unable to make any such estimate. Any fire authority wishing to reduce the operational capability of its brigade, including the number of firefighting posts, must seek his approval under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947; but no such request for approval has been received. The Secretary of State's practice is to grant approval only where he is satisfied that the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover will be maintained. So far as the Gloucestershire police are concerned, with the abolition of police force establishment controls from 31 March 1995, responsibility for staffing matters such as these has been devolved to chief constables.

Community Sentences

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has supporting the Government's proposals advanced in the Green Paper on the nature of community sentences; when the White Paper on this subject will be published; and if he will take into account evidence and recommendations from the probation service in this report. [17502]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Under the current legislation, the courts are able to choose from a limited range of community orders when determining a community sentence. A new integrated sentence would give clear practical benefits to the courts, including greater choice and flexibility in the type of punishment served, better matched to the circumstances of the individual offence or offences, as well as more say in the way these punishments are carried out.

My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to publish a White Paper, but will consider carefully the results of the public consultation, including any comments from the probation service.

Crime Statistics

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of crimes committed in each year since 1989 *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of crime recorded for each of those years; [17226]

(2) how many of the offences estimated by his Department to have been committed in 1993 were recorded. [17227]

Mr. Maclean: Information on crimes committed can be obtained from the British crime survey—BCS—but only for the years 1981, 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1993. A comparison of BCS figures of offences committed in these years with statistics of crimes recorded by the police, can be made only for offences against individuals and their property. These figures are contained in the table:

Comparison of British Crime Survey and notifiable offences recorded by the police

Year	*Crimes committed (BCS estimates) (thousands)*	*Crimes recorded by the police (thousands)*	*Percentage recorded of committed*
1981	6,538	1,466	22
1983	7,187	1,639	23
1987	8,499	2,070	24
1991	9,763	2,897	30
1993	11,567	3,090	27

Note:

Offences included are: Acquisitive crime: burglary, theft of and from vehicles (including attempts), bicycle thefts, thefts from the person. Vandalism: household property and vehicles. Violence: wounding and robbery.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the criminal injuries compensation board used Mr. Richard Beattie to carry out psychological assessments on its behalf in the last five years; and how much the board paid for Mr. Beattie's work. [17268]

Mr. Maclean: Although my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland have joint responsibility for oversight of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, the day-to-day administration of the scheme and the handling of individual cases is a matter for the board itself, to which the hon. Member should direct his inquiries.

Immigration

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals, by nationality, have been *(a)* apprehended and *(b)* subsequently debarred from entry to the United Kingdom on board Eurostar trains since the inception of channel tunnel services. [17012]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Between November 1994 and 30 March 1995, 378 persons have been required to submit to further examination. Their apparent country of origin was as follows:

Albania: 2
Algeria: 16
Australia: 4
Bangladesh: 3
Belgium: 1
Benin: 1
Botswana: 1
Brazil: 8
British overseas national: 1
British overseas citizen: 1
Bulgaria: 4
Cameroon: 2
Canada: 1
China: 4
Colombia: 6
Costa Rica: 1
Ivory Coast: 8
Czech Republic: 3
Czechoslovakia: 2
Ecuador: 4
Egypt: 2
Eritrea: 1
France: 6
Ghana: 1
Haiti: 1
Hungary: 5
Indonesia: 1
Iran: 3
Iraq: 1
Israel: 2
Italy: 2
Jordan: 1
Japan: 11
Kazakhstan: 3
Korea: 2
Laos: 1
Lebanon: 2
Liberia: 1
Malaysia: 5
Mauritius: 1
Mexico: 3
Morocco: 4
Netherlands: 2
Nigeria: 2
Pakistan: 2
Poland: 30
Portugal: 1
Romania: 8
Russia: 6
Rwanda: 1
Senegal: 1
Singapore: 1
Slovakia: 1
Slovenia: 1
Somalia: 2
South Africa: 2
Sri Lanka: 4
Switzerland: 2
Togo: 1
Tunisia: 3
Turkey: 2
USA: 14

Venezuela: 1
Yugoslavia: 27
Zaire: 4
Nationality doubtful: 130

Of these, 237 have been refused leave to enter the United Kingdom. The nationalities of those refused leave are as follows:

Albanian: 2
Algerian: 11
Australian: 1
Bangladeshi: 3
Benin: 1
Brazilian: 5
British Overseas Nationals : 1
British Overseas Citizens: 1
Bulgarian: 2
Cameroonian: 1
Chinese: 6
Colombian: 2
Czech: 3
Ecuadorian: 4
Egyptian: 2
Ghanaian: 1
Hungarian: 3
Indonesian: 1
Iranian: 2
Iraqi: 1
Ivory Coast: 8
Japanese: 1
Jordanian: 1
Lebanese: 1
Liberian: 1
Malaysian: 3
Moroccan: 4
Nigerian: 2
Pakistani: 1
Polish: 21
Romanian: 7
Russian: 4
Rwandan: 1
Slovenian: 1
Somalian: 1
South African: 1
South Korean: 1
Sri Lankan: 3
Stateless: 22
Togo: 1
Tunisian: 3
Turkish: 1
USA: 6
Yugoslavian: 20
Zairean: 4
Nationality Doubtful: 65

Overseas Prisons

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list visits he has made to prison establishments in other countries since his appointment as Home Secretary; what was the duration of these visits; and if he will make a statement on the discussions he had with the prison authorities at each of these prisons. [16762]

Mr. Howard: During a visit to the United States in January this year I visited the following establishments:

Date		*Establishment*
2 January 1995	(0930–1115)	Hernando County Jail, Brookeville, Florida
4 January 1995	(0830–1030)	Lockhart Work Programme Facility, Texas
4 January 1995	(1100–1330)	Kyle Pre-lease Centre, Texas
5 January 1995	(1000–1030)	Harris County Sheriff's Department Boot Camp

It is not my practice to disclose details of discussions I may have had.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his counterparts in other countries relating to prisons in the last three years. [16764]

Mr. Howard: It is not usual practice to disclose details of discussions of this kind.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits abroad each Secretary of State has made in each year since 1990. [16765]

Mr. Howard: In so far as central records are held, they show the following:

	Visits
1990:	
Mr. Waddington	4
1991:	
Mr. Baker	10
1992:	
Mr. Baker	1
Mr. Clarke	4
1993:	
Mr. Clarke	2
Mr. Howard	2
1994:	
Mr. Howard	6
1995:	
Mr. Howard	1

SCOTLAND

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow the shadow unitary authorities in Strathclyde a say in the duration and value of any contracts awarded after 6 April by Strathclyde passenger transport executive. [15858]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Strathclyde passenger transport executive contracts of £75,000 or more are referred automatically to Strathclyde regional council. Any such contracts falling within the conditions laid down by section 55 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 will be subject to the consent procedures involving successor authorities set out there.

Further Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current salaries of the principals of Scotland's further education colleges; and what they were at the moment of incorporation following the transfer of control from the local authorities. [17071]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on salaries paid to college principals at the time of incorporation on 1 April 1993 is not held centrally; further education college audited accounts for 1993–94 did not require to include information about the salaries of principals. With effect from the 1994–95 financial year, further education college boards of management will be required to indicate in a consistent manner in their annual accounts the total emoluments of principals. The audited accounts, which are public documents, are due to be submitted to the Scottish Office Education Department by 30 September 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a further education funding council. [17072]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce a further education funding council.

Forestry

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra money will be made available to fund grant aid for forestry on land which is to count against a farmer's set-aside obligations. [17077]

Sir Hector Monro: The increased funding announced in the Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98—Cm 2814—is expected to be sufficient to meet all applications for grant-aid for forestry, including those for land which is to count against a farmer's set-aside obligations.

Child Care

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the child care or nursery facilities within his Department; and what is the breakdown in their use *(a)* by grade and *(b)* by gender. [15237]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* My Department operates an on-site nursery at East Craigs, Edinburgh, which is licensed for 15 full-time equivalent places. A total of 17 staff use the facility—12 female and five male. The grade breakdown is as follows:

Grade equivalent	*Number*
7	2
SEO	1
HEO	2
EO	6
AO	5
AA	1
Total	17

A further 30 to 35 place nursery is due to open at Victoria quay, Edinburgh in autumn 1995. In addition, my staff have access to a holiday play scheme operated by Customs and Excise in Edinburgh.

Borders College

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to *(a)* receive and *(b)* act upon the report from the chairman of the board of his inquiry held in January into staff discontent at Borders college. [17410]

Mr. Lang: The board of management of Borders college has carried out a review into matters of concern raised by lecturers' unions and a report has been submitted to the Scottish Office Education Department. Discussions between my officials and the chairman of the board of management and the college principal have taken place. Further investigations are under way. I will write to the right hon. Member when these are completed.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Scottish Homes supplied the names and addresses of its tenants in the north of Glasgow to Gemini Housing Association; and if the names and addresses were drawn from a computer database. [18065]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when and at what charge Scottish Homes supplied Gemini Housing Association with computer printed labels run of names and addresses of Scottish Homes tenants living in the north end of Glasgow; [18220]

(2) in what circumstances Scottish Homes gives computer data information to organisations other than registered housing associations; [18221]

(3) if Scottish Homes stores the names and addresses of its tenants on computer; [18222]

(4) on how many occasions in 1994 Scottish Homes supplied the names and addresses of all the tenants in the north of Glasgow to organisations other than registered housing associations. [18219]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Speech and Language Disorders

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children have been diagnosed as having a specific speech or language disorder as a primary handicap, in each Scottish region and islands area; what number of these children from each region or island area are educated outwith their own region and, of these, how many are educated in England; what schools are attended by children with specific speech or language disorders who are educated within their own region and what is the annual cost per pupil; and of these children, identified with a specific speech or language disorder as a principal handicap, how many are recorded, in each region and islands area. [17877]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not held centrally in the form requested. The available information is given in the table.

Number of pupils in Scottish schools whose main difficulty in learning is a communication disorder as at September 1993

	Education authority:		*Grant-aided*	*Independent schools*
	Pupils in special schools	*Recorded pupils in mainstream primary and secondary schools*	*Pupils in special schools*	*Pupils*
Scotland	[1]353 (209)	363	8	[2]67
Borders	5 (3)	7	0	
Central	7 (7)	43	0	
Dumfries and Galloway	1 (1)	18	0	
Fife	16 (2)	2	0	
Grampian	61 (24)	27	0	
Highland	17 (17)	35	0	
Lothian	57 (13)	24	4	
Strathclyde	157 (122)	179	4	
Tayside	31 (19)	25	0	
Orkney	1 (1)	1	0	
Shetland	0 (0)	1	0	
Western Isles	0 (0)	1	0	
Strathclyde divisions:				
Argyll and Bute	1 (1)	3	0	
Ayr	33 (27)	47	0	
Dumbarton	4 (0)	24	0	
Glasgow	86 (62)	41	4	
Lanark	26 (15)	27	0	
Renfrew	7 (7)	37	0	

[1] Figures in brackets give the number of pupils in Special Schools who have a Record of Needs.

[2] This figure cannot be broken down by Region.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of Scotland is designated as being environmentally sensitive; how much Government funding is spent annually on environmentally sensitive areas; how this formula is calculated; and if he will make a statement. [17795]

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* There are 10 environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland covering over 1.4 million hectares, about 20 per cent. of the land area. Expenditure in 1993–94 was £0.963 million and planned provision will rise to £9.2 million in 1997–98. Payments are calculated on the basis of estimated average income losses and additional costs resulting from compliance with the scheme requirements and may also take account of the need to provide an incentive. Sufficient resources have been allocated to allow eligible farmers and crofters in the designated areas to participate in the scheme.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for every financial year since 1988–89 and the plans until 1997–98 for *(a)* the amount of the Scottish Office grant in aid to Scottish Enterprise, *(b)* the amount raised internally by rental and sale of its property; *(c)* the total revenue received in grants for the European Community and *(d)* the total budget. [17699]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is given in the table:

£ million

	Grant-in-aid	Gross provision	Property proceeds (Rental)	Property proceeds (Disposal)	Receipts from European Social Fund for Government training programmes
1991–92	379.3	446.4	7.7	16.5	18.1
1992–93	375.6	449.1	9.0	7.0	22.8
1993–94	378.8	451.4	11.9	15.2	23.3
1994–95 (estimate)	432.7	467.1	8.5	21.0	23.3
1995–96 (provisional estimate)	436.3	471.7	10.3	20.1	29.5
1996–97 (plans)	n/a	472.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
1997–98 (plans)	n/a	472.7	n/a	n/a	n/a

Scottish Enterprise came into operation on 1 April 1991. Details of its budget after 1995–96 will be addressed in future public expenditure surveys.

Unitary Authorities

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority employees he estimates will be offered three years' protection of salary before being downgraded as a result of being offered lower-paid jobs in the new unitary authorities. [17901]

Mr. Kynoch: We have not made any estimate, as the number will depend on decisions taken by the new councils once they have determined their staffing structures.

European Social Fund

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the future administration of the European social fund in Scotland, and if he will make a statement. [18693]

Mr. Lang: I took the responsibility last year for European social fund expenditure under objectives 1, 2 and 5b for the new programming period which started on 1 January 1994. I have now agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment that I should assume responsibility for the administration of all European social fund expenditure in Scotland.

As regards the Great Britain objective 3 programme, the Scottish Office will be responsible for all relevant projects which commenced from 1 January 1995 onwards. On the same basis, my Department will also be responsible in Scotland for all Community initiatives involving ESF support, including ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT.

To this end, I have agreed with my right hon. Friend that these arrangements should be implemented from 1 April 1995 and the relevant administrative and financial changes are being put in place on that basis.

Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about performance targets for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency for 1995–96. [18694]

Mr. Lang: For the financial year 1995–96 I have set the following targets:

Aerial surveillance—per cent of hours flown on task: 85%

Aerial surveillance—cost per aircraft sighting: £86

Marine surveillance—number of boardings at sea: 2,800

Marine surveillance—cost per boarding: £2,400

Sea Fisheries Inspectorate—cost per logsheet check: £67

75 per cent. of cases for prosecution to be reported within 6 weeks of offence being detected and 90 per cent. within 8 weeks

Number of cases where court proceeding are taken as percentage of offences reported to prosecuting authorities: 75%

In order to ensure that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency uses its resources efficiently, I have set it a target to achieve cash-releasing efficiency gains of 2 per cent. over 1995–96.

The chief executive will be directly accountable to me for the achievement of these targets, which will be reported in the agency's annual report.

HEALTH

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the practice of mixed-sex wards will be abandoned by the national health service. [15515]

Mr. Sackville: It is for trusts and health authorities to decide for themselves how to use the resources available to them. However, we have recognised the problem and recently issued a revised and expanded patients charter which gives patients the right to be told, before they go into hospital, whether it is planned to care for them in a ward for men and women. In such cases they will be told how their dignity and privacy will be protected. In all cases they can expect single-sex washing and toilet facilities. If patients prefer to be cared for in single-sex accommodation—either a single-sex ward or a "bay" within a larger ward which offers equal privacy—their wishes will be respected wherever possible.

There may be some cases, particularly emergencies, where a hospital cannot provide single-sex accommodation. This is most likely to arise if a patient needs to be looked after by a specialist nurse in an intensive care ward or in an observation unit. It is also possible that single-sex accommodation may not be available at the time proposed for the patient's admission. If this is the case, the patient can choose between accepting immediate admission or waiting for single-sex accommodation to become available.

There is a difference between a mixed-sex ward, consisting of a number of single-sex bays with four to six patients in them, and a "Nightingale" type ward, which is suitable only for single-sex accommodation. We are phasing out these "Nightingale" wards and no new ones are being commissioned.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was saved by fundholders in each year since 1990 in each regional health authority area; and how much of this money was invested into the general practitioners' premises. [16092]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 November 1994 at columns *321–22* and on 14 March at column *545*.

Information on how general practitioner fundholders spend savings is available from regional health authorities, which are responsible for managing the fundholding scheme in their area.

Estranged Children

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations she has received about 16 and 17-year-olds who contact social services claiming to be estranged from their parents; [16885]

(2) what representations she has received from parents of 16 and 17-year-olds who claim to social services that they are estranged from their parents; and if she will make a statement; [16884]

(3) what assessment she has made of whether the Children Act 1989 gives parents sufficient rights when 16 and 17-year-olds inform social services departments that they wish to leave home claiming estrangement; [16882]

(4) what rights parents have if a 16 or 17-year-old child seeks assistance from social services claiming estrangement from their parents; [16883]

(5) if she will issue new guidelines to social service departments dealing with 16 and 17-year-olds who claim to be estranged from their parents. [16881]

Mr. Bowis: Over the last 12 months the Department of Health has records of five representations from parents about the estrangement of their 16 or 17-year-old children. The Children Act 1989 requires authorities, so far as reasonably practicable, to ascertain the wishes and feelings of parents. Parents have a right to make representations or complaints and the authority must respond to these. If parents remain dissatisfied they have recourse to the local government ombudsman, who can investigate complaints of local government maladministration. Ultimately, parents could seek judicial review if they consider the authority has failed in its duties. Local authorities are expected to promote or maintain contact between the child and the parents wherever possible and to provide advice and counselling so that families can overcome identified difficulties. Guidance is contained in volume 2 of the "Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations". I have no current plans to amend this.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *700*, to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge, if she will initiate inquiries into the practice of consultants refusing, as a direct result of the patients charter, to accept on to their waiting lists patients referred by general practitioners for non-urgent operations on the basis that this would extend the waiting lists beyond Government guidelines of acceptability. [17076]

Mr. Malone: No. Decisions on when patients are treated must be made by the doctors involved in the patient's care and must be based on their assessment of the patient's clinical needs and priority.

Publicity

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by her Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are her latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17633]

Mr. Sackville: The breakdown of expenditure for 1992–93 to 1994–95 is shown in the table.

£ Million

	Financial year		
Media	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95 (estimated)*
TV	2.773	1.793	1.582
Radio	0.020	0.492	0.951
Newspaper	1.976	2.504	0.904
Other	0.285	1.020	1.024
Recruitment	0.012	0.009	[1]0.137

[1] Includes health service professions recruitment. Budgets for 1995–96 have not yet been agreed.

Expenditure covers a wide range of publicity campaigns relating to legislation, policy, patient's rights and other health advice

Poisons Unit

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) by what criteria projects are chosen by the national poisons unit; [18024]

(2) if she will list those projects undertaken by the national poisons unit which are directly linked to grants; [18025]

(3) if she will list by source and value the grant income of the national poisons unit. [18023]

Mr. Sackville: Management of the poisons unit at New Cross, London, is the responsibility of the Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital Trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chief executive of the trust, Mr. Tim Matthews, for details of projects undertaken at the unit.

In 1994–95, the Department provided £672,000 to the trust in respect of the poisons unit's ongoing contribution to the work of the national poisons information service.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the aims and conclusions of the surveillance of traditional remedies by the national poisons unit; [18026]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the number of deaths or serious injuries caused by traditional remedies. [18027]

Mr. Sackville: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has funded surveillance by the poisons unit at Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital Trust of possible toxic effects of traditional herbal remedies. These reports have been considered by both the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and the Food Advisory Committee. Both committees accepted that clinical evidence gave cause for concern about the safety of some of these products and recommended that further consideration should be given to the action which might be appropriate. Officials in the Department of Health and in the Ministry are taking this forward.

The Medicines Control Agency has a well developed system for monitoring adverse effects of all licensed medicines, including traditional remedies when they are licensed. All safety hazards which arise are promptly investigated and where necessary action is taken to minimise the risks.

Blood Services

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled due to a lack of blood supplies since March 1994. [18016]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who sanctioned the change of logo for the National Blood Authority; and if royal approval was *(a)* required and *(b)* sought. [18028]

Mr. Sackville: The national blood service logo was introduced by the National Blood Authority in April 1994 as one part of the authority's identity and communications review.

Official advice was that it was not necessary to seek formal permission to remove the crown from the logo.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the cost *(a)* per unit and *(b)* in total of A-positive type blood discarded during (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994; [18020]

(2) what is the cost *(a)* per unit and *(b)* in total of AB blood discarded during (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994. [18019]

Mr. Sackville: The average cost of type AB blood and of type A-positive blood is £35 per unit. The information about blood discarded is not available centrally.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to prevent wastage of stocks of AB type blood. [18018]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assessment has been made of the decision by the National Blood Authority to collect all clinical fresh frozen plasma by apheresis; and what assessment has been made of the surpluses of plasma this will generate. [18017]

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority has made no decisions about collection of fresh frozen plasma for clinical use. The matter is under consideration.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to publish her Department's report on the contribution of the pharmaceutical industry to the British economy. [17882]

Mr. Malone: The joint Government-industry pharmaceutical industry strategy working group has [illegible] some work on the contribution of the pharmaceutical industry to the United Kingdom economy, and a report is being prepared by the office of health economics, which is part of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

Nurses' Pay

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she will take to ensure that the nursing profession receive a 3 per cent. pay increase; and if she will make a statement. [17880]

Mr. Malone: The Government accepted the recommendation from the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine that there should be a 1 per cent. increase in national salary rates and local negotiations on pay—including, where appropriate, leads and allowances—and/or conditions. The NPRB's expectation that the outcome of local negotiations plus the 1 per cent. increase in national pay should provide improvements for staff totalling between 1.5 and 3 per cent. is endorsed by the Government.

So far, some 60 trusts have signalled their intended approach to pay for their nursing staff. About 70 per cent. of these are proposing to pay an increase of around 3 per cent. The Government expect this trend to continue.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she will take to ensure the independence from Government influence of the Nurses' Pay Review Body; and if she will make a statement. [17867]

Mr. Malone: The Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine which was set up in 1983 always has been and continues to be an independent body.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to await the conclusion of an enabling agreement by the Nurses and Midwives Negotiating Council before promoting any local pay settlements for nurses; and if she will make a statement. [17866]

Mr. Malone: Trusts already have freedom to negotiate local deals. However, an enabling provision in the national terms and conditions of service will further facilitate local pay bargaining.

Sight Tests

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis she has carried out comparing the costs of reintroducing NHS eye tests for the elderly with the extra medical and social costs of treating advanced eye disease in the same groups of people. [17988]

Mr. Malone: None. Estimates of the total numbers of sight tests performed in Great Britain since universal eligibility for free national health service sight tests was removed in April 1989 are as follows:

	Millions
1989–90	[1][3]10.8
1990–91	[1][3]12.41
1991–92	[2][3]12.8
1992–93	[2][3]14.3
1993–94	[3][4]13.2
1994–95	[3][4][5]12.7

[1] Figures estimated using Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians data.

[2] Figures estimated by FODO.

[3] These estimates may not be comparable because of different sampling methodologies used.

[4] Figures estimated by the joint—Department of Health and profession—Technical Sub-Committee.

[5] There is no statistically significant change in the estimated volume since 1993–94, which indicates that the volume has remained much the same.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken for the early prevention, detection and treatment of eye problems in the population aged over 65 years. [17987]

Mr. Malone: A sight test must by law include a comprehensive eye examination to check for any disease, injury or abnormality which may be present. People aged over 65 are not, as a group, automatically eligible for free national health service sight tests, but provision has been made for people especially at risk from eye disease and those in receipt of income support, family credit and disability working allowance to continue to be entitled to them.

Clinical Outcome Indicators

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer 28 March, *Official Report,* column *563,* when she intends to publish clinical outcome indicators for NHS trusts in England similar to those published by the Secretary of State for Scotland in December 1994. [17961]

Mr. Sackville: The clinical outcome indicators for national health service trusts which were published in Scotland were based on linked patient records. Such linkage is not yet available in England and there are therefore no plans at present to publish such indicators. The programme of developing new outcome indicators is longer term and until the work progresses it will not be possible to give publication dates.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Burden : To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the policy of her Department regarding compensation for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through contaminated blood concentrates. [18039]

Mr. Sackville: The Government have no plans to make payments to haemophilia patients who have been infected with hepatitis C through blood products.

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *145*, when she expects the ad hoc working party of experts to produce guidance on procedures for the look-back exercise for identifying those at risk of hepatitis C. [18581]

Mr. Sackville: The guidance, including counselling guidelines and treatment options, is being issued to the national health service under cover of a letter from the Chief Medical Officer. Copies will be placed in the Library.

This phase of the exercise is to trace, counsel and, where appropriate, treat those identified as being at risk. It will primarily concern hospital consultants in a number of specialties, those working in blood transfusion centres, and general practitioners. We shall do all that we can by way of counselling and, where appropriate, treatment to care for those who may have been infected.

NHS Low Income Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people get full charge remission under the NHS low income scheme. [18232]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available. In 1994–95, 694,135 claims to the national health service low income scheme resulted in entitlement to full charge remission for the claimant and his dependants. In addition, receipt of income support, family credit and, from 1 April 1995, disability working allowance—and capital was £8,000 or less when this benefit was claimed—provides automatic entitlement to full charge remission under the low income scheme.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times in each year since 1979–80 her Department has written to an hon. or right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question. [18520]

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many parliamentary questions to her Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18518]

(2) how many times in each year since 1979–80 her Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report;* [18519]

(3) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by her Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18517]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Patient Complaints Procedure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recourse is open to a patient who is aggrieved after the responsible medical officer for complaints has agreed to provide an independent professional review; and if she will make a statement. [18231]

Mr. Malone: The independent professional review is carried out by two consultants independent of the hospital involved and the result of their report is final in issues concerning clinical judgement, unless new evidence is brought to light in which case it is for the regional director of public health—or the medical officer for complaints in Wales—to consider what action to take which may include reconvening the IPR. Once the IPR process has reported, the chief executive of the hospital will write to the complainant.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied then he or she may refer their case to the Health Service Commissioner. However, the HSC may only investigate the process of the handling of the complaint. Under the present system complaints about clinical judgement are outside his jurisdiction. The complainant can also consider approaching the appropriate professional representative body, the General Medical Council, and/or taking legal advice.

The Department of Health recently published in the document "Acting on Complaints", copies of which have been placed in the Library, proposals for a simpler, speedier and more effective complaints procedure which will cover complaints about clinical judgement. The Government will introduce legislation as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows, to extend the jurisdiction of the HSC to cover all national health service complaints including complaints about the exercise of clinical judgement. These plans will be developed in more detail in consultation with the NHS, professional representative bodies and other interested parties in the coming months. The new NHS complaints procedure will be implemented from April 1996.

Access to Information

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to increase access to information about the national health service. [18762]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall be publishing a code of practice on openness in the national health service on Wednesday 5 April. This fulfils the Government's commitment in the White Paper on Open Government, published in 1993, to increase public access to information about the NHS. This code is the first of its kind in the NHS and, following the codes of conduct and accountability which I published last year, represents a further step towards making the NHS more responsive and accountable to the public it serves. It builds on the success of the patients charter and performance league tables in increasing and improving the information available to members of the public about the NHS.

The governing principle of this code of practice on openness is that the NHS should respond positively to requests for information. The code sets out clearly for the public what information is available and from whom. It explains how to complain about a refusal to provide information, including referral of such a complaint to the Health Service Commissioner. It also describes good practice in publishing information and in responding to requests for information which is not routinely published. One of the key aims of the code of practice on openness is to foster mutual trust and confidence between the public and the NHS.

The code of practice is to be implemented by all NHS trusts and authorities on 1 June 1995. My Department will be issuing detailed guidance to assist NHS organisations in the operation of the code.

Copies of the code will be placed in the Library.

NHS Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the report by the Government Actuary on his valuation of the national health service superannuation scheme in England and Wales 1984 to 1989. [18763]

Mr. Malone: I have today placed copies of the report in the Library.

The report concludes that the rate of contribution required from employers to meet the scheme's future liabilities, after taking account of employees' contributions, should remain at 4 per cent. The scheme's liabilities do not include the cost of pensions increase, most of which is currently met by the Exchequer.

I have decided to accept the Government Actuary's recommendation.

Waiting Lists, London

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her latest estimate of the waiting list for elective surgery at each London district health authority; and what are the available beds in each London district health authority. [18290]

Mr. Malone: Information on waiting lists and times at each national health service trust and district health authority is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", published twice yearly. Copies are available in the Library.

The latest information on the average daily number of available beds is for NHS trusts and directly managed units and is published in "Bed availability for England: Financial Year 1993–94", copies of which are also available in the Library.

Health Service Development, London

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how it is proposed to develop London's health services following the recent public consultations conducted by health authorities in north and south London. [18858]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today written to the chairmen of the North and South Thames regional health authorities advising them of my decisions on a number of proposals from health authorities to develop local services. These proposals have all been subject to extensive public consultation and I have given most careful consideration to the comments made. Copies of my letters to the regional chairmen will be placed in the Library.

Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham

I have decided to accept the proposals for the concentration of acute services provided by the Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust by developing St. Thomas' as the main site for acute in-patient and emergency services, and developing Guy's as a hospital for local people providing a range of services including a minor injuries unit, out-patient clinics, day surgery facilities and in-patient beds for planned, non-emergency treatment for people on waiting lists. Guy's would also retain the dental hospital and school, and would provide mental health services including in-patient beds. I have made it clear that the Guy's accident and emergency department and supporting beds are not to close until alternative facilities are in place and operating satisfactorily, which I understand will not be before the end of 1998.

I have also decided to accept the proposal to transfer kidney transplant operations from King's College hospital, Dulwich to the Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust.

Bexley and Greenwich

I have decided to accept the proposals to develop the Queen Elizabeth military hospital as the main new NHS district general hospital for the Greenwich area by transferring acute services from Greenwich district hospital and the Brook hospital to QEMH. This will lead to the closure of the Brook hospital and change of use of the Greenwich district hospital. I have also decided to agree to the transfer of specialist neurosurgery and cardiothoracic services from the Brook hospital to King's and Guy's and St. Thomas', respectively.

East London and The City

I have decided to accept the proposals to improve the general and specialist services managed by the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust by bringing them together on the Royal London Whitechapel site. This will mean, over time, transferring services from the London chest hospital site and most of the St. Bartholomew's site.

I am determined that the St. Bartholomew's ethos and culture should be preserved, albeit on a different site. In making my decision, I have paid particular attention to the views which have been expressed about the historical significance of St. Bartholomew's and its national and international importance as a centre of excellence in medical teaching and research. I am setting up a project team to explore the options for using the invaluable asset of the Smithfield site. This will build on the work carried out by the trust and the "City Initiative".

I also welcome the proposals to develop the Homerton hospital as a modern district general hospital for the growing population of Hackney.

Barnet

I have decided to accept the proposals to develop the Edgware site as a new local hospital. The Edgware accident and emergency department will be replaced by a minor injuries unit, and in-patient services transferred from Edgware general hospital to Barnet General, following completion of its redevelopment, Northwick Park and the Royal Free hospitals. I have made it clear that the Edgware accident and emergency department is to remain open until phase 1a of the development at the Barnet general hospital, which includes a new accident and emergency department, has been completed, which I understand is not expected to be before 1997, and satisfactory arrangements are in place for ambulance transport and for patient and visitor transport between the two sites.

The changes which I have agreed will strengthen specialist services by concentrating them in fewer, better, centres of excellence and provide modern acute hospitals closer to major centres of population. Together with major planned investment in primary and community health services, they will take forward our aim of improving health care for Londoners.

Exhaust Fumes (Leukaemia)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of whether exposure to benzene from motor exhaust fumes is a causative factor in leukaemia and lymphoma; and if she will make a statement. [17701]

Mr. Sackville: Benzene is known to have both carcinogenic and toxic effects, and studies of workers exposed to high concentrations of benzene—up to 100 parts per million—throughout their working life have demonstrated increased risks of leukaemia. Because benzene is a genotoxic carcinogen, no absolutely safe level of exposure can be defined. However, no adverse effect on blood formation has been confirmed in humans following regular repeated exposure to benzene in air at concentrations below 25–30 ppm.

The Department is advised on the health effects of benzene by the Committee on Carcinogenicity and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. Their views were taken into account by the joint Department of the Environment/Department of Health expert panel on air quality standards when it recommended a United Kingdom air quality standard for benzene of 5ppb as a running annual average. The urban annual average concentrations is generally at or below 5ppb; at these concentrations there is only an exceedingly small risk to health. The overall effect of policies now in place or agreed means that by the year 2000 exceedances of 5ppb standard should be virtually eliminated.

Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus occurred in Britain in each year since 1990 and in each month since January 1994. [17770]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally in England. Details relating to Wales and Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

Foster Placements

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals she is considering to alter the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991 with respect to the duties of local authorities and the delegation of those duties to profit-making independent fostering agencies; [17553]

(2) what consultations she has undertaken or plans to undertake about any proposed changes in the Foster Placement Regulations 1991. [17554]

Mr. Bowis: The Government propose to amend the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991 to allow local authorities to delegate to profit-making bodies, certain of their fostering duties.

In August 1994 the Department of Health advised authorities, through circular LAC(94)20, copies of which are available in the Library, of an intention to amend these regulations in this way. I shall shortly be consulting on the draft regulations and associated guidance.

Lynfield Mount Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disciplinary action has been taken following the internal and external inquiries into the circumstances in which Raymond Pemberton escaped from the secure unit at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford; and if she will make a statement. [18156]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for Bradford Community Health National Health Service Trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust for details.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in her Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18326]

Mr. Sackville: The numbers of staff in post in the Department's agencies for the period 1 April 1993 to 1 February 1995—the latest date for which information is held—and the numbers of posts in agencies which have been contractorised in the last two years, are shown in the tables.

Agency staff in post[1]

	1 April 1993	*1 April 1994*	*1 February 1995*
Medicines Control Agency	327	379	372
National Health Service Estates	98	99	109
National Health Service Pensions Agency	531	530	498.6
Medical Devices Agency	—	[2]160.5	158

[1] Vacancies and unfilled posts not included.

[2] The Medical Devices Agency was established on 27 September 1994. Staff in post figures are given for that date.

Contractorised posts

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Medicines Control Agency	2	—
National Health Service Estates	23	—
National Health Service Pensions Agency	—	16.4
Medical Devices Agency	—	4.35

Royal Northern Hospital

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations or considerations were received either by her Department or the regional health authority concerning the future of the Royal Northern hospital in Islington. [18417]

Mr. Malone: The future of the Royal Northern hospital is a matter for the North Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Stavely, chairman of the authority, for information concerning the representations the authority has received. The Department of Health has received few expressions of interest in the future of the hospital.

Accident and Emergency Services, London

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that the accident and emergency departments of *(a)* the Royal Free hospital, *(b)* University College hospital, *(c)* Whittingdon hospital, *(d)* the Royal London hospital, *(e)* Homerton hospital, *(f)* North Middlesex and *(g)* Chase Farm will remain open permanently. [18310]

Mr. Sackville: The provision of accident and emergency services is the responsibility of local health authorities, and is determined in the light of local needs, priorities and resources. The hon. Member may wish to contact New River health authority for details of any plans concerning North Middlesex and Chase Farm hospitals; Camden and Islington health authority about the Royal Free, Whittington and University College hospitals; and East London and The City health authority about Homerton and the Royal London hospitals.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest estimate of the operating capacity and operating level of each of London's accident and emergency units; and if she will make a statement. [18289]

Mr. Sackville: It is for local health authorities to determine the extent of their needs for accident and emergency services, and to ensure that these are met.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration her Department has given to the effect that the closure of London hospitals will have on the time that emergency ambulances will take to reach a suitable hospital. [18269]

Mr. Malone: When proposing major service changes, local heath authorites take into account the effect on ambulance journey times to ensure that arrangements will be adequate.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the increase or decrease in the number of dentists between 1985 and 1995 in the areas of *(a)* Kent, *(b)* Surrey, *(c)* Bedfordshire and *(d)* Buckinghamshire. [18273]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

General Dental Service: numbers of dentists[1,2] in Kent, Surrey, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire family health services authorities at 30 September 1995 and 30 September 1994.

FHSA	1985	1994	Increase
Kent	458	540	82
Surrey	431	443	12
Bedfordshire	128	149	21
Buckinghamshire	189	240	51

Source:

Dental Practice Board.

Notes:

[1] Includes principals, assistants and vocational trainees. Excludes hospital, community and salaried dentists.

[2] Some dentists have contracts with more than one family health services authority. These dentists have been counted only once, in the family health services authority in which they hold their main contracts.

Contagious Diseases (Health Workers)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses and how many doctors have died from contagious diseases originating at their work place in each of the last 15 years; what information is given to nursing and other staff of the risks of disease from specific patients; and if she will make a statement. [16946]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The information requested from the national health service industrial injuries scheme records would require extensive manual investigations and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information from other sources is as shown.

Employers are required by the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 to report specified diseases suffered by a person currently at work where the work involves an activity mentioned in the schedule. There is no requirement to report deaths resulting from these diseases. The specified diseases relevant to health care workers most likely to be fatal are hepatitis, tuberculosis and illnesses caused by a pathogen which presents a hazard to human health. The latter would include HIV. The table gives details of reports received since April 1986 where the occupation was given as nurse or doctor. Not all of these will have been occupationally acquired.

Year	*Hepatitis*	*Tuberculosis*	*Pathogen*	*Total*
1986–87	11	6	4	21
1987–88	9	3	—	12
1988–89	7	1	—	8
1989–90	8	2	—	10
1990–91	5	3	2	10
1991–92	4	5	12	21
1992–93	1	2	2	5
1993–94	—	2	2	4

The Public Health Laboratory Service keep records of how HIV infection and hepatitis B were probably acquired. No deaths from AIDS are known to have occurred in health care workers who acquired HIV infection occupationally. No fatal cases of acute hepatitis B are known to have occurred in a health care worker infected at work in the United Kingdom during the past 10 years.

The number of deaths from tuberculosis in health care workers infected at work is not known. However, a survey in 1988 revealed fewer than 50 health care workers with tuberculosis and the majority of those will not have acquired the disease through their work. Based on the known fatality rate for TB in this age group, only one or two of these cases will be expected to have died.

In 1990 The Department of Health issued a booklet "Guidance for Clinical Health Care Workers—Protection Against Infection With HIV and Hepatitis Viruses". Advice is also contained in guidelines by the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens; "HIV—the Causative agent of AIDS" also issued in 1990. Advice on protection of health workers was given in the British Thoracic Society guidelines in 1994. Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Food labelling (Peanut Products)

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans her Department has to introduce food safety regulations to enforce the indication of peanut extract contents on food labelling. [17014]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

The European Community's scientific committee for food is currently considering recommendations concerning which allergens occurring in food have sufficiently serious consequences for consumer health to justify their always being listed on a food label. We expect the EC Commission to make proposals for revised rules following receipt of the scientific opinion and we expect that peanuts will be included.

In the meantime, my officials have held discussions with industry and consumer representatives and have established awareness of the problem across all sectors of the industry. As a result, many food manufacturers are now labelling their products voluntarily and some have examined the reformulation of products. We have also sponsored research to determine whether and how far groundnut oils may be contributing to the problems.

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in England the total number of homeless households accepted for each local authority in each year between 1979 and 1994. [17045]

Mr. Curry: I have today placed in the Library a table giving the numbers of homeless households which each local authority in England reported as having accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation, under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 in the years 1979 to 1994.

Council House Sales

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of council homes sold *(a)* under the right to buy, and *(b)* otherwise, by each local authority in England in each year from 1980 to 1994. [17044]

Mr. Curry: Tables showing the available information on total right-to-buy sales for each English local authority for every financial year from 1979–80 to March 1994 are in the Library. In addition, the tables also give data on total sales and on the number of flats sold.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which are considered to be debt free; and what are the Government guidelines on the debt to equity ratio for local authorities. [17372]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A local authority is debt free if it has a nil or negative credit ceiling at the beginning of the current financial year and has no outstanding borrowing, other than short-term borrowing repayable within not more than 12 months or borrowing under the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1924. The following local authorities declared themselves to be debt free as at 30 September 1994:

Dorset
Bedford
Bracknell
Breckland
Broadland
Chiltern
Christchurch
Corby
Dacorum
Daventry
East Cambridgeshire
East Devon
East Dorset
Epsom and Ewell
Hambleton
Hertsmere
Leominster
Medina
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Sussex
Newbury
Rochester upon Medway
Ryedale
St. Edmundsbury
South Bucks
South Northampton
South Shropshire
South Wight
South Coastal
Surrey Heath
Swale
Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells
West Sussex
Barking and Dagenham
City of London

There is no real equivalent to shareholders' equity in local authorities, and therefore no guidelines on the ratio of debt to equity. But the local government capital finance system effectively regulates authorities' new borrowing and requires provision to be made for debt redemption. We will continue to encourage local authorities to reduce their outstanding debt using sums which they have set aside for this purpose.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to reduce the rate support grant to local authorities. [18236]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Revenue support grant funds the difference between local authorities' standard spending assessments and what they can expect to receive from council taxes, non-domestic rates and from other grants. The relative levels of these components are considered annually by the Government as part of the public expenditure round.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce his capping principles for 1995–96 and the list of authorities which he intends to cap.

Mr. Gummer: My capping principles for 1995–96 are as follows:

(i) for police authorities:

any increase of more than 2.5 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over SSA;

any increase of more than 1.5 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over 5 per cent. above SSA;

any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over 10 per cent. above SSA;

(ii) for inner London boroughs and the metropolitan county fire and civil defence authorities:

any increase of more than 2 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over SSA;

any increase of more than 1.25 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over 5 per cent. above SSA;

any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over 10 per cent. above SSA;

(iii) for all other authorities:

any increase of more than 0.5 per cent. over the 1994–95 base budget is an excessive increase if it gives rise to a 1995–96 budget requirement over SSA;

(iv) for all authorities:

any 1995–96 budget requirement more than 12.5 per cent. above SSA is excessive save that an authority will not be designated if:

(a) its 1994–95 SSA was reduced by 10 per cent. or more purely as a result of the 1993 SSA review and its 1995–96 budget requirement is a cash freeze or reduction on its 1994–95 base budget;

(b) its 1995–96 budget requirement is 30 per cent. or less above SSA and is a cash freeze or reduction on its 1994–95 base budget;

(c) its 1995–96 budget requirement is 60 per cent. or less above SSA and is at least 5 per cent. below its 1994–95 base budget;

(d) its 1995–96 budget requirement is at least 10 per cent. below its 1994–95 base budget.

with the general proviso that:

no authority is to be designated if its budget requirement is £10,000 or less above the limit implied by these principles.

In accordance with sections 54 and 56 of the Local Government Act 1992, I have decided to designate the authorities listed. The amount given in brackets after each authority is the amount which I am proposing should be the maximum amount calculated by each authority as its budget requirement for 1995–96—in the case of billing authorities, the amount is gross of local precepts:

Devon county council—£592.046 million
Gloucestershire county council—£300.714 million
Shropshire county council—£239.364 million
Somerset county council—£262.321 million
Sheffield city council—£392.763 million
Newcastle upon Tyne city council—£233.991 million
Barnsley metropolitan borough council—£150.626 million
Norwich city council—£16.378 million
Lincolnshire police authority—£58.577 million
South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority—£32.934 million

I have placed in the Library of the House a table which gives further details.

Authorities which have been designated for council tax capping now have a period of 28 days, starting today, in which to inform us whether or not they accept their proposed cap. It they accept, the cap is confirmed by notice and the authority can set a revised lower budget and lower council tax bills forthwith. The exception is South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority which has been designated at the budget it originally set and therefore does not have to reduce its budget nor incur rebilling costs. If an authority challenges, it must propose an alternative together with its reasons for doing so. At this stage, authorities have the opportunity to meet us to explain that case. Once we have considered all the available information, we shall propose final caps which will be included in an order, a draft of which is debated by the House of Commons. If the draft order is approved, final caps are set by notice and revised budgets and council tax levels must then be set by the authorities concerned.

Gloucestershire County Council

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Gloucestershire county council's total debt for the latest year for which figures are available; and what were the figures for each of the previous 10 years. [17373]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows:

Outstanding debt at end of year[1]

Year	*£ million*
1983–84	23.9
1984–85	23.8
1985–86	45.9
1986–87	53.4
1987–88	66.8
1988–89	92.4
1989–90	104.4
1990–91	121.1
1991–92	124.5
1992–93	129.9
1993–94	136.3

Sources:

[1] 1983–90 CIPFA capital expenditure and debt financing statistics.

1990–94 Total external debt, borrowing and lending surveys and the Public Works Loans Board.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Internet electronic addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information superhighway. [17738]

Sir Paul Beresford: DOE is currently evaluating the Internet for electronic communications and has not established formal e-mail addresses for the Department centrally or Ministers individually. A fully advanced office support system project is, however, now under way and will, among other things, provide full electronic mail links across all areas of the Department and the ability to communicate via external networks, during the next three years.

Officials have been asked to investigate the feasibility of publishing a range of departmental information through the Internet. No firm decision has yet been taken by the Department to use this service.

Construction Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer from the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *432*, what is his Department's view on whether value for money in public procurement and the efficient contribution of the construction industry to the economy is best served by a single exclusive register for public sector work. [17726]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Sir Michael Latham, in his review "Constructing the Team", recommended that there should be single lists of contractors and consultants seeking public sector work. He further recommended that these be based upon the contractor management information systems and the consultants register, databases managed by the Department of the Environment. Two working groups acting under the auspices of the Construction Industry Board are considering Sir Michael's recommendations. One is considering consultants, the other contractors. Both working groups are due to report later this year. In tandem with the two working groups, the Department of the Environment has set in hand a consultancy project with Capita Management Consultancy Ltd., which is considering, among other things, the costs and benefits which would accrue to both the public and private sector, in having a single list for contractors and consultants for public sector work. The consultants are due to report at the end of April this year.

Local Authorities (Overtime)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on total overtime payments made by local authorities; and if he will list the total amount paid by each local authority in the most recent year the information is available. [18063]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is not available centrally.

Research Projects

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column 229, to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), if he will list for the remaining regional government offices the research projects contracted for, the titles of the projects, their estimated cost and to which company or organisation they have been awarded. [17492]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 31 March 1995]*: The following contracts have been let on behalf of the government offices listed, since their establishment in April 1994:

Government Office for the North East

None

Government Office for the North West

None

Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside

Title	*Estimated Cost £*	*Contractor*
Research and evaluation advice unit	41,000	Leeds Metropolitan university
Analysis of TEC corporate plans	4,700	BPI group
Regional economic review	13,000	Leeds Metropolitan university
Market it yourself tool-kit—for use by community and voluntary organisations	10,000	Collingwood Court and Associates Ltd.

Government Office for Merseyside

Title	*Estimated cost (£)*	*Contractor*
Mapping exercise into womens' networks, self-help groups and information points.	17,299	Kate Smith

Government Office for the West Midlands

Title	*Estimated Cost £*	*Contractor*
Travel patterns in the west midlands	37,000	ECOTOEC Ltd.
Integrated regional office consultancy study	23,221	Cooper Simms Associates Ltd.

Government Office for the East Midlands

Title	*Estimated cost £*	*Contractor*
Research into the strategic and operational aspects of planning the delivery of modern apprenticeships	9,655	Pieda plc
Research into the position of women in the economy and labour market in the east midlands	15,639	Institute of Manpower Studies
Research into TECs in the east midlands in influencing the delivery and provision of higher level skills, education and training	9,655	Pieda plc
Research into the extent of management skills in the east midlands and possible future management skill requirements	10,239	University of Warwick

Government Office for the Eastern Region

None.

Government Office for the South West

Title	*Estimated cost £*	*Contractor*
National education and training targets in the south west	11,000	Prism Research (in collaboration with the SW TECS)
Competitiveness: a regional management economic and labour market assessment	21,000	K P M G Consulting
Fair play for women—mapping of women's networks in the south-west and research into their level of effectiveness	18,000	M Ball

Government Office for the South East

Title	*Estimated cost £*	*Contractor*
Household survey of progress towards lifetime targets	10,000	Hampshire TEC

Government Office for the South East

Title	*Estimated cost* £	*Contractor*
Customer survey	20,000	Surrey TEC
Career aspirations of adolescent girls	4,490	The Basingstoke Consortium
Delivery of fair play for women—Research into Muslim women's Borough experience in the labour market	4,500	Reading Borough Council
Technical vocational education initiative research	5,252	Denman Associates
Funding strategies for high-tech businesses	1,234	Innovation Resources (George Deacon)
"South-east Fact File" Update	3,000	Ancer Ltd

Motor Exhaust Pollution

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the addition of involatile ethers on motor exhaust pollution. [17769]

Mr. Atkins: The environmental case for the addition of involatile ethers such as MTBE, ETBE or TAME to petrol as oxygenating agents in not yet clear. The Government will continue to keep their use under review, and will be participating fully in the setting of standards for vehicle emissions and fuel formulation at a European level, in particular in the light of the forthcoming report from the European tripartite initiative on future engine and fuel technologies.

Walton Bridge

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call in the planning application by Surrey county council to replace Walton bridge. [17775]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are considering representations that the application should be called in for decision by my right hon. Friend. I shall write to the hon. Member when the decision on call-in has been made.

North Sea

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail the progress being made to fulfil United Kingdom commitments to a 50 per cent. reduction in pollution levels of pesticides and heavy metals going into the North sea. [17476]

Mr. Atkins: A comprehensive progress report on the implementation of all the commitments made at the third international conference on the protection of the North sea, including that to achieve significant reductions—of 50 per cent. or more—of inputs to the North sea of certain listed hazardous substances, is being prepared jointly by the North sea states, and will be published for the fourth North sea conference in June. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Allowing for the difficulties of assessment and comparison, this report will show that the United Kingdom has reduced, by about 50 per cent. or more, inputs of 12 of the 16 pesticides, and seven of the eight heavy metals, in the list. Other reductions have also been achieved.

Waste Management

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the guidance on the regulations for the dismantling and metals recycling industry forthwith, and extend the date for registration for exemption from waste management licensing until 1 May 1995. [18428]

Mr. Atkins: Exemptions from waste management licensing for the recovery of scrap metal are provided in the Waste Management licensing (Amendment etc.) Regulations 1995 which came into force on 1 April 1995. The effect of regulations 3(7) and (8) is to provide a six-month transitional period, to 1 October 1995, during which businesses may register exemptions. We have provided guidance on the regulations in DOE circular 6/95. Copies of the circular have been placed in the Library of the House.

Water Charges

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the basis of charging for water in England and Wales after March 2000 when the use of rateable value will no longer be possible. [18809]

Mr. Gummer: It is for water companies to decide the basis on which they should calculate the bills of individual customers, although the Director General of Water Services has powers to prevent preferential and discriminatory charging of individuals and classes of customer. Companies may not, however, use rateable values after 31 March 2000, and there are limitations on access to information about the council tax banding of individual properties.

The Government believe that metering is in the long term the best basis for paying for water in many circumstances. It is fair and equitable in that it relates charges directly to the amount of water used. It gives customers some control over their bills. Payment by amount used encourages customers to use only water they need and in dry areas it is important that we should develop patterns of water use that are sustainable in the longer term. The Government therefore believe that companies should extend the availability of meters as far as is reasonable. Compulsory transfer to meters for existing domestic customers in existing premises should not generally be necessary.

For practical reasons, wide extension of the use of meters will take considerable time to achieve. Meanwhile, companies will need an alternative basis of charging for many properties. The Secretary of State for Wales and I have considered the representations we have received from the water industry that information about council valuation bands would be a suitable basis for charging for water. We have looked carefully at the evidence which has been put forward. We have concluded that a change to a system based on council tax banding would not be satisfactory. Such a charging system would not necessarily be more equitable than any other unmeasured basis and its introduction would give rise to widespread and arbitrary changes in bills, including the possibility of substantial increases in charges for many of those least able to pay. Further changes would also have to follow as customers moved to charging by metered consumption. We do not therefore intend to allow access to this information.

Companies will, however, need an alternative to metering as the basis of charging after 31 March 2000. The Secretary of State for Wales and I have therefore decided that the best course would be to allow the use of rateable values after that date. The necessary changes to the legislation will be made in due course.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food and Drink Statistics

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the United Kingdom food and drink deficit or surplus *(a)* in total and *(b)* with other countries of the EU for each year from 1990 to 1994. [14929]

Mr. Jack *[Pursuant to his reply, 22 March 1995, co. 232.]:* Imports and exports of food, feed and drink as recorded in the overseas trade statistics in the years 1990 to 1994 are shown in £ million in the table:

£ million

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993 provisional*	*January-September 1994 provisional*
Total:					
Imports	12,298	12,262	13,406	13,841	10,868
Exports	6,352	6,827	7,521	8,053	6,435
Crude trade gap	5,946	5,435	5,886	5,789	4,433
EU:					
Imports	8,030	8,019	8,862	8,381	6,510
Exports	3,632	4,293	4,736	4,730	3,885
Crude trade gap	4,398	3,726	4,127	3,651	2,625

Note:
Because of differences in valuation principles, the crude trade gap overstates the contribution of food, feed and drink to the deficit on visible trade in the balance of payment statistics by about 15 per cent.
Source:
Central Statistical Office.

Live Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether calves kept in lorries while waiting for loading on to an aeroplane can be adequately watered. [16979]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* It is possible, depending on the circumstances, for calves to be satisfactorily fed with liquid feed while on a lorry. The circumstances have not to date arisen where this has been necessary while waiting for loading on to an aeroplane.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the welfare of calves being exported by aeroplanes from Coventry airport; how many calves have departed from Coventry airport in each month since September 1994; and how many calf fatalities there were in each month which occured (i) during loading; (ii) on board the aircraft and (iii) during unloading. [16973]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Information about flights from Coventry with calves is as follows:

	1994			*1995*		
	October	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March (to 29th)*
Flights	None	33	71	3	31	51
Calves	None	6,296	13,535	291	3,102	4,946

No calf fatalities have been reported during loading or unloading, or while the calves were on board the aircraft.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if there is a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food veterinary surgeon present at all loadings of calves on to aeroplanes art Coventry airport. [16975]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* All loading of calves on to planes at Coventry airport are supervised by an inspector or a veterinary inspector from the Ministry.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the legal opinion published on 30 March by the RSPCA and the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which argues that the Government could lawfully prohibit the export of veal calves for rearing in veal crates. [18769]

Mr. Waldegrave: The legal opinion published by the RSPCA and IFAW on 30 March is a complex document which merits thorough examination. I shall consider it carefully alongside the other legal advice I have received.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people will be transferred from local authorities to the Meat Hygiene Service; and what is the total estimated cost of this operation. [17017]

Mrs. Browning: A total of 753 staff are expected to transfer to the Meat Hygiene Service from local authorities. External consultants were employed to carry out this exercise which has been completed at a cost of £85,000.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the difference in charges for meat inspection per hour between each local authority and the Meat Hygiene Service. [17618]

Mrs. Browning: A comparison between existing local authorities authority charges for meat inspection and the proposed standard charges by the Meat Hygiene Service was given in the cost compliance assessment which was tabled with the Meat (Hygiene, Inspection and Examinations for Residues) (Charges) Regulations 1995.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 29 March, *Official Report*, columns *653–54*.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many people will be employed by the Meat Hygiene Service; and what will be their total annual salary; [17016]

(2) what will be the number of senior management staff within the Meat Hygiene Service; and what is their estimated total annual salary. [17024]

Mrs. Browning: The Meat Hygiene Service expects to employ 947 staff at an estimated total annual salary for 1995–96 of £26.5 million. It will employ 11 senior managers at an estimated total annual salary of £476,000.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the total number of Meat Hygiene Service *(a)* official veterinary surgeons and *(b)* Meat Hygiene Inspectors; and what will be their estimated salaries. [17219]

Mrs. Browning: The Meat Hygiene Service expects to employ 47 official veterinary surgeons and 835 meat hygiene inspectors. In addition, veterinary services and relief cover for meat inspection will be obtained through contract. I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 3 April to hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) in respect of MHS salaries.

Abattoirs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans the Minister has to monitor the capacity of abattoirs in the United Kingdom. [17019]

Mrs. Browning: The Department has no plans to collect this information centrally. Information on the capacity of British abattoirs is contained in the Meat and Livestock Commission's annual publication entitled "The Abattoir Industry in Great Britain", available from the MLC, ISBN 0904650.33.2.

Intergovernmental Panel on the Oceans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the letter from the Prime Minister to hon. Member for Linlithgow of 9 March, what progress has been made on the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on the oceans. [17199]

Mr. Jack: The Government share concerns about the depletion of fish stocks and the wider problems of the marine environment. We are reviewing the adequacy of existing mechanisms for fisheries management and will be taking soundings internationally about the possible value of a new initiative such as the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on the oceans.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information superhighway. [17740]

Mr. Jack: As a result of its participation in the CCTA Government information service pilot project, MAFF is aware of the potential offered by electronic networks such as the Internet for the rapid and cost-effective dissemination of public information, and some of the wider opportunities that might be available to the Department through access to Internet services such as the world wide web. The Department is reviewing the options for developing the use of these services further by expanding the range of information on MAFF services, activities and publications accessible to Internet users, and for providing direct access to Internet services for MAFF staff. This work will include looking into the provision of a dedicated MAFF service on the Internet, together with full consideration of the security issues.

We shall also be considering how e-mail access to all parts of the Department, including Ministers' offices, can be increased. The current structure of the Internet electronic mail address for MAFF divisions is:

a.n.other@div.maff.gov.uk

At present, the gateway for public inquirers using e-mail is through the MAFF helpline service on:

helpline@inf.maff.gov.uk

Sheep Dips

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the development and use of non-organophosphorous sheep dips. [17392]

Mrs Browning: Flumethrin-based non-organophosphorous sheep dips are already authorised for use in the United Kingdom. Decisions on whether to use these products is the responsibility of the individual sheep farmer in the light of their particular circumstances, including the alternatives available and the health status of their flock. The development and marketing of non-organophosphorous dips is a matter for the commercial judgment of the manufacturers concerned. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate will do all it can to complete the assessment of any applications for marketing authorisations for such products as quickly as possible.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the assessment of the proposals submitted for epidemiological research into the effects of organophosphorous sheep dips; and if he will make a statement. [18770]

Mrs. Browning: Thirteen proposals were received in response to the advertisements placed at the end of 1994 following acceptance by the Government of the recommendation of the medical and scientific panel of the veterinary products committee for carefully designed and targeted epidemiological studies into the effects of OP sheep dips. This research is to be publicly funded. Assessment of the proposals has now been completed, and after detailed consideration it has been concluded that none meets the specifications laid down in the original advertisement. Considerable changes would need to be made before any of them could do so and, in the circumstances, it has been decided to re-advertise so that new or revised proposals can be submitted. This will be done as quickly as possible, but it is now likely to be the end of July before any contracts can be awarded.

I very much regret this further delay in getting this important work under way, but it is clearly in the interests of all concerned to ensure that any research which is commissioned is both scientifically sound and addresses the issues of concern.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will indicate in respect of the members of the review of the common fisheries policy *(a)* their position for or against the common fisheries policy and *(b)* the Government or European posts or grants which they have or have had in the past; [17964]

(2) what consultations he has had with *(a)* the Scottish White Fish Producers, *(b)* the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and *(c)* Save Britain's Fish before appointing the members of his review body on the common fisheries policy; of if he will accept nominations from these bodies for members; [17896]

(3) what consideration was given to including in the review group of the common fisheries policy individuals critical of the common fisheries policy. [17963]

Mr. Jack: The members of the group set up to review the common fisheries policy were appointed because of the particular personal expertise in fisheries and related matters which they could bring to the group's discussions. I shall want the group to take an open-minded look at possible improvements to the CFP and, if it decides that it would help its work to hear from specific organisations or individuals, that could be arranged. I did not consider it would be helpful to have members representing particular interest groups.

Banner Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to respond to the recommendation in the Banner report on the ethical implications of emerging technologies in the breeding of farm animals to establish an advisory standing committee on the broad ethical questions involved in this field. [18076]

Mrs. Browning: The Government are considering with the Farm Animal Welfare Council and the animal procedures committee whether an additional source of advice on ethical issues is needed or whether the existing committees could fulfil this role. These bodies are expected to consider the issue later in the year.

Grant Misuse

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what has been the total cost to his Department of preparing and bringing charges against farmers in Devon and Cornwall for allegedly misusing departmental grants for hedging and ditching; against how many farmers his Department has prepared cases; how many have been charged; and what has been the outcome of any court cases so far; [18005]

(2) if it is his Department's intention to continue to pursue charges against farmers in Devon and Cornwall for allegedly misusing hedging and ditching grants; and if he will make a statement. [18006]

Mrs. Browning: This Department has been conducting investigations into a large number of grant applications in Devon and Cornwall.As a result of these investigations, so far, 19 people have been summoned and subsequently committed to the Crown court for trial. One case has been heard, at the end of February, and this resulted in an acquittal of the defendant. Three further cases are likely to be listed for trial in May. All the cases are kept under constant review in accordance with the code for Crown prosecutors. Further reports are under consideration and at this stage I am unable to comment further.

It is not possible to calculate the total cost to the Department of preparing and bringing charges before the court without disproportionate cost being incurred.

Crop Fees

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of the Seeds (National List of Varieties) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (SI 1995 No. 607); what is the highest percentage increase in fees on crops; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of a fee for a winter oilseed rape variety. [18396]

Mr. Jack: These regulations implement the final stage of a review of the statutory plant variety trialling system, which reduced the overall number of trial sites and hence the overall costs. The industry was fully consulted and agreed the proposals. Part of this agreement included the reintroduction of statutory trial fees over two years from 1 April 1994. The cost to the industry of such fees is more than offset by the savings arising from the reduced trialling system and the transfer of disease testing costs to Government. The net effect of these arrangements was to reduce the overall costs to the industry by about 10 per cent.

Since the industry agreed to the above arrangements in advance, I foresee no adverse effect from the introduction of statutory trial fees for winter oilseed rape varieties.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Press Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many press officers there are in his Department currently; and what the figure was in 1979. [16573]

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently 29 press officers working in the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office compared with 26 in 1979.

Part-time Study

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to reduce the number of hours permitted for a person on benefit to attend courses at colleges of further education without losing benefit; and if they have examined the impact of these plans on *(a)* the participation in vocational education courses by the long-term unemployed and *(b)* the future of further education establishments particularly those developed specifically to tackle the shortage of skills in areas of high unemployment. [17069]

Mr. Moss: The Government have announced proposals to update the rules for part-time study while claiming unemployment benefits when jobseeker's allowance is introduced in April 1996.

As now, people claiming unemployment benefits will be able to study part-time provided they remain available for and are actively seeking employment. Courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council in England are, however, no longer classed as either full or part-time. They are defined in terms of the number of guided learning hours per week and the Government have decided, therefore, that for benefit purposes, part-time further education courses in England will be defined as courses up to 16 guided learning hours.

The concept of guided learning hours does not apply in Northern Ireland and consideration is being given to definitions that will reflect the education system in Northern Ireland. The new rules will be designed so that the same number of people can study part time while claiming unemployment benefits as do so now.

School Pupils

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial commitment the Government will give to a strategy within the primary and secondary sector to address low achievement levels among young people in the non-grammar school sector in Northern Ireland using professsionally qualified teachers. [17066]

Mr. Ancram: Some £20 million is being made available over the next three years to support an initiative aimed at addressing the problem of low achievement by pupils in a number of primary and secondary—non-grammer—schools in Northern Ireland. Selected schools will bid for the additional resources on the basis of school improvement plans which they must prepare.

University of Ulster

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy that the education and training services provided by the proposed new university of Ulster campus will complement the existing services in the west Belfast community. [17070]

Mr. Ancram: The Government have given no commitment to the proposed new university of Ulster campus at Springvale. The findings of an economic appraisal, and a report by the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council, both of which are expected shortly, will have to be fully considered before any firm view can be taken.

Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the official total cell capacity and *(b)* the inmate prison population in each prison in Northern Ireland on 24 March 1995. [17237]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Establishment	*Total cell capacity*	*Number of prisoners*
Her Majesty's Prison Belfast	413	293
Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry	500	331
Her Majesty's Prison Magilligan	328	298
Her Majesty's Prison Maze	794	721
Her Majesty's Young Offenders Centre	295	198
Total	2,330	1,841

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount of drugs and explosives that have been detected for each of the past five years as a result of strip searching of convicted and remand prisoners in *(a)* female and *(b)* male establishments. [18134]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 3 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question relating to finds during full searches in Northern Ireland Prison Service establishments.

The information you requested in respect of female prisoners is set out below. Information in the form required in respect of male prisoners is unobtainable from records after 31 march 1993.

Part (a):

Finds of drugs and explosives that have been detected for each of the past five years as a result of full searching of convicted and remand prisoners in female establishments:

1.3.90–31.12.90: None

1.1.91–31.12.91: None

1.1.92–31.12.92: None

1.1.93–31.12.93: None

1.1.94–31.12.94: None

1.1.95–28.2.95: None

Part (b):

Finds of drugs and explosives that have been detected for each of the past five years as a result of full searching of convicted and remand prisoners in male establishments:

1.3.90–31.12.90: There were 5 incidences of finds of drugs. Precise quantities are not recorded.

1.1.91–31.12.91: There were 5 incidences of finds of drugs. Precise quantities are not recorded.

1.1.92–31.12.92: There were 14 incidences of finds of drugs. Precise quantities are not recorded.

1.1.93–31.3.93: There were 3 incidences of finds of drugs. Precise quantities are not recorded.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the launch of the Northern Ireland Prison Service as an executive agency of the Northern Ireland Office. [18766]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Prison Service was established as an executive agency on 1 April 1995. I have set a number of key performance targets for the agency to achieve in its first year. These are as follows:

> To ensure 100 per cent. security for prisoners in high and top risk categories.
>
> To ensure at least 99.5 per cent. security for prisoners in medium and low risk categories.
>
> To ensure that the number of significant breaches of order and control does not exceed 159, this being the average for the previous three years. This figure will also form the baseline for future years.
>
> To increase the proportion of prisoner places with access to sanitation at all times of the day and night from 70 per cent. to 80 per cent.
>
> To increase the amount of time available for vocational training and occupational services from four hours per day to five hours and for education from 4.5 hours per day to six hours.
>
> To devise a system of regime monitoring and set baselines for each establishment.
>
> To implement the following programme to improve further the links between prisoners and their families:
>
> publishing a visitors charter approved by the Northern Ireland charter unit for HMP Magilligan and HM YOC Hydebank Wood;
>
> extending the use of payphones to all establishments; and opening additional visiting accommodation at HMP Maghaberry
>
> To offer all eligible prisoners at HM Magilligan and HMP Maghaberry a sentence plan and to achieve a 50 per cent. uptake;
>
> To ensure that the average annual cost per prisoner place does not exceed £73,122.

Copies of the framework document which sets out the terms within which the agency will operate will be placed in the Library, along with its first corporate and business plan.

Abortion Law

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the report on the abortion laws in Northern Ireland published by the Northern Ireland Family Planning Association, a copy of which has been sent to him. [17283]

Mr. Moss: I welcome the report in that it contains information and views which will further inform the current debate on the law on abortion in Northern Ireland.

Health and Social Services Trusts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who appoints *(a)* chairmen and *(b)* members of health trusts in Northern Ireland; and what is the criteria for their appointment. [17267]

Mr. Moss: All appointments to the boards of HSS Trusts in Northern Ireland are made by the Department of Health and Social Services, with the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend. All appointments are made on the basis of merit and there are no formal criteria for appointment. However, those appointed are likely to have some or all of the following attributes:

> an understanding of top management in a large organisation;
>
> a relevant specialist skill or knowledge;
>
> experience of the voluntary sector, preferably at senior management or committee level;
>
> living or working in the area to be served by the trust;
>
> willingness to give the necessary time commitment.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the social security benefits generally available to United Kingdom citizens between the years 1980 and 1994; and where the implementation of identical legislation led to different decisions being reached in Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. [17512]

Mr. Moss: Benefits generally available to United Kingdom citizens from 1980 to 1994 are listed in:

> "The Government's Expenditure Plans"
>
> "Northern Ireland Commentary on Public Expenditure Plans"
>
> "Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities: the Government's Expenditure Plans"
>
> Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Social Security benefits are available in Northern Ireland on the same basis as they are in Great Britain. It would not be appropriate to comment on the merits of individual cases as these are decided in accordance with the relevant law by independent adjudication authorities in the respective jurisdictions. Anyone who is dissatisfied with these decisions has the right to invoke the statutory review and appeal procedures.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17735]

Sir John Wheeler: In line with the open Government code of practice published in April 1994, the Northern Ireland civil service will be developing a strategy for making information available to the public domain through electronic means, including the Internet. CCTA, the Government Centre for Information Systems, have established a "presence" on the Internet for UK Government and some information from Northern Ireland Departments has already been made available to the public using this service. For example, the business development service of the Department of Finance and Personnel arranged for the publication of the joint framework document, UK papers, on the CCTA server. Currently none of the Ministers or Northern Ireland Departments have official addresses on the Internet. However, a number of NICS officials have mail boxes which are accessed through CCTA GTNet service.

Drugs

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 665, if he will list the number of occasions and dates when evidence in relation to drugs offences was available and appropriate action was taken. [17641]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morely: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of Blue Tongue were reported in each year since 1980. [17816]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of Aujesky's disease were reported in each year since 1985. [17811]

Mr. Ancram: Aujesky's disease has been notifiable in Northern Ireland only since February 1993. Nine cases of Aujesky's disease were notified in 1993 and eight in 1994. A scheme to eradicate Aujesky's disease in Northern Ireland was introduced in September 1994.

Hospital Provision

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to receive the report from Mr. James McKenna on hospital provision. [17846]

Mr. Moss: The acute hospitals reorganisation project chaired by Dr. James McKenna is looking at a wide range of specialities currently provided in the Royal Group of Hospitals Trust and the Belfast City Trust. I expect to receive a number of reports from Dr. McKenna over the next year.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many requests there have been from domestic consumers to have their water metered in each of the past five years in Northern Ireland. [17976]

Mr. Moss: None.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the water and sewerage in Northern Ireland, industrial and domestic, is paid for on a metered basis. [17978]

Mr. Moss: Approximately 17.5 per cent. of the annual expenditure on water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland is met from metered charges.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the principal water catchment ares in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the rest of Ireland. [17974]

Mr. Moss: The principle water catchment areas in Northern Ireland are:

The Mourne mountains
The Antrim plateau
The Sperrin mountains
Lough Neagh basin
Lough Erne catchment
Foyle valley

The last three of these straddle the border with the Republic of Ireland. I do not have information on the water catchment areas for the rest of Ireland.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many domestic properties in Northern Ireland are metered for the purpose of paying for water and sewerage; and what percentage this is of the total number of households; [17977]

(2) how many households have been disconnected for non-payment of water charges in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [17973]

Mr. Moss: The water supplied to a property which is used solely for domestic purposes is not metered and is not subject to disconnection.

The water supplied to a property which has mixed domestic and other use may be metered and is subject to disconnection for non-payment of water charges.

The total number of disconnections for non-payment of water charges in Northern Ireland in each of the past five financial years is set out in the table. Information on disconnections of metered supplies with a domestic content could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

1989–90: 292
1990–91: 258
1991–92: 385
1992–93: 211
1993–94: 146

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations the Minister has received from which individuals or groups in Northern Ireland to privatise the water and sewerage industry in the Province. [17975]

Mr. Moss: Since the Government announced their intention to privatise water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland in 1992 there have been a number of representations from elected representatives, district councils, voluntary bodies and private individuals about the Government's plans. None of these has expressed support for water privatisation.

Peace and Reconciliation Programme

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to give technical assistance for the preparation of projects and applications for funds under the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. [17463]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The draft guidelines for the special support programme stipulates that technical assistance should be made available during the preparation and implementation of the programme. In the preparation stage, it is a matter for the European Commission to offer any necessary assistance. It is likely that the programme will also include a provision to cover technical assistance during the implementation stage, but this will need to be agreed with the Irish authorities and the Commission.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will allow private sector companies to match finance for projects obtained from the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. [17465]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Government welcome private sector contributions to projects which the structural funds support. Where activities merit and are eligible for support from the funds within the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, it is likely that there will be scope for the private sector and private finance to play their part. However, the programme has still to be drawn up in conjunction with the Irish authorities and then negotiated with the European Commission.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations he *(a)* has had or *(b)* intends to have with European Commissioners concerning procedures through which the private sector could access resources from the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. [17464]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The Government wish to maximise the private sector contribution to projects assisted under the structural funds and have forwarded to the European Commission proposals for facilitating private sector contribution to projects to which the European regional development fund makes grants. This issue is not specific to the special support programme for peace and reconciliation.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he had made of the European Commission guidelines concerning the ability of the private sector wholly to match finance projects eligible for support from the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. [17466]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland is subject to the normal regulations governing the use of structural funds. The Government are awaiting the Commission response to UK proposals on the role of private sector matching funds in the context of these regulations.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to an hon. or right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18532]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18480]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report;* [18531]

(4) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18479]

Sir John Wheeler: Neither the Department nor the House of Commons POLIS unit collects information in the form requested.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the reception held at RUC Garnerville on 15 March 1995. [18313]

Sir John Wheeler: The cost of staging the RUC information forum on policing on 15 March 1995 at RUC Garnerville was £5,727.53.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis and on how many occasions the RUC has deployed an armoured car and two RUC constables to Surrey. [18312]

Sir John Wheeler: No armoured RUC vehicles, and consequently no associated constables, have been deployed elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Child Support

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make payments to those recipients of disability working allowance and family credit who lose income for the balance of the period of their existing claim to benefit as a result of the adjustments to the child support maintenance payments arising from the regulation changes to be introduced on 18 April and when; and if he will make a statement. [18764]

Mr. Moss: As will happen in the remainder of the United Kingdom, it is the intention to make such payments as soon as it is administratively possible to do so after the loss has been identified. In bringing forward the measure as part of the Child Support Bill now before the House, the Government have recognised that it is unreasonable not to offer compensation to working parents with care who are modestly paid, particularly as the structure of income support offers automatic adjustment for the incomes of those parents with care not at work and dependent on income support.

It would be unfair to wait until primary legislation receive Royal Assent, before considering compensation, as this would produce a large delay, which might cause hardship. Accordingly, payments will be in advance of both Royal Assent and of any estimate that could include provision for this compensation. Parliamentary approval for this provision will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department of Health and Social Services, vote 4. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £25,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Northern Ireland contingencies fund.

Prior Options Studies

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decisions have been reached on recently completed prior options studies carried out by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. [18765]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: These prior options studies were undertaken as part of a strategic review of the Department which examined how it might be reorganised and managed in the context of the Government reform initiative. As a result, it is proposed to create a further five next steps agencies dealing with the planning, environment, road and works services and the land registry and registry of deeds. These proposals will lead to radical restructuring of the Department which will involve a substantial shift in emphasis towards the Department becoming a purchaser rather than a direct provider of executive services. It is proposed that these Agencies will be launched and come into operation from 1 April 1996. When added to the Water Executive Agency, which is in the course of preparation for launch and five existing next steps agencies, the Department will have a total of 11 Agencies.

Industrial Research and Technology Unit

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the future organisation of the Industrial Research and Technology Unit. [18810]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am pleased to announce that the Industrial Research and Technology Unit will be established as an executive agency of the Department of Economic Development with effect from 3 April 1995. It will be responsible for the promotion of industrially-relevant research, development and technology transfer in Northern Ireland. This new status will give IRTU the freedom to operate within a framework of appropriate efficiency targets and performance measures. The following targets have been set for 1995–96:

to deliver a marketing programme for the promotion of innovation; this programme will have particular emphasis on the role of middle managers, women in science and the importance of industrial design;

under the Compete programme to increase the average industrial contribution by 1 per cent. and participation by new users to 10 per cent.;

to deliver an awareness campaign to promote the benefits of good environmental management and through a series of initiatives to encourage industry to take appropriate action;

to promote an increase of 20 per cent. in the use of national and worldwide databases;

to achieve a 20 per cent. increase in the uptake of IRTU's technical consultancy services;

to deliver a work programme to enable Government Departments to meet obligations for environmental protection, energy efficiency and health and safety at work;

to achieve efficiency savings of 2.5 per cent.

to undertake an examination of the scope for market testing of the Unit's activities;

to develop monitoring systems and, in association with the other DED businesses, deliver an appropriate action plan for targeting social need.

The policy and resources framework for the new agency is set out in the framework document, copies of which are being place in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Internet

Mr.Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super highway. [17732]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Department of Social Security is currently using Internet to provide and obtain information on a limited scale, and is actively considering further opportunities offered by the information super highway to improve its methods of communication. None of the Department's Ministers is currently linked to the Internet.

Pensions

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases in 1994 individuals were precluded from receiving payment of their retirement pension because of late application, under regulation 19(6)(b) of the Social Security (Claims and Payments Regulations) 1987. [17487]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the total population was old age pensioners in each year since 1974; and what assessment he has made of the relationship between the increase in benefit expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product from 1974–75 to 1994–95 and the increase in the percentage of old age pensioners in the population. [17679]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table. The data indicate that, although the number of people over state pension age as a percentage of the population of Great Britain has increased slightly over the period, this has not been the most significant factor in the increase in benefit expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

	Total benefit expenditure £ billion[1]	*Money GDP £ billion*[2]	*Benefit expenditure as percentage of GDP*	*Population of Great Britain (000s)*[3]	*Number over state pension age in Great Britain (000s)*	*Number over state pension age as percentage of population*
1974–75	6.6	89.4	7.38	54,709	9,276	16.95
1975–76	8.9	111.2	8.00	54,702	9,384	17.15
1976–77	10.6	130.0	8.15	54,693	9,450	17.28
1977–78	12.8	151.3	8.46	54,667	9,507	17.39
1978–79	15.9	173.7	9.15	54,655	9,535	17.45
1979–80	18.8	208.6	9.01	54,712	9,560	17.47
1980–81	22.7	237.7	9.55	54,797	9,713	17.73
1981–82	27.7	261.0	10.61	54,815	9,810	17.90
1982–83	31.6	285.8	11.06	54,780	9,867	18.01
1983–84	35.3	310.0	11.39	54,834	9,882	18.02
1984–85	38.3	332.1	11.53	54,956	9,910	18.03
1985–86	41.8	364.9	11.46	55,127	10,021	18.18
1986–87	44.9	392.7	11.43	55,285	10,102	18.27
1987–88	46.7	434.8	10.74	55,434	10,173	18.35
1988–89	47.3	484.1	9.77	55,580	10,221	18.39
1989–90	50.2	525.8	9.55	55,775	10,279	18.43
1990–91	56.5	556.8	10.15	55,972	10,310	18.42

	Total benefit expenditure £ billion[1]	*Money GDP £ billion*[2]	*Benefit expenditure as percentage of GDP*	*Population of Great Britain (000s)*[3]	*Number over state pension age in Great Britain (000s)*	*Number over state pension age as percentage of population*
1991–92	66.1	580.8	11.38	56,207	10,356	18.42
1992–93	75.2	604.8	12.43	56,388	10,380	18.41
1993–94	82.4	639.0	12.90	56,559	10,391	18.37

[1] 1995 Social Security Departmental report and earlier equivalents.

[2] "Financial Statement and Budget Report", 1995–96.

[3] Population figures supplied by Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (England and Wales) and General Register Office(Scotland). Population figures for 1994–95 are as yet unavailable.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current cost, gross and net, of increasing the basic state pension by £1 for a single pensioner and pro rata for a pensioner couple. [17688]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The estimated cost for 1995–96 is £480 million gross[1] and £350 million net[2].

[1] GB and overseas costs.

[2] Offsetting effects on income-related benefits.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many instances in 1994 women failed to claim their retirement pension on reaching the age of 60 years in the last year. [17486]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested. For the year ended March 1995, approximately 113,000 invitations to claim retirement pension were issued to men and women which did not result in a claim for benefit. These invitations are issued as a matter of course to people with potential entitlement to retirement pension as their 60th or 65th birthday approaches and, if they then fail to claim, again five years later.

Incapacity Benefit Appeals

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what he expects will be the time between the lodging of an appeal against the refusal of incapacity benefit and the subsequent tribunal hearing; and what plans he has to lay down performance standards in this respect; [17722]

(2) what is the average period between the lodging of an appeal against the refusal of invalidity benefit and the subsequent tribunal hearing; and what are the performance standards set down by him. [17718]

Mr. Hague: The administration of appeals is the responsibility of the President of the Independent Tribunal Service, His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte. For 1994–95 he set an average clearance time of 28 weeks for invalidity benefit and other appeals heard by the social security appeal tribunals. This covered the time from lodgement of appeal to the date of tribunal hearing. The same target will apply to incapacity benefit and other social security appeal tribunal appeals in 1995–96. The latest performance figures for invalidity benefit appeals are for the quarter ending June 1994, when they were cleared on average in 26.6 weeks.

Prisoners (Housing Benefits)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much money will be saved by reducing housing benefits to prisoners; and what assessment he has made of the consequential effect on the numbers of prisoners and the effect on expenditure; [17506]

(2) what plans he has to increase the amount of housing benefit for newly released prisoners. [17505]

Mr. Roger Evans: We estimate that there could be up to 10,000 single prisoners in receipt of housing benefit in a full year at a cost of up to £10 million. By limiting benefit for single prisoners to a maximum of 13 weeks, we expect to save most of that. We are discussing the possible financial effects of the changes with interested Government Departments, however, we do not expect that there will be any impact on the prison population. On release from prison, ex-offenders will be able to claim help with their housing costs in the same way as other tenants.

Disability Discrimination

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the costs of the changes to the Disability Discrimination Bill proposed by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 27 and 28 March; if he will itemise the cost of each change; and what he now expects to be the total cost of the Bill. [17802]

Mr. Hague: During consideration of the Disability Discrimination Bill on 27 and 28 March, I announced that the Government would seek to amend it in the Lords so that it would confer protection against discrimination on people who have had a disability that meets the Bill's definition and to take a power to make regulations to set accessibility standards for new public transport vehicles. I also announced that we proposed to incorporate within the Bill a number of measures which will ensure that providers of education give greater emphasis to the needs of pupils with special educational needs and students with learning difficulties and disabilities in planning their services. We have not yet finalised the necessary detailed changes to the Bill and therefore it is not possible to estimate the compliance costs.

A number of other amendments were made. These are designed to clarify the Bill's provisions and accordingly impose no new costs. It is, in any case, normal practice for more detailed estimates of the cost of new measures to accompany the publication of the regulations which will implement them, but an indication of the total cost of the Bill is contained in its compliance cost assessment, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Incomes

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, taking into account all available benefits, what would be the weekly income of *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a married person with a non-earning partner and *(c)* a married person with a non-earning partner and two children aged under 16 who was paid £3.50 an hour working (i) eight hours a week, (ii) 16 hours a week and (iii) 24 hours a week. [18082]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table. Entitlement to unemployment benefit has been assumed where this would be advantageous to the family type concerned. Earnings have also been assumed to be for a period that would allow for the highest benefit income. Eight hours' work has been assumed to represent one day's employment and 16 hours' work has been assumed to represent two day's employment.

To improve incentives to increase hours of work, two new measures will be introduced from October 1996. The back–to–work bonus will allow those who work part time while claiming jobseeker's allowance to build up a lump sum of up to £1,000. This will be payable when either the claimant or partner stops receiving jobseeker's allowance to go into work of 16 hours or more. In addition, a new in-work benefit aimed at couples and single people without children will be tested to examine its effects on increasing the gain from work, in the same way as family credit does now for families with children.

Weekly income for various family types at different hours of work

Hours of work	*Gross earnings* £	*Tax and national insurance contributions* £	*Take home pay* £	*Unemployment benefit* £	*Income support* £	*Family credit* £
Single person—aged 25 or over						
8	28.00	0.00	28.00	37.88	0.00	0.00
16	56.00	0.00	56.00	30.30	0.00	0.00
24	84.00	7.39	76.61	0.00	0.00	0.00
Married couple—non-earning partner						
8	28.00	0.00	28.00	61.25	0.00	0.00
16	56.00	0.00	56.00	49.00	0.00	0.00
24	84.00	3.84	80.16	0.00	0.00	0.00
Married couple—non-earning partner with two children aged 4 and 6 years						
8	28.00	0.00	28.00	61.25	10.35	0.00
16	56.00	0.00	56.00	0.00	0.00	66.70
24	84.00	3.84	80.16	0.00	0.00	60.78

Weekly income for various family types at different hours of work

Child benefit £	*Rent* £	*Housing benefit* £	*Council tax* £	*Council tax benefit* £	*Total net income* £	*Net income after rent and council tax* £
Single person—aged 25 or over						
0.00	30.91	21.04	6.60	3.56	90.49	52.98
0.00	30.91	7.77	6.00	0.00	94.07	56.56
0.00	30.91	14.07	6.60	1.42	92.10	54.59
Married couple—non-earning partner						
0.00	30.91	26.00	8.60	7.09	122.34	82.83
0.00	30.91	15.77	8.60	3.94	124.71	85.20
0.00	30.91	30.91	8.60	8.60	119.67	80.16
Married couple—non-earning partner with two children aged 4 and 6 years						
18.45	36.42	36.42	11.00	11.00	165.47	118.05
18.45	36.42	24.65	11.00	7.38	173.18	125.76
18.45	36.42	12.80	11.00	3.73	175.92	128.50

Notes:

1. Earnings for eight hours assumed to represent one day's employment. Earnings for 16 hours assumed to represent two day's employment.
2. All the examples shown assume take-up of full entitlement to the income-related and contributory benefits that would be most advantageous.
3. All the family types shown are assumed to live in local authority accommodation and be liable for average council tax and local authority rent.
4. Earnings are assumed to be £3.50 an hour.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he proposes to make to expedite payment arrangements to nationals of the EU who have won appeals to the tribunal against denial of benefit decisions under the habitual residence test, pending his Departments appeal against the tribunal verdict; what assessment he has made of hardship arising during the waiting period for his Department's further appeal and the appropriate arrangements to cover such hardship; and if he will make a statement. [18165]

Mr. Roger Evans: Where an adjudication officer has appealed to a social security commissioner against a decision of a social security appeal tribunal to award benefit, payment of that benefit may be suspended pending the outcome of the appeal. Decisions to suspend payment are made on a case by case basis by Benefits Agency staff acting on behalf of the Secretary of State. Payments of benefits should not be suspended where doing so would cause severe hardship. Statistics are not kept on the number of cases where payments are made because of hardship.

Market Testing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18334]

Mr. Roger Evans: A reduction of 2,532 posts has resulted from the award of contracts to private sector organisations for work that was previously done by civil servants.

A reduction of 993 posts has resulted from the efficiencies generated by civil servants whose bids to keep the work in-house were successful in a market test.

War Widows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the comparative totals of pension now received by *(a)* war widows and *(b)* widows on basic benefits currently received each year for all appropriate categories. [18159]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The rate of the basic war widow's pension awarded to the widow of a man whose death was due to service in the armed forces, depends on the late husband's rank. For the widow of a private, for example, the annual equivalent rate of the basic pension[1] is currently £3,897. The maximum annual pension for the widow of an officer is currently £4,621.

In addition, for the widow of a man whose service ended before 31 March 1973, a supplementary pension is paid; the annual equivalent is currently £2,541. Age allowances of £444, £856, and £1,273 are also payable at ages 65, 70 and 80 respectively. Most war widows now receive a total war widow's pension of about £7,294 a year. All of a war widow's pension is tax free.

Full details of the rates of war pensions and allowances are in the Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order, a copy of which may be found in the Library.

In comparison, the average pension currently received each year by a widow entitled to either widow's pension or widowed mother's allowance under the national insurance widow's benefits scheme is £2,995.

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[1] Normally payable weekly.

Fraud

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the information on sector fraud referred to in the executive summary of the sector fraud report in relation to *(a)* central and south Derbyshire and *(b)* nationally in each of the last two available 12-month periods. [16162]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of fraud work is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the right hon. Member with such information as is avaialable.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 3 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about sector fraud savings in Central and South Derbyshire and nationally. The information you requested is detailed below.

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*
Central and South Derbyshire		
Weekly benefit savings	4.74	5.49
Instrument of payment savings	0.24	0.34
National Figures		
Weekly benefit savings	487.14	535.62
Instrument of payment savings	23.68	45.1

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give details of instances, other than that of Marc Calder, where the personal details of a client of the Child Support Agency have been released publicly; [17093]

(2) what are his responsibilities to clients of the Child Support Agency in relation to the holding of personal details by the agency. [17095]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. David Jamieson, dated 4 April 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's responsibility to maintain client confidentiality.

The particular episode to which you refer is an isolated incident. Protecting clients' confidentiality is a cornerstone of the Agency's work, even when there is a great temptation to "put the record straight".

Information obtained in the course of deciding an application for child support is kept in the strictest confidence. An officer acting on behalf of the Secretary of State may use such information for benefit purposes, but it may not be passed to someone outside the Department of Social Security unless required, for example, by a child support appeal tribunal, or an authority dealing with housing benefit or council tax.

The disclosure of evidence is covered by child support legislation, and it is a criminal offence to disclose information without lawful authority. If any member of staff of the Agency is found to have disclosed personal details of a client without authorisatin, this will lead to disciplinary action. This may result in prosecution and/or dismissal.

TRANSPORT

Ship Accidents

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made in discussing the proposal put forward by George Livanos for a worldwide registration of ship accidents; and what consideration the International Maritime Organisation is giving to the proposal to establish a database on casualty statistics and investigations of shipping accidents by the sub-committee on flag state implementation. [17201]

Mr. Norris: Neither we nor the International Maritime Organisation have any record of Mr. Livanos' specific proposals. The IMO sub-committee on flag state implementation is working to the construction of a casualty database as a matter of priority. A correspondence group has been established to develop the work intersessionally and will report to the next session of FSI in February 1996.

Petrol

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the amount of *(a)* benzene and *(b)* aromatics compounds typically present in different grades of petrol; and what is the maximum permitted by law. [17700]

Mr. Norris: The composition of petrol varies significantly between refineries and between batches produced by the same refinery due to the processes used and the crude oil being processed. The latest available—1993—data from the United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association indicates that the average percentage of benzene and aromatics, by volume, in different grades of petrol, on a sales adjusted basis, is as follows:

Percentage by volume

Petrol	*4 star leaded*	*Unleaded premium*	*Unleaded super*
Benzene	2.12	2.46	3.08
Aromatics	31	33	42

Benzene is controlled at a maximum of 5 per cent. by EC directive F5/210/EEC. There is no maximum limit for aromatics.

British Rail (Consultants)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which consultants his Department has appointed to advise on the information systems implications of rail privatisation; when they were appointed; and what was the value of the contracts. [18086]

Mr. Watts: Ernst and Young was appointed on 8 June 1993 to advise on the overall programme management of information systems to support the restructured railway industry. Information about the value of individual contracts is commercially confidential.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which consultants have been engaged by British Rail in the last three years to advise on information systems; on what dates they were appointed; and what was the value of the contracts. [18085]

Mr. Watts: I understand from British Rail since 1993–94 the following consultants have been engaged to advise on information systems: Andersons Consulting, AD Little, Focus on Research, Forecast, Gemini, Holmes and Marchant, IMPAC, INDECO, Price Waterhouse, Touche Ross and TQM. Information on consultants prior to that year is not readily available. Information about the value of individual contracts is commercially confidential.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally in each of the past nine months in favour of claims for slots at Heathrow made by (i) United Airlines and (ii) American Airlines from (1) the airlines, (2) lobbyists and (3) hon. Members. [18081]

Dr. Mawhinney: I receive numerous representations concerning UK-US air services. The allocations of slots at Heathrow remains the responsibility of the independent Airport Co-ordination Ltd.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18335]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is given in the table:

Agency	*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*Jobs (nature)*
	Taken over by contractors	*Disappeared*	*Taken over by contractors*	*Disappeared*	
Coastguard	nil	nil	nil	16	Uniformed Coastguards and administrative
Driving Standards	nil	49	nil	nil	Driving Examiners
Driver and Vehicle Licensing[1]	—	—	[2]131	315	Administrative

Agency	*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*Jobs (nature)*
	Taken over by contractors	*Disappeared*	*Taken over by contractors*	*Disappeared*	
Highways	nil	nil	nil	72	—
Marine safety	nil	nil	nil	nil	—
Transport Research Laboratory	—	[3]84	—	[3]107	Scientific, industrial and administrative
Vehicle Certification	nil	nil	1	1	Administrative
Vehicle Inspectorate	nil	nil	16	84	Administrative, professional and technical

Notes:

[1] Posts reduced as a result of *"Competing for Quality"*, Cm 1730, the reporting of which does not accord with financial years. total reductions over the two financial years are shown in the table against 1994–95.

[2] Includes 123 posts which were market tested and work won by contractors.

[3] Reduction in posts reflects decline in demand for TRL services and contracting out work previously undertaken in-house; not possible to separately identify post reductions due to contracting-out activities.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of equal opportunity courses attended since beginning their appointment for each chief executive currently employed by his Department. [17891]

Mr. Norris: Three agency chief executives attended an equal opportunities seminar in autumn 1994. General management courses attended by agency chief executives during their careers will have included equal opportunities training.

Ferry Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will direct the Scottish rail users consultative committee, under the terms of section 78 of the Railways Act 1993, to consider the proposed withdrawal of the Kyle of Lochalsh-Kyleakin ferry service, subject to the relevant provisions of section 56 of the Transport Act 1962; and if he will make a statement. [18164]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) made a direction under section 78 of the Railways Act 1993 on 9 May 1994. The effect was to allow the Rail Users Consultative Committee for Scotland to continue to exercise its functions under section 56(4) to (6) of the Transport Act 1962 in relation to ferry services provided by Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd.

Public Bodies

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the appointments he has made to non-departmental bodies. [17892]

Mr. Norris: Most of the appointments made by my right hon. Friend to non-departmental bodies are listed in "Public Bodies 1994", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Appointments are also made by my right hon. Friend to port authorities, the acting conservator of the River Mersey and to the honorary medical advisory panels.

Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what limitations there are on the number of passengers permitted to stand on *(a)* single-deck and *(b)* double deck passenger vehicles (i) in general public service and (ii) hired by education authorities for the transport of pupils. [17834]

Mr. Norris: The number of passengers permitted to stand on a public service vehicle either single or double deck, is usually determined as part of the issue of a certificate of initial fitness or certificate of conformity for the individual vehicle.

Some older PSVs, however, were not issued with such certificates, in these cases the number of standing passengers permitted is one third of the seating capacity, in the lower deck only for double-deck vehicles, or eight passengers, whichever is the less. Standing is not permitted on the upper deck of any PSV.

These requirements apply to all PSVs including those hired by education authorities.

Passenger Service Requirements

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how British rail operators will be penalised for ignoring the new passenger service requirements. [17366]

Mr. Watts: Franchise operators will enter into a contract with the franchising director through the franchise agreement, which will require them to operate the services specified in the passenger service requirement. If operators do not deliver a timetable compliant with PSR, the franchising director may impose penalties, or, as a last resort, terminate the franchise agreement.

In respect of the first four franchises for which PSRs have been developed, British Rail confirmed at the time of the PSR consultation that its operators will continue to operate the existing level of service until such time as services are franchised to the private sector. The PSR is based broadly on the existing BR timetable.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to inform the public of the new passenger service requirements; and what procedure they must follow in complaints about any operator not following the passenger service requirements. [17367]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director is currently considering the responses to a comprehensive consultation with rail users consultative committees and local authorities about the first four proposed passenger service requirements. These represent the detailed contractual framework within which operators must draw up their passenger timetable. Operators will be under an obligation to publish comprehensive information about their timetable.

Operators must submit to the franchising director details of their proposed timetable. The franchising director will ensure that these are compliant with the PSR and will also monitor the actual services run. The franchising director may impose penalties if the PSR is not delivered. If passengers have complaints about services, these should be directed in the first instance to the train operator, and if they remain dissatisfied they should refer to the appropriate RUCC.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when all railways will be given passenger service requirements; and if they will be managed uniformly. [17368]

Mr. Watts: A passenger service requirement will be included in each franchise agreement that the franchising director makes with a franchise operator for the provision of passenger services. The franchising director has a statutory objective to franchise passenger services as soon as is reasonably practicable, and has a target to franchise at least 51 per cent. of passenger services by April 1996. He is currently developing a performance regime that will apply to all franchise operators.

Publicity

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To as the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates of for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17640]

Mr. Norris: The spending by my Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and the latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 are as follows:

£000

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 (estimate)*
(a) TV	5,052	4,193	4,335	n/a
(b) Radio	633	0	0	n/a
(c) Press (includes recruitment)	592	506	392	n/a
(d) Other	0	7	130	n/a
(e) Total	6,277	4,706	4,857	n/a
(f) Recruitment (percentage of total)	[1]8.2	[2]9.8	[1]5.5	[1]274.821

[1] Includes some or all costs for all agencies except the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

[2] Includes all costs for the Highways Agency, Coastguard and Marine Safety Agency.

[3] Includes all costs for the Central Transport Group, and senior staff in executive agencies at G5 level and above.

Expenditure plans by media for 1995–96 are not yet finalised.

Above figures exclude statutory advertising and advertising on road schemes.

Plutonium Nitrate

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has now received from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority a copy of the full review of plutonium nitrate transport to which he referred in his answer of 2 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1123*. [17962]

Mr. Norris: The Department has recently been notified that the full review report, which includes the executive summary, is now available. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

WALES

Trunk Road Agencies

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what conclusions he has reached on the pattern of trunk road agencies following local government reorganisation; and if he will make a statement. [18811]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Transition committees were invited to submit proposals for new trunk road agencies to replace the existing eight agencies after April 1996. Proposals were received from nine transition committees or groups of transition committees. These have been assessed and I have decided to appoint eight new agencies arranged geographically to give the minimum change from the present agency boundaries. This I believe will be welcomed in reducing disruption to staff and working procedures during the reorganisation.

I have selected the following proposals:

North East Wales—the proposal from the transition committees of Aberconwy and Colwyn, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham acting in partnership for the trunk roads in the area covering the present county of Clwyd plus Aberconwy.

North West Wales—the proposal from Caernarfonshire and Merionnethshire transition committee and supported by Anglesey transition committee but amended to exclude the trunk roads in the Aberconwy and Colwyn unitary authority for the trunk roads in the area covering the present county of Gwynedd less Aberconwy.

Mid Wales—the proposal from Powys transition committee for the trunk roads in the area of the present county of Powys.

West Wales—the proposal from Carmarthenshire transition committee, supported by Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire transition committees for the trunk roads in the area covering the present county of Dyfed.

West Glamorgan—I have selected the proposal from Neath and Port Talbot transition committee in preference to the proposal from County of Swansea transition committee for the trunk road and motorway in the area covering the present county of West Glamorgan.

Mid Glamorgan—the joint proposal from Bridgend, Rhondda, Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil transition committees for the trunk roads and motorway in the area covering the present county of Mid Glamorgan.

South Glamorgan—the proposal from Cardiff transition committee for the trunk roads and motorway in the area covering the present county of South Glamorgan.

Gwent—the joint proposal from Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen transition committees for the trunk roads and motorways in the area covering the present county of Gwent.

Shadow authorities, when formed, will be asked to confirm their acceptance of the proposed agencies, to produce service delivery plans for detailed consideration by the Welsh Office, and to agree with the Welsh Office the terms of the new agency agreements to take effect from 1 April 1996.

I shall be reviewing the arrangements 12 months after their introduction and assessing their adequacy and viability particularly where the agencies have a relatively small trunk road mileage.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to ensure that patients in mental hospitals are allocated to wards on the basis of the severity of their illnesses rather than on their places of residence. [18080]

Mr. Richards: The responsibility for determining the level of need and the provision of appropriate services rests entirely with local health authorities. The decision to admit a patient to a specific hospital ward is a clinical one, taken at a local level and based on the needs of the individual.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 23 March, *Official Report*, column *343*, concerning dentists in Gwynedd, how many of the general dental practitioners in Gwynedd on 31 December 1994 were *(a)* taking on new NHS patients and *(b)* treating adults on the NHS; and what was the corresponding number of dentists in Gwynedd on 31 December in each of the preceding five years. [17343]

Mr. Richards: Information is not held centrally on the number of dental practitioners taking on new NHS patients or specifically treating adults on the NHS at any given time. The number of practitioners in Gwynedd treating NHS patients, of any age, in each year from 1989 to 1993 was as follows:

	[1]*Number of practitioners*
30 September 1989	66
30 September 1990	69
31 December 1991	63
31 December 1992	63
31 December 1993	67

[1] Principals, assistants and vocational trainees.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many family health services authorities have been unable to provide emergency dental services in each month since April 1991. [17393]

Mr. Richards: From information supplied by family health services authorities since August 1992, emergency dental services have operated in all Welsh authority areas except Dyfed. There was a period up to May 1993 when Gwynedd family health services authority was also unable to arrange such a clinic.

General dental practitioners provide emergency cover for their registered patients under their terms of service.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the increase or decrease in the number of dentists in each of the family health services authority areas in Wales between 1985 and 1995. [18270]

Mr. Richards: The information is given in the table:

	[1]*Number of general dental practitioners*		
FHSA area	*30 September 1985*	*31 December 1994*	*Change*
Clwyd	87	119	+32
Dyfed	80	104	+24
Gwent	109	140	+31
Gwynedd	65	66	+1
Mid Glamorgan	119	123	+4
Powys	30	34	+4
South Glamorgan	129	134	+5
West Glamorgan	123	130	+7

[1] Principals, assistants and vocational trainees. Dentists working in more than 1 FHSA are counted in the FHSA where the majority of their work is performed.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received during the past 12 months concerning NHS dental services in Gwynedd; what steps he has taken over that period to overcome the problem; and what has been the effect of these steps. [18301]

Mr. Richards: In the past 12 months 93 representations have been received about dental services in Gwynedd, including 57 from Members of Parliament. During the same period the Gwynedd family health services authority has received nearly £7,000 to cover the cost of local initiatives aimed at increasing NHS dental provision. A location incentive grant has also been agreed by the Welsh Office to assist a dentist to open a new practice in Dolgellau.

The Welsh Office has also provided a grant of £50,000 to the health authority to enable it to purchase extra community dental sessions and continues to support the Gwynedd family health services authority salaried dental service. On 30 January, my right hon. Friend announced that he is making a further £2.5 million available to improve dental services in the community.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what was *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest level of remuneration paid by his Department to full-time general dental practitioners in Wales during the most recent year for which figures are available. [18272]

Mr. Richards: General dental practitioners are independent contractors paid, in the main, on an item-of-service basis. The concept of "full time" does not therefore apply and information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists there are currently being trained in the University of Wales; and what assessment he made of whether this number is adequate to meet demand. [18303]

Mr. Richards: There are 117 dental students in Wales. Following the last review of medical and dental manpower there was an expansion of 20 per cent. at the Welsh dental school compared with a reduction of 10 per cent. elsewhere. The Welsh dental school is now at full capacity. Dental manpower is assessed on a UK basis and the present manpower strategy is based upon the recommendations of the dental strategy review group which reported in 1982. The situation is being kept under review.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many salaried dentists there were employed in each of the family health services authority areas in Wales on 31 March; and if he will make a statement. [18271]

Mr. Richards: Three salaried general dental practitioners were employed on 31 March 1995, one each by Gwynedd, Dyfed and Powys family health services authorities.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when did he last met representatives of the British Dental Association to discuss problems relating to NHS dentistry in Wales; and what was the outcome of such discussions. [18302]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend has not previously met representatives of the British Dental Association but has indicated his willingness to meet representatives of the profession in Wales at an appropriate time, if requested. Welsh Office officials maintain regular contact with those representatives.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure by his Department on NHS dentistry services in the county of Gwynedd in each of the past five years. [18304]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

Expenditure on NHS dentistry services in Gwynedd

	£000
1989–90	2.537
1990–91	3.031
1991–92	3.623
1992–93	5.115
1993–94	4.787

Source:

Family health services authority, district health authority and dental practice board statistics accounts.

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of thyroid cancer were reported in each of the health authorities in Wales in each of the last 10 years; and what the average was for Wales in each of those years. [17136]

Mr. Richards: The latest available information is given in the table.

Number of new registrations

Health authority area of residence	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Clwyd	11	11	11	7	9	11	9	7	8	13	13
East Dyfed	3	1	5	3	6	2	7	4	5	5	7
Gwent	6	10	12	5	14	8	12	6	10	9	12
Gwynedd	3	4	1	2	4	6	6	5	2	2	7
Mid Glamorgan	11	9	5	5	6	7	9	9	8	11	11
Pembrokeshire	2	2	—	1	3	—	6	5	6	4	2
Powys	3	2	1	1	—	—	3	1	7	2	—
South Glamorgan	10	6	6	10	9	8	11	5	6	9	7
West Glamorgan	4	4	5	7	6	7	3	9	11	10	6
Wales	53	49	46	41	57	49	66	51	63	65	65

Nursery Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of children in nursery schools in each of the counties of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17399]

Mr. Richards: The number of children in maintained nursery schools in each county in Wales, as at January 1994, is as follows:

	Part time	*Full time*
Clwyd	195	—
Dyfed	70	121
Gwent	825	90
Gwynedd	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	426	793
Powys	—	—
South Glamorgan	811	21
West Glamorgan	230	—
Wales	2,557	1,025

Source:

Schools Census, January 1994.

Rheumatology Services

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the proposed rheumatology service for Gwent following the withdrawal of one of the consultants. [17419]

Mr. Richards: The provision of this service is a matter for Gwent Health Commission and its providers. However, I understand that interviews for a replacement consultant rheumatologist will be held this month. Gwent Health Commission assures me that arrangements have been put in place to provide consultant cover until this post is filled, so that the quality and level of service will not suffer.

Health Service (Patient Choice)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will take to ensure that Mrs. Griffin's children can be treated for chemical poisoning at the Breakspeare hospital; and if he will make a statement. [17381]

Mr. Richards: This is not a matter in which it is appropriate for me to become involved. Hospital referrals are a matter for the clinical judgment of the general practitioner, and are arranged in conjunction with the relevant health authority.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his policy concerning the wish of patients to join or remain on the list of a general practitioner; and if he will make a statement; [17383]

(2) if he will consult the Clwyd family health services authority to ensure that Mrs. Griffin of Bockley might be enabled to remain on the list of a general practitioner of her choice; if he will meet Mrs. Griffin; and if he will make a statement. [17382]

Mr. Richards: The family health services authority is responsible for managing general medical services in its area, and no useful purpose would be served by the meeting proposed.

Patients have the right to join the list of any GP willing to accept them. Doctors, as independent contractors, have the right to remove patients from their practice list without being required to offer an explanation. Patients also have the right to withdraw from a doctor's list without giving reasons. This is because it is considered essential to the practice of good medicine that a doctor and patient have mutual trust and confidence in each other.

Patients who are unable to find a doctor willing to accept them on their list can be allocated to a GP by the family health services authority.

Prescribing Costs

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice the Welsh Office has given on indicative budgets for general practitioners in Gwent. [17412]

Mr. Richards: The Department's letter of 31 January 1995 to family health services authorities in Wales gave guidance on the allocation of resources for GP prescribing in 1995–96. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average spending on drugs by *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in the latest available quarter. [17394]

Mr. Richards: Information for the quarter ending 31 December 1994 is as follows:

	Average cost per patient per quarter £
Fundholders	20.15
Non fundholders	22.41

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions there have been between the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh Office and the Regional Commissioner of the European Community concerning possible grant allocations to the Welsh Development Agency and the principle of additionality; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of such discussions. [17697]

Mr. Redwood: There have been no such discussions but Welsh Office officials meet regularly with the WDA to discuss a wide range of issues, including financial matters.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department approved the redundancy cost for the 19 staff previously employed by the Welsh Development Agency's small firms service and youth training scheme sections, as provided for in point 8 of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the 1991–92 accounts; and under what statutory authority the payments were authorised. [18169]

Mr. Redwood: Redundancy costs were approved on 21 February and 14 March 1991 respectively.

The agency may make redundancy compensation payments under schedule 1 to the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department approved the redundancy cost for the staff previously employed by the Welsh Development Agency's utility services function, as provided for in point 8 of the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General's commentary on the 1991–92 accounts; and under what statutory authority the payments were authorised. [18168]

Mr. Redwood: The costs of transferring these services, which included but did not separately identify redundancy costs, were agreed on 27 March 1990.

The agency may make redundancy compensation payments under schedule 1 to the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975.

NHS Pay

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to await the conclusion of an enabling agreement by the Nurses and Midwives Negotiating Council before promoting any local pay settlements for nurses; and if he will make a statement. [17869]

Mr. Richards: NHS trusts have freedom to negotiate local deals. However, an enabling provision in the national terms and conditions of service will facilitate local pay bargaining.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the administrative costs borne by the NHS in Wales under the present national pay bargaining system; what estimate he has made of the likely level of comparable costs under localised pay bargaining; and if he will make a statement. [18249]

Mr. Redwood: Localised pay bargaining costs will be contained within existing management resources.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the level of pay increases *(a)* awarded and *(b)* offered to (i) chief executives of NHS trusts and health authorities in Wales, (ii) managerial staff generally and (iii) accounts staff in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [18247]

Mr. Redwood: NHS trusts have the freedom to determine their own pay arrangements; information on the level of pay increase is not available for staff who have opted for such terms. Salaries of chief executives will be published in trusts' annual reports with effect from 1 April 1995. Chief executives of health authorities had an increase of 2.2 per cent. pay with effect from 1 September

1994 and are entitled to a supplement reflecting individual performance.

Managerial and accounts staff retaining national terms received a 2.2 per cent. pay rise from 1 September 1994 and are also entitled to individual performance related supplements.

Negotiations are under way for the 1995 pay round.

Job Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18337]

Mr. Redwood: Cadw has contracted two jobs to the private sector. Its staff numbers fell by 32 between 31 March 1993 and 31 March 1995.

NHS Research and Development

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to advertise for the post and appoint a new director of research and development for the national health service in Wales. [18167]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on Monday 3 April 1995, *Official Report* Column *975*.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the date of the departure of the former director of research and development for the national health service in Wales, Mr. Ian Russell; and what factors led to the delay in appointing a successor. [18166]

Mr. Richards: Professor Ian Russell departed from his post as director of the office of research and development NHS Wales on 31 December 1994. The opportunity has been taken to review the future function and setting of the office of research and development. These have now been agreed.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Local Government Management Board regarding central funding for reorganisation appeals; if he will make it his policy to introduce funding in full for such appeals; and if he will make a statement. [18241]

Mr. Redwood: I have received no such representations. I have no plans to provide funding for appeals on staffing matters which result from local government reorganisation. The revenue settlement for 1995–96 takes account of a number of reorganisation costs, such as these, which will fall to local authorities.

Radiological Protection

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Health and Safety Executive concerning the discontinuation of the forms KH 10a, b and c as regards the monitoring to adequate standards and statutory requirements of radiological protection for patients and staff. [18245]

Mr. Redwood: It was not necessary to consult the Health and Safety Executive before dropping these forms. The responsibility for maintaining adequate standards and meeting statutory requirements for the radiological protection of patients and staff is the responsibility of the district health authority or trust. The Welsh Office will shortly be issuing guidance to the health service in Wales setting out statutory requirements and general advice on the use of ionising radiation.

Stillbirths and Infant Deaths

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the relative merits of *(a)* the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy statistical exercise and *(b)* the discontinued form LHS 27/1; if he will list the principal points of difference between the two; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in Wales is a detailed study of deaths of babies after the onset of labour and within the first two weeks of life where the birthweight was greater than 1499 grammes and there and there was no gross or life-threatening abnormality. It seeks to inform and improve clinical practice by increasing the understanding of ways in which numbers of deaths might be diminished, with particular regard to identifying departures from accepted standards of care which could have played a part in the ensuing death.

The discontinued LHS 27/1 return simply recorded the total number of live births and stillbirths to residents of the district health authority and births, stillbirths and deaths in the first 28 days, analysed by weight. It was discontinued as the central requirements that it covered were available routinely from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Kwiksave, Prestatyn

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he intends to make to Kwiksave with regard to their consultation on the closure of their Prestatyn depot and the transfer of jobs to England. [18238]

Mr. Richards: Kwiksave is keeping me informed on the proposed closure of its distribution depot at Prestatyn, which represents a loss of 20 per cent. of the work force at the site. Targed is also aware of the proposal and stands ready to do all that it can to ensure that any future training needs are catered for.

While all job losses are regrettable, Kwiksave will nevertheless remain a major employer in Prestatyn and in north Wales.

Non-teaching Staff

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority all categories of non-teaching staff employed *(a)* in schools and *(b)* outside schools, indicating which are considered to be administrative staff; and what is the ratio to teachers. [17653]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Numbers of non-teaching staff in schools are collected through the annual schools census. The following list shows the categories of staff for which information is collected by type of school. Information about numbers in each category is available from each local education authority.

Nursery
Class I nursery assistants
Class II nursery assistants
NNEB students in training
Permanent supply nursery assistants
Primary
NNEB qualified nursery assistants
NNEB students in training
Other assistants/aides employed in the class room
Clerical/office workers
Secondary
Special needs support staff (including ancillary sessional workers)
Laboratory or workshop technicians
Resource technicians
Nurses/matrons
Office or clerical staff including library assistants
Special
Qualified nursing/childcare staff
Unqualified nursing/child care staff
Qualified ancillary staff
Unqualified ancillary staff

The Local Government Management Board collects information about local authority staff employed outside schools. Figures are compiled of the number of full-time and part-time non-manual staff employed in the education service, other than lecturers and teachers. This category comprises all non-manual staff identified as employed within the education service and includes administrative, secretarial and clerical staff, youth and community workers, nursery and other non-teaching classroom assistants, library staff serving educational establishments, education psychologists and careers guidance staff. Figures for individual education authorities are not released into the public domain because estimates at this level of disaggregation are not considered sufficiently reliable by the LGMB.

The use of different terminology defining the categories used in the schools census forms means that it is not possible to eliminate double counting of the same people in the LGMB figure and the school census results. A ratio of administrative staff to teachers can therefore not be calculated.

North East Wales Institute

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the total cost of *(a)* the Touche Ross report into the financial affairs of the North East Wales Institute commissioned by the Higher Education Funding council for Wales, *(b)* the subsequent Touche Ross report entitled "NEWI Outline Structure Recovery Plan" and *(c)* the work undertaken to date with regard to NEWI by Mr. Fuller of Touche Ross and his associates. [17861]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The report commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales cost £45,237. The subsequent report and the consultancy work were commissioned and paid for by NEWI and the cost of these is a matter for the Institute.

Examination Achievements

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pupils in each of the last three years have gained grades A to C in English, Mathematics and Science, and what percentage this was of the year group. [17992]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The following table shows the number of 15-year-old pupils in Wales who gained grades A to C in 1992 and 1993, and those who gained A*–C in 1994, in the specified GCSE subjects. Percentages are calculated on the basis of pupils aged 15 at the start of the academic year, as it is not known in which year group examination candidates are taught.

Pupils aged 15[1] achieving GCSE grade A (A)—C*

	1992		*1993*		*1994*	
	Number of pupils	*Per cent. of age group*	*Number of pupils*	*Per cent. of age group*	*Number of pupils*	*Per cent. of age group*
English[2]	14,398	42.4	13,717	42.8	14,924	46.2
Mathematics	11,568	34.1	11,645	36.3	12,834	39.7
Science[3]	11,972	35.3	12,123	37.8	12,476	38.6
Combination[4]	8,650	25.5	8,227	25.7	9,256	28.6

Notes:

[1] Pupils aged 15 at August 31 of previous year.

[2] Includes pupils' better result of English language and literature.

[3] Includes pupils' best science result.

[4] Pupils achieving the combinations of mathematics, science and english GCSEs grades A(A*)—C. Includes pupils' best result in science and the better result of English first language and Welsh first language. Figures for the combination of mathematics, science and english alone are not available.

Source:
Welsh examinations database.

DEFENCE

Base Storage and Distribution Agency

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Defence Agency status for the Army's Base Storage and Distribution Organsiation. [18855]

Mr. Soames: The Army's Base Storage and Distribution Organisation will become a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence on 4 April 1995. The agency will be responsible for storing and distributing a vast range of general and technical stores, ammunition and vehicles and fuels to meet the Army's requirements in peace, crisis and war. In addition, the agency will provide a training environment for field Army personnel to gain the skills in storage and distribution functions to operate logistic bases in combat zones and theatres of operations.

The agency, to be known as the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency will comprise a small headquarters at Andover which will manage the operation of seven base storage depots in the United Kingdom, together with their supporting distribution outlets, and three base storage depots in Germany. The agency currently employs some 5,700 civilian staff and 600 military personnel.

As the first chief executive, Brigadier K. J. W. Goad will be offered new opportunities to build on the current organisation's professional expertise and high performance standards. Through a more commercial approach, the chief executive will actively seek to improve the efficiency of his organisation and thereby fulfil the agency's aim of providing its customers with an efficient service which offers the best value for money. The chief executive has been set the following key targets for financial year 1995–96:

1. Deliver to customers by the required delivery date at least 99 per cent. immediate, 98 per cent. high priority, 97 per cent. medium priority and 95 per cent. routine demands.
2. Deliver a military logistic support capability which the field Army can deploy worldwide, meeting at least a satisfactory opeval standard.
3. Introduce by 31 March 1996 formal tasking agreements with main ABSDA customers, and establish performance standards and annual targets for service improvement.
4. Complete by 31 March 1996 a competing for quality review of £5,000,000 (operating costs) of ABSDA business activities.
5. Achieve by 31 March 1996 a further 2.5 per cent. improvement in efficiency.
6. Close by 31 March 1996 17 storage depots in accordance with the programme endorsed by the defence costs study.
7. Introduce accruals accounting during the first year of operation and produce a set of "shadow" accounts for 1995–96.
8. Define by 31 March 1996 ABSDA's future financial and business information needs as a statement of requirement for a corporate management information system.

I shall arrange for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of the house.

Transport and Movements Executive

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Directorate of Transport and Movements (Army). [18856]

Mr. Soames: The Directorate of Transport and Movements (Army) will become a Defence Agency of the Ministry of Defence on 4 April 1995 when its name will change to the Defence Transport and Movements Executive. As a fully rationalised tri-service organisation, the main focus of DTMX will continue to be concentrated at its headquarters at Andover, alongside the Quartermaster General's headquarters. It will in due course absorb the surface freight functions carried out by the Navy Department, Air Force Department and the MOD Procurement Executive. The agency has other assets and personnel located at Marchwood military port, Bicester international freight terminal and the Ministry of Defence main building. In all there are some 250 staff comprising 92 military and 158 civilian.

The role of the agency is to provide an agreed transport and movements service for the world-wide support of HM armed forces, the MOD and other Government Departments and sponsored organisations. In so doing, it will meet the appropriate operational logistic support requirements in peacetime, crisis, transition to war and war for all its customers within agreed standards by the most efficient and cost-effective means available.

As the first chief executive, Brigadier M.G.R. Hodson CBE will be afforded greater responsibility and flexibility to build on the current organisation's professional ability and reputation for excellence. This in turn will provide the framework and ethos to give him the essential delegations and autonomy to interface effectively with industry whilst still retaining the military control necessary for policy and planning, which is so essential to mount military operations in any theatre. By adopting a more commercial approach, the chief executive will strive to improve efficiency and value for money and by so doing fulfil the agency's requirement to manage and control an effective operational transport and movements system that supports and sustains the armed forces world wide, while offering best value for money.

The chief executive has been set the following challenging key targets for the first year of operation:

1. To confirm and satisfy the operational requirement through the achievement of a satisfactory operational evaluation.
2. To develop with the owner by August 1995 criteria to measure DTMX's fitness for its wide peacetime transport and movements role.
3. To provide an agreed transport and movements service which meets the standard priority system requirements, as laid down in Department regulations (JSP 336), to time in 95 per cent. of cases.
4. To implement the agency's competing for quality strategy including specifically:
   a. To investigate partnering for Falkland Islands resupply by 1 December 1995.
   b. To complete the statement of requirement for the tri-service freight distribution market test by November 1995 and issue invitation for tender by January 1996.
5. To introduce a system for accruals accounting by:
   a. Developing an accounts feeder system and interim accruals accounting system by 1 September 1995 prior to the introduction of the ASCOT accruals accounting system by 31 March 1996.
   b. Producing accruals accounts for 1995–96 for a shadow NAO audit in order to produce accruals accounts for 1996–97 for a full NATO audit.
6. To reduce by 2 per cent. annually the ratio of DTMX management overheads compared to the total value of overall business.
7. To identify the potential utilisation and throughput at Marchwood military port and 25 Squadron Royal Logistic Corps, Bicester in order to provide a base line against which future targets can be set for the utilisation of owned assets.
8. To complete the initial development, basic installation and staff training for the DTMX management information system and activity-based costing system as defined in the IS strategy by 31 March 1996.
9. To introduce by 31 March 1996 service level agreements with the main DTMX customers and suppliers and establish performance standards and annual targets for service delivery and improvement.

I shall arrange for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of the House.

Rescue Co-ordination Centre

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future location of the rescue co-ordination centre Pitreavie and Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland. [18857]

Mr. Soames: As a consequence of the "Front Line First" recommendation to close the maritime headquarters at Pitreavie by April 1996, it was originally intended to relocate the rescue co-ordination centre and Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland to RAF Leuchars. Subsequent studies have, however, identified that substantial operational advantages and cost savings would be gained by relocating RCC Pitreavie to RAF Kinloss, which would subsequently become the home for the new, single national military rescue co-ordination centre by 31 March 1997. The proposed relocation of RCC Pitreavie to RAF Kinloss, which would involve the transfer of 36 posts, 30 service and six civilian, will be subject to the usual process of consultation with the trade unions. AOSNI and his staff will relocate from Pitreavie to RAF Leuchars as originally planned, at which time the post will be combined with that of station commander.

Sub-strategic Nuclear Capability

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's sub-strategic nuclear capability. [18913]

Mr. Soames: In 1993 the Government announced that in the longer term we would utilise the flexibility of the Trident system to under take the sub-strategic as well as the strategic nuclear role. I am pleased to say that the arrangements for this are progressing well. The Trident system will provide a continuously available sub-strategic capability when the second submarine—HMS Victorious—joins the patrol cycle around the end of this year, and the capability will be fully robust when HMS Vigilant enters service in 1998. In the light of this we have decided that the WE177 free-fall bomb should be withdrawn from service by the end of 1998.

Seized Documents

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the practice of his Department in respect of the classification of documents as company documents; and if the documents referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *554*, as company documents were the personal copy of a director of board minutes and related documents. [17009]

Mr. Soames *[holding reply 28 March 1995]:* I have nothing further to add to my answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *554*.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which minister authorised the raid by the Ministry of Defence police on the officers of British Manufacture and Research Company in April 1990; who now has possession of the documents seized; when he expects that the documents; will be returned to the former chairman; and if he will make a statement. [18242]

Mr. Soames: No ministerial approval was either needed or given. The Ministry of Defence police were acting properly within their legal powers to pursue a criminal investigation and it would have been quite improper for Ministers to intervene. The documents seized were returned to the official receivers in June 1993. They were all regarded as company documents and treated as such throughout the Ministry of Defence police investigation.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department took possession of documents taken from the company BMARC; on what date these documents were handed over to the Scott inquiry; and if he will list the Ministers who had access to these documents within his Department. [18300]

Mr. Soames: Documents from Astra/BMARC premises were seized by Ministry of Defence Police on several occasions between March and August 1990. These were not MOD-owned documents and were returned to the receivers of Astra in June 1993. The question of the provision of any of these documents to the Scott inquiry is one for the receivers of the inquiry. No Minister had access to the documents which had been seized by the Ministry of Defence police for the purposes of an investigation into alleged corruption.

Statutory References

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what statutory references to hon. Members have been made in legislation introduced by his Department, or its predecessors, since 1965. [17036]

Mr. Soames: An analysis of the legislation sponsored by my Department and its predecessors since 1965 for references to hon. Members could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Although officers of state are regularly mentioned in legislation, it would be extremely unlikely for reference to be made specifically to an individual hon. Member.

Chemical and Biological Substances

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to instigate a study into the long-term health effects of exposure to chemical and biological substances. [17288]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no evidence that either civilian or service personnel have been exposed to harmful levels of chemical and biological substances which would justify such a study.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the differences between the position adopted by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States of America, *(c)* Australia and *(d)* Canada in respect of Government provision for ex-service men exposed to chemical and biological substances. [17284]

Mr. Soames: No formal assessment has been made, but legal, health and welfare provisions are known to differ. Not all countries have a national health service; and not all countries' laws allow their citizens, including serving and former members of the armed forces, to pursue legal action through the courts for damages against the state. In the UK, in addition to the above and to the comprehensive system of social security benefits, the Department of Social Security makes provision for war pensions under which former service personnel who suffer an injury or illness which is attributable to service, howsoever caused or by whatever agent, may be entitled to a pension or gratuity.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's investigation of farm workers exposed to organic phosphates in drawing up its own evaluations of the effects of exposure to chemical or biological weapons. [17286]

Mr. Soames: The structure and purpose of organophosphorous nerve agents differ significantly from those of organophosphorous sheep dips. Nerve agents are intended to produce immediate acute effects and can kill in minutes. They principally attack the body through the respiratory system, although some also attack through the skin. For full effect, the nerve agent will need to vaporise over time and result in a downwind hazard. On the other hand, organophosphorous sheep dips have a much reduced mammalian toxicity and there is no requirement for the material to vaporise over time as the route of attack is through contact with the insects. Sheep dip compounds have extremely low volatility, thus rendering any inhalation exposure insignificant. The assessment made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food into alleged health problems experienced by farm workers, therefore, have little relevance to the effects of exposure to chemical or biological weapons.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's liaison with *(a)* the USA, *(b)* Canada and *(c)* Australia in respect of studies of chemical weapons and defences against their use since 1965. [17289]

Mr. Soames: There are a number of agreements with NATO allies covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment. The following international agreements include chemical and biological defence in their scope:

a. The United Kingdom, United States and Canada memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence with addresses research, development, production and procurement of chemical and biological defence equipment. This was signed in 1980 and has been an extremely effective means of ensuring close collaboration between the three countries.

b. NATO army armaments group panel VII on nuclear, biological and chemical defence and its sub-panels and working groups which are the main NATO forums. CB defence is also discussed by other NATO panels and by the NATO defence research group.

c. The United Kingdom-United States-Canada-Australia American, British and Canadian Armies agreement between the Armies of the four countries. This includes a group known as the Quadrupartite Working Group which has a panel on NBC defence.

d. The United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia air standardisation co-ordinating committee agreement which also has a sub-group addressing CB defence.

e. The United Kingdom and United States navies have an information exchange agreement which includes NBC defence in its scope.

f. The technical co-operation programme which involves the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand is concerned with collaboration in defence research and has a sub-group that is active on CB defence.

g. The Anglo-French defence research group allows the exchange of information and collaboration on research for CB defence.

h. The Anglo-Netherlands-Norwegian collaboration project exchange of information and collaboration on research for CB defence.

i. FINABEL, an army-army agreement covering CB defence information exchange between Britain, France, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Belgium.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will instigate a compensation scheme similar to that of the United States for former service men and volunteers exposed to chemical and biological weapons. [17285]

Mr. Soames: Any person who is disabled by an injury or illness due to service in her Majesty's forces may be entitled to a gratuity or a pension under the war pensions scheme administered by the Department of Social Security.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons Porton Down volunteers are denied the use of Ministry of Defence medical facilities to investigate their ill health with particular reference to long-term health effects of exposure to organic phosphates. [17287]

Mr. Soames: The role of the defence medical services is to train armed forces medical personnel and to provide a health care service for serving members of the armed forces. Responsibility for the health care of those who have left the armed forces rests with the national health service. With regard to Porton Down volunteers, my Department has no evidence that participation in human volunteer studies over the last 40 years has resulted in any long-term adverse health effects.

Defence Attachés

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the methods of appointments of defence attachés in embassies. [17238]

Mr. Soames: None

Service Accommodation

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Government have decided on the appointment of a financial advisor to carry forward the sale of the married quarter estate. [17349]

Mr. Soames: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 22 March, *Official Report*, columns *216–18*, we intend to develop proposals for the possible transfer of the married quarters estate to the private sector, on the basis of initial work undertaken for us last autumn by NatWest Markets. We are close to completing the competitive selection of financial advisers to assist us in this process.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *819*, when he now expects the surplus married quarters in Lacey street, Northumberland to be *(a)* sold or *(b)* made available for housing purposes. [18239]

Mr. Soames: Twelve surplus married quarters in Lacey street, Longhoughton, have been advertised for sale through the services discount scheme. The remaining 14 properties will be offered for sale in the same way if sufficient interest is demonstrated during the sale of the first phase. Any properties not taken up under the scheme will be offered for sale either to a housing association or on the open market.

Air Miss, Humberside

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, from what squadron and from what base were the four Royal Air Tornados that were involved in an air miss with an Air UK Fokker 50, 20 miles east of Ottringham, Humberside on 22 March; if he will send the hon. Member for Don Valley a copy of the accident report when it is published; and if he will make a statement. [17133]

Mr. Soames: This incident is under investigation by National Air Traffic Services. A report will be produced in due course and a copy placed in the Library of the House. The identity of the military aircraft concerned has not yet been confirmed.

Smoking

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities are provided and arrangements made for the comfort and well-being of staff who *(a)* smoke and *(b)* do not wish to be affected by smoking at (i) the work station and (ii) rest, recreation and refreshment facilities at MOD main building, Whitehall, London. [18282]

Mr. Freeman: My Department's policy is that smoking in the main building is not allowed in the main reception areas, toilets, changing rooms, conference and function rooms, lifts and the staff restaurant, except for the bar and a designated smoking area. In addition, smoking is prohibited in stairwells, the escalator area and all corridors. Smoking areas are available in two areas of the ground floor and some lift areas and within designated areas of the staff restaurant. The policy within individual offices is decided by the wishes of the majority.

Low Flying

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying exercises have taken place over *(a)* Pendle, *(b)* Ribble Valley and *(c)* the Yorkshire Dales national park in each year since 1990. [17847]

Mr. Soames: Although records are maintained of the total number of sorties flown in the United Kingdom low flying system, it is not possible to estimate the number of sorties flown over particular locations.

Ex Gratia Payment to Australia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which state is the recipient of the ex gratia payment expended from class I, vote 1, subhead E2 of his Department's budget. [18122]

Mr. Soames: The payment is made to Australia.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown of expenditure from class I, vote 1, subhead J4 of his Department's budget. [18123]

Mr. Soames: The expenditure is broken down as follows:

	£
Contributions towards the administrative expenses of the mutual defence co-operation agreement with the US	6,000
Contributions to the Victoria and George Cross Reunion Association	31,000

Advisory and Sales Teams

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *778-79*, if he will describe the roles of the British defence advisory team and the Army sales team mentioned in his answer of 30 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *526* to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and the extent to which they differ. [17129]

Mr. Freeman: The British defence advisory team is available to provide overseas Governments with on-site studies and specialist military advice on operational needs for single or multi-service roles. The army sales teams organise and conduct demonstrations, training and trials of British defence equipment in United Kingdom and overseas, and assist companies with sales promotion material and provide specialist advice.

The teams differ in as much as the BDAT provides operational advice, whereas the sales teams support foreign interest in UK defence equipment.

Nuclear Weapons Research

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the rules in respect of the Government allowing a non-nuclear state direct or indirect access to its facilities for computer simulation of nuclear testing. [17556]

Mr. Soames: Such access is not allowed under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty if it would assist the non-nuclear weapon state to acquire a nuclear weapon capability.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the number of simulated nuclear explosions which have been undertaken, *(b)* the number of tests on nuclear weapons components or precursors and *(c)* the costs contributed by the United Kingdom and United States of America respectively, of such forms of nuclear testing under the 1958 United Kingdom Mutual Defence Agreement in each of the last 15 years. [17557]

Mr. Freeman: Records of simulations and component tests carried out in the course of nuclear weapons research are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Surplus Sales

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by volume and type, the surplus *(a)* furniture or household items, *(b)* clothing, *(c)* plant, machinery or tools, *(d)* electrical goods, *(e)* electronic goods, *(f)* computer equipment, *(g)* ships, *(h)* aircraft, *(i)* tanks, *(j)* armoured vehicles, *(k)* artillery, *(l)* ammunition, *(m)* missiles, *(n)* helicopters, *(o)* torpedoes and *(p)* other items sold to acceptable foreign Governments in the last three years for which information is available; if he will identify the countries invovled; and if he will give the total receipts for each category of item. [15802]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Sales to foreign Governments in the last three years have been as follows:

	Number
Plant and machinery:	
Tractors	4
Trailers	1
Dump trucks (medium)	3
Dump trucks (light)	3
Cranes	1
Crawlers	1
Graders	2
Caterpillar	3
	18
Ships:	
Type 21 frigates	6
Type 22 frigates	4
Leander class frigates	2
Fleet tankers	2
River class minesweepers	7
Offshore patrol vessels	1
	22
Aircraft:	
Jaguars	1
Jet Provost ground runners	3
	4
Armoured Vehicles:	
Scorpion CVRTs	12
Artillery:	
M109s	117
Skyflash	300
BL755	50
	350
Helicopters:	
Wasps	6
Lynx HAS3	3
	9
Ammunition:	
200 rounds mortars	—
10k misc. explosives	—
200k + small arms	—
56k + artillery	—
Various naval ammunition	—

The total value of sales was £206 million.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, column 77, how many meetings have taken place between representatives of his Department and Conservative hon. Members since 1 October 1994 to discuss procurement decisions; and if he will give *(a)* the date, *(b)* the subject and *(c)* the names of the Ministers and hon. Members attending. [17655]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 20 March 1995, *Official Report*, column 77.

Independent Reviews

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the independent reviews of his Department's work carried out over the last five years, stating *(a)* the date, *(b)* the subject, *(c)* the organisation or individuals who carried out the review, *(d)* the cost and *(e)* whether the report is classified or can be placed in the Library. [17656]

Mr. Soames: Budget-holders throughout the Ministry of Defence have delegated authority to engage external advisors, on a paid consultancy basis or otherwise, to conduct independent reviews of aspects of the Department's work. Information on such studies is not collected centrally, and the details requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In addition, the National Audit Office carries out value for money studies of the Ministry of Defence's work as part of its statutory duties. Reports that have been published by the NAO are available in the Library of the House.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *505*, if he will give a breakdown of the costs of keeping overseas staff employed by the Defence Export Services Organisation, for each post; and to what entertainment allowances these staff are entitled. [17657]

Mr. Freeman: Further to my answer of 27 March, details of the entertainment allocations for posts overseas for FY 1994–95 are as follows:

Riyadh: £2,000
Kuwait: £2,000
New Delhi: £2,000
Bangkok: £3,000
Kuala Lumpur: £7,000
Jakarta: £4,000
Canberra: £4,500
Seoul: £5,000
Ankara £4,000

There is no separate entertainment allocation for disposals sales staff in Germany.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, *Official Report*, column *505*, if he will list the duties of overseas staff employed by the Defence Export Services Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [17658]

Mr. Freeman: The duties of the defence supply staff in the DESO offices in Riyadh, Kuwait, New Delhi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Canberra, Seoul and Ankara are to provide local advice and support to British defence equipment manufacturers. The Disposals Sales Agency staff in Germany receive, market, arrange for sale and issue surplus MOD equipment locally.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officials have left the Defence Services Organisation to join defence or defence-related companies in each of the last 10 years for which information is available; and if he will list the companies involved and the numbers joining each company. [17659]

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available for the period before January 1990. Since then, 13 members of the Defence Export Services Organisation have made business appointment applications. It is not know whether the appointments were taken up.

Company	*Applications*
1990:	
VSEL	1
CDP Nexus	1
1991:	
Short Brothers	1
BAe	1
Crew Services Ltd.	1
Landair Consultants	1
EEZ International Ltd.	1
Carmichael and Sweet Ltd.	1
Marconi Underwater Systems	1
Thorn EMI Electronics	1
Telecom Supply Line Ltd.	1
1992:	
Sillicon Valley Systems	1
SD-Scion	1
BAe	1
Short Brothers	1
BAe Defence	1
Vosper Thornycroft	2
GEC-Marconi Avionics	1
1993:	
Bendix Ocean Systems	1
Vosper Thornycroft	1
BAe	1
Ferranti International	1
Marconi Underwater Systems	1
Computer Devices	1
EDS/Scion	1
MSI Defence Systems	1
Yarrow Shipbuilders	1
NI Tech	1
1994:	
GM Firth (Holdings) Plc	1
GEC-Marconi Naval Systems	1
Sultanate of Oman	2

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contact the Defence Export Services Organisation had with Mr. Stephen Adolphus Kock between 1985 to 1991 concerning defence sales to *(a)* Saudi Arabia, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* Iraq, *(d)* Kuwait, *(e)* the United Arab Emirates and *(f)* Oman. [18244]

Mr. Freeman: The DESO is not aware of any record of contact with Mr. Kock concerning exports of defence equipment to the countries listed.

Defence Clothing and Textile Agency

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed by the Defence Clothing and Textile Agency; what is its annual budget; and what are its terms of reference. [18083]

Mr. Soames: The number of staff employed at present in the Defence Clothing and Textile Agency is 447, and its annual budget for financial year 1994–95 was £111.337 million. Further information can be found in the organisation's corporate plan, business plan and framework document, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Western European Armaments Group

Dr. Clark: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to join the Western European Armaments Group; and what assessment he has made of the advantages membership would create for Britain. [17539]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The title of the Western European Armaments Group was adopted following the transfer of the functions of the former Independent European Programme Group to the Western European Union in December 1992. The United Kingdom has been a member of the group since its establishment in 1976. The group is the main forum for European co-operation in research, development and production of defence equipment and our membership allows us to participate in the development of the European defence equipment market.

Training Exercises (Safety)

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the regulations governing safety officers involved in training under battlefield conditions using live ammunition. [18293]

Mr. Soames: The qualifications required to allow officers and NCOs to conduct such training are subject to continual review and are revised where necessary. The qualifications held by individual officers and NCOs are reviewed annually by commanding officers.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the use of lasers instead of live ammunition during training exercises. [18292]

Mr. Soames: My Department is seeking to introduce lasers into training exercises where it is practicable to do so. The Army is currently using direct fire weapon effects simulators, which employ eye-safe lasers in order to provide realistic two-sided manoeuvre training, known as tactical engagement simulation. This type of training has already commenced on Salisbury plain and is to be introduced at Suffield Canada and a smaller work-up training site in Germany.

Deaths and Injuries (Information)

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the provision of information to families of service personnel injured or killed in *(a)* war zones and *(b)* peacetime training exercises; and if he will make a statement. [18291]

Mr. Soames: It is my Department's policy to inform the next of kin of members of the armed forces who are killed or injured in the course of their duty as quickly and as fully as possible of the undisputed facts. Since December 1992, in recognition of the special position of next of kin, service board of inquiry reports have been made available to the nominated next of kin of deceased service personnel, or to the individual in cases of serious permanent injury, should they so request, subject only to the essential minimum of security requirements. No distinction is made between whether the death or injury occurs in a war zone or on a peacetime training exercise.

Operational Aircraft Requirement

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft are available to the RAF for operational use; and if he will specify the total number of aircraft required by the RAF. [18295]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to annex D of the Statement of the Defence Estimates 1994, Cm 2550, which sets out the strength of the Royal Air Force as at 1 April 1994. New figures will be included in this year's publication.

Tornado Aircraft, Coningsby

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornados based at RAF Coningsby have recently been grounded; and if he will specify the reasons for the grounding of the Tornados; which company is responsible for the maintenance of the Tornados; what investigation has been carried out into the responsibility for the damage; what is the total cost to repair the damage; who is financially responsible for paying for these repairs; and if he will make a statement. [18294]

Mr. Soames: Two Tornado F3s from RAF Coningsby, taking part in NATO Exercise Strong Resolve between 20 February and 10 March, were suspected of receiving contaminated fuel from a VC10 tanker during air-to-air refuelling. The aircraft were grounded for four hours each on 6 March as a precautionary measure; no contamination was found and there was no damage to the aircraft.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will cease passing logistical, intelligence and surveillance information to the Turkish armed forces following their invasion of northern Iraq. [18305]

Mr. Soames: Her Majesty's Government give no support to the Turkish armed forces which assists their operations in northern Iraq.

Old Sarum Airfield

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the registered office and directors of the companies which hold the lease on Old Sarum airfield, namely Blanefield Investments NV and Old Sarum Park Properties Limited. [18309]

Mr. Soames: My Department does not hold any details of the registered office or directors of Blanefield Investments NV as dealings with that company in respect of the lease of Old Sarum airfield have been conducted through the company's appointed legal representatives. The registered office of Old Sarum Park Properties is Old Sarum airfield, Salisbury, Wiltshire. No details of the directors of that company are recorded by the Department in respect of the lease at the airfield.

Territorial Army Centre, Newbury

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Territorial Army will stop using the TA centre, St. Michael's road, Newbury. [18250]

Mr. Soames: Although we expect that the Territorial Army will no longer require the St. Michael's road centre after the amalgamation of the 1st and 2nd battalions of the Wessex Regiment in October, an exact date has yet to be decided.

Service Widows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the annual cost of paying the widows of ex-service men a pension of half the rate of their late husband's, regardless of their marital status, income or capital resources. [18160]

Mr. Soames: The armed forces pension scheme already provides a pension for eligible widows of former service men at half the rate of their late husbands'. This provision was introduced in 1973. Prior to that date, service widows' pensions were assessed at one third of the late husband's pension. The total cost of bringing all widows' pensions in issue at present up to the half rate would be around £27 million per year. In common with other public service occupational schemes, a widow's pension ceases on remarriage. There is, however, discretion to restore the original pension if the subsequent marriage has come to an end and the widow is financially worse off as a result. We estimate that the annual cost of continuing to pay pensions to service widows who remarry would be around £5 million.

Airwork Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change there has been in the probationary status of Airwork Ltd. with respect to bids and tenders for aircraft maintenance work located at RAF St. Athan and its listing as a defence contractor requiring special attention; and if he will make a statement. [18419]

Mr. Freeman: As a result of a breach of contract by Airwork, the contract was terminated by the Department in May 1993. Subsequently, BAe Warton was contracted to repair the aircraft and a claim for damages is being pursued against Bricom, parent company of Airwork at the time of the breach.

In November 1993 Airwork's business was acquired by Shorts Brothers, although liability for breach of contract remains with Bricom under the conditions of sale. As a result of the breach Airwork Ltd. was placed on the CRSA list—contractors requiring special attention—meaning that they were considered to be significantly in breach of their contractual requirements, that their response in the form of corrective actions was being formally monitored and that consideration would be given to the implications for existing contracts and for new contract proposals.

The support services division of Shorts Brothers Plc, formerly Airwork, is included on the CRSA list. Listed companies will not automatically be disqualified from bidding for MOD work; each case is treated on its merits. The essential criterion is the relationship between the cause of the breach and the work for which the company wishes to be considered.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 April 1995

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *630*, if he will give such information on water and sewerage charges paid by his Department, as can be provided without disproportionate costs. [15935]

Mr. Jack: As my reply on 15 March said, there is currently no centrally held record of payments made on water and sewerage charges paid by the Department. Under decentralised budgets, responsibility of these matters rests with well over 100 accommodation managers throughout the estate, who are dealing with a diverse range of property occupation. There would be disproportionate costs involved in attempting to collect this information now.

The Department is working on establishing a central database for water, and other types of charges, but this will not be fully effective until after 1994–95.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *499*, regarding calves loaded at Brightlingsea on 3 March, what steps he has taken to assure himself that all calves were individually fed in the period stated while they were still in the vehicles. [17127]

Mrs. Browning: There was only one lorry carrying calves for that sailing. It was not loaded to its full capacity, and so the calves could be fed while on board the vehicle. The calves were individually bucket fed while the lorry was waiting at the port, and this was carried out satisfactorily, according to the report of the veterinary office who was present.

I should make clear, with apologies, that the answer I gave on 14 March about livestock exported from Brightlingsea on 3 March was unfortunately corrupted in transmission and should have read:

> "I understand that the journey of the 194 calves began at 05.30 hours from premises in Kent. The lorry carrying calves arrived at a lairage near Harwich shortly after 10.00 hours where it waited until convoyed to the port, arriving at about 14.00 hours. The calves were fed abroad the lorry between 18.00 hours and 19.50 hours. The vessel berthed at 23.10 hours an the calves were loaded from 23.30 hours fed immediately. All were aboard by 23.45 hours. Sheep were loaded between 23.45 and 01.20 hours."

The two final paragraphs which were mistakenly added to the above-mentioned reply ought to have been included instead in my reply of 14 March to the hon. Member about livestock exported from Shoreham port on 6 March—column *499*. This latter reply should have read:

> "A veterinary officer was at the port awaiting the arrival of six trucks containing calves. In the event, a demonstration prevented two livestock lorries already on their way to Shoreham from reaching the port. I understand that these lorries returned with the calves to the premises of origin in Oxfordshire. Officials were satisfied that all the animals could be returned to the home premises within the 15-hour limit by which time the animals would have had to be fed and rested.
>
> The other four livestock lorries were at local lairages ready to load calves already resting there. In the circumstances, loading of those animals for Shoreham did not even begin.
>
> Journey plans had been scrutinised by officials before the proposed export journeys started and were satisfactory."

Rabies

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dogs have developed rabies in quarantine during a 20-year period; how many of these had valid certificates of vaccination against rabies; and which countries they came from. [17200]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Two dogs have developed rabies in quarantine in the last 20 years—an Irish wolfhound imported from the USA in 1983 and a Welsh terrier cross imported from Zambia in 1990. The Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and other Mammals) Order 1974 requires all dogs to be vaccinated against rabies on entry into quarantine to prevent infection from being contracted within the premises if another animal should develop rabies. There is no requirement for animals to have been vaccinated prior to entry into quarantine and therefore no information is held on whether they hold valid certificates of vaccination.

Baby Milk

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what policy considerations underlay his decision to amend the draft version of the United Kingdom regulations on advertising of baby milk in relation to the dissemination of information and controls on the advertising of brand name baby milk; and what representations he has received for and against his amendments. [17484]

Mrs. Browning: In deciding the final form of the regulations, Ministers gave heed to the Government's deregulation policy of implementing the minimum requirements of EC legislation, unless there are very good reasons for going beyond them.

Since the regulations were made and laid before the House, Ministers have received a large number of representations objecting, in particular, to the advertising controls on infant formulae. Not unexpectedly, only a few representations have been received from those content with the regulations.

Meat Imports

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers the United Kingdom has to sustain its ban on the import of meat products from animals reared using growth hormones if this is ruled to be illegal under GATT. [17475]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* The ban to which the hon. Member refers results from a European regulation. The UK voted against its adoption on the grounds that it was not justified scientifically. The legality of the ban has not so far been tested in the GATT. Were there to be a successful challenge we should, in conjunction with our EU partners, need to respond appropriately under the rules of the World Trade Organisation on the settlement of disputes.

Holderness Coast

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultation he has held with English Nature, the Countryside Commission, the National Rivers Authority and Holderness borough council over proposals to draw up a coastal protection scheme for the Holderness coast. [17844]

Mrs. Browning: Under the provisions of the Coast Protection Act 1949, coast protection authorities, such as Holderness borough council, must obtain the Ministry's approval for capital works intended to protect the coast against erosion. The Ministry is in regular contact with such authorities and requires them to consult other relevant bodies, including the National Rivers Authority, English Nature and the Countryside Commission, on proposed works. My right hon. Friend the Minister met a delegation from the council, led by the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), to discuss Holderness coastal defence issues on 7 February.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment has been made of the potential impact of the proposed trial of a submerged tyre bank off Dimlington coast, Holdersness on sites of special scientific interest at Dimlington cliff and Spurn point; and if a licence will be granted for a trial; [17843]

(2) If Sir William Halcrow and Partners have published the results of its environmental study into the consequences of a trial of a submerged tyre bank off the Dimlington coast, Holderness. [17842]

Mr. Jack: An application has been received under part 11 of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 from Humberside county council for a licence to deposit rubber rocks made from tyres in a trial offshore reef to test the effectiveness of such structures in contributing to the protection of the Humberside coast. The council has been told that a full environmental assessment will be required in support of the application and we understand this is currently being prepared by Halcrow and Partners. Publication of the study is a matter for the council.

The Ministry will wish to study this assessment and consult other interested parties before deciding whether or not to issue a licence.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an assessment of the consequences, both for the British fishing industry and other interests, if the United Kingdom withdraw from the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [17970]

Mr. Jack: The Government's views on the idea that the UK might withdraw from the common fisheries policy have been made clear to the House on a number of occasions. These include already this year, for example, the fisheries debate on 18 January, oral answers on 23 March, and three private notice questions, on 10 January and 13 and 28 March.

Aujeszky's Disease

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of Aujeszky's disease were reported in each year since 1985. [17820]

Mrs. Browning: The number of confirmed outbreaks of Aujeszky's disease in England for the period in question is as follows:

Year	*Number of outbreaks*
1985	12
1986	5
1987	6
1988	5
1989	5
1990–1995	Nil

Food Poisoning

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the change in the occurrence of food poisoning which can be attributed to the slaughter and handling of meat at abattoirs since the introduction of the EC meat hygiene regulations in 1992. [17953]

Mrs. Browning: A number of organisms, such as escherichia coli 0157:H7, some salmonella serotypes and listeria monocytogenes have been implicated in food poisoning incidents associated with the consumption of meat and meat products. In most cases of this kind, it is not possible to trace the meat back to the abattoir of origin.

Thorough cooking will destroy most, if not all, pathogenic micro-organisms, but steps must be taken at every stage of production to limit the risk of contamination of the unprocessed product because of the hazards associated with cross-infection and light cooking. The most appropriate point to address the problem of contamination with pathogenic organisms is in the slaughter hall, a critical control point in the chain of production where a number of conditions of animal and public health significance can be detected.

The Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992 have improved hygiene standards generally in slaughterhouses and other licensed fresh meat premises but it is not possible to assess whether the occurrence of food poisoning has changed as a result of their introduction.

Fish Species

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the fish species in United Kingdom waters and in the North Atlantic that *(a)* have been fished out and *(b)* are in danger of being fished out. [17854]

Mr. Jack: I am not aware that there are any fish species in waters around the United Kingdom or in the north Atlantic which are biologically extinguished or likely to be so. However, on the basis of 1994 scientific assessments, 37 per cent. of commercial fish stocks around the United Kingdom are at or below minimum biologically acceptable levels, that is, recruitment of young fish is insufficient to maintain the size of the stock at current levels. These stocks are:

North Sea—cod, saithe, plaice, mackerel;
Eastern Channel—cod, whiting, plaice;
Western Channel—sole;
Bristol Channel—cod, sole, plaice;
Western waters—hake, mackerel;
Irish Sea—cod, whiting, sole;
West of Scotland—cod, haddock, saithe, whiting, Clyde herring

In the north Atlantic, the following stocks are insufficiently prevalent to permit a viable commercial fishery:

East and West Greenland—offshore cod;
Faroes—bank cod;

A fishing moratorium applies within the regulatory area of the North-west Atlantic Fisheries Organisation to the following:

American plaice, yellowtail flounder, witch, capelin; cod, in NAFO division 3NO.

Blue Tongue

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of Blue Tongue were reported in each year since 1980. [17817]

Mrs. Browning: No case of Blue Tongue has ever been reported in England.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fishers and Food what alternatives were considered to the Meat Hygiene Service during its development. [18408]

Mrs. Browning: A review of the options for meat hygiene enforcement by a MAFF-Department of Health study team in 1991 considered:

enhancement of local authority enforcement,
central enforcement by the State Veterinary Service,
transferring enforcement to a separate body, and
contracting out.

The possibilities of privatisation or of contracting out were further considered as part of the process of establishing the Meat Hygiene Service as an agency of this Department.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fishers and Food if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister in consultations on the Environment Bill. [18650]

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend the Minister is the nominated green Minister for MAFF. This reflects the importance we attach to the consideration of environmental implications across the whole range of MAFF policies. Progress on MAFF's environmental performance is reported annually in departmental reports—Cm 2803—and in the United Kingdom's annual report "This Common Inheritance"—CM 2822. Copies of both are in the Library of the House.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares of land were set aside under the arable area payments scheme in each region of England in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is the estimate of the number of hectares of land that will be set aside in each region in 1995–96. [18659]

Mr. Waldegrave: The area of land set-aside under the arable area payments scheme in each region in England in 1993–94 is shown in the table below. Equivalent figures for 1994–95 are not yet available and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as they are. It is still too early to estimate the number of hectares that have been set aside in 1995–96 as farmers do not have to submit their integrated administration and control system claims until 15 May.

Areas set-aside in 1993–94 (hectares)

	Number
Wessex	32,323
Anglia	131,930
Northern	16,674
North Mercia	21,385
South West	10,092
North East	75,643
East Midlands	96,168
South East	73,183
South Mercia	35,467

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total cost of payments for *(a)* set-aside and *(b)* in total under the arable area payments scheme in each region of England in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is estimate of the total cost of payments in each region of England in 1995–96. [18635]

Mr. Waldegrave: The total of payments claimed for set-aside and arable area payments for regions of England for 1993–94 is shown below. The total amount paid will have been slightly lower because of reductions made for various reasons. However, since such reductions have to be calculated on the basis of the total claim, which may include land in more than one region, it is not possible to give the total amounts paid on a regional basis. The equivalent figures for 1994–95 are not yet available and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as they are. It is not yet possible to estimate the cost of payments in each region for 1995–96 as integrated administration and control system claims do not have to be submitted by farmers until 15 May.

Cost of set-aside and arable payments in 1993–94

	Set-aside £	*Total AAPS* £
Wessex	8,625,448	41,258,638
Anglia	35,205,471	175,758,954
Northern	4,450,178	22,587,760
North Mercia	5,706,655	275,179,904
South West	2,693,018	12,115,126
North East	20,185,548	101,011,554
East Midlands	25,662,373	136,205,244
South East	19,528,730	104,344,814
South Mercia	9,464,455	49,928,317

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many claims were made for in England (1) for set-aside and (2) in total under the arable area payments scheme in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95 of *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* between £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* between £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* between £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* between £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* between £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* between £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* between £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* between £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* between £50,001 and £200,000, *(k)* between £200,001 and £1,000,000 and *(l)* over £1,000,000; and what is his latest estimate of the number of claims that will be made in 1995–96 in each value band. [18634]

Mr. Waldegrave: The number of claims made in England for set-aside and in total under the arable area payments scheme in England in 1993–94 were £26,283 and 45,774 respectively and in 1994–95 were 29,261 and 46,920.

The distribution of payments for 1993–94 is only available in the form set out below. Similar figures for 1994–95 are not yet available as the final oilseed payments for the year are still being made. It is too early to estimate the value of claims for 1995–96 as IACS claims do not have to be submitted by farmers until May 15.

Total payments in England banded by size of payment

Size band	*Number of payments*
Up to £4,999	21,345
From £5,000 to £9,999	6,577
From £10,000 to £24,999	9,712
From £25,000 to £49,999	5,164
From £50,000 to £99,999	2,325
From £100,000 to £249,999	599
From £250,000 to £499,999	45
From £500,000 upward	[1]7
Total	45,774

[1] It is not possible to identify separately the number of payments above £1,000,000 for reasons of confidentiality.

Disabled People

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18593]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry, including its agencies, takes its responsibilities in the area of equal opportunities seriously and aims to respond as far as reasonably possible to the needs of disabled members of the public and staff.

In the area of access, the Ministry has for several years been reviewing its estate and improving the accessibility of the buildings it occupies. A survey of all staff in 1993 showed where they thought additional measures were necessary. Funds have now been set aside for a further three-year programme, starting with a full survey of the estate to indicate where further improvements can be made.

Badger Setts (Paignton Zoo)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badger setts there are known to be in the boundaries of Paignton zoo; how many of these have been interfered with; how many have received a licence to be interfered with; for what reasons the licences were issued; and if he will make a statement. [18636]

Mrs. Browning: I will write to the hon. Member once ADAS, the Ministry's wildlife adviser, has completed a site visit.

Central Veterinary Laboratory

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Central Veterinary Laboratory in 1995–96. [19214]

Mr. Waldegrave: I have set the Central Veterinary Laboratory the following strategic performance targets for 1995–96:

Financial Performance—full cost recovery for all Central Veterinary Laboratory services

Efficiency: an overall efficiency gain of 2.5 per cent.

Service Delivery: 85 per cent. of ROAME R and D milestones achieved

Service quality: achievement of a satisfactory report from a Visiting Group

Achievement of laboratory accreditation for Radiochemistry Unit

Details of performance in 1994-295 will be set out in the agency's annual report and accounts to be published during July 1995.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has completed the review of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate; and if he will make a statement. [19210]

Mr. Waldegrave: The review of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has now been completed. This has concluded that the VMD should continue to operate as an executive agency.

An independent evaluation of the VMD was carried out by external management consultants. As well as assessing the VMD's performance this also considered the effects of agency status on both the VMD and core Department. Overall, the study concluded that the VMD had made significant progress since its launch as an agency in 1990. There were, of course, some areas for improvement and lessons to be learnt for both the agency and the Department. I have placed a summary of the evaluation's main recommendations, and the management response, together with a copy of the VMD's revised framework document in the Libraries of both Houses.

EMPLOYMENT

Service Sector Pay

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what comparisons he has made on the basis of purchasing power parity between the living standard of the average service industry worker in the United Kingdom and that of his EU counterparts. [15930]

Mr. Oppenheim: For service sectors where information is available, gross pay in the UK is higher than in Western Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands—once the cost of living has been taken into account.

Manual Worker's Pay

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the increase in real take-home pay for manual workers between *(a)* 1973–74 and 1978–79 and *(b)* 1978–79 and 1993–94. [18425]

Mr. Oppenehim: Real take-home pay for a single man at the lowest 10 per cent. of the earnings distribution fell by 1 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and increased by 23 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Job Losses

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs were lost in each region, broken down by gender, over the last 12 months for the occupational categories *(a)* managerial and administrative, *(b)* professional, *(c)* associate professional and technical, *(d)* clerical and secretarial, *(e)* craft and related, *(f)* personal and protective service, *(g)* sales *(h)* plant and machine operatives and *(i)* other. [18421]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Information is available only for the net change in jobs. This can be obtained from the labour force survey Quantime service available in the Library.

Remploy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for all standard employment regions the total number of Remploy units and the number of people employed in them for the last three favourable years. [16758]

Miss Widddecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the total number of Remploy units and the number of people employed in for the last three years.

The information in the following list gives Remploy's estimates, by Employment Service Region, of the numbers of severely disabled people employed in their factories as at end March for the last three years. It does not include those on the Interwork programme.

Region	*Year*	*Number of severely disabled people*	*Number of units*
East Midlands	1992	456	7
	1993	420	8
	1994	400	8
North East	1992	862	8
	1993	796	8
	1994	770	8
North West	1992	1,552	18
	1993	1,465	18
	1994	1,473	19
Scotland	1992	915	10
	1993	854	10
	1994	850	10
South East	1992	789	10
	1993	748	10
	1994	752	10
South West	1992	583	9
	1993	551	9
	1994	569	9
Wales	1992	1,288	14
	1993	1,200	14
	1994	1,176	15
West Midlands	1992	607	5
	1993	579	6
	1994	568	6
Yorkshire and Humberside	1992	940	14
	1993	907	14
	1994	903	14

I hope this is helpful.

Special Contracts and Priority Suppliers Scheme

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received regarding the workings of the special contracts arrangements and priority suppliers scheme; and if he will make a statement. [16759]

Miss Widdecombe: I have received representations from a range of people and organisations, including correspondence from hon. Members.

Occupational Health

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will indicate the measures that his Department undertakes to address occupational health; and if he will make a statement. [18255]

Mr. Oppenheim: Much of the Health and Safety Executive's everyday activity, such as modernising the framework of health and safety law, inspection of workplaces, provision of advice and formal enforcement action, addresses occupational health issues and the reduction of levels of occupational ill health. Details are contained in the Health and Safety Commission's plans of work and annual reports. The plan of work for 1995–96 will be published on 21 April and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Additionally, the HSE is giving priority in 1995 to implementing a programme of action based on the conclusions of its recent strategic review of the 10 main occupational health risks: toxic substances, biohazards, noise, vibration, ionising and non-ionising radiation, manual handling, upper limb disorders, sick building syndrome and stress. Action includes obtaining better information on the scale and pattern of ill health; commissioning further research, for example on prevention techniques; provision of practical guidance and publicity and inspection campaigns.

In May 1995, the HSE will be launching a major new three to four-year campaign, "Good Health is Good Business", to help to improve employers' management of health risks. The first year will focus in particular on noise, respiratory sensitisers and musculoskeletal risks.

Minimum Wage (Women)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Equal Opportunities Commission to consider its research findings on the effect of women of the introduction of a minimum wage. [18773]

Miss Widdecombe: I have no plans to do so.

Transfers and Redundancies

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to amend the legislation concerning consultation with employees' representatives about collective redundancies and transfers of undertakings; and if he will make a statement. [18972]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Employment Department is seeking views from a range of organisations on a proposal to amend the legislation concerning an employer's duty to provide information to, and to consult, representatives of employees about proposed redundancies and business transfers. A copy of the proposal has been placed in the Library.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Palestinian National Authority

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals were made by the Prime Minister during his recent visit to extend material and technical aid to the Palestinian national authority. [15535]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 14 March, *Official Report*, column *476*.

Gaza Airport and Port

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what statements were made by the recent British delegation to Gaza about the willingness of Britain to be involved in building Gaza airport and port. [15536]

Mr. Baldry: No statements on this issue were made by representatives of Her Majesty's Government. I understand that a number of British firms expressed interest in these projects.

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he plans to ensure that contributions to IDA-11 will reduce poverty. [15584]

Mr. Baldry: We have already made clear in the on-going IDA-11 negotiations that we look to the World bank to strengthen the effectiveness of its programmes, including implementation of its poverty reduction strategy. I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 7 and 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *130–31*, and *366–67*.

Somaliland

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals exist at British or international level for the reintroduction of mine clearing operations in Somaliland. [17824]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 February 1995, columns *488–89*. The situation is unchanged.

South African Elections

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria were used to decide the delegation sent to monitor the 1994 South African elections; and if he will make a statement. [18139]

Mr. Baldry: Britain provided a total of 70 election observers under the auspices of the United Nations and European Union observer missions. The main criteria for the selection of individuals was that they should have experience and professional skills relevant to the running of elections.

Aid for Trade Projects

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects funded, and the sums allocated, by the £34.5 million returned to the aid budget in 1994–95 in recompense for the illegal use of the money to fund the Pergau dam and three other aid for trade provision projects. [18211]

Mr. Baldry: Spending on these four projects for 1994–95 was estimated to be £32.016 million. This was allocated as part of a wider reallocation of resources at the time of the spring supplementary estimate. The availability of these funds effectively allowed:

i. further spending on country programmes (£13.825 million)—principally for additional programme aid for Malawi, mine clearance in Cambodia and a range of know how fund projects in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union;

ii. additional spending on emergency and refugee relief (£12.191 million)—principally of work in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechyna; and

iii. additional funding (£6 million)—principally for research and primary health care work in developing countries through the WHO and other international health organisations.

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the restructuring of the Natural Resources Institute;

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the restructuring of the Natural Resources Institute.

Mr. Baldry: Against the background of changes in the nature and level of demand for the NRI's services, we have put in hand a restructuring programme. The result will be a smaller institute which focuses on the NRI's interdisciplinary strengths in adaptive research and related development services. The NRI management envisage an organisation of around 360 professional and administrative staff, which will mean a reduction of present staffing level by 140. We aim to achieve the reduction in staffing by voluntary means.

The restructured institute will continue to play a major role in Britain's programme of aid for the natural resources sector in developing countries. It will do so as a supplier of services in its own right and as a manager of resources from the available science base. The NRI's expertise is increasingly sought by outside clients in the development aid community. The institute will be strongly encouraged to expand this aspect of its activities.

WALES

"D" Plates

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to amend the law relating to the display of "D" plates by learner drivers in Wales. [19243]

Mr. Richards: The Government are considering amending the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1987 to permit learner drivers in Wales to display "D" plates in preference to "L" plates if they wish. A consultation document seeking the views of the public and organisations with an interest in this matter is being issued today and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

School Pupils

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the full programme of action to raise the achievement of pupils in schools in Wales promised in "People and Prosperity: An Agenda for Action in Wales". [19244]

Mr. Redwood: I intend to publish this document on Thursday 6 April. The text is entitled "A Bright Future: Getting the Best for Every Pupil at School in Wales". Among other things, it follows-up material in "People and Prosperity: An Agenda for Action in Wales". Taken as a whole, this initiative will be directly relevant to primary and secondary schools. It includes a consultation on a specific target for attainment in the core subjects of the national curriculum. The proposal is that, by 2000, at least half of all individual 15-year-olds should get an A to C grade in each of GCSE mathematics, science, English or Welsh, first language. Responses are sought by the end of June and the final target will be published in the autumn. I have made arrangements for copies of the text to be placed in the Library of the House.

Lydia Owens

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has received a copy of the report of the inquiry team which investigated the abduction of Lydia Owens from Glan Clwyd hospital and if he will make a statement. [19245]

Mr. Richards: The inquiry team set up by Glan Clwyd NHS trust has completed its report and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. I am satisfied that the circumstances have been thoroughly investigated and the board of the trust has accepted the recommendations, which are being implemented. All hospitals are reviewing their security arrangements and the chairman of the Glan Clwyd NHS trust has discussed the recommendations with the chairmen of other NHS trusts in Wales so that they can implement them where appropriate.

Smoking

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what initiatives the Welsh Office is taking to encourage people to stop smoking; and if he will make a statement; [16799]

(2) what is the budget allocated for publicity to educate the public about the effects of smoking in the current year; and if he will make a statement. [16774]

Mr. Richards: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children have received statements for special educational needs in each of the counties in Wales in each year from 1980 to the present time. [16837]

Mr. Richards: Estimates of the number of children in each county in Wales for whom statements of special educational needs were made for the first time, for each year since 1987, are shown in the following table. Data for earlier years are not available on the same basis. Totals for Wales shown in the table reflect the county estimates and in respect of 1987 and 1988 should be substituted for those I gave the hon. Member in my reply of 17 March, *Official Report*, column *766*.

Errors in the return to the Welsh Office from one county have been identified in the meantime.

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Clwyd	377	187	213	264	318	251	251	472
Dyfed	160	104	121	193	225	272	397	437
Gwent	272	235	463	338	402	480	497	395
Gwynedd	80	70	99	133	130	205	178	201
Mid Glamorgan	537	575	643	543	490	545	583	542
Powys	17	16	30	78	120	134	55	77
South Glamorgan	217	201	174	243	184	215	274	321
West Glamorgan	274	234	304	307	358	354	415	436
Wales	1,934	1,622	2,047	2,099	2,227	2,456	2,650	2,881

Carbon Fibre Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the sources of carbon fibre pollution in Wales. [17511]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Carbon fibre is an inorganic material used in the manufacture of a wide range of products including aircraft, high-performance cars and sports equipment. It is normally used, in small quantities, as a strengthening material. The World Health Organisation has indicated that the potential health risk from carbon fibre pollution in the general environment is very low.

County Council Smallholdings

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many county council farm tenancies there are in each of the counties of Wales *(a)* at present and *(b)* in 1979; and if he will make a statement. [17395]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Number of Tenancies (position as at 31 March)

	1979	*1994*
Clwyd	186	154
Dyfed	144	163
Gwent	120	89
Gwynedd	184	175
Mid Glamorgan	29	4
Powys	261	219
South Glamorgan	72	35
West Glamorgan	7	2

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimated number of acres of council farm tenancies in the proposed new local authorities based on the former Clwyd county council; and if he will make a statement. [17398]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 31 March 1994, Clwyd county council let 3,640 hectares of land as smallholdings. It is not possible to estimate the number of hectares of council farm tenancies falling within each individual new local authority. It is the Government's intention that the smallholdings should be transferred to the new authorities.

General Practitioners

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of general practitioner practices in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil, *(b)* Rhymney and *(c)* Mid Glamorgan which have established patient participation groups. [17387]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Rowlands : To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioner trainees there are currently in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil, *(b)* Rhymney and *(c)* Mid Glamorgan. [17389]

Mr. Richards: The numbers of GP trainees currently engaged in the general practice component of their training are as follows:

	Number
Rhymney	1
Merthyr	0
Ogwr	13
Rhondda/Taff	8
Total in Mid Glamorgan	22

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of general practitioner practices in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil, *(b)* Rhymney and *(c)* Mid Glamorgan that have established the programmes and standards listed in section 6.2 of the Mid Glamorgan family health services authority's business plan 1995–96. [17391]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

This is a local management issue for the Mid Glamorgan family health services authority.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the number and percentage of general practitioner practices in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil, *(b)* Rhymney and *(c)* in Mid Glamorgan which have employed nurses. [17386]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

The number of practice nurses employed in Mid Glamorgan at 1 April 1994 was 169—whole-time equivalent 121.5.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of United Kingdom-trained general practitioners in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil, *(b)* Rhymney and *(c)* Mid Glamorgan. [17388]

Mr. Richards: This information is not readily available.

The number of unrestricted principals at 1 April 1994 in Mid Glamorgan was 303.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether family health services authorities' procedures are adequate in assisting and advising families who believe that a general practitioner has been negligent in his care of a patient belonging to that family; and if he will make a statement. [18099]

Mr. Richards: Negligence is a matter for the courts; it is not something on which FHSAs would offer advice.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of general practitioner practices in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside and *(b)* Clwyd that have established patient participation groups; and if he will make a statement. [18101]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

NHS Pay

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received concerning *(a)* nurses' pay *(b)* ambulance staff pay and *(c)* radiographers' pay; and if he will make a statement. [17397]

Mr. Richards: I have received 31 representations, including a petition, on nurses' pay and two representations specifically about radiographers' pay. I have not received any regarding the pay of ambulance staff.

Respite Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he will take to deliver more respite care in each of the counties of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17401]

Mr. Richards: It is for local authorities, health authorities and GP fundholders to determine and meet the need for respite care in their areas.

Local authorities in Wales will receive £124.4 million in 1995–96 for community care, including respite care. It is for those authorities to decide how best to use this money to meet the needs of their local populations.

The recent Welsh Office guidance on NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs—WHC(95)7, WOC16/95—has reiterated that health authorities and GP fundholders have important responsibilities too, in arranging and funding respite health care. Working with local authorities, health authorities have been asked to set out by April 1996 the arrangements they will make for this.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who advises him on sustainable development policy issues pertaining to Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17482]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Advice on sustainable development matters is available to my right hon. Friend from a range of sources. These include in particular the Welsh Office, the Government panel on sustainable development, and the UK round table.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to establish a Welsh advisory group on sustainable development along the lines of that set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [17497]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) by my right hon. Friend on 17 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *770*.

Registered Playgroups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of children in *(a)* playgroups and *(b)* toddler groups in each of the counties of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17400]

Mr. Richards: Information on the numbers of children in playgroups and toddler groups is not held centrally. The available information relates to the number of places in registered playgroups for children aged from two years and six months and is given in the following table:

Number of places available in registered playgroups as at 31 March 1994

Local Authority	*Places*
Clwyd	5,131
Dyfed	3,089
Gwent	3,063
Gwynedd	3,348
Mid Glamorgan	3,928
Powys	1,513
South Glamorgan	4,093
West Glamorgan	1,318
Total	25,483

Rheumatology Services

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if a consultant has yet been found for the proposed rheumatology service for Gwent; and if he will make a statement. [17420]

Mr. Richards: It is the responsibility of health authorities and trusts to identify health needs and corresponding staff requirements; therefore, this information is not held centrally.

Mid Glamorgan Family Health Services Authority

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to meet the underfunding identified in Mid Glamorgan family health services authority's business plan 1995–96. [17390]

Mr. Richards: None. For 1995–96, the Mid Glamorgan FHSA has received its weighted capitation share of administration funding and cash increase of 7.9 per cent. for its cash-limited general medical services. The average increase for FHSAs in Wales was 6 per cent.

Low Flying

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations have been received by his Department from the Celtic League regarding the dangers posed by toxic pollution fall-out arising from crashes of RAF aircraft on low flying exercises in Wales. [17520]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None; although I understand the Celtic League has written to the Ministry of Defence about this.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18530]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18548]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to an hon. or right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18550]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18549]

(5) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer written 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18547]

(6) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior officials of a non-departmental

public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each years since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18529]

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

NHS Complaints

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the procedures of medical complaints and assess whether they are carried out speedily enough; and if he will make a statement. [18100]

Mr. Richards: All NHS complaints procedures were reviewed by the committee chaired by Professor Alan Wilson, whose report "Being Heard" was published in May 1994. The Government's response was announced on 21 March and included targets of two working days and four weeks for initial and full responses to complaints made at stage 1 of the new system. Deadlines for complaints made at stage 2 will be worked out in discussion with interested parties.

Dental Services

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many dental practices taking new NHS patients there were in 1992 in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement; [18225]

(2) how many dental practices there are in Dyfed taking new NHS patients; and if he will make a statement; [18223]

(3) how many dental practices taking new NHS patients there were in 1992 in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement; [18226]

(4) how many dental practices there were taking new NHS patients in Powys in 1993; and if he will make a statement; [18230]

(5) how many dental practices there are in the county of West Glamorgan currently taking new NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [18224]

Mr. Richards: The information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Family health services authorities are best placed to provide information on local availability of NHS general dental services, and to provide advice and assistance to any unregistered patient who experiences difficulty in finding a dentist willing to accept them under NHS arrangements.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dental practitioners with fewer than two years' post-qualification experience there are in the county of Clwyd; and if he will make a statement [18229]

Mr. Richards: According to information supplied by the family health services authority, there are six dentists in Clwyd who have less than two years' post-qualification experience.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dental practices there are in *(a)* the county of Dyfed and *(b)* Clwyd. [18228]

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of dental practices is not available centrally. However, at 31 December 1994, there were 104 and 119 general dental practitioners practising in Dyfed FHSA and Clwyd FHSA respectively. Dentists who work in more than one FHSA have been counted in the FHSA where they perform most work.

Teaching Posts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the number of teachers in Wales who cannot find permanent posts. [18105]

Mr. Richards: Information about teachers seeking permanent posts is not available. The appointment of teachers is entirely a matter for local education authorities and schools. The overwhelming majority of full-time teachers have permanent contracts.

Remploy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total number of Remploy units and number working in them for each county and for Wales as a whole during the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [16757]

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for Remploy has been delegated, by the Employment Department, to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has asked the chief executive to provide information on the number of Remploy units and employees in these units. This information is not available at county level in Wales and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Out-patients

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to the NHS in Wales of the non-attenders to out-patient appointments in 1993–94. [17712]

Mr. Redwood: No calculation is made centrally of the cost of failures to attend out-patient appointments in hospitals in Wales.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he has received from individual members of the board of the Countryside Council for Wales during the current year which have been critical of his proposals for the funding of the Countryside Council for Wales. [18638]

Mr. Redwood: One.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he has received from the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales from 1 January to date concerning the funding of the Countryside Council for Wales; and on what dates he received such correspondence. [18737]

Mr. Redwood: I have received two such letters dated 27 February and 9 March.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of land were set aside under the arable area payments scheme in Wales in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95 and what is his estimate of the number of hectares of land that will be set aside in 1995–96. [18660]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Some 3,114 hectares of land were set aside under the arable area payments scheme in 1993–94 and 4,181 hectares in 1994–95.

It is too early to estimate the hectarage for 1995–96 as farmers do not have to submit their integrated administration and control system applications until 15 May.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims were made in Wales (1) for set-aside and (2) in total under the arable area payments scheme in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95 of *(a)* between zero and £5,000, *(b)* between £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* between £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* between 15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* between £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* 25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* between £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* between £75,001 and £100,000, *(i)* between £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* between £150,000 and £200,000, (k) between £200,001 and £1 million and (l) over £1 million; and what is his latest estimate of the number of claims that will be made in 1995–96 in each value band. [18630]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures requested are as follows:

	1993–94		*1994–95*	
	Set aside	*Total*	*Set aside*	*Total*
£0–£5,000	285	2,282	331	2,177
£5,001–£10,000	13	134	32	148
£10,001–£15,000	1	50	6	79
£15,001–£20,000	1	21	3	46
£20,001–£25,000	—	8	—	21
£25,001–£50,000	—	12	—	25
£50,001–£75,000	—	—	—	11
£75,001–£100,000	—	—	—	1

There were no claims above £100,000.

It is too early to estimate number of claims in 1995–96 as farmers do not have to submit their IACS applications until 15 May.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of payments under the arable area payments scheme *(a)* for set-aside and *(b)* in total in Wales in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) in 1994–95 and what is his estimate of the cost of payments in 1995–96. [18631]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Total payments under the arable area payments scheme for *(a)* set-aside amounted to £617,380 in 1993–94 and £1,104,525 in 1994–95 and *(b)* in total amounted to £5,526,389 in 1993–94 and £7,923,953 in 1994–95. It is too early to estimate payments for 1995–96 as farmers do not have to submit their IACS applications until 15 May.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list (a) the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and (c) the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18651]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is the "Green Minister" for the Welsh Office, having special responsibility for its environmental policies and programmes. Details of these can be found in the latest Welsh Office departmental report, Cm 2815, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The proceedings of Cabinet and Cabinet committees, and communications between Ministers, are confidential. However, the latest position on the Government's overall strategy on the environment is set out in "This Common Inheritance—UK Annual Report 1995", Cm 2822, a copy of which is also available in the Library of the House.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18585]

Mr. Redwood: My Department has a disabled persons officer to identify needs of disabled people and to ensure that a range of specialist facilities and services are provided in meeting those needs wherever it is safe and practicable to do so. At office buildings, these include reserved car parking, adaptations to entrances and building layouts, toilets, modifications to lifts and service installations, vehicles, furniture, telephones, computers and other office equipment. The Cadw agency also makes special arrangements for easy access to monuments which the disabled people can visit in safety; full details are published in a Cadw information sheet for people with disabilities.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will produce further guidance notes to footnote (7) to appendix 1 in his departmental report published on 9 March, when he has reached agreement with the local authorities and the other bodies eligible for funding for infrastructure projects from the European regional development fund on the split between allocation to local authorities and the other eligible bodies for the year 1995–96 to 1997–98, and if he will make a statement. [14762]

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* At no point does the Department agree with the various sponsors of ERDF projects any split between the allocations to local authorities and other eligible bodies. The distribution of the resources under the objective 2 and 5b programmes is made by the technical working groups of the monitoring committees on a project-by-project basis. Decisions are taken throughout the life of these programmes on the basis of agreed selection criteria.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18455]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18456]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18457]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to an hon. or right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question. [18458]

Mr. Newton: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18459]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report*, in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18460]

Mr. Newton: None. I am not responsible for any non-departmental public bodies or agencies.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pension Fund

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he received the report by the Government Actuary on the valuation of the parliamentary contribution pension fund as at 1 April; when the report was laid on the Table; and when copies of it were placed in the Vote Office of the House. [18768]

Mr. Newton: I received the report on 28 March; copies were sent to the right hon. Member and other trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund on 29 March; it was laid on the Table on 30 March and copies were placed in the Vote Office on 4 April.

Secretarial Allowance and Pensions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress he has made on taking forward recommendations made by the Senior Salaries Review Body on the temporary secretarial allowance and secretarial pensions; and if he will make a statement. [17509]

Mr. Newton: A number of modifications are proposed to take account of practical problems identified in the report and representations from a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Lady herself. These have been approved by Madam Speaker. The Accountant is writing to all hon. Members with details of the modifications, which are being implemented with effect from 1 April 1995.

Parliamentary Channel

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what representation he has received about the cost to subscribers to Videotron's Option 1 of receiving the Parliamentary channel. [16626]

Mr. Newton: No such representations have been received.

Lord Advocate

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his letter, on what aspects of the Lockerbie case the Lord Advocate can volunteer a statement to the Scottish Grand Committee. [18095]

Mr. Newton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate cannot properly volunteer a statement on aspects of a particular criminal case. Although the Lord Advocate can make a statement to the Scottish Grand Committee under Standing Order No. 94D(2)(a) to facilitate his questioning by members of the Committee about a matter relating to his officials' responsibilities, to the extent that they fall within the order of reference of the Scottish Affairs Committee established under Standing Order No. 130, the consideration of individual cases is excluded under that standing order. In this regard, the Lockerbie case is no different from any other current criminal case.

In addition, provision is made under Standing Order No. 94D(2)(b) for a Law Officer to announce the policy of the Government on a matter relating to Scotland or the response of the Government to an event relating to Scotland. However, having regard to the interests of justice, it would be improper for the Lord Advocate to make any announcement giving details of the evidence or any investigative steps in relation to any criminal case while proceedings are pending. Once again, in this regard the Lockerbie case is no different from any other criminal case.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his letter, in what circumstances the Lord Advocate can attend the Scottish Grand Committee. [18094]

Mr. Newton: The Lord Advocate, who is not a member of the Scottish Grand Committee, may attend the Committee by virtue of Standing Order No. 94D. Under paragraph (1) of that standing order, the Chairman of the Committee may permit a Scottish Law Officer, whether or not a member of the Committee, to make a statement, of which prior notice has been given to him, and to answer questions thereon put by members of the Committee. Paragraph (4) provides that a Law Officer who is not a member of the Committee may not make a statement from the body of the Committee, and shall not vote, make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

Press Gallery

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will arrange improvements to the comfort of the seating in the Press Gallery.

Mr. Ray Powell: No improvements are presently planned. If the hon. Member has specific proposals, he should write to the Director of Parliamentary Works.

Parliamentary Data and Video Network

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee when GroupWise was promised for the PDVN; when it was delivered for DOS and Windows users; when it will be working for Apple Macintosh users; and how much Novell will have to pay for late delivery.

Mr. Waller: GroupWise is version 4 of the software package formerly known as WordPerfect Office which constitutes the main user software for the Parliamentary Data and Video Network. A useable version of GroupWise version 4.1 for Windows was delivered on 15 November 1994. A version for DOS was received by instalments soon afterwards and is still being evaluated. The final sections of the UK version for Apple will be provided in early May 1995.

The agreement with WordPerfect which was due to expire at the end of February 1995 was renegotiated with Novell, which has now taken over the WordPerfect corporation, for an additional year, compensating the House for the fact that it was not possible to upgrade from WordPerfect Office version 3 to GroupWise version 4 during 1993–1994.

Fire Officers

Mr. Steen: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many fire officers are employed full and part time in the Palace of Westminster; who pays for them; what is the cost to public funds and what has been the cost to public funds, with particular reference to the Palace and its estate, of implementing fire regulations.

Mr. Beith: The agreed complement of the Palace of Westminster fire section is one principal fire officer, four senior fire officers and 24 fire officers. Members of the fire section are civilian employees of the Metropolitan police. The cost of the service to the House of Commons was £570,000 in the last financial year. During the period 1993 to 1999, an average expenditure of approximately £1 million per annum has been planned towards meeting fire safety requirements throughout the parliamentary estate.

Family Mediation Exhibition

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to family mediation services to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Tuesday 6 June to Friday 9 June 1995.

Energy Efficiency

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what measures were taken in 1994 to improve energy efficiency in the Palace of Westminster and increase recycling facilities in the Palace of Westminster; and what is the percentage of *(a)* stationery used within the Palace of Westminster which is made of recycled material and *(b)* paper, tin, plastic and glass waste produced in the Palace of Westminster which is recycled.

Mr. Ray Powell: A report by the Director of Works entitled "Energy Conservation on the Parliamentary Estate" dated 20 June 1994 describes the measures being taken and is available in the Library. During the financial year 1993–94, approximately 30 per cent. of stationery provided for Members' use from the Serjeant at Arms's store was made of recycled material. All non-confidential waste paper, glass, plastic and recycled metal is recycled.

TRANSPORT

Railways (Safety Plan)

Mr. Budgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the railway group safety plan for 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [19305]

Mr. Watts: The Railtrack board has now submitted a 1995 safety plan for Britain's national railway network. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The plan sets out strategic safety objectives for 1995–96, reports safety performance by British Rail and Railtrack in 1994–95 and gives details of the arrangements for managing safety on the railway. The objectives are designed to maintain safety and to set strategic objectives to improve it wherever practicable. Railtrack and operators have developed programmes and action plans designed to achieve their individual and shared objectives. The plan is also an important companion to railway safety cases, and will ensure that full and proper attention is paid to safety during the privatisation process.

RAF Northolt

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Government have to assist business aviation at RAF Northolt; and if he will make a statement. [19247]

Mr. Norris: The Government carried out a consultation exercise last year with business users on the possibility of creating a civil enclave at RAF Northolt to make better use of the existing capacity. Responses showed that the high capital costs and physical constraints would make this financially unviable. The Government do not intend to pursue this proposal.

However, it is clear that the business aviation industry would welcome increased activity at Northolt through extending shared use of the facilities. The Government will consult further with the industry, and take into account the views of the local communities and other interested parties, to identify detailed working arrangements at Northolt which could improve the service offered to users and to business in the south-east more generally.

Driving Licences (Fitness to Drive)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of motorists who, since the implementation of the Road Traffic Act 1988, have notified the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency of *(a)* any disability or condition that affects their fitness to drive or which might do so in the future and *(b)* the proportion of this total that have glaucoma. [17870]

Mr. Norris: Between January 1989 and December 1994, the DVLA received 2,016,601 notification of medical conditions—some drivers would have submitted more than one notification in that period. The number of notifications of glaucoma from January 1992 to December 1994 was 11,211. Figures prior to 1992 are not available.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what publicity measures his Department have taken to inform drivers of their requirement under the Road Traffic Act 1988 to notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency of any disability or condition that affects their fitness to drive or which might do so in the future. [17871]

Mr. Norris: Every driving licence carries a note reminding the holder of his obligation to notify the DVLA of the worsening of an existing medical condition or the onset of a new condition. Leaflet INS 57 which is issued with every driving licence carries a similar message.

Leaflet D100 "What you need to know about driving licences", available from most post offices, carries more detailed information.

Between February 1994 and January 1995, a leaflet aimed at older drivers which reinforced the medical requirements was issued with all vehicle excise licence reminders.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18600]

Mr. Norris: Advice about space planning and risk assessment for people with disabilities has been issued to my Department's property managers. They have been asked to improve access to and within buildings.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information superhighway. [17734]

Mr. Norris: Neither the Department centrally, nor Ministers, have Internet addresses. The Transport Research Laboratory and several hundred staff in the Department have Internet mail addresses used for specific aspects of their work. The Department is currently reviewing the scope for wider use of the Internet in planning new internal and external electronic mail facilities for installation in 1996.

Railways (Passenger Service Requirements)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the basis for the passenger service requirements; and how long his Department has been researching passenger service requirements as a way of improving the rail system. [17369]

Mr. Watts: The guidance issued to the franchising director by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport requires him to ensure that passenger service requirements for the first franchises are based upon the timetable being operated by BR immediately prior to franchising. A copy of an explanatory note setting out the franchising director's approach to, and criteria for, setting these passenger service requirements has been placed in the Library of the House.

The White Paper "New Opportunities for the Railways:the Privatisation of British Rail"—July 1992, CM 2012—set out proposals for specifying service levels in franchise agreements as an important element in our plans for improving passenger services.

Public Bodies

Mrs. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17640]

Mr. Norris: The information on non-departmental public bodies and agencies is not held centrally, nor are figures readily available elsewhere. Such data as could be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs are in the following table.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 (est)*
DVLA						
a) TV	Nil	33,000	121,000	101,000	551,000	n/a
b) Radio	74,000	87,000	137,000	88,000	79,000	n/a
c) Press (including recruitment)	67,213	55,329	106,077	99,000	25,000	n/a
d) Other	363,000	178,000	304,000	422,000	87,000	n/a
e) Total	504,213	353,329	668,077	710,000	742,000	n/a

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 (est)*
f) Recruitment (percentage of total)	0.44	0.09	0.31	Nil	Nil	Nil
Traffic Director for London[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	Nil	11,647	9,812	29,306	30,000
London Regional Passengers Committee (LRPC)[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	—	—	1,410	n/a
Northern Lighthouse Board[1]						
f) Recruitment	5,097	17,335	5,291	6,227	5,731	5,000
Trinity House Lighthouse Service[1]						
f) Recruitment	5,000	14,000	10,000	16,000	11,000	15,000
Traffic Commissioners[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	13,919	—	—	13,000
VI[1]						
f) Recruitment	43,503	29,566	11,635	5,562	904	Nil
Highways Agency[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	—	—	36,541	n/a
VCA[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	200	—	626	1,547	1,500
TRL[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	n/a	40,000	50,000	70,000
DSA[1]						
f) Recruitment	49,000	800,000	Nil	10,000	34,000	12,000
Marine Safety Agency[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	—	—	12,181	15,000
The Coastguard Agency[1]						
f) Recruitment	—	—	—	—	23,458	21,000

[1] No above the line advertising (a to d).

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18646]

Dr. Mawhinney: I am the green Minister for the Department of Transport but all my ministerial colleagues share a common objective of promoting transport policies compatible with sustainable development.

My aims for transport, as set out in "This Common Inheritance 1995" are to develop appropriate national and local strategies and measures for reducing the need to travel and to encourage more sustainable and environmentally acceptable patterns of transport.

I have been fully involved in consultations on the Environment Bill.

Private Detective Agencies

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to date, and what is the current cost per month, of his Department's and the Highways Agency's use of *(a)* Brays private detective agency, and *(b)* other private detective agencies and if he will give a breakdown of those costs per road scheme or project.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 5 April 1995:

Mr. John Watts has asked me to write in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the use by the Department of Transport and the Highways Agency of Brays and other private detective agencies in connection with road schemes.

Detective agencies have been employed by solicitors, on behalf of the Department on the following schemes. The information you requested is below. All but £200 of the payments, marked *, were to Brays Detective Agency.

Road scheme	*Paid to date £*	*Estimated ongoing monthly cost £*
A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road	294,000	25,000
A4/A6 Batheaston/Swainswick Bypass	150,000	Nil
M3 Bar End-Compton	259,000	Nil
M65 Blackburn Southern Bypass	1,500 *200	Nil

Road scheme	*Paid to date* £	*Estimated ongoing monthly cost* £
A34 Newbury Bypass	300	Nil
A11 Besthorpe-Wymondham	450	Nil
Total of all above	705,450	25,000

The figures have been rounded. I hope this is sufficient for your purposes.

Disabled People (Transec)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the facilities for staff with disability provided in the new accommodation occupied by the transport security division; and if he will give full financial and technical details regarding lifts and arrangements for the evacuation of disabled staff in the case of an emergency. [17904]

Mr. Norris: Transec's accommodation provides facilities for visitors and staff with disabilities. These include parking spaces, access ramps suitable for wheelchairs and a special toilet. The landlord is responsible for ensuring that the lifts comply with all legal requirements and for meeting any costs. A copy of Transec's incident control procedures, which include emergency arrangements for the evacuation of all staff, will be placed in the Library.

Railway Passenger Services Funding

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State (1) what amount and type of funding will be made available to the South Yorkshire passenger transport executive to support local railway services after the expiry of metropolitan railways grant; [18021]

(2) if he will make it his policy to announce replacement funding for metropolitan railways grant before May; and if he will notify passenger transport executives of the arrangements in sufficient time to allow them to support services under a seven-year franchise. [18022]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend proposes to replace the current temporary arrangements, whereby revenue support for railway passenger services funded by English passenger transport executives is divided between revenue support grant and metropolitan railway grant, with an enhanced RSG with effect from 1996–97. The proposed arrangements for allocating the enhanced RSG to PTEs have been set out in a consultation paper, which has been circulated to the PTEs with an invitation to comment by the middle of April. We intend to announce a final decision on future funding for PTE supported railway passenger services shortly after that date.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18505]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18506]

(3) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18510]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18508]

(5) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18507]

(6) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18509]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is a matter of public record, but could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Coach Parking, London

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy for providing coach parks in central London, with particular reference to coaches bringing tourists to visit the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey; and if he will make a statement. [18096]

Mr. Norris: It is for the London boroughs to provide coach parking facilities. With this Department's encouragement, discussions between the boroughs, the coach and tourist industries and others have recently brought significant improvements, including the provision of 150 new coach spaces in central London.

Pedestrian Rights

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the implementation of the European charter of pedestrian rights. [18235]

Mr. Norris: The Government endorse the intentions of the charter to promote the principle of pedestrians as road users, but we do not believe that it would be practicable to adopt all of its detailed requirements.

Correspondence

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Under-Secretary of State for Transport will reply to the letters from Mr. Brian Bostock, dated 20 February and 8 March. [18264]

Mr. Norris: I replied to Mr. Bostock's letter of 8 March on 28 March. My Department has no trace of his letter of 20 February.

Railway Noise Barriers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost per metre of *(a)* reflective and *(b)* absorbent railway noise barriers of a common height. [18397]

Mr. Watts: Railway noise barriers vary in height, but the most commonly used are 2m high. The comparative costs per linear metre at this height are £210 for a reflective barrier and £340 for an absorptive barrier. The costs quoted are for barriers alongside a new railway line and include installation.

Defective Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances a public service passenger vehicle may remain in service with a defective speedometer or tachograph. [18263]

Mr. Norris: It is an offence to use, cause or permit to be used any vehicle on a road which does not comply with the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 which include provisions relating to speedometers and recording equipment.

In addition, under European legislation, in the event of a breakdown or faulty operation of a tachograph, the employer must have it repaired by an approved fitter or workshop as soon as circumstances permit or, if the vehicle is unable to return to the premises within one week, en route.

Pedestrian Zones

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken into the extent to which restrictions on vehicles entering pedestrian-only zones are flouted. [18234]

Mr. Norris: None. Local authorities are solely responsible for the day-to-day administration of their pedestrian zones.

DEFENCE

Phoenix

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a decision will be taken on the future of the Phoenix remotely piloted vehicle programme; and if he will make a statement. [18774]

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence has reviewed the Phoenix programme to determine how best to proceed in the light of delays to the programme and remaining technical problems.

Subject to the satisfactory conclusion of an agreement with the prime contractor, GEC-Marconi Avionics, we have decided that an additional programme of work on Phoenix should be undertaken to resolve the remaining technical difficulties and to demonstrate satisfactory system performance over a series of rigorous flight trials. This programme of work, which will last about one year, will be undertaken at the contractor's expense. The MOD will make no further payments to the company for the supply of Phoenix until the successful completion of the programme.

We believe that, provided the remaining technical problems can be overcome within an acceptable time scale, the Phoenix system will provide a cost-effective means of meeting the Army's need for an unmanned airborne surveillance system. Should GMAv fail at any stage to demonstrate satisfactory progress during the programme of work, the Ministry of Defence will, however, be prepared to cancel the project. While the work is in progress we will, therefore, examine potential alternative systems, in case it does not prove practicable to bring Phoenix up to an acceptable standard.

The prime contractor's undertaking to carry out the necessary work at its own cost and risk will require the company to apply considerable additional resources. We welcome this substantial commitment on its part, which reflects the confidence expressed at the most senior levels of the company in its ability to produce an effective system. In the meantime, the position of the Ministry of Defence and the interests of the taxpayer have been fully protected.

Defence Accounts Agency

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the first three-year review of the Defence Accounts Agency have now been completed; and if he will make a statement. [18775]

Mr. Freeman: The review of the first three years of operation of the Defence Accounts Agency has now been completed and I have placed a consultative document, summarising its findings; the options for the future; and the proposed way ahead in the Library of the House.

The Ministry of Defence has also now considered the future of the proposed Defence Accounts Agency mainframe rationalisation project. We have decided in the light of the conclusions of the review, that it would not now be appropriate to proceed with this project.

Service Career and Manpower Structures

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his policy towards performance-related pay for the Armed Forces; [18297]

(2) what consideration he is giving to a reduction in the number of ranks in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement; [18299]

(3) when he expects to make a statement concerning the Bett report. [18298]

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* My right hon. Friend, the then Minister for the Armed Forces, announced on 9 February 1994, *Official Report,* column *361*, the intention, in the light of changes in military commitments and deployment patterns, to set in hand a major independent review of service career and manpower structures and terms and conditions of service, to ensure that we will have personnel and management arrangements appropriate to the early part of the 21st century. The review was to be wide-ranging in accordance with the terms of reference set out on 30 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *748–49*. It was also to take into account the implications of the front line first exercise. In that context, the Government have made it clear that, following the decisions that have been taken on the size, capabilities and roles of the armed forces for the post-cold war world, the armed forces are now set on a steady course for the future. Mr. Michael Bett was appointed to lead the review.

Mr. Bett and his team have completed their review; I received their report, "Managing People in Tomorrow's Armed Forces", on 30 March. Mr. Bett has consulted extensively within the armed forces and within my Department. He has made some 150 recommendations which cover the whole field of rank and career structures, pay and allowance structures and pensions, housing and accommodation policies and wider conditions of service. As Mr. Bett says, his intention has been to ensure that the armed forces continue to hold their own against civilian competitors, in recruiting and retaining high quality people. We are most grateful to Mr. Bett and his team for all their work.

Mr. Bett has undertaken an independent review; we now need to consider his recommendations. Our initial examination is likely to take several weeks, and will include a consideration of the amount of further study and development required to validate Mr. Bett's proposals. I shall make a further statement about our general approach at the end of that period. Thereafter, there will need to be a further, more lengthy development period before a final definitive response to the report can be made.

Throughout this process, I intend that, as for front line first, the armed forces themselves should be fully involved. Service personnel will be encouraged to submit their comments, which we shall consider carefully. In the meantime, to assist in the consultation process, Mr. Bett's report is being published today. A copy of the report is being distributed to every unit of the armed forces, together with an explanatory leaflet for every service man and woman. Copies of the report and leaflet are being placed in the Library of the House.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17739]

Mr. Freeman: For security reasons, the MOD does not use Internet electronic mail widely for communication within this Department. This function is served by the Department's own secure electronic mail facility within its corporate headquarters office technology system.

Departmental Internet electronic mail addresses are not centrally co-ordinated within MOD and no list is available. However, there are estimated to be several hundred personal addresses rising to more than a thousand if the Defence Research Agency is included. There are no personal Internet electronic mail addressees for MOD Ministers.

The Department's approach to the information super-highway is that it may be used where appropriate. For example, the Department's press releases are issued electronically through the Central Office of Information and are accessible to users of Internet via Data-Star dialog (Europe) or Mead/Lexis/Nexis.

RAF Strategic Deterrent Force

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review process was adopted in regard to the official history commissioned from Humphrey Wynn on the RAF strategic nuclear deterrent forces, published by HMSO. [17519]

Mr. Soames: Humphrey Wynn's official history on the RAF strategic nuclear deterrent forces was reviewed in accordance with the initiatives set out in paragraph 9.28 of the White Paper on Open Government, Cmd 2290, and released under the provisions of section 5(1) of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967.

Aircraft Crashes

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what post-crash investigations into the possibility of toxic contamination are conducted by or on behalf of his Department in the event of accidents involving RAF or Royal Naval aircraft. [17517]

Mr. Soames: An RAF environmental health officer is held at immediate readiness at all times to attend aircraft crash sites to identify hazards. The EHO's role is to provide occupational hygiene advice and monitoring for other personnel attending the crash site and environmental monitoring of the site to advise on soil and water contamination.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish an investigation into the recent allegations published in Newfoundland that an RAF Canberra aircraft carrying radioactive samples crashed at Goose bay, Newfoundland in 1957. [17518]

Mr. Soames: I am unaware of these allegations. I can confirm that an RAF Canberra crashed in the vicinity of Goose bay, Labrador, on 16 May 1957. An investigation into the incident was conducted at the time, and I know of no reason to reopen it.

Airport Use

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for transport in respect of the possibility of using BAe-owned airports for civilian use in areas where current civilian airports are overcrowded. [17377]

Mr. Freeman: None.

Disabled Former Service Personnel

Mr. Jim Cunnigham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he is making to ensure that those disabled former members of the armed forces are assisted in finding insurance to meet mortgage interest payments. [17374]

Mr. Soames: My Department makes no specific arrangements to assist disabled former members of the armed forces in finding insurance to meet mortgage interest payments. All service personnel discharged on medical grounds are advised by a resettlement advice officer on how best to prepare for entry to civilian life, and this advice covers a number of aspects such as employment, housing and financial matters.

Major Projects (Late Running)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to remedy the late running of major defence projects; and what was the total amount of cost overruns in the current financial year. [17375]

Mr. Freeman: My Department has instituted several initiatives in recent years to improve the timeliness of delivery of major projects. These initiatives include tauter contracting; improved risk management; better training and guidance for project managers; and procedures for better estimation of in-service dates. Information on Defence equipment cost control performance was published in March 1995 in the MOD's departmental report, Cm 2801, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Nigeria (Visits)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the exact dates of visits by officials in his Department to Nigeria since June 1993 and the reason for the visit in each case. [17777]

Mr. Freeman: My Department does not hold a central record of visits by officials overseas nor could one be provided except at disproportionate cost. No official visits to Nigeria since June 1993 have been identified.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Nigeria since June 1993 listing the Ministers and the reasons for the visit in each case. [17782]

Mr. Freeman: There have been no visits to Nigeria by Ministers in my Department since June 1993.

Arms Exports

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures his Department will be implementing to ensure that all future transfers of military, security and police equipment, including dual-use technologies, will comply with the European Parliament resolution, passed on 19th January. [17781]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology to him.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on the marine environment of any leakage of the contents of the ships scuttled in the Irish Sea in the mid-1950s; [17849]

(2) on how many occasions since 1965 ordnance, nerve gases and other noxious agents have been dumped at sea. [17851]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *448*, 3 February, *Official Report*, column *890*, and 31 March, *Official Report*, columns *875–76*, to the hon. Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald).

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy for getting rid of surplus ordnance and chemical and biological weapons. [17850]

Mr. Soames: Surplus conventional munitions are disposed of by demolition, open burning or breakdown. The UK no longer holds stocks of chemical weapon munitions, and any old chemical weapons munitions found in the UK are transferred to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, where rounds are individually analysed and the chemical agent "fill" disposed of by incineration. Biological weapons were abandoned by the UK in the 1950s: there has been no recent requirement to dispose of any such weapons.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that nerve gases, bombs and other noxious agents dumped in the North sea in the mid-1950s do not pose a threat to coastal areas of the United Kingdom and Ireland and to the marine environment. [17852]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no knowledge of dumping of any chemical munitions or their agents in the North sea in the 1950s.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the reason for the low-level pass over Bessacarr, Doncaster, by an RAF jet at 19.28 on 23 March. [17833]

Mr. Soames: Two formations of two United States Air Force F-15 aircraft were authorised to fly in the general area around this time, and an investigation is underway to establish whether these aircraft flew at low level over Bessacarr. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member when this is complete.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of the training exercise which brought eight Tornado aircraft from RAF Bruggen to Barnoldswick on 30 January . [17853]

Mr. Soames: The cost of the training sortie was £117,000. As the hon. Member is aware from my answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *463*, an investigation is under way to establish whether the aircraft flew over Barnoldswick.

Tornado Crashes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Official Report*, column *397*, how many RAF personnel or civilians were killed or injured as a result of the Tornado crashes. [17806]

Mr. Soames: A total of 17 RAF personnel and two civilians were killed in the Tornado crashes referred to.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Official Report*, column *397*, what reasons have been established for each of the Tornado crashes. [17804]

Mr. Soames: Summaries of the RAF boards of inquiry into all but four of the crashes referred to in the question can be found in the Library of the House. Boards of inquiry into the remaining four are still under way and copies of the summary of their findings will be placed in the Library in due course.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Offical Report*, column *397*, what was the replacement cost of the 27 Tornado aircraft lost since 1981. [17805]

Mr. Soames: Of the 27 Tornado aircraft which crashed over the UK land area or at sea in UK waters, four have been repaired. No replacement costs arise for the remaining 23 aircraft since there is an attrition reserve from which aircraft are taken to replace those lost. Records are not maintained centrally of other costs which may arise from an accident, such as aircraft salvage or third party claims.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Offical Report*, column *397*, if any of the 17 Tornados which crashed on land did so in built up-area. [17807]

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF Tornado aircraft have crashed since 1983 outside United Kingdom land and United Kingdom-controlled sea *(a)* in military operations, *(b)* as a result of pilot error and *(c)* due to mechanical or similar failure. [17848]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

(a) six Tornados crashed during combat sorties during the Gulf conflict.

Completed RAF boards of inquiry concluded that:

(b) six Tornados have crashed as a result of aircrew error;

(c) three Tornados have crashed as a result of mechanical or similar failure.

Sarin

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the chemical agent Sarin was stored at RAF Llandwrog. [17893]

Mr. Soames: No Sarin was stored at RAF Llandwrog.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18454]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18450]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18452]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18451]

(5) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18449]

(6) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18453]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17617]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of aid in each of the last five financial years from his Department to states of the former Soviet Union; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure has been taken. [18126]

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence's programme of promoting bilateral defence cooperation and contacts with central and eastern Europe—including the states of the former Soviet Union—began in 1993–94 and involved expenditure of £70,000 under vote 1E1, in that same year. The budget for 1994–95 was increased to £200,000. In addition, the MOD has on occasion agreed to waive costs of training provided to central and eastern European countries where the aims serve defence interests. The total of these waivers was £77,000 in 1993–94 and £456,000 in 1994–95.

The Ministry of Defence is also assisting Russia in the removal of nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles to destruction sites. The total costs of this fall to vote 3B4 and are:

1992–93: £2.2 million

1993–94: £13.4 million

1994–95: £16.6 million

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the total cost of procurement for the Trident system in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the financial year 1995–96; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure is taken; [18130]

(2) what is the total cost of running the strategic weapons system in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the financial year 1995–96; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure is taken; [18128]

(3) what is the total cost of construction in support of the Trident programme at Faslane and Coulport in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the financial year 1995–96; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure is taken. [18131]

Mr. Freeman: Estimated expenditure in 1994–95 and 1995–96, where available, is as follows:

	1994–95 £ million	1995–96 £ million	Subhead vote
Trident System[1]	696.0	456.0	[2]n/a
Strategic Weapon System Running Costs (Polaris and Trident missiles)	[3]86.5	[4]n/a	2A1, 2A2, 3C2, 3D2
Trident Construction Programme (Faslane and Coulport)	42.0	6.2	3D1

Notes:

[1] As well as all costs associated with the submarine and its weapons and other systems, the figures include the shore construction costs which are also shown separately in the table.

[2] Details of the vote subheads of all acquisition costs attributable to the Trident system are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

[3] This figure includes the cost of repairs, spares and technical, storage and engineering services provided by contractors and MOD at various locations in support of the UK's Polaris and Trident missiles.

[4] Estimated costs for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Mutual Defence Co-operation Agreement

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to his Department of the administrative expenses of the mutual defence co-operation agreement with the United States of America. [18124]

Mr. Freeman: Administrative tasks associated with business conducted under the aegis of the 1958 UK/US mutual defence agreement are mostly handled by the atomic control office, London and the atomic co-ordinating offices at Aldermaston and Washington. The costs of these tasks are not calculated separately.

Nuclear Submarine Decommissioning Costs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of provision for nuclear submarine decommissioning costs in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the financial year 1995–96; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure is taken. [18132]

Mr. Freeman: The estimated cost of decommissioning nuclear submarines in 1994–95 was £4.3 million and the provision for 1995–96 is £9.2 million. These costs are attributed to class I vote 2, subhead 2A21.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the variation in expenditure from Class I, Vote 1, Subhead B4 of his Department's budget for the last three years. [18125]

Mr. Soames: There is no such subhead. There is, however, a subhead B4 in class I vote 3.

The year-on-year variations against this subhead reflect the progress of this programme, which peaked in 1994–95 and is now nearing completion.

Nuclear Equipment Exports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for delivery of nuclear warhead containers and transport equipment to Russia. [18127]

Mr. Freeman: To date, 155 super-containers have been delivered. The remaining 95 will be delivered in two shipments which will be made in April and June of this year.

Production of the transport equipment has been completed. Delivery of the truck cargo heavy duty (Russia) (TCHD(R))s has slipped from the original schedule, due to difficulties of siting support staff in Russia. These have now been resolved and deliveries are expected to commence in the middle of this year, completion being by early March 1996.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has an on-going requirement for carrying out nuclear tests in relation to the safety and reliability of the nuclear stockpile. [18121]

Mr. Freeman: We have a responsibility to ensure the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons and we are currently studying how best to meet this requirement.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy in relation to hydro-nuclear experiments and the proposed comprehensive test ban treaty. [18147]

Mr. Freeman: We are negotiating in good faith a comprehensive test ban treaty with an effective verification regime. We are studying how best to meet our responsibility to ensure the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons under such a treaty.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of running the Atomic Weapons Establishment in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the financial year 1995–96; and from which subheads of which votes this expenditure is taken. [18129]

Mr. Freeman: The costs of the defence nuclear programme have been regarded by successive Governments as inappropriate for public disclosure. With contractorisation, AWE operating costs have also become commercially sensitive.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who, within his Department, is to be authorised to have direct access to the police national computer; and what procedures are being established for ensuring that information gained from this source is handled correctly. [18133]

Mr. Soames: As a fully constituted and recognised police force, the Ministry of Defence police have for some time had direct access to the police national computer. The procedures in place to ensure that information is handled correctly are those issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Direct access to the specific transaction for security vetting has also been approved for the Department's security vetting organisations. The service, which has not yet been implemented, will be subject to a memorandum of agreement with the Home Office which will set out the operating procedures and the purposes for which the information will be used.

British Meat

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what percentage by value of meat purchasing contracts placed by his Department is the origin of the meat specified; what percentage is specified as British meat; what percentage is specified only as imported meat; and what percentage is specified as British or imported meat. [18347]

Mr. Freeman: Since 1 October 1994, the supply of food to the armed forces has been the responsibility of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. My Department does not specify the source from which meat should be obtained.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department in the last year for which figures are available on British meat; and how much was spent on imported meat. [18346]

Mr. Freeman: Contract specifications for the supply of meat to the armed forces are concerned with quality and price and do not stipulate the source from which meat should be obtained. The information requested is therefore not available.

Transport (Royal Family)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the costs for the last two years and what are the estimated costs for the current year and the next two years of *(a)* the royal yacht, *(b)* the Queen's flight, *(c)* royal flights in civil aircraft and *(d)* equerries. [18049]

Mr. Soames: Actual and estimated expenditure in support of the royal family borne by my Department on class I votes is as follows:

£ thousands

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*[1]	*1995–96*[2]
Royal yacht	8,361	8,397	11,090	8,411
Queen's Flight[3]	7,590	9,105	8,893	n/a
Royal flights in civil aircraft	9	140	160	480
Equerries	170	316	319	292

Notes:

[1] Current forecast of outturn.

[2] Amount included within the Class I 1995–96 Supply Estimates presented to the House on 23 March 1995.

[3] Total operating cost. The Queen's Flight has not been used exclusively by the Royal Family, and it would not therefore be possible to allocate expenditure to users without disproportionate cost. On 1 April the Queen's Flight was merged with 32 Squadron to become No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron. A disaggregated element of the cost of royal flying is being established.

We do not publish detailed future plans, as approval to commit expenditure is subject to formal endorsement through Ministers and the parliamentary supply system. Figures for 1996–97 are therefore not yet available.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18597]

Mr. Freeman: Because my Department does not deal with the public direct, the main thrust of our initiatives aimed at providing access and facilities for disabled people relates to our role as an employer of civilian staff. These initiatives form part of my Department's programme for action on disability called "Ability not Disability", which aims to achieve equality of opportunity for disabled people in recruitment, training and career development. One specific action within the programme is a survey of all buildings housing 100 or more staff to identify what needs to be done to make them accessible to disabled people, and to fund the necessary modifications by 1999.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the green minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18656]

Mr. Freeman: My noble friend Lord Henley, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, is the Department's green Minister. He chairs the ministerial steering group which provides policy direction and determines appropriate environmental and energy efficiency strategies to ensure compliance with relevant United Kingdom legislation, EC directives and wider Government policy. The ministerial steering group has initiated a programme of environmental reviews of defence activities which have the potential to harm the environment. These include reviews of land contamination and the defence estate; pollution prevention procedures; the use of particularly hazardous substances and my Department's aqueous discharge and water abstraction arrangements.

Army Vehicles

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the trial for a replacement of the Army's Land Rover 1 tonne and three-quarter tonne ambulances. [18792]

Mr. Freeman: The competitive evaluation trial has been completed, and the technical reports are now in preparation. It is anticipated that a final decision on the outcome of the competition will be made in late summer with contract placement expected by early October this year.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18321]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Jim Drew to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

I have been asked to reply, as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have a) been taken over by contractors and b) disappeared.

Since ABRO was launched as a Defence Agency on 1 April 1993, no jobs have been lost as a result of being taken over by contractors. The number of staff in the Organisation has however reduced from 3800 to 3379. A significant proportion of the reduction has been in military posts—the result of a combination of efficiency savings and a policy of transferring military posts to units providing first and second line support to Army field units. The remaining reduction is attributable to efficiency measures undertaken at the Agency's workshops.

I hope that you find this information useful.

Letter from Peter Trevelyan to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

Minister (DP) has asked me to write to you on behalf of the Defence Accounts Agency in reply to your Parliamentary Question, number 7171G, in which you asked for a list of the jobs that have been lost to Agencies in the Ministry of Defence in the past two years that have (a) been taken over by contractors and (b) disappeared.

The Defence Accounts Agency was formed four years ago with a staff of about 2,000. Since its formation no further jobs have been transferred to it by the Ministry of Defence. The Defence Accounts Agency has neither been taken over by a contractor nor disappeared.

I hope that this reply is satisfactory.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

PQ NO 7171G

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your question about jobs lost to agencies in the past two years.

Taking the individual parts of your question, the Defence Analytical Services Agency has:

a. had no jobs taken over by contractors

b. disestablished 29 posts as part of the Department wide PROSPECT initiative.

Letter from Andrew Roache to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question No 7171G, where you ask to list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have a) been taken over by contractors and b) disappeared.

I have interpreted your question to mean jobs lost from the agency during this period. Since the Defence Animal Centre (DAC) was launched as a Defence Agency in June 1993, no jobs have been lost as a result of being taken over by contractors.

As a result of the MOD-wide Options for Change initiative and Defence Costs Study measures 46 military posts have been lost with effect 1 April 1995.

I hope you find this information useful.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

1. In today's written answer the Minister for State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question concerning job losses in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). DERA was formed on 1 April 1995 to bring together most of the MOD's non-nuclear science and technology resources and it includes three former MOD agencies, the Defence Research Agency (DRA), the Defence Operational Analysis Centre (DOAC), and the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE).

2. As Chief Executive of DERA I now have responsibility for all these areas. All three agencies have undergone some structural changes as a result of their incorporation into DERA and there may be some reduction in numbers resulting from the formation of the new agency. Specific figures are not yet available.

3. Between April 1993 and March 1995 there were 62 job losses at DOAC and 17 job losses at CBDE, none of which were contractorised; the savings have been achieved through efficiencies.

4. The reduction in posts in the Defence Research Agency between April 1993 and March 1995 amount to 1600 of which 390 were redeployed, the majority within DRA. These reductions have arisen from a combination of a reduction in demand for services as the disciplines of hard charging for services have led to more critical scrutiny of real need by customers, and, efficiency improvements achieved through rationalisation and streamlined processes aimed at reduced cost and improved quality. These reductions have been primarily in the support services area and comprise around 1595 full time posts whose functions have been discontinued and 5 posts which have been transferred to contractors.

5. I hope you will find this information useful.

Letter from Richard Kirby to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

I have been asked by the Minister for Defence Procurement to reply to your Parliamentary Question about Defence Agency job losses. As the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA) I can brief you on the aspects affecting this area of business.

I am pleased to say that the formation of the DCTA, on 22 November 1994, has not generated any job losses, either internally or in the private sector. Planned future re-structuring of the Agency, collocating to a single site in early 1996, together with the requirements of Defence Cost Study exercises will however undoubtedly lead to a streamlining of the business structure which in time will lead to a number of posts being lost within the organisation. We would expect these changes to be achieved through natural processes, without redundancy.

Letter from Tweedie M. Brown to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your question about jobs transferred to agencies in the past 2 years.

As of 1 March 1995, the Defence Postal and Courier Services Defence Agency had 487 military and civilian personnel in post. This is a reduction, in the past 2 years, of 33 of which 23 were taken over by contractors.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: AGENCIES AND JOB lOSSES

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence as to the number of jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have (a) been taken over by contractors and (b) disappeared, as it affects my Agency.

There has been a reduction of nine posts—5 UK based Civilians and 4 locally engaged employees in the Disposal Sales Agency as a result of contractorisation of the sales disposal function in Germany.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your PQ 7171G.

In response to your request to list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in the Ministry of Defence in the past two years, the Duke of York's Royal Military School has lost the following:

(a) 0.5 (Steward). Taken over by contractor.

(b) 1.5 (Housemaids). Disappeared.

(c) 1.0 (Instructor Officer). Disappeared.

Letter from S. Parnell to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION—PQ 7171G

You recently asked The Secretary of State for Defence to list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have (a) been taken over by contractors and (b) disappeared.

During the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1995 the number of staff directly employed by the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency has reduced by 29. No jobs were lost to contractors. All reductions are ascribed to efficiency improvements.

Letter from Alan Pollard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION—AGENCIES AND JOB LOSSES

The Logistic Information System Agency was formed on 21 November 1994. No jobs were lost or transferred to a contractor upon formation.

In accordance with the Government's Competing for Quality programme we are considering how best to carry out our "non-core" activities. Current proposals envisage the transfer of these activities to a civilian partner. If this is followed through we see about 150 posts being transferred. The final numbers are not yet firm. Following transfer all transferred staff will continue to work on our sites under a "Government Owned Contractor Operated" (GOCO) arrangement, although the GOCO status will be reviewed at an appropriate time. We have no plans to cut the remaining staff in the Agency.

Letter from Martyn Bittleston to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

On behalf of the Chief Executive, who is out of the country at the moment, I have been asked to amplify the Minister's response to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning contractorisation.

In the Meteorological Office

a. No jobs have been taken over by contractors in the past 2 years.

b. The total number of jobs has fallen from 2526 to 2299 in the 2 years to 31 March 1995. A net loss of 227.

Letter from Brigadier A. J. Hoon to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 3 April 1994:

I understand that you have asked the Secretary of State for Defence to list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years. Acting on behalf of the Chief Executive of Military Survey I have been asked to reply with regard to this Agency.

As a Defence Agency, remaining in the defence chain of command, I can identify no job losses to Military Survey in the past two years.

Letter from W. S. Graham to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

1. The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning jobs that have been lost to Agencies in his Department for the past 2 years.

2. My response to your 2 part question is as follows:

a. There are no jobs in the NARO Defence Agency that have been taken over by contractors.

b. The size of workforce of this Agency is task related and is therefore subject to minor fluctuations, but has however increased overall in the past 3 years.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question No. 7171G about Agencies and Job Losses.

At Queen Victoria School no jobs have been taken over by contractors or lost in the past 2 years.

I hope this answers your question satisfactorily but if there is anything on which you would like me to elaborate please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from Air Vice-Marshall R. H. Kyle to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he would list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared.

The Maintenance Group Defence Agency manpower figures have reduced progressively for several years. The average figures for each year are reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts. Figures taken from the last three reports, together with the latest available figures, are:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1 February 1995*
Service	7,500	6,800	6,634	4,760
Civilian	6,100	6,000	5,679	4,575
Total	13,600	12,800	12,313	9,335

A major reorganisation within the Ministry of Defence took place on 1 April 1994. As part of this process, 1,978 Service and 947 civilian posts were transferred from the Maintenance Group Defence Agency to another area.

There have been no jobs within the Agency that have been lost to contractors in the past 2 years. The other reductions in jobs that have occurred have been as a result of efficiency savings and the effects of the ending of the Cold War.

Letter from David Rennison to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 4 April 1995:

I write on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment (RAFSEE) in response to your Parliamentary Question No. 7171G to the Secretary of State for Defence.

Since becoming a Defence Agency on 22 November 1994 no jobs have disappeared or been taken over by contractors.

Letter from I. S. Mitchelson to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

1. I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the jobs that have been lost from Agencies in the past two years—in this instance with particular regard to Children's Schools (North West Europe) Defence Agency.

2. This Agency has:—

(a) had no jobs taken over by Contractors; and

(b) lost 492 teaching posts (inclusive of UK based/locally enrolled, full time equivalent) in the last two years as a result of the Drawdown of British Forces in Germany and the subsequent closure of schools and falling rolls at those remaining. Additionally there has been a loss of 311 locally employed non-teaching staff. These figures reflect the last two years, beginning 1 April 1993.

Letter from Air Vice-Marshal J. A. G. May to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION No. PQ7171G

—TRAINING GROUP DEFENCE AGENCY REPLY

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement has asked me to reply to the question you asked of him in respect of Defence Agencies and Job Losses.

I am able to tell you that no Training Group jobs have been transferred to contractors since the launch of Training Group Defence Agency on 1 April 1994. I am able to tell you, too, that no Training Group jobs have "disappeared" since the same date.

I am copying this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel & Training Command.

Defence Equipment

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of each type of *(a)* ships, *(b)* ammunition, *(c)* artillery, *(d)* missiles, *(e)* helicopters, *(f)* torpedoes and *(g)* aircraft surplus to his Department's requirement have been or are to be sold in the 1994–95 financial year. [15803]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* Quantities of surplus United Kingdom defence equipment sold or expected to be sold in the financial year 1994–95 are as follows:

	Amount
Ships	
Type 22 frigates	4
Leander class frigates	3
River class minesweepers	7
Oberon submarines	1
Fleet tenders	11
Motor fishing vessels	3
Fleet tankers	1
Landing craft	3
Mooring and salvage vessels	1
Target vessels	3
Floating cranes	1
Armament lighters	3
Sullage lighters	2
Diving vessels	1
Barges	2
	46
Ammunition	
Rounds naval	24,000
Artillery	55,000
Small arms	5,000
	84,000
Artillery	
M109s	32
Missiles	
Skyflash	40
Helicopters	
Lynx HAS3	3
Aircraft	
Andovers	4
Beagles	1
Beavers	1
Buccanners	10
Canberras	6
Chipmunks	12
Devons	2
Gnats	2
HS125s	5
Hunters	19
Jaguars	1
Javelins	1
Jet Provosts	56
Jet Provost ground runners	3
Lightenings	1
Spitfires	1
Varsities	1
Victors	1
	127

Overseas Contracts

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *218*, if he will name the representatives of the Government of Indonesia and the representatives of Her Majesty's Government who signed memoranda of understanding on behalf of their respective Governments in September 1983, March 1984, April 1986 and November 1991; and in each case what positions they occupied as officials or Ministers within those governments. [17053]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* Details of exchanges between Governments are confidential; and it has been the general policy of successive Governments not to reveal details concerning such arrangements without the prior approval of the other Government.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *609*, if he will list the exact date of, and the signatories to, each memorandum of understanding signed with the Government of Nigeria since 4 May 1979.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 March 1995]:* The answer given in March *Official Report*, column *609*, referred to defence exports-related MOUs. No central record of MOUs is kept by my Department and a comprehensive list could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. MOUs not related to defence exports were signed with the Government of Nigeria on 24 November 1980 and 14 July 1992. It has been the general policy of successive Governments not to reveal details without the prior approval of the other Government.

TREASURY

Financial Services

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he is doing to improve the performance of the British financial services industry in terms of long-term investment in Britain. [16443]

Mr. Nelson: Last year, the Treasury conducted an inquiry into provision of finance for industry entitled "The Industrial Finance Initiative". A summary of our conclusions was submitted to the Trade and Industry Select Committee, and I gave evidence to the Committee on 8 February. I refer the hon. Member to that submission—a copy of which is available in the Library—and in particular to the catalogue of measures since implemented to improve the terms and availability of finance for industry.

Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the costs for the last two years and what are the estimated costs for the current year and the next two years of the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood. [18050]

Mr. Nelson: The figures requested are set out in the table:

£000

1992–93 (Outturn)	*1993–94 (Outturn)*	*1994–95 (Forecast outturn)*	*1995–96 (Estimate)*	*1996–97 (Estimate)*
605	477	564	669	677

Insignia re-stocking occurs irregularly, according to need.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18488]

(2) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18487]

Mr. Nelson: The table gives the numbers of ordinary written and named day, or priority as appropriate, written questions tabled to Treasury Ministers since 1988–89, and the number of holding answers given to named day and priority questions for each of these Sessions.

Information relating to earlier years and the analysis sought of substantive replies are not readily retrievable and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions tabled to the Treasury

Session	*Ordinary written*	*Named day/priority written*	*Holding answers*
1988–89	1,007	924	530
1989–90	1,162	827	413
1990–91	851	796	298
1991–92	481	485	180
1992–93	1,811	1,373	473
1993–94	1,316	731	245
1994–95[1]	733	470	271

[1] To 5 April.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18942]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18491]

Mr. Nelson: Since October 1992, when arrangements were introduced for printing in the *Official Report* letters sent to hon. Members by agency chief executives in response to parliamentary questions, chief executives responsible to Treasury Ministers have replied directly to four questions:

1992–93: 3
1993–94: —
1994–95: 1

In each case, the answers were printed in the *Official Report*.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18490]

(2) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the Official Report. [18489]

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Income Tax

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Exchequer in 1995–96 of extending the 20p band to the point at which it would become the highest marginal rate of tax *(a)* for half of all income tax payers and *(b)* for three quarters of all income tax payers. [16820]

Sir George Young: The full year cost at 1995–96 income levels would be about £4.3 billion for half of income taxpayers and about £7.5 billion for three quarters. These estimates do not allow for any behavioural changes which might result from the introduction of the new regime.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of income tax revenue was paid by those with the top 10 per cent. of incomes in each year from 1978–79 to 1995–96. [18974]

Sir George Young: The information requested is given in the table.

Shares of total tax liability paid by top 10 per cent.[1]

	Percentage
1978–79	35
1979–80	34
1980–81	35
1981–82	35
1982–83	36
1983–84	36
1984–85	38
1985–86	38
1986–87	39
1987–88	41
1988–89	42
1989–90	42
1990–91	42
1991–92	43
1992–93	44
1993–94[2]	44
1994–95[2]	44
1995–96[2]	44

[1] For years up to and including 1989–90 married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation in 1990–91 husbands and wives are counted separately.

[2] Provisional.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information provided to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 5 May 1994, *Official Report*, columns *588–92* for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1997–98; and if he will revise the figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94. [17429]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 31 March 1995]*: Available information on income tax payers is given in the table. The increases in taxpayer numbers is largely due to economic growth. In addition, the number of people in work is increasing—United Kingdom work force in employment up 174,000 between December 1993 and December 1994.

Taxpayers by marginal rate: Numbers in thousands

Marginal rate	*1992–93*	[1]*1993–94*	[1]*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
20	4,240	5,200	5,000	5,400
25	19,430	18,400	18,400	18,400
40	1,720	1,900	2,300	2,400
Total	25,390	25,500	25,700	26,200

[1] Provisional estimates projected from the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes.

Taxpayers by marginal rate: Percentages

Marginal rate	*1992–93*	[1]*1993–94*	[1]*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
20	17	20	19	21
25	76	72	72	70
40	7	8	9	9
Total	100	100	100	100

[1] Provisional estimates projected from the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes.

Deregulation

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be publishing consultation documents on industrial and provident society, credit union and friendly society measures contained in the illustrative list attached to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [19126]

Mr. Nelson: I am pleased to announce that consultation documents proposing amendments to regulations governing the constitutions and activities of these institutions were published today. Copies are being placed in the Library. The effect of the changes will be to ease the administrative burden on societies and unions without removing any necessary protection for their members. Subject to the response, the Government hope to implement the proposals later this year through an order under section 1 of the Act.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of whether Her Majesty's Government are required, under the provisions of the Maastricht treaty, to seek to aim at any specified levels of inflation or of the public sector borrowing requirement; and if he will make a statement. [18152]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Article 103 of the treaty on European Union requires all member states to regard their economic policy as a matter of common concern, but the broad guidelines on economic policy adopted by the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers under article 103(2) are only recommendations. The same applies to the outcome of the excessive deficits procedure set out in article 104c.

The latest broad guidelines on economic policy, adopted by ECOFIN on 11 July 1994, recognised the need to achieve low inflation on a permanent basis and sound public finances. Such aims are consistent with Government's existing economic policy, as were the recommendations under the excessive deficit procedure, adopted on 7 November 1994.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of individuals whose after-tax income will be reduced by the forthcoming restriction of tax relief on mortgage interest at source from 20 to 15 per cent. [17180]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* About 10.1 million single people or married couples will benefit from mortgage interest relief in 1995–96, all of whom will be affected by the change in the rate of relief.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual value of mortgage interest relief at source to *(a)* the average standard rate taxpayer and *(b)* the average higher rate taxpayer, with (i) a £30,000 mortgage, (ii) in a £60,000 mortgage and (iii) a £100,000 mortgage (1) in 1979–80, (2) in 1993–94, (3) as projected for 1994–95 and (4) as estimated for 1995–96 expressed in 1994 prices. [16812]

Sir George Young *[holding answer 29 March 1995]:* Information is given in the following table.

Much of the reduction in the value of the relief is due to lower interest rates.

Annual value of mortgage interest relief (£)

	[1]*1979–80*	[2]*1993–94*	[3]*1994–95*	[4]*1995–96 (in 1994–95 prices)*
Basic rate taxpayer with:				
£30,00 mortgage	970	590	470	350
£60,000 mortgage	970	590	470	350
£100,000 mortgage	970	590	470	350
Higher rate taxpayer with:				
£30,000 mortgage	1,450	590	470	350
£60,000 mortgage	1,450	590	470	350
£100,000 mortgage	1,450	590	470	350

[1] Average higher rate taxpayer assumed to obtain relief at 45 per cent. Average building society interest rate was 12.9 per cent.

[2] Average building society interest rate was 7.9 per cent.

[3] Interest rate of 7.8 per cent. used. This is based on the average building society interest rates from April 1994 to January 1995, and then assuming, by convention, no changes from the current interest rate of 8.1 per cent. Relief at 20 per cent.

[4] Assumes, by convention, no changes from current interest rate of 8.1 per cent. Relief at 15 per cent.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the regulations under the Legal Aid Act 1988 which require that where a person granted legal aid succeeds in recovering a preserved property the legal aid is repayable, with particular concern for those on income support. [17212]

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the interest charged on legal aid assistance. [17213]

Mr. John M. Taylor: When a legally aided person recovers or preserves money or property as a result of the proceedings for which he or she is legally aided, the Legal Aid Board recovers the legal aid costs from that money or property. This is known as the statutory charge. In certain circumstances, enforcement of the charge is postponed. In those cases, simple interest is charged for the length of the postponement at a rate which is currently 8 per cent. per annum. This rate is reviewed from time to time when it seems appropriate to do so in the light of movements in interest rates generally. There are no current plans to change the rates.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money has been paid in legal aid for persons whose cases are being considered by *(a)* the European Court of Justice and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights; and if he will list the number of (1) cases and (2) people involved.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have reflected carefully on this inquiry to which my hon. Friend returns, but regret that I must refer him to the answer I gave him on 28 March, *Official Report,* column *525.*

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he now plans to take in respect of the provision of legal aid to the nation's richest citizens. [17845]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is now considering the responses he received to the consultation paper, "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy." He will announce shortly the proposals which he intends to take forward.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the cost of civil legal aid for divorce cases for each of the last five years and the estimated cost for the current financial year; and what is the projected cost for the next financial year. [17098]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to provide the net cost of divorce cases alone. Net expenditure in respect of all civil matrimonial legal aid for each of the five years is as follows:

1989–90: £87.5 million
1990–91: £108.6 million
1991–92: £150.5 million
1992–93: £207.2 million
1993–94: £266.7 million

The net cost of all civil legal aid in 1994–95 is estimated to be £611.1 million and is projected to be £677.8 million in 1995–96.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to restrict the availability of legal aid for divorcing couples and their children; what mechanisms he intends to introduce to allow those adults and children requiring professional legal assistance, rather than the assistance of mediators, for the protection of their interests to get that assistance; and who will be taking decisions about whether people get the assistance of a mediator or lawyer in publicly funded matrimonial cases. [17104]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor will be issuing his Green Paper on legal aid later in the spring. Proposals relating to legal aid in family cases will be covered in that document.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost to public funds of legal aid granted to persons who were not British citizens or resident in the United Kingdom during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information as to an applicant's nationality is not collected and is therefore not available. The Legal Aid Board does maintain a record of applications received from applicants resident outside the United Kingdom, but information on the cost to legal aid of those cases could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Privity of Contract

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he proposes to introduce legislation relating to the law of privity of contract; and if he will make a statement. [17240]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It remains the intention of the Government to proceed with legislation in this area as soon as there is a suitable legislative opportunity.

Age Limits (Courts)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the *(a)* legal lower age limit and *(b)* customary lower age limit on visitors to criminal or civil courts. [17230]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There is no legal age limit for any visitor to a criminal or civil court. People of all ages visit these courts.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super highway. [17728]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Neither my Department, the Lord Chancellor nor I have an Internet electronic mail address. My Department has no current plans to use the Internet but will keep under review the facilities available and their potential use.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotions materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising, and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17629]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure on all forms of advertising and publicity, and separate figures for recruitment advertising, are given in the table. The recruitment advertising figures are only for recruitment carried out centrally. Recruitment is also carried out locally but costs are not separately identifiable. It is not possible to identify separate figures for the different types of advertising. The figures include costs for the Court Service, which became an agency on 3 April 1995.

Year	*Total advertising and publicity*[1]	*Recruitment advertising*	*Recruitment as percentage of total*
1992–93	51,901	36,209	70
1993–94	126,195	47,744	38
1994–95 (provisional)	152,412	45,341	30
1995–96 (plan)	191,650	52,650	27

[1] Including recruitment.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)*, and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising, for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17630]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A list of the non-departmental public bodies and agencies is set out below. In relation to the non-departmental public bodies for which the Lord Chancellor has responsibility, the following information is available:

Legal Aid Board (created in 1989

Publicity budget for publicising the legal aid scheme:

1989–90: £103,000
1990–91: £150,000
1991–92: £132,000
1992–93: £234,000
1993–94: £140,000
1994–95: £185,000

The planned expenditure for 1995–96 is £243,750. No figure has yet been planned for 1996–97. Publicity in this area is carried out, almost exclusively, by way of leaflets and posters for the general public.

Information on recruitment advertisements is available only from 1992–93:

1992–93: £215.731
1993–94: £135,259
1994–95: £252,359 (estimate)

Law Commission Apart from 1992–93, expenditure was all on recruitment

	Newspapers £	*Other (D)* £	*Total* £
1986–87	[1]1,500	NIL	1,500
1987–88	[1]1,700	NIL	1,700
1988–89	[1]2,100	NIL	2,100
1989–90	[1]2,400	[1]500	2,900
1990–91	[1]3,000	[1]1,000	4,000
1991–92	[1]3,500	[1]1,250	4,750
1992–93	3,783.50	[2]5,408.25	[2]9,191.75
1993–94	3,838.73	2,067.33	5,906.06
1994–95	4,816.18	2,145.87	6,962.05
1995–96[3]	4,500	2,000	6,500

[1] Best estimate: figures prior to 1986–87 are not available and until 1992 were not distinguished from miscellaneous expenditure.
[2] Includes a Law Commission brochure.
[3] Estimate.

Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct (created in 1991)

The only expenditure has been on newspaper advertising for the recruitment of staff. The figures are:

1991–92: £4,917.19
1992–93: £7,013.36
1993–94: £11,195.98
1994–95: £11,200 (estimate)

The other NDPBs either do not incur such expenditure or the cost is included in departmental figures.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for four agencies: the Court Service, Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. The Court Service, which came into operation as an agency on 3 April 1995, is covered in the answer to the question about this Department. As the question concerns specific operational matters on which the chief executives of the other three agencies are best placed to provide answers, I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

NON-DEPARTMENTAL PUBLIC BODIES

Executive Bodies

Legal Aid Board
Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board (now inactive)

Advisory Bodies

Insolvency Rules Committee
County Court Rule Committee
Supreme Court Rule Committee
Land Registration Rule Committee
Family Proceedings Rule Committee
Crown Court Rule Committee
Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax
Advisory Committee on JPs in England (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) and Wales
Judicial Studies Board
Advisory Council on Public Records
Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct
Council on Tribunals
Law Commission
Northern Ireland Court Service—
Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax (NI)
Advisory Committees on JPs in Northern Ireland
Advisory Committees on Juvenile Court Lay Panel
Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI)

TRIBUNALS

Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Adjudicators
Lands Tribunal
Pensions Appeal Tribunal
Valued Added Tax Tribunal
Transport Tribunal
General Commissioners of Income Tax

AGENCIES

Court Service

Her Majesty's Land Registry
The Public Record Office
The Public Trust Office

Letter from S. Hutcheson to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 4 April 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary question, listed on 28 March 1995, regarding the cost of advertising and promotional activities.

The Public Trust Office has not spent any money on *(a)* television or *(b)* radio advertising since 1979.

Expenditure on *(c)* newspapers advertising has been limited to the advertising of senior management posts which cost a total of £19,891.58 in 1994–95. Prior to 1994 recruitment was undertaken centrally by the Lord Chancellor's Department and no separate figures are available for the Public Trust Office.

The cost of *(d)*, other promotional materials and activities, including the design and printing the Framework Document, Corporate and Business Plans in 1994 prior to the launch of the Public Trust Office as an Executive Agency, was £10,980. The cost of producing and publishing pamphlets in 1994 (including Charter Statements, explanatory booklets and leaflets sent to our customers) was £37,500. There have been no other promotional activities. Figures for each year since 1979 will have been subsumed within other budgets and the information required can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

The figures for 1994–95 are those quoted in the paragraph above. The cost of producing Corporate and Business Plans in 1995–96 is currently being researched but is not expected to exceed £5,000. The production and design of Charter Statements, explanatory booklets and leaflets for 1995–96 has yet to be tendered and the cost cannot, therefore, be quantified at present.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: EXPENDITURE ON ADVERTISING

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question relating to advertising by the Public Record Office.

(a)/(b) The Public Record Office has not advertised on television or radio.

The following table shows:

(c) the amounts spent on newspaper advertising;

(d) the approximate amounts spent on other promotional materials and activities;

(e) the totals of *(c)* and *(d)*;

(f) the proportions of *(e)* spent on recruitment and advertising.

Year	*(c) Newspaper advertising £*	*(d) Promotional activities £*	*(e) Total £*	*(f) Recruitment proportion Per cent.*
1986–87	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1987–88	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1988–89	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1990–91	28	Nil	28	100
1991–92	20,666	1,500	22,166	93
1992–93	10,326	1,500	11,826	87
1993–94	77,392	1,500	78,892	98

Information for earlier years is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Our latest estimates for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are:

	1994–95	*1995–96*
a) television	nil	nil
b) radio	nil	nil
c) newspaper	£70,000	£44,500
d) other promotional	£1,500	£1,500
e) totals	£71,500	£46,000
f) recruitment proportion	98 per cent.	98 per cent.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: EXPENDITURE ON ADVERTISING IN HM LAND REGISTRY

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning total expenditure by HM Land Registry on all forms of advertising for each year since 1979. I can provide the following information:

a) television advertising—nil;

b) radio advertising—nil;

The following table answers your questions c), d), e) and f):

Year	*Total advertising costs £*	*Recruitment per cent.*
1979–80	23,696	48
1980–81	5,789	37
1981–82	7,425	46
1982–83	5,160	49
1983–84	3,365	36
1984–85	4,143	43
1985–86	7,470	43
1986–87	12,669	90
1987–88	32,828	99
1988–89	70,226	99
1989–90	36,434	95
1990–91	20,940	96
1991–92	6,342	66
1992–93	15,002	1
1993–94	16,233	0
1994–95 (forecast)	30,000	0
1995–96 (budget)	35,000	0

The Registry's major expenditure on advertising has been for staff recruitment, particularly to meet the property boom of the late 1980's; for advertising in connection with the registration of high value transactions (until 1980); and to give effect to a continuing statutory requirement concerning the replacement of Land and Charge Certificates.

The advertising costs shown in the table all relate to newspaper advertising apart from the years 1992–93 onwards where costs for staging exhibitions and displays are also included. These costs are subsumed within the total budget and cannot be separated.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Jury Service

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what legal grounds a person called for jury service may be excused from jury service; and if he will list the different categories of people who are automatically exempt from jury service. [17097]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Section 9 (1) of the Juries Act 1974 gives a person the right to be excused from jury service if they are among the persons listed in part III of schedule 1 to the Act. The schedule is a lengthy one and a copy will therefore be sent to the hon. Member. The jury summoning officer may also use discretion and excuse a person from jury service if, pursuant to section 9 (2) of the Act, they are able to show good cause as to why they should be excused.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people were called for jury service in each of the last 10 years at *(a)* the Central Criminal court, *(b)* Inner London Crown court, *(c)* Middlesex Crown court and *(d)* Harrow Crown court; and what percentage of these people were excused from jury service on each of the legal grounds available. [17101]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Divorce

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many decrees absolute were granted in each of the last five years, and what percentage of them were made on each of the five legal grounds for divorce. [17099]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table gives the numbers of divorces in each year from 1989 to 1993, the latest year for which figures are available. It also gives the percentages of these divorces that were based on each of the five facts by which irretrievable breakdown of marriage can be demonstrated. A small proportion of petitions are based on a combination of facts, and this proportion is also shown.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Number of Dissolutions	150,477	152,927	158,301	159,967	164,556
Adultery (per cent.)	29.26	28.80	28.26	27.59	27.02
Behaviour (per cent.)	44.34	45.37	46.28	46.20	45.32
Desertion (per cent.)	0.74	0.67	0.68	0.64	0.68
2 Year Separation with consent (per cent.)	19.14	18.77	18.58	19.38	20.75
5 Year Separation (per cent.)	6.00	5.86	5.70	5.74	5.81
Combination of Facts (per cent.)	0.28	0.27	0.24	0.22	0.21

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what costings his Department has done on the introduction of a national mediation service; what savings he expects to make by funding mediation services for divorcing couples and their children rather than legal aid; and when he intends to publish these costings. [17102]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no plans to establish a national mediation service. The Lord Chancellor is still examining possible arrangements for the funding of local mediation services in the context of his proposed Green Paper on publicly funded legal services, to be issued later in the spring.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* trained mediators and *(b)* mediation centres he estimates will be needed to provide the necessary assistance for divorcing couples and their children. [17103]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The decisions which are made about how best to encourage a wider use of family mediation during the divorce process will determine what assessments are made of the numbers of mediators and mediation centres required to meet any additional demand.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18596]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In relation to the headquarters of the Lord Chancellor's Department and associated offices access and facilities for disabled people are continuously reviewed, and every effort is made to improve them as necessary. We will continue to build on this approach.

The Lord Chancellor has responsibility for the Court Service, the Public Trust Office, Her Majesty's Land Registry and the Public Record Office as executive agencies. As this question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives are best placed to provide the answer, I have asked them to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: FACILITIES FOR THE DISABLED

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your question about facilities for the disabled.

Newly built Crown, county and combined court centres comply with the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations 1991, which lay down specific levels of access for disabled court users. The policy is that the design of buildings should enable disabled people to gain independent access into and within the building so that they can fulfil their role in the function of that building; this policy covers all building users—visiting public, jury, professionals and all staff engaged in the building.

New court building schemes have a revised Crown Court layout which provides better access to and within a courtroom. A sound enhancement system for the hard of hearing is required as standard in one courtroom in every new building. This is generally provided as an infra-red system which preserves security.

Appropriate facilities are provided for wheelchair users, the hard of hearing and people with impaired sight. These include parking facilities close to entrances, level or ramped approaches close to entrances, good acoustic environments, signage and infra-red hearing aid installations, good quality lighting, the avoidance of hazards along routes, clear layouts and back-up aural information.

It will be necessary to review our estate in the light of the requirements of the Disabled Bill currently before Parliament and the Regulations to be made under it. There will also have to be discussions with disabled people and the organisations that represent them, to ensure that their views are taken into account and that they are informed of any problems there may be with particular buildings.

The Department has some 450 buildings; about a third of these are listed or older buildings and it will not always be easy or even possible to arrange the kind of access that is required. Our managing agents have been instructed to review our Estate and to identify what needs to be done to improve access. On the basis of that information and as part of the ongoing refurbishment programme, every effort will be made, subject to resource and building constraints, to bring our buildings up to the required standard.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: ACCESS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN HM LAND REGISTRY

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the measures taken to facilitate access for disabled people in HM Land Registry. I can provide the following information:

The Land Registry carried out a comprehensive review of all facilities offered for disabled people in 1988. A wide range of improvements, including better means of access, were subsequently carried out. These included the provision of dedicated car parking spaces, the building of ramps, and the installation of electronic doors. Where it was not possible to provide unaided wheelchair access, "service call" facilities were installed.

A further review of facilities has recently been carried out as part of the Registry's response to the "Programme for Action to Achieve Equality of Opportunity in the Civil Service for Disabled People". While the great majority of Registry sites already meet the requirements indicated in the Access Checklist published in the Programme, an action plan is currently being prepared to enhance facilities where required.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from S. Hutcheson to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 4 April 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Departments' response to your Parliamentary question concerning access for disabled people.

Appropriate facilities are provided for wheelchair users which include ramps, handrails, parking facilities near to the entrance and toilets which are accessible to wheelchair users. We also have evacuation chairs for wheelchair users for emergencies such as a fire.

The Public Trust Office is situated in an older building and as parts of it are refurbished we are increasing the numbers of toilets with disabled access.

Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 4 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: FACILITIES FOR THE DISABLED

In the absence of the Chief Executive, who is away on official business, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question relating to facilities for the disabled at the Public Record Office.

The Kew building, which opened in 1977, incorporated several design features for the disabled. These are:

a) a lift for disabled users;

b) toilets for disabled users;

c) a wheelchair access ramp leading to the public entrance;

d) 5 parking bays for the disabled located at the point nearest to the public entrance;

e) a visual alarm for the fire alarm system.

An extension to the existing building, due for completion in 1995–96, will include the same facilities.

The nineteenth-century Chancery Lane building has been adapted in recent years to improve facilities for disabled users and includes:

a) two wheelchair lifts to allow access from street level to the ground floor;

b) ramped access to the microform reading room;

c) toilets for disabled users;

d) parking for the disabled by prior arrangement

In addition, there are special arrangements to make documents available to wheelchair users in the reading room which allows easiest access for them.

Evacuation chairs are available on both sites for use in an emergency.

The Public Record Office has appointed a Disabled Persons Officer, part of whose job is to ensure that action point in the Office's Equal Opportunities Policy relating to disabled facilities are followed. This includes ensuring that special equipment needs for staff are met.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18438]

(2) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18440]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18439]

(4) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer.

(5) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18441]

(6) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18442]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted only in the form requested at disproportionate cost.

New Technology

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department to what extent new technology is being deployed to speed up court work. [18416]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the

Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked him to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 5 April 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION: TECHNOLOGY USED TO SPEED UP COURT WORK

You will know that it is the practice for Chief Executives of Agencies to reply direct to Members of Parliament who have tabled written Parliamentary Questions. As The Court Service became an Executive Agency on 3 April the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has therefore asked me to reply to your question about new technology in the courts.

Several computer systems have been, or are being, introduced into the county courts to speed up court work. For example, the Summons Production Centre (SPC) and the County Court Bulk Centre (CCBC) deal with large quantities of summonses and post-issue process for major plaintiffs, such as the water industry and finance companies. The SPC issued 1.6 million default summonses for fixed amounts, in 1994 and is operated by only six staff. Both the SPC and CCBC are highly automated. As a result, we can guarantee that summonses will be issued and dispatched within 24–48 hours at the SPC and that judgments will be entered and warrants of execution issued within 48 hours at the CCBC.

Electronic links between the CCBC and the 100 largest courts have recently been established. This allows warrant information to be transferred overnight from the CCBC to the local courts so that the warrant can be in the hands of the bailiff the next day.

County Courts also have 'stand alone' computer systems to help with accounting functions for handling suitors' cash payments and for monitoring the progress of warrants. In addition, a new computer system, called CaseMan, is under development and is currently being installed at 6 pilot sites. CaseMan is a database system that will allow court records to be stored and documents to be produced electronically. In due course, CaseMan will be developed to support a wide range of functions including those carried ut by the stand alone systems mentioned earlier.

Finally, in the Crown Court a strategic system was developed in 1989 and has progressively been installed in all Crown Court centres. All centres now have comprehensive support through the Crown Court Support System (CREST) for case progression, listing, accounting and payment of costs.

Public Appointments

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many public appointments, excluding judicial appointments, his Department has made in the last five years; what are the names and positions of the appointees; how many of the positions were advertised; how many of the appointees were on the list held by the Cabinet Office's public appointments unit; and how many of the appointments were made in consultation with *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* the Government Chief Whip.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A complete answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Lord Chancellor makes over 1,800 non-judicial appointments to bodies for which he has ministerial responsibility. Of those appointments, over 900 were made in the last five years. The great majority of these were made to the advisory committees on justices of the peace where the appointments field largely consists of those who are already JPs, appointments for which are advertised. The table shows the non-judicial public bodies listed under this Department in the Office of Public Service and Science publication "Public Bodies". Of the appointments made in the last five years, 21 were advertised. In addition, two vacancies for barristers on the Legal Aid Board were advertised in *Bar News*, a publication distributed to all subscribing members of the Bar. While we have no record of how many appointees were on the list held by PAU, six appointments were of people suggested by the PAU; four were made in consultation with the Prime Minister; and one in consultation with the Government Chief Whip.

Entries in Public Bodies

	Members
Executive Bodies	
Legal Aid Board	14
Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board (although it is now inactive)	—
Advisory Bodies	
Insolvency Rules Committee	7
County Court Rule Committee	11
Supreme Court Rule Committee	12
Land Registration Rule Committee	5
Family Proceedings Rule Committee	11
Crown Court Rule Committee	11
Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax	621
Advisory Committees on JPs in England (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) and Wales	1,037
Judicial Studies Board	55
Advisory Council on Public Records	15
Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct	17
Legal Aid Advisory Committee (since wound-up)	10
Council on Tribunals	21
Law Commission	5
Northern Ireland Court Service—Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax (NI)	15
Advisory Committees on JPs in Northern Ireland	56
Advisory Committees on Juvenile Court Lay Panel	11
Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI)	10

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of the functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18642]

Mr. John. M. Taylor: I am the green Minister for the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The initiatives taken by my Department relate mainly to its environmental impact as a consumer. The Department is continuing and intensifying its efforts to improve energy efficiency. It has an on-going programme to maintain and, where appropriate, upgrade the historic buildings on our estate. It has ensured that the design of new court buildings takes full account of environmental concerns and, in the procurement of goods and services, it takes all reasonable steps to maximise the use of recycled and renewable resources.

I have regular discussions with other green Ministers on the ways of achieving the Government objectives in this area.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Residences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what were the costs for the last two years and what are the estimated costs for the current year and the next two years of *(a)* expenditure on palaces in occupation of Her Majesty and residences occupied by members of the royal family and *(b)* gentlemen at arms and yeomen of the guard. [18048]

Mr. Sproat: The total expenditure on the occupied royal palaces since 1992–93 has been:

1992–93: £23.1 million
1993–94: £19.8 million
1994–95: £20.5 million

Estimated expenditure for the next two years is as follows:

1995–96: £20.7 million
1996–97: £20.9 million

Of these totals, expenditure on the gentleman at arms and yeomen of the guard has been or will be:

1992–93: £39,000
1993–94: £55,000
1994–95: £68,000
1995–96: £54,000
1996–97: £55,000

Arts Council

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will list all persons who have served on advisory panels to the Arts Council in each year for the last 10 years giving the bodies, institutions and/or organisations to which they were professionally attached;

(2) if he will itemise all funds distributed by the Arts Council either by grant or as expenses which have gone to a member of any advisory panel, whether directly or to bodies, institutions or organisations with which they are associated, in each year during the last 10 years.

Mr. Sproat: Full lists of the membership of all the Arts Council's advisory panels and of the grants made are published each year in the council's annual report and accounts, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Historic information to allow cross referencing between the interests of panel members and grants to individual organisations is only available at disproportionate cost.

The Arts Council has, throughout its history, operated an advisory structure which allows peer group review of the artistic output of the recipients of grants from the council. The arts funding system relies heavily on the advice, experience and expertise of those appointed to these advisory panels. Nominations for membership of panels are sought from a wide range of relevant professional and trade organisations, and the membership of all panels changes regularly. Panel members are not paid, and receive expenses only on a reimbursement basis. It is inevitable that in order to involve people with the requisite knowledge and experience, some panel members will be employed by, or work on a freelance basis for, organisations that receive funding from the Arts Council; the council's procedural and ethical code states:

> "Members of the Council, Boards, Panels and Committees and staff with any interest in, or whose partners have an interest in, an organisation subsidised by, or seeking subsidy from, the Council, should declare this interest whenever that organisation is the subject of discussion and ask the Chairman at what point it would be appropriate for them to leave the meeting".

I understand that the code is rigorously applied. In line with the Government's code of practice for board members of executive non-departmental bodies, the Arts Council is revising its own code of practice from 1 April 1995. The new code contains a full statement of the responsibilities of members and provides for a register of members' interests.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what study he is making of the links between conservation area status and listed building status. [16542]

Mr. Dorrell: I announced in my speech to the *Architects' Journal* centenary dinner on 8 March that the heritage Green Paper I intend to publish later this year will consider the interaction between listing and other statutory controls, including those relating to conservation areas.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what study he is making of a more open listed buildings system; what sources of information are available to his Department; and what proposals he has to initiate information-gathering about listed buildings other than from English Heritage. [16544]

Mr. Dorrell: I recently announced that I was introducing public consultation on listing proposals for post-war buildings and those arising from other thematic studies carried out by English Heritage. The possibility of extending consultation to other types of listing will be discussed in a heritage Green Paper which I will publish later this year.

Documentary information on buildings proposed for listing is available from a number of published sources including the national monuments record, and from inspections made by English Heritage. In deciding whether to list a building I take into account any information, from whatever source, which is relevant to the assessment of the building's architectural or historic interest. I hope that the new arrangements for public consultation will enable owners and members of the public to contribute to the process of appraisal.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what criteria he has for the commercial disposal of listed buildings; and what obligations apply in respect to the need to obtain the highest price. [16541]

Mr. Dorrell: The terms of disposal of listed buildings are ultimately a matter for the individual vendor. However, so far as the disposal of Government historic buildings is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 8 March *Official Report*, columns *174–75*, in which I announced the publication of a new guidance note for Departments. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to introduce more flexibility into listings of grade II listed buildings. [16540]

Mr. Dorrell: I propose to publish a Green Paper later in the year which will invite public discussion of the need of greater flexibility. Among the possibilities which may be worth considering is a more selective approach to the listing of buildings already protected by conservation area designations; and a new power to list only the exteriors of certain buildings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he hopes to legislate to require Departments to obtain consent from the local planning authority for the demolition or alteration of listed buildings, and for the demolition of unlisted buildings in conservation areas along the lines he announced at the centenary dinner of the *Architects' Journal.*

Mr. Dorrell: Legislation will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are his Department's responsibilities in relation to the Forth rail bridge. [16543]

Mr. Dorrell: Questions relating to the Forth rail bridge's importance as a historic structure are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Canoeing and Angling

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate he has made of the grant available from the Sports Council and other public bodies in support for canoeing in the year 1993–94, expressed in terms per capita of those participating in this sport; and what are the corresponding figures for the sport of angling. [16859]

Mr. Sproat: In 1993–94, canoeing governing bodies received grants of £542,266 from the Sports Council, a sum of £5.42 on a per capita basis for the 100,000 people who take part in the sport. A further £16,875 was also provided in awards from Sportsmatch, a business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport launched by the Government in 1992 to increase the amount of business sponsorship going into grass roots sport and physical recreation. In 1993–94, Sports Council grants to the governing bodies of angling was £74,415, a sum of 2.8p on a per capita basis for the 2.7 million adults actively participating in the sport. In addition to this, £4,211.10 was provided in Sportswatch awards.

Lottery Scratch Cards

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how he plans to compensate those charitable organisations which have lost funding previously raised through lottery or scratch card schemes as a result of competition from the national lottery. [18871]

Mr. Dorrell: Charitable, voluntary and benevolent organisations will be able to apply for funds from the National Lottery Charities Board, which will receive 20 per cent. of the national lottery's contribution to good causes. This could amount to more than £300 million a year when the lottery reaches it peak. In addition, many of the applicants for funds from the other lottery distribution bodies are themselves charities. I therefore expect that a high proportion of the money distributed from the lottery will go to the benefit of the charitable sector.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17619]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department's spend in the period 1992–95 for *(a)* to *(c)* was nil. Publicity expenditure for 1993–94 was £25,000 and £57,000 in 1994–95; the 1992–93 figure is not available. Publicity plans for 1995–96 have not been finalised.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18594]

Mr. Dorrell: My Department wishes to promote access for all people, including disabled people, to the whole range of the activities for which it is responsible. The Department has an equal opportunities policy which covers all staff including disabled people, and its buildings are accessible to wheelchair users and people with other disabilities.

My Department's agencies have both taken positive action to help disabled people. The Historic Royal Palaces Agency has provided wheelchair access to the crown jewels, and additional lifts to all floors in Hampton court palace, where a wheelchair loan service is also available. The Royal Parks Agency is implementing long and short-term projects for improving access to its parks. These include the wheelchair loan service in Greenwich park and the special needs centre in Richmond park.

The Department and its agencies will continue to build on this kind of approach.

The Disability Discrimination Bill, which will apply to all Government Departments, contains new rights for disabled people in employment and creates rights of access to goods, facilities and services. It also establishes the National Disability Council to advise the Government on eliminating discrimination against disabled people.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18330]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* In the past two years no jobs in my Department have been taken over by contractors and/or disappeared.

Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total expenditure on *(a)* all forms of publicity and *(b)* all publications and pamphlets produced for his Department and for all the agencies and public bodies for which his Department is responsible for each year since 1979, including the budgeted figure for 1995–96, (i) including and (ii) excluding privatisation-related expenditures and expressed in 1994 prices; and if he will supply information for the period from 1 April 1993 to 1 March 1995 showing (1) the nature and (2) the purpose of each publicity campaign and of each publication involving the expenditure of more than £50,000. [14594]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 17 March 1995]:* Expenditure by the Department of National Heritage on publicity during 1993–94 was £25,000 and for 1994–95 was £57,000. Corresponding expenditure for these years by the Royal Parks Agency was £61,400 and £45,000, and by the Historic Palaces Agency £226,300 and £451,300.

No privatisation-related expenditure has been incurred. The Historic Royal Palaces Agency produced one publicity campaign costing over £50,000, in respect of the launch and promotion of the new jewel house at the Tower of London in 1994.

Budgets for 1995–96 are still being finalised. The other information requested could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what dates he has met *(a)* the Library Association, *(b)* the Museums and Galleries Commission, *(c)* Equity, *(d)* the Musicians Union, *(e)* the Association of British Orchestras, *(f)* the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, *(g)* the Association of District Councils and *(h)* the Association of County Councils to discuss the work of his Department. [18149]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Since my appointment I have held meetings with:

i) the Library Association on 3 October 1994;

ii) the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 30 November 1994, 24 January 1995 and 8th March 1995;

iii) the Association of County Councils on 28 September 1994.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what dates he has met *(a)* the Art Council, *(b)* English Heritage, *(c)* the Crafts Council, *(d)* the Design Council, *(e)* the National Campaign for the Arts, *(f)* the Royal Institute of British Architects, *(g)* the Royal Society of Arts and *(h)* the regional arts boards to discuss the work of his Department. [18148]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Since my appointment I have held meetings with representatives of:

i) The Arts Council and individual Regional Arts Board (frequently);

ii) English Heritage (frequently);

iii) the Royal Institute of British Architects on 25 October 1994;

iv) the National Campaign for the Arts on 3 October 1994;

v) the Royal Society of Arts on 23 February 1995.

Royal Residences

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost to his Department of maintenance and running costs of *(a)* Buckingham palace, *(b)* Windsor castle, *(c)* Kensington palace, *(d)* St. James's palace, *(e)* Balmoral and *(f)* Sandringham in each of the last five years including periods when they were unoccupied; and what proportion of these sums is represented by employees' salaries. [16920]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The cost to my Department of maintenance and running costs of Buckingham palace, Windsor castle, Kensington palace, St. Jame's palace, Balmoral and Sandringham has been as follows:

£ million

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Buckingham palace	7.53	6.56	5.47	6.62
Windsor castle	11.05	12.18	9.75	7.94
Kensington palace	0.84	0.64	1.11	1.36
St. James's palace	3.23	2.42	2.04	3.15
Balmoral	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.06
Sandringham	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.06
Costs that are not attributable by location	1.16	1.26	1.29	1.35
Total	23.94	23.16	19.80	20.54

The expenditure for Sandringham and Balmoral comprised costs incurred when Her Majesty the Queen was in residence on official duties; these two properties are not maintained by my Department.

Expenditure records are not available to my Department for the periods before 1991–92.

Not all salary costs are attributable by individual location. The total salary costs across the whole estate expressed as a percentage of the total grant in aid were as follows:

Per cent.

1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
7.7	12.2	16.2	16.3

The increase in salary costs between 1991–92 and 1992–93 reflects the transfer of staff from PSA to the new property section. The increase between 1992–93 and 1993–94 principally reflects the setting up of the fire, health and safety branch following the Windsor castle fire.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what targets he has for withdrawing regulations within his Department. [15550]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* A reply by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs in response to a similar question from my hon. Friend on 27 March, *Official Report,* column *473* sets out the targets across government. In my Department, our targets for deregulation include:

to complete a review by 1995 of the Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price Display) Order 1977 and Hotel Proprietors' Act 1956;

to complete a review by 1995, with a view to the abolition by 1996, of the requirements for television dealers both to register as such with the BBC and to hold a valid dealer demonstration licence;

to bring forward proposals on media ownership rules;

to commence reviews on sports ground safety legislation and the legal deposit arrangements for books published in the UK; and

to continue to press its concerns on a number of regulations affecting the tourism industry.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15618]

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 27 March, *Official Report,* column *435.*

VE-day Commemorations

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if veterans from Caribbean countries have been invited to take part in VE-day celebrations. [18142]

Mr. Soames: I have been asked to reply.

The Government very much hope that those heads of state of Government from the Caribbean who have been invited to London for the VE-day commemorations, will be accompanied by second world war veterans from their countries. We have also contacted associations representing Caribbean veterans resident in the UK, and invited nominations to attend the various commemorative events. In addition, we envisage that veterans from the Caribbean will play a significant role in the commemorations to mark the 50th anniversary of VJ-day in August.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Arms Embargo

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General if he will refer the conduct of the former directors of the British Manufacture and Research Company to the Director of Public Prosecutions for her to consider an investigation into possible breaches of arms embargo with Iran. [18611]

The Attorney-General: Investigation of possible breaches of export controls on arms is a matter for the commissioners of Customs and Excise to whom any information on alleged breaches should be passed.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18586]

The Attorney-General: The equal opportunities policies of the Departments for which I am responsible support the provision of facilities for disabled members of staff and visitors. Wherever practicable, premises are made accessible to disabled people and their needs and comfort are taken into account. Measures taken and facilities offered include the provision of disabled toilet facilities and ramps to provide access to buildings. Where possible, car parking spaces have been designated. The Department's policies will be reflected in the design specifications for new buildings.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mining Subsidence

18. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Coal Authority to discuss coal mining subsidence. [16454]

Mr. Page: My Department is in frequent contact with the Coal Authority about the range of issues within its responsibilities.

Chemical Weapons Convention

21. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to bring forward legislation for the early ratification of the chemical weapons convention; and if he will make a statement. [16457]

Mr. Taylor: The legislation needed to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the chemical weapons convention will be introduced as soon as practicable. In judging when that may be, we shall, of course, take account of the offer of full co-operation made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) in business questions last week.

Deregulation

22. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will initiate a league table for all Government Departments to show the number of rules or regulations which have been replaced on a monthly basis. [16458]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No. I do not think that this would be a helpful way of assessing progress, particularly given that the deregulation initiative goes wider than simple repeals.

Cadbury Committee

23. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps have been taken to encourage the implementation of the Cadbury committee proposals. [16459]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has consistently made clear its support for the Cadbury code to those responsible for its implementation.

Business Links

24. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links have been established to date. [16460]

Mr. Heseltine: There are currently 75 business links operational and approval has been given for a further 146.

27. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the network of business links to be completed. [16463]

Mr. Heseltine: There are currently 75 business links open, a further 146 have been approved and there remain only 17 areas to come forward to the national assessment panel.

Progress has been good with over two thirds of the network now approved. By the end of 1995, there will be around 200 outlets operational and every firm in England should have access to a business link.

Manufacturing Industry

25. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the President of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry. [16461]

Mr. Heseltine: I, and other DTI Ministers, regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry. The latest figures show manufacturing output up 4.3 per cent., productivity up 4.6 per cent. and exports up 14 per cent., on a year earlier.

26. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has for manufacturing growth in the east midlands. [16462]

Mr. Page: While my Department does not commission or produce such estimates, recent surveys by the CBI and other economic analysts show sustained growth in the region in 1994 and good prospects for 1995. For example, the latest economic survey by east midlands chambers of commerce and industry shows that in the last quarter of 1994, 51 per cent. of businesses experienced improved home orders, 42 per cent. showed improved export orders, 42 per cent. planned investment in new plant and machinery and 68 per cent. were confident of improved turnover in 1995.

Telecommunications Companies

29. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with representatives of the United States Government about opportunities for British telecommunications companies to compete in the American market. [16465]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government strongly support the efforts of United Kingdom telecommunications companies to enter the United States and other markets, and we take every opportunity to press for their interests.

My officials have regular contacts with United States regulatory authorities to pursue policy issues of interest to UK companies. Most recently, I spoke to the US Secretary of Commerce in the margins of the G7 conference in Brussels on 25 to 26 February to get across the need for the US to support worldwide liberalisation and removal of restrictions on foreign ownership of US telecommunications operators. I am pleased to say that, at that conference, Vice-President Gore confirmed that they would be pursuing both objectives.

Pit Closures

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent meetings he has had with R. J. Budge, chairman of RJB Mining, to discuss the closure of pits. [16466]

Mr. Eggar: My colleagues and I have had no meeting with Mr. Budge to discuss colliery closures.

Manufacturing Investment

31. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of gross domestic product was invested in United Kingdom manufacturing industry in 1993. [16467]

Mr. Page: Manufacturing investment was 2.3 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1993 and 10.2 per cent. of manufacturing output, when measured at 1990 prices.

Industrial Ownership

33. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to retain the ownership of the British car, aerospace and telecommunications industries in United Kingdom hands. [16469]

Mr. Eggar: The Department's objective is to increase the competitiveness of businesses in Britain, regardless of their ownership. We welcome overseas investment in these as in other industries. Any acquisitions in these sectors from UK or foreign companies are treated in exactly the same way under the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Orimulsion

34. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the growth in imports of orimulsion and what assessment he has made of its consequences. [16470]

Mr. Page: Imports of orimulsion began in December 1990. There was strong growth in 1992, but imports have remained fairly stable since then. In 1994, imports were 1.2 million tonnes. Figures for use of orimulsion are published in "Energy Trends", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The future use of orimulsion is a commercial matter for the companies concerned, which will have to comply with requirements of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Late Payment

32. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received from trade associations about the problem of late payment of invoices. [16468]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am not aware of any recent representations from trade associations on the problems of late payment of invoices.

35. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his plans to deal with the problem of late payment. [16471]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Following consultation with the business community, the Government announced a package of new measures to address late payment in the May 1994 White Paper on competitiveness. Work on these continues.

The Government also announced that they would re-examine the case for a statutory right to interest on overdue debts in two years if there has been no significant improvement.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to deal with the problem of late payments for businesses. [16433]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Following consultation with the business community, the Government announced a package of new measures to address late payment in the May 1994 in the White Paper on competitiveness. The measures include:

Government Departments and their agencies to comply with the CBI prompt payers code, to state whether they have done so and publish their payment policies in their annual reports and to publicise their arrangements for handling complaints of late payment.

streamlining of court procedures for debt recovery and a review of the limit for the informal small claims procedure;

implementation of proposals to require public companies to state their payment policies in their director's reports;

development of proposals for a British standard for prompt payment;

work with trade associations, business links and others to improve credit management and debt collection skills in small firms.

The Government also announced that they would re-examine the case for a statutory right to interest on overdue debts in two years if there has been no significant improvement.

Export Promotion

36. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in the MOD concerning the promotion of British exports. [16472]

Mr. Needham: There is frequent contact at both ministerial and official level between my Department and the Defence Export Services Organisation, who work together closely on defence export issues.

Industrial Development, Merseyside

37. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to encourage the development of industry in Merseyside. [16473]

Mr. Page: We are continuing actively to encourage industrial development on Merseyside by working with local partners to attract new industry and to foster the growth and improve the competitiveness of indigenous enterprise.

Firework-related Injuries

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firework-related injuries were referred to hospitals in the period around 5 November 1994.

Mr. Heseltine: Accident and emergency units in hospitals in England, Wales and Scotland treated 1,574 people for injuries caused by fireworks. That is an increase over the total reported for 1993. An analysis of the figures for 1994 and for the previous four years will be placed today in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

It is of concern that firework injuries should have increased, that there were two accidental deaths, and that almost 500 of the injuries appear to have been due to illegal misuse.

My Department is in touch with representatives of the fireworks industry and of enforcement authorities to discuss ways in which fireworks injuries can be reduced.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the latest statistics on firework incidents and injuries. [18975]

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins).

Insolvency

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to announce proposals for a revised company voluntary arrangements procedure following the consultation on the document "Company Voluntary Arrangements and Administration Orders" issued by the Insolvency Service in October 1993. [19212]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have today issued a further consultative document outlining proposals for a new company voluntary arrangement procedure which has been developed in the light of the first consultation exercise. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Our earlier consultation revealed a broad consensus that there should be a short moratorium to allow financially troubled companies a breathing space during which to put together a rescue plan. That view, however, was qualified by concerns about how to safeguard assets during that period.

The scheme set out in this consultative document would allow companies a 28-day moratorium with the minimum of formality. This would give companies in financial difficulty temporary protection from their creditors during which they could put together a rescue plan for agreement by creditors. The scheme also proposes various safeguards to protect lenders and other creditors and to discourage abuse. Comments are sought by 31 July 1995.

I am also arranging for a summary of the responses to the first consultative document to be published and copies will shortly be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Government are still considering issues relating to the proposal for a debt equity mechanism and whether any other measures should be taken to facilitate administrations.

Telecommunications Report

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has yet received a report by the Director General of Telecommunications for the year 1994, as required under section 55 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. [19213]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Yes. The 11th report by the Director General of Telecommunications is being published today. It covers the period 1 January to 31 December 1994. Copies of the report have been laid before each House of Parliament.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17733]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Some 2,000 of the Department's staff can currently be contacted via Internet/X400 service email. For this reason, it is not practicable to list all the addresses. This number will rise to 5,000 over the next 18 months as our office automation programme—OSPREY—is fully implemented. All Ministers will be added to OSPREY during this summer's recess. In the meantime, my own Internet account is taylor@mintech.demon.co.uk.

I have instigated a programme to consider and develop the Department's usage from a strategic perspective, which will consider the potential for full Internet access from OSPREY workstations, along with the creation of a data server dedicated to supply departmental information to the Internet community.

The Department's approach to the information super-highway has been set out in evidence to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and in debates in the House, as well as in the Command Paper, dated November 1994 which is on the Internet at http://www.open.gov.uk/dti/broadband-comms/anx-9.htm.

Raytheon Plant, Broughton

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he has taken to persuade the president of Raytheon to reconsider his decision to close the Raytheon plant in Broughton. [17836]

Mr. Heseltine: Ministers at the DTI and the Welsh Office have met the president of Raytheon and have written to the company. The UK work force at Raytheon and local interests at Broughton have been kept in touch.

Privatised Utilities (Pay Increases)

Mr. Olner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on pay increases for executives in privatised utilities since privatisation. [16448]

Mr. Eggar: Pay increases for executives in the privatised utilities are a matter for the companies and their shareholders and not for the Government.

Coal Gasification

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department is giving to research into the development of coal gasification for the purposes of power generation. [16858]

Mr. Page: My Department views the development of coal gasification for the purpose of power generation as a major element of its clean coal technology R and D programme, which was detailed in energy paper 63 last October. My Department encouraged the formation of an industry-led consortium known as the clean coal power generation group to take forward, with Government assistance, further activities in coal gasification. This consortium consists of GEC Alsthom subsidiaries European Gas Turbines, Stein Industrie and EVT together with PowerGen, Babcock Energy and British Coal's coal technology development division. The initial objective of this consortium is to take forward a power generation technology known as the air blown gasification cycle to a point where its individual components are fully developed. This technology is fully described in a brochure entitled "Towards Cleaner Coal Power Generation" which, along with energy paper 63, can be found in the Libraries of the House. There are currently in excess of 40 projects under way within this and related coal gasification initiatives to a total project value of over £74 million. The DTI contribution to this work is approximately £14 million.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18655]

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend President of the Board of Trade has designated me as the Department's green Minister. The latest outline of the Department's environmental initiatives appear in the expenditure plans report for 1995, Cm 2804. There are close and frequent consultations between Departments on matters of common interest. Representations made by my Department on environmental matters, including the Environment Bill, are consistent with the Department's objectives of stimulating an effective business response to environmental developments and ensuring that the Government's overall environmental policy takes proper account of the impact on business.

Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the expected role of the trading standards inspectors, with regard to enforcing the European Union EMC directive 89/336/EEC; and, in particular, what measures will be taken to ensure that the directive will not be enforced differently in different EU nations. [17417]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Local authority trading standards officers are the principal enforcement agents in the United Kingdom for the electromagnetic compatibility directive, 89/336/EEC. It is expected that they will follow a predominantly complaints-driven enforcement policy and that they will combine market surveillance under this directive with enforcement of other existing, related legislation, such as the low voltage directive, 73/23/EEC.

Administrative co-operation between national enforcement agencies is being developed to facilitate consistency of application throughout the EU. My Department's single market compliance unit will advise and assist, where possible, UK businesses facing barriers to trade within the Union.

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a positive pre-compliance test would comply with the European Union EMC directive 89/336/EEC.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It is for manufacturers to decided how best to comply with the electromagnetic compatibility regulations which implement the EMC directive. Pre-compliance, diagnostic, testing can give a manufacturer a degree of confidence that his product will not breach agreed levels of electromagnetic radiation but the manufacturer cannot be sure of complying with the law if he chooses not to test an example of the finished product. Harmonised European standards provide the clearest route by which a manufacturer can self-certify his products as complying with the essential protection requirements.

Dr. Spink: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the expected total cost of implementing and subsequently enforcing European Union directive EMC 89/336/EEC *(a)* to Her Majesty's

Government and *(b)* to United Kingdom industry and distribution; and what assistance United Kingdom industry and distribution can expect to help them to implement the new directive. [17418]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The cost to central and local government of implementing and enforcing the EMC regulations is expected to be low since enforcement will be undertaken by local authority trading standards officers, as part of their existing role concerning electrical safety.

For manufacturers, it has been estimated that between 2 and 5 per cent. could be added to design costs, although the cost should decline as the proportion of designs taking account of EMC requirements from the outset increases. Technical assistance has been made available to industry via an extensive EMC awareness campaign, including oral advice; guidance publications; articles in technical and trade press; and the formation of 15 regional EMC clubs to help companies understand the legal, technical and business aspects of the directive.

House Collapse, Kidsgrove

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will request the Coal Authority to investigate the causes of the house collapse on 28 March in Kidsgrove, Stoke on Trent; and if he will make a statement. [17787]

Mr. Page: The Coal Authority is currently investigating the cause of this occurrence.

Privatised Utility Companies

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those privatised utilities which, according to the estimates of his Department, have been able to reduce bills to United Kingdom consumers as a result of overseas investment. [16234]

Mr. Eggar: Companies' revenues from any overseas activities are outside the regulated businesses. The money to develop foreign businesses comes from shareholders' funds, not those of UK customers; this means that overseas activities have no effect on UK prices and bills.

Paper (Price)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on changes in the price of paper over the past 12 months; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that these are justified. [18560]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The price of paper is a matter for the commercial judgment of those concerned. I understand that the Director General of Fair Trading has recently considered price increases in the paper products market but has found no evidence to suggest that these were the result of anti-competitive practices. Any evidence of such practices should be brought to the attention of the DGFT.

Nigeria (Visits)

Mr. Wray: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Nigeria since June 1993 listing the Ministers and the reasons for the visit in each case; [17778]

(2) if he will list the exact dates of visits by officials in his Department to Nigeria since June 1993 and the reason for the visit in each case. [17784]

Mr. Needham: In accordance with EU measures announced in 1993, there have been no visits by any Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry during the period specified. Officials from the Department's overseas trade services division have, however, visited Nigeria since June 1993 and the specific dates where available are listed in the table. In each case, the visit was entirely for trade promotion purposes.

Official	*Number of visits*	*Period*
Export Promoter	5	25 January–4 February 1994 14 February–18 February 1994 9 May–13 May 1994 27 November–7 December 1994 19 February–25 February 1995
Grade 7	2	October 1993 February 1994
HEO	8	September 1993 November 1993 April 1994 June 1994 September 1994 25 November–3 December 1994 26 January–3 February 1995 (with successor)
EO	1	26 January–9 February 1995

Precious Metals (Marking)

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if has changed his policy in respect of resistance to moves to permit manufacturers' self-certification under the EU draft directive on the marking of precious metal articles. [17439]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 31 March 1995]:* There has been no change of policy. The Government believe that manufacturers' self-certification offers a lower form of guarantee to consumers than independent marking of precious metal articles, as practised by the United Kingdom assay offices. This was made clear in the Council of Ministers' meeting on March 30, when the current draft directive was not accepted.

Arms Exports

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures Her Majesty's Government will be implementing to ensure that all future transfers of military, security and police equipment, including dual-use technologies, will comply with the resolution passed by the European Parliament on 19 January in respect of bringing all such transfers within the scope of European export controls and making all such transfers apparent; and if he will make a statement. [17140]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* European Parliament resolutions are not binding on either individual member states or on the Council, although its views are noted. Decisions on arms exports remain a national responsibility.

Mr. Wray: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures his Department will be implementing to ensure that all future transfers of military, security and police equipment, including dual-use technologies, will comply with the European Parliament resolution passed on 19 January. [17786]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok, (Mr. Dunnachie).

Dr. David Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the values of loan guarantees of British arms exports in each of the last 10 years. [17525]

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 31 March 1995]:* ECGD support for defence business over the last 10 years is as follows:

Financial year	*Value of defence business (£ million)*
1985–86	208
1986–87	446
1987–88	197
1988–89	707
1989–90	378
1990–91	640
1991–92	276
1992–93	1,591
1993–94	1,973
1994–95	623

The figures for 1994–95 are provisional pending the publication of ECGD's 1994–95 trading accounts.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Delegations

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the "Information Bulletin" on the activities of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union for the period July 1994 to February 1995, which has been sent to him. [19215]

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

Mr. Nicholas Ingram

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the US state of Georgia regarding the proposed electrocution of a British subject, Nicky Ingram; and if he will make a statement. [17774]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 31 March 1995]:* My sympathy is with any family who find themselves in this difficult position. My own views on capital punishment are well known. However, after careful consideration, I am advised that there are no proper grounds for the British Government to intervene. I have therefore not made any representations on Mr. Ingram's behalf.

Ministers (Car Hire)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the rules concerning the use by members of the Government in their official capacity of cars hired from the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [17702]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The Government car service may provide private car hire facilities for members of the Government where a Government car service car and driver are not available.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, what has been the cost of cars hired from the private sector for the transport of members of the Government for each year from 1987 to date. [17702]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

The information as requested is not available.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will hold discussions with the British relatives of Lockerbie victims before taking action on any decision of the United Nations to implement wider oil sanctions against Libya and other actions as a result of the meeting of the American Lockerbie relatives with White House officials. [17857]

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

We shall keep representatives of the British relatives of the Lockerbie victims informed of developments at the United Nations concerning sanctions against Libya and continue to take their views into account in considering how to ensure that those responsible for the bombing are brought to justice.

EDUCATION

Microscopes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what response she is sending to the Royal Microscopical Society in respect of its proposal that there should be a microscope in every school. [16375]

Mr. Forth: Officials replied to the Royal Microscopical Society's proposal on 2 March 1995. The reply welcomed the society's initiative and wished it well, while making it clear that it is for schools and local authorities to decide what equipment they need to meet the requirements of the national curriculum. A copy of the reply has been placed in the Library.

Medical Schools

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what specific financial arrangements are in place to assist medical students; and if she will make a statement. [17709]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies which I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 4 April.

Pupils

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils there were in *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* grant-maintained schools in each local authority area at January. [18345]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested for 1994, the latest date for which information is available, is shown in the table.

Numbers of pupils[1] in maintained schools in each local education authority area in England (January 1994)

	LEA maintained schools	*Grant-maintained schools*
Corporation of London	214	0
Camden	19,610	2,381
Greenwich	36,441	0
Hackney	25,049	0
Hammersmith	14,573	1,237
Islington	23,517	0
Kensington and Chelsea	8,967	944
Lambeth	21,864	4,593
Lewisham	32,007	421
Southwark	28,775	4,133
Tower Hamlets	33,954	891
Wandsworth	20,241	7,181
Westminster	17,033	0
Barking	26,030	0
Barnet	33,906	9,769
Bexley	31,055	3,287
Brent	26,718	8,997
Bromley	28,160	11,803
Croydon	38,213	4,680
Ealing	32,664	7,408
Enfield	36,327	5,791
Haringey	29,608	0
Harrow	27,374	528
Havering	31,341	3,877
Hillingdon	20,043	15,171
Hounslow	32,403	2,123
Kingston upon Thames	15,863	3,149
Merton	23,232	0
Newham	40,255	582
Redbridge	34,393	1,125
Richmond upon Thames	19,038	0
Sutton	17,750	7,572
Waltham Forest	30,642	2,099
Birmingham	163,079	14,802
Coventry	49,913	0
Dudley	43,366	5,054
Sandwell	51,108	653
Solihull	33,368	559
Walsall	43,020	6,366
Wolverhampton	40,552	2,404
Knowsley	27,992	731
Liverpool	81,934	2,366
St. Helens	29,946	0
Sefton	47,168	0
Wirral	51,857	2,107
Bolton	42,429	3,261
Bury	27,814	232
Manchester	70,796	0
Oldham	41,653	0
Rochdale	34,020	2,010
Salford	35,883	430
Stockport	42,970	0
Tameside	35,107	2,371
Trafford	29,833	3,083
Wigan	50,621	0
Barnsley	34,578	0
Doncaster	52,032	0
Rotherham	44,190	0
Sheffield	70,775	2,505
Bradford	83,406	5,565
Calderdale	28,728	4,709
Kirklees	62,567	1,267
Leeds	113,062	1,184
Wakefield	51,922	0
Gateshead	30,558	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	40,749	0
North Tyneside	31,660	0
South Tyneside	26,397	0
Sunderland	51,321	0
Isles of Scilly	291	0
Avon	137,357	1,710
Bedfordshire	81,360	9,567
Berkshire	103,502	9,833
Buckinghamshire	90,109	11,653
Cambridgeshire	84,515	17,274
Cheshire	153,008	2,927
Cleveland	103,146	0
Cornwall	69,977	0
Cumbria	65,372	9,773
Derbyshire	128,591	17,272
Devon	136,651	4,983
Dorset	78,626	9,591
Durham	97,711	0
East Sussex	88,025	0
Essex	146,390	76,532
Gloucestershire	56,666	21,714
Hampshire	201,345	19,180
Hereford and Worcester	94,445	3,643
Hertfordshire	137,829	19,099
Humberside	143,600	341
Isle of Wight	17,955	0
Kent	183,670	51,103
Lancashire	214,486	7,103
Leicestershire	138,347	3,270
Lincolnshire	66,722	22,410
Norfolk	93,702	11,347
North Yorkshire	104,727	0
Northamptonshire	85,417	12,466
Northumberland	51,019	650
Nottinghamshire	156,816	1,837
Oxfordshire	78,400	81
Shropshire	57,984	3,989
Somerset	64,487	631
Staffordshire	163,143	4,470
Suffolk	93,282	0
Surrey	107,933	13,139
Warwickshire	68,726	4,783
West Sussex	94,854	0
Wiltshire	70,552	12,927
England	6,764,552	556,699

[1] Head count of pupils of all ages.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three and four-year-olds in each local education authority were *(a)* in maintained nursery classes and *(b)* in maintained primary schools in each year since 1990; what percentage of the relevant population each figure represents; and what was the percentage change on the previous year in each case. [18625]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the changes to the funding of each post-16 college between 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what changes are forecast for each college in future years. [18348]

Mr. Boswell: Details of the allocation of funding to colleges are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I am therefore asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Funding Councils

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the cost of abolishing the Universities Funding Council; [18604]

(2) what was the cost of abolishing the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council; [18603]

(3) what was the cost of establishing the Higher Education Funding Council. [18606]

Mr. Boswell: There were no direct costs in abolishing the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and the Universities Funding Council. The two councils occupied the same building in Bristol and were already operating as a joint executive before they were dissolved on 31 March 1993 and re-formed on 1 April 1993 as the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The only direct costs of establishing the Higher Education Funding Council were the £500,000 running costs grant paid in 1992–93 to run the new council alongside those it was to replace.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the costs of establishing Ofsted. [18608]

Mr. Boswell: The establishment of Ofsted was contained within the existing departmental provision for running costs, and was not separately identified. In 1992–93, DFE transferred £8.225 million to the vote of the newly created Ofsted. This covered setting up and running costs from formation on 1 September 1992 until the end of the financial year 1992–93.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans she has to improve access; and if she will make a statement. [18592]

Mr. Forth: The Department has staff in London and Darlington. The Teachers Pensions Agency occupies specific areas on the Mowden hall site in Darlington, its accommodation being provided by the Department.

Sanctuary buildings in London was designed to be fully accessible to the disabled. The entrance allows for easy access by wheelchair and there are a limited number of parking spaces in the basement for disabled staff. There are lifts to all floors of the building including the basement for use of the car park. There are male and female toilets for the disabled on every floor. The staff training centre at Park gate in Tothill street is housed on a single floor of an older building. A ramp is available to allow for wheelchair access.

The main Darlington office is at Mowden hall. There is level access to the building. Access for disabled people has been improved over the years to provide:

parking spaces specifically for disabled people;

ramps both portable and static where necessary on site;

a reception desk which has been lowered to make it more user friendly;

lifts which are available from the reception area to all floors of the main building;

toilets for the disabled which are fitted with emergency alarms;

and emergency flashing lights are provided for staff with hearing difficulties.

The staff training centre at Enterprise house in Darlington offers access by a stairmatic chair. There are plans to relocate the staff training centre to the main Mowden hall site by the end of 1995 making it more accessible.

Evacu-chairs are provided on all sites to assist with the evacuation of disabled staff in emergencies.

The Department will be considering what further action could be taken to improve physical access and facilities for disabled staff, as part of its action plan to achieve equality of opportunity for staff with disabilities.

School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of establishing the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. [18602]

Mr. Forth: The estimated total cost of establishing the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, including the cost of winding up the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council, is £4.2 million. These costs will be more than offset by recurrent savings on running costs as a result of replacing two bodies with one. Running costs are estimated at £9.4 million in 1994–95 for SCAA, the first full year of its operation, as against £11.3 million for NCC and SEAC in 1992–93, the last full year of their operation.

National Youth Agency

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the cost of abolishing the National Youth Bureau; [18610]

(2) what was the cost of establishing the National Youth Agency. [18609]

Mr. Boswell: No specific cost resulted from the abolition of the National Youth Bureau, as its staff and functions were taken over by the National Youth Agency on its establishment in April 1991. The grant previously paid to the five national youth service bodies including the National Youth Bureau was channelled through the NYA.

In 1990–91, DFE grant to the national youth service bodies was £1.067 million. In 1991–92, DFE grant to the agency was £1.345 million, which comprised a core grant of £1.165 million and additional grant of £0.180 million. The additional grant included funding for initial start-up costs of the agency.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will name the green Minister for her Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18643]

Mr. Robin Squire: I am the Department's Minister with responsibility for green matters.

The Department works closely with other partners in the education system on environmental matters within school education, teacher training, further and higher education and the management of premises. The revised national curriculum, which will come into force for most pupils in September 1995, requires extensive coverage of environmental matters, particularly through scientific and geographical aspects. Recently the Department, jointly with the Department of the Environment, organised a conference on education about the environment which focused on the effective teaching of the environmental aspects of the national curriculum. In the last six months, the Department has issued guidance for schools on solar energy and on energy-saving measures, while guidance on the schools environmental assessment method is in preparation.

In 1993, the Department drew to the attention of further and higher education institutions the report of the committee set up with the Welsh Office to review the state of environmental education in further and higher education in England and Wales. Implementation of the report's recommendations is largely for the institutions themselves, but the Department is currently considering the proposal for monitoring progress nationally.

"Education Means Business—Private Finance in England"

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the costs of *(a)* publication and *(b)* distribution of her Department's 1994 publication "Education Means Business—Private Finance in England" were; and how many copies were issued and to whom. [18601]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 3 April, *Official Report*, column *921*.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of establishing the Further Education Funding Council. [18605]

Mr. Boswell: The running cost expenditure of the council for 1992–93, the period in which it was established, was £24.4 million, most of which expenditure was devoted to preparing colleges for incorporation. The council's running cost for 1993–94, which related principally to the administration of the new sector, was £18.8 million. In both periods, the process of establishing the council was assisted by the work of officials within my Department. Figures disaggregating the cost of their contributions to the establishment of the council are not available.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of establishing the Teacher Training Agency. [18607]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Eduction spent £67,849 on establishing the Teacher Training Agency. This figure does not include the time spent by officials working on what is now the Education Act 1994. In addition, the Department made available £1,472,151 to the agency in the 1994–95 financial year, which covered further setting up costs as well as the agency's administration.

Education and Youth Ministers Councils

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the outcomes of the Councils of Education Ministers and of Youth Ministers held on 31 March 1995. [19121]

Mr. Boswell: On 31 March, the Council of Education Ministers adopted a resolution on improving and diversifying language learning and teaching within the education systems on the European Union, and reached political agreement to the Council's common position on the Commission proposal to make 1996 the European Year of Lifelong Education and Training.

The Council of Youth Ministers, held on the same day, adopted a resolution on co-operation in the field of youth information and studies concerning youth.

School Finances

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many school governing bodies have set deficit budgets in the current year. [18400]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not collect this information.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list by education authority the total unspent balances in schools at the conclusions of each of the last three financial years. [18554]

Mr. Robin Squire: For the financial year 1993–94, the information requested may be found in the answer given on 1 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), *Official Report*, columns *614–16*. The requisite information for 1992–93 is at present being collated by the Department from the local management of schools outturn statements published by local education authorities for that year, and I will write to my hon. Friend when this work is complete. For 1994–95, the information is not yet available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many parliamentary questions to her Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which she has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18540]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to her Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which she has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18539]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by her Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18535]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to her Department requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18536]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 her Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report;* [18537]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 her Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question. [18538]

Mr. Boswell: Neither the Department nor the House of Commons POLIS unit collects information in the form requested.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list by education authority the cash balances held at the conclusion of each of the last three financial years. [18553]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information will take a few days to gather. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list by education authority in descending order the cash sum per pupil represented by the top slice percentage of the common funding formula. [18069]

(2) if she will list by education authority in descending order the common funding formula top slice percentages. [18068]

(3) if she will list by education authority the amounts agreed by her Department as expenses to be deducted from each local education budget before calculating amounts due to grant-maintained schools under the headings *(a)* corporate management, *(b)* service strategy and regulation, *(c)* premature retirement compensation costs of local education authorities' school staff, *(d)* other, and *(e)* the total for (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [18070]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list each non-departmental body and agency for which she has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since 1979–80; and what are her latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17604]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has responsibility for the following non-departmental public bodies:

Centre for Information on Language, Teaching and Research;
Education Assets Board:
Funding Agency for Schools;
Further Education Funding Council;
Further Education Unit—to 31 March 1995;
Higher Education Funding Council for England;
National Council for Educational Technology;
National Youth Agency;
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority;
Special Educational Needs Tribunal;
Teacher Training Agency.

The Department has one next steps agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency.

Operational and managerial matters are the responsibility of the individual body concerned. I have therefore asked the chairman or chief executive of each body to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Geoffrey Parker to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

I am writing at the request of Tim Boswell, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education, with information you requested in your recent Parliamentary Question about NDPB expenditure.

The Teacher Training Agency was established last September so the figures below represent the estimated outturn for the period from September 1994 to March 1995. We do not have firm estimates for these items for 1995–96.

Expenditure 1994–95	*£000s*
(a) Television advertising	Nil
(b) Radio advertising	Nil
(c) Newspaper advertising	44
(d) Other promotion materials and activities	39
(e) Total (a to d)	83
(f) Proportion of (e) spent on recruitment advertising	53 per cent.

I hope this information is helpful.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Computer Pornography

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *488*, when he expects to receive the report from CCTA on pornography on the Internet; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [17897]

Mr. Horam: I expect to receive a report from CCTA examining all the ethical issues of the Internet, which includes, but also ranges more widely than, pornography, in July. I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18466]

Mr. David Hunt: Since my Department was formed in May 1992, there have been no such instances.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18465]

Mr. David Hunt: Since my Department was formed in May 1992, a total of six questions have been transferred for answer to the chief executives of the agencies of which I am responsible. The figure can be broken down as follows:

1992–93: 2
1993–94: 0
1994–95: 4

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18464]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18462]

(3) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18461]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*. [18463]

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18591]

Mr. Horam: The Cabinet Office, the Central Office of Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office have all appointed departmental disabled persons' officers, DDPOs. The DDPOs each work closely with their respective accommodation services to ensure that they are aware of the needs of disabled staff and visitors.

The London estate of the Cabinet Office consists, largely, of historic listed buildings which were not designed with the needs of disabled people in mind. In the light of this the Cabinet Office has commissioned an "access survey" for its London buildings to determine how they can be made more accessible within the constraints imposed by listed building regulations

For each of my Department's buildings, for which we are the major occupier, a number of measures have been taken to improve access and facilities for the disabled within the rolling programmes of building works and refurbishment. These include: provision of designated car parking spaces where car parks exist; introduction of braille buttons in lifts; provision of toilets for the disabled wherever possible within constraints of building lay-out and lease provisions; access ramps to entrances where practical, and availability of escorts within buildings to help visitors who are visually impaired.

We will continue to build on this approach.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans the Medical Research Council has to initiate research into hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; and if he will make a statement. [17705]

Mr. Horam: The Medical Research Council supports an extensive portfolio of basic and applied research in cardiovascular disease, much of which has direct relevance to the problem of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. However, none of this is specifically addressing the disease as such.

Although there are currently no plans to initiate research specifically into hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, the MRC is happy to consider applications in this field.

Coronary Diseases

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the coronary diseases researched by the Medical Research Council and the amount spent on each, for the last year for which figures are available. [17706]

Mr. Horam: Following is a list of the cardiovascular diseases researched by the Medical Research Council:

Arrhythmia
Atherosclerosis
Atheroma
Cardiomyopathy
Heart failure
Hypercholesterolaemia
Hyperlipidaemia
Hypertension
Ischaemia
Thrombosis

Owing to the significant overlap of funding covering these diseases, and to the interrelation between the above categories, it is impossible to provide specific figures covering each of the diseases. However, in the last financial year for which figures are available, 1993–94, the MRC spent over £6 million directly on cardiovascular research, and over £16 million on research which may have some relevance to the condition.

Executive Agencies

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for this year and each of the past five years, how many employees in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which his Department is responsible who have been employed on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks; or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration are re-employed in the same or similar position at a later date.

Mr. Horam *[pursuant to his reply, 15 March 1995 c. 620–21]:* The figure for the number of people employed by the COI on contracts of less than 51 weeks is 17—3.4 per cent.—and not zero as originally stated.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18653]

Mr. Horam: I am the green Minister for the Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service and Science, its executive agencies, and HMSO and the Central Office of Information. My Department has an environmental strategy and has updated its supporting action plan for 1995; my Department's non-departmental public bodies have also been invited to support energy savings policies. Details of specific actions taken in support of the Department's strategy are given in the Government expenditure plans for the Cabinet Office, Cm 2820, published on 1 March 1995. My Department is involved in discussions on a number of other environmental issues.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's position in negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty in relation to nuclear tests carried out for safety and reliability purposes. [18112]

Mr. David Davis: We are committed to negotiating a comprehensive test ban treaty with an effective verification system and which commands universal adherence. We are studying how best to meet the continuing need to assure the safety and reliability of our deterrent.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent proposals he has received from other states with regard to the review conference of the inhumane weapons convention. [18114]

Mr. David Davis: There is a wide measure of agreement among our NATO allies, EU partners and others on proposals for strengthening protocol II of the convention concerning anti-personnel landmines. These include the extension of the scope of the protocol to non-international armed conflict; new provisions on self-destructing mechanisms, detectable mines and the marking and mapping of minefields, as well as the protection of humanitarian workers in mined areas; and the inclusion of restrictions on transfers in the protocol.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those states that have ratified the 1981 inhumane weapons convention. [18113]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 27 March, *Official Report*, column *442*. The United States of America has now also ratified the convention.

Royal Visits (Costs)

Mr. Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the costs for the last two years and what are the estimated costs for the current year and the next two years of *(a)* the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps and *(b)* royal overseas visits at the request of Government Departments. [18051]

Mr. Baldry: The costs borne by my Department are:

(a) Marshall of the Diplomatic Corps

1992–93: £67,552

1993–94: £67,806

1994–95: £63,101 Estimate

1995–96: £68,848 Estimate

1996–97: £71,742 Estimate

(b) Royal visits overseas at the request of Government Departments

1992–93: £455,695

1993–94: £491,845

1994–95: £560,000 Estimate

1995–96: £477,000 Estimate

1996–97: £489,000 Estimate

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the King of Morocco on Libya sanctions. [18092]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs nor I have had recent discussions about Libya with the King of Morocco.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with President Nelson Mandela and other South African leaders about a rapprochement between Libya and the west. [18091]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had discussions with a number of South African leaders during Her Majesty the Queen's recent state visit to South Africa. The South African Government share our concern that Libya should comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions without further delay.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with President Mitterand the implications of the agreement for large-scale oil exploration rights between the Government of Libya and the French Company Totale for the imposition of United Nations sanctions against Libya. [18199]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *9*, if he will enter into discussions with Djibouti and Morocco on their abstention over sanctions against Libya. [18201]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *8*, following the emergence of new information about the Lockerbie crime, if he will pursue the Lockerbie investigation further with the Government of Finland. [18205]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *9*, if he will specify what the unwarranted criticisms were to which he referred, with regard to the German authorities and the Scottish police in relation to Lockerbie. [18203]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It was reported in the press and media, wrongly, that the German authorities had released Abdul Fatah Ghadanfar before the Scottish police were given an opportunity to interview him and that the Scottish police had not made any efforts to interview him, or his associate Haj Hafez Dalkamouni, in connection with the Lockerbie bombing.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *9*, if the concerns of Her Majesty's Government about Abdul Ghadanfar were known to the German police before his release from arrest. [18191]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 6 March.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *6*, regarding the possible involvement of officials of countries other than Libya in the Lockerbie bombing, if he will name the countries, the possible involvement of whose nationals have been very closely investigated. [18193]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *6*, regarding the possible involvement of officials of countries other than Libya in the Lockerbie bombing if he will make available all available evidence which supports charges to the Government of Germany. [18195]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Security Council has endorsed our demand that Libya make the two accused available for trial in Scotland or the United States. It would not be appropriate to disclose the contents of confidential communications with the prosecuting or judicial authorities of other countries.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *5*, if he will specify what were the differences in detail to which he referred, between the story in relation to which Air Malta brought the action and those contained in the warrants for the arrest of the two accused Libyans. [18197]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 6 March.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has conveyed to the German authorities details of the suitcase of white powder, handled by Mr. Wilson, farmer of Tundergarth Farm near Lockerbie in December 1988, about which information was conveyed to him in a letter of 9 February from the Rev. John Mosey. [18183]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No significant quantities of drugs were recovered in the course of the Lockerbie investigation, although some small "user" amounts of cannabis were found. Allegations that a quantity of white powder drugs were found in a suitcase recovered at Tundergarth Mains farm were investigated some years ago in the early stages of the investigation. There was no substance to the allegations and nothing to be conveyed to the German authorities.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *6*, what action he has taken to offer Volke Rath, state prosecutor at Frankfurt, additional evidence against two accused Libyans, to enable him to bring proceedings in Germany. [18184]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Security Council has endorsed our demand that Libya make the two accused available for trial in Scotland or the United States. It would not be appropriate to disclose the contents of confidential communications with the prosecuting or judicial authorities of other countries.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *7*, whether the Scottish police asked or suggested to the Bundeskriminalamt or Verfassungschutz that they could directly question Mr. Ghadanfar and Mr. Dalkamouni. [18185]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 6 March.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *9*, if he will enter into discussions with Egypt and Sudan about Lockerbie and their opposition to sanctions against Libya. [18202]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have regular contacts with the Governments of both countries on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *6*, on the consideration of evidence of the involvement of officials of countries other than Libya in the Lockerbie bombing, what new information has been considered since 6 March. [18192]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 6 March.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet Esmat Abdul Meguid and the Arab League on the issue of Libya's position in relation to Lockerbie in the next three months. [18194]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I hope to meet Dr. Meguid in London today.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *6*, when he estimates that the issue of the United States decision that the Montreal convention, requiring attempts at conciliation and arbitration, should not be applied in relation to Pan Am 103 and Lockerbie will be heard before the International Court of Justice; and if he will outline the position of Her Majesty's Government. [18196]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The timing of any hearing is a matter for the International Court of Justice. The United Kingdom does not accept that Libya enjoys rights under the Montreal convention in relation to the sabotage of Pan Am 103.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation have been made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by Professor Dr. John Buontempo, former Maltese ambassador to Arab countries, in connection with the Lockerbie bombing. [18198]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Professor Buontempo has explained to Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials his personal view that the trial of the two Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing should be held in Malta.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's ambassador in Cairo last had discussions with Dr. Meguid, Secretary General of the Arab League, on Lockerbie; and what was the result. [18200]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Her Majesty's ambassador at Cairo has had a number of discussions on Lockerbie with the Secretary General of the Arab League. Dr. Meguid shares our concern that the issue should be resolved urgently, in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *8*, if he will support the proposal by the hon. Member for Eastwood, (Mr. Stewart) to allow the Scottish courts to operate outside Scotland. [18204]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

There is no need for Scottish courts to operate outside Scotland. There are arrangements which allow the evidence of witnesses who are abroad to be taken before a local judge or relayed by direct television link to the courts in Scotland. We have no reason to believe that the Libyans will surrender the two accused for trial before a Scottish court sitting aboard. The Scottish lawyer representing the two accused has most recently suggested trial by a panel of judges headed by a Scottish judge. This is simply the latest in a long line of inappropriate and often contradictory proposals, none of which satisfies the requirement of the Security Council that the accused be produced for trial in Scotland or the United States.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18654]

Mr. Baldry: I am the FCO green Minister for both the diplomatic and development wings.

I have set up an environmental management committee to produce a departmental action plan on green issues affecting the domestic arrangements of the FCO.

Through officials, I have been concerned with reaching an acceptable procedure with the Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Environment for trying to ensure that timber and timber products are purchased from sustainably managed sources.

I have also, through officials, been actively involved in the consultation process with other Government Departments about the Environment Bill.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18598]

Mr. Goodlad: This Department ensures that all new refurbishment projects build in access and facilities for disabled people, apart from areas which are protected on heritage grounds. Disabled staff and visitors have access to all floors of the FCO's main building. There is a wheelchair access to the FCO's only public office in London. Car parking for disabled people is also available.

When planning new building work overseas, the FCO complies with UK and EU building regulations which require disabled access to non-domestic buildings. Where the local standard is higher, the FCO meets local requirements.

The Overseas Development Administration's sites in London and East Kilbride provide disabled access to the buildings, including lifts to all floors. The ODA is considering the installations of stairlifts to two areas of the London office currently inaccessible to wheelchair users.

The Natural Resources Institute's accommodation was checked and approved by the Department of Employment's disablement advisory service in the late 1980s.

Nigeria (Visits)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the exact dates of ministerial visits to Nigeria since June 1993, listing the Ministers and the reason for the visit in each case. [17779]

Mr. Baldry: There has been no ministerial visit to Nigeria since my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey last visited in January 1993.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the exact dates of visits by officials in his Department to Nigeria since June 1993 and the reason for the visit in each case. [17783]

Mr. Baldry: Details of such visits are not held centrally and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Burundi. [17825]

Mr. Baldry: The security situation in Burundi remains volatile. We are deeply concerned about developments and will continue to monitor events closely. We are working with the international community—and with the Secretary General's special representative, Mr. Ould

Abdallah, in particular—to support the moderates from all sides in the Government who have agreed to work towards restoring public confidence and consolidate national reconciliation and democracy.

Ethiopia

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made to whether the Government in Ethiopia is breaching human rights; and if he will make a statement. [15332]

Mr. Baldry: We are concerned about the human rights situation in Ethiopia and take every opportunity to stress to the transitional Government the importance of making real progress in this area.

HEALTH

NHS Executive Publications

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pamphlets the national health service executive has published since April 1991; if she will list for each publication the number published, the title, the recipients and the cost; and what was the total cost. [16167]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 25 February 1993, columns *668-71*, and on 21 October 1993, columns *311-14*, and to the reply that my right hon. Friend the then Minister of Health gave the hon. Member for Brightside on 28 March 1994, columns *595-96*, for information about pamphlets, leaflets and brochures issued by the national health service executive between April 1991 and March 1994. In 1993–94, seven further publications were issued. These were:

Title		
Grassroots Issues 1–6	cost £3,814	Issued to Mental Health Carers and Professionals
Creating Compatible Careers	cost £2,350	Issued to reference/nursing libraries, female health professionals on management programmes.

A list of pamphlets and brochures issued in 1994–95 will be placed in the Library shortly.

As a major employer, with responsibility for running a service used by the public, it is important that the NHS should give better information about the range of services it provides.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which she has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year sine 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since 1979–80; and what are her latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17634]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested for the Department's non-departmental public bodies could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The chief executives of the Department's four agencies have been asked to reply to the hon. Member on those parts which fall within their areas of responsibility.

Letter from K. Jones To Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 31 March 1995:

Expenditure on Advertising

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, about expenditure on advertising, as part of it falls within my area of responsibility.

The Medicines Control Agency has not carried out any advertising using television, radio and newspapers. Nor has it produced any promotional materials beyond those relating to the Agency's statutory functions. The Medicines Control Agency was established in June 1991 and figures relating to the expenditure on recruitment advertising are available from 1992.

The sums involved are:

1992/93: £14,800
1993/94: £27,701
1994/95: £36,326
1995/96: £45,000 (forecast)

Letter from Alan Kent to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply for the Medical Devices Agency (MDA) to your recent Parliamentary Question about expenditure on advertising and promotional materials and activities.

The MDA was launched on 27 September 1994. Prior to that publicity services were paid for as part of the Department's overall expenditure. Since then MDA has spent £40k on newspaper advertising, to recruit 9 staff. There was no expenditure in this period on television or radio advertising for any purpose.

Spending on promotional materials and activities was £105k in the same period, including publicity material connected with the launch; none was for recruitment purposes.

We are in discussion with the Department about transferring a publicity budget to the Agency for 1995–96, based on last year's spend.

Letter from John Locke to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, as part of it falls within my area of responsibility.

NHS Estates was launched as an executive Agency of the Department of Health in April 1991. In response to your question:

a) and b) No expenditure has been incurred in television advertising or radio advertising.

c) Newspaper advertising spending to date from April 1991 totals £24,500. Totals spent in each year are as follows:

1991/92: not available
1992/93: not available
1993/94: not available
1994/95: £24,5000
1995/96: £12,000 (budgeted)

d) Spending on promotional materials and activities to date totals £693,978.14. Totals spent in each year are as follows:

1991/92: £275,000
1992/93: £164,000
1993/94: £114,450
1994/95: £140,528.24
1995/96: £52,000 (budgeted)

All newspaper expenditure relates to recruitment advertising. Annual recruitment advertising information is only available from

April 1994. Prior to this services were provided by the Department of Health. None of the spending on promotional material and activities relate to recruitment.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as part of it falls within my area of responsibility.

The only publicity undertaken by the Agency relates to the NHS Pension Scheme and is directed to NHS staff and employers. We do not advertise on television, radio or in newspapers. Promotional activities undertaken during 1994–95 and 1995–96 were:

representation at 5 NHS Conferences at a total cost of £10,044.00;

the insertion of information about the NHS Pension Scheme in the National Association of Health Authorities & Trusts (NAHAT's) diary at a total cost of £1,327.75;

seminars held in England and Wales and booklets printed for all NHS employees about changes to the NHS Pension Scheme Regulations at a total cost of £75,234.32.

We did not engage in recruitment advertising.

NHS Accountability

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she will take to improve democratic accountability in the national health service; and if she will make a statement. [177881]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) on 17 January, columns *440–42*.

Baby Milk Manufacturers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what regulations exist in the NHS on sponsorship by *(a)* manufacturers of infant formula milk, *(b)* distributors of infant formula milk and *(c)* Bounty Services Ltd.; and to what extent these regulations vary between trust and non-trust hospitals; [18399]

(2) if she will list the occurrences in the past 10 years of sponsorship in the NHS by *(a)* manufacturers of infant formula milk, *(b)* distributors of infant formula milk and *(c)* Bounty Services Ltd. [18398]

Mr. Sackville: Advice on commercial sponsorship in the national health service does not distinguish between that provided by the baby milk industry and that provided by other commercial sponsors. No information is available centrally on the sponsorship provided by the baby milk industry to health authorities and trusts.

General advice is contained in "Income Generation: A Guide to Local Initiative", issued under cover of HN(89)9. Advice on commercial sponsorship of posts and of attendance by staff at relevant conferences, courses and other events is contained in HSG(93)5, "Standards of business conduct for NHS staff". Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Section 64 Grants

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the grants given under section 64 for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96. [18409]

Mr. Bowis: Grants totalling £19.663 million were awarded to 369 voluntary organisations in England under the section 64 general scheme during 1994–95. Details have been placed in the Library. Information on grants given during 1995–96 will be made available at the end of that financial year in the usual way.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the National Drugs Advisory Committee working party report on solvent abuse is to be published. [18208]

Mr. Bowis: Shortly.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what authority the salaries of practice managers in general practitioner fundholding are paid. [18914]

Mr. Malone: General practitioners are independent self-employed contractors to the national health service and, as employers, are responsible for the salaries of their staff, including practice managers.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of fundholding practices whose patients are currently not being admitted to hospital for elective surgery because the practices have reached their financial limits; and if she will make a statement. [18257]

Mr. Malone: All national health service purchasers—district health authorities and fundholding general practitioners—are responsible for managing resources, to best meet the health needs of patients. Within this, all emergency cases are seen immediately, urgent cases are placed on a common waiting list and for non-urgent cases, national or local patients charter standards apply.

Listeriosis

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of listeriosis were recorded in each of the past five years; and what were the main causes. [18918]

Mr. Sackville: The number of cases of systemic listeriosis reported to the public health laboratory service in England and Wales in the last five years is as follows:

1990: 115
1991: 127
1992: 106
1993: 102
1994: 115

The main cause of infection in these cases is unknown.

The report of the World Health Organisation informal working group on foodborne listeriosis, concluded that the primary means of transmission of listeria monocytogenes to humans is through contamination of foodstuffs. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library.

Social Services

Mr. David Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is made available via the Liverpool standard spending assessment per child at risk; and what are the figures for *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Wandsworth, *(d)* Westminster and *(e)* the English average. [18949]

Mr. Bowis: The figures for the children's social services standard spending assessment per child at risk for 1995–96 are as follows:

England: £15,548
Liverpool: £13,622
Birmingham: £17,285

Manchester: £15,828
Wandsworth: £27,369
Westminster: £31,293

The variation in the figure mainly reflects the variation in the proportion of residents under 18 years in non-white ethnic groups in each of the authorities.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the work that she has commissioned into the children's social services standard spending assessments to be completed; if it will be ready for incorporation into the 1996–97 provisional standard spending assessments settlement; how many people are working on the study; if its findings will be retrospective; and what particular consideration is being given to the Liverpool children's social services standard spending assessments. [18933]

Mr. Bowis: Some exploratory work has been commissioned and shall be completed in May. The timing of any further research depends on the findings of the exploratory work but it is not expected that the research will affect standard spending assessments for 1996–97. One person is currently working part-time on the research. Any findings will not be applied retrospectively. No particular consideration is being given to any single local authority's children's social services standard spending assessment.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account she takes of the economic index in determining Liverpool's social services standard spending assessment; what significance she attaches to ethnicity in determining the unit cost in relation to social services care; and what weight is given to economic factors in comparison to ethnicity in deciding the social services standard spending assessment. [18948]

Mr. Bowis: Neither the economic index nor any general economic factors are used in the calculation of social services standard spending assessments. An ethnicity factor is included as it has been shown to be related to the unit cost of children's services.

Dental Services

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to announce the Government's plans for the future of the general dental service following the consultation of the Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry." [19125]

Mr. Malone: I am today writing to all dentists in England setting out the Government's proposals for the future of national health service dentistry. Ministers in the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices are writing in similar terms to the dentists in their countries.

I am outlining a package of reform that will ensure access to high quality oral health care for the patient, stability for the dental profession and value for money for the taxpayer. These reforms will ensure that the oral health of the nation's children continues to improve. All treatment which is clinically essential will continue to be available in the national health service, as it is now.

As set out in "Improving NHS Dentistry", all present exemptions and remissions from patient dental charges are to remain unchanged. This announcement does not include any changes to the structure or level of dental charges.

"Improving NHS Dentistry" drew on Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's review of dental remuneration and the Health Select Committee's report on dental services. It set out two options for short-term reform of the current system of paying dentists. The first was a system of sessional fees which would reward dentists for the time spent treating NHS patients. This system will not be pursued as a short-term option.

The other option was to reform the current fee-based system of paying dentists and I am today announcing a package of reforms which will achieve this. The package has five components:

(1) The Government's highest priority is to sustain and develop the improvements in child oral health. We therefore intend to improve the capitation system currently in place for the care of children by relating payments to dentists to disease levels in children most in need. Details will be discussed with the profession.

(2) In adult care, we will introduce more rigorous prior approval procedures for monitoring treatment to ensure that the general dental service provides only those treatments which are clinically essential and for which there is no clinically acceptable, less costly, alternative.

(3) We also wish to reform the system of continuing care payments which dentists receive for adults on their lists to ensure better value for taxpayers' money. The continuing care relationship between dentists and patients will remain. We will discuss changes with the profession. If reform proves not to be possible, the Government will reconsider the future of these payments.

(4) We intend to develop the role of the community dental service to meet the needs of patients in areas of the country where there is difficulty obtaining NHS treatment under the general dental service. This will include, subject to Parliamentary approval and the passage in due course of any necessary legislation, allowing the community dental service to levy charges. All charge exemption and remission arrangements that apply in the general dental service will apply equally in the community dental service.

(5) The Government also intend to discuss with the profession the issue of past overpayments under the previous remuneration system and how we can together ensure financial stability in the general dental service. Providing satisfactory progress is made in the fundamental review of dental remuneration, the Government will not rule out waivers of past overpayments.

I reaffirm the Government's aim of introducing a system of local contracts between health authorities and dental practices similar to that which operates elsewhere in the health service. "Improving NHS Dentistry", our Green Paper published last year, noted that such a system would need careful piloting and evaluation before any decision were taken on nationwide introduction. Primary legislation is required to set up pilots. Over one third of local dental committees said that they were prepared to take part in pilot schemes. The Government therefore intend to seek an appropriate opportunity, in due course, for the necessary legislation. Meanwhile, we are keen to work with the profession and other interested groups to develop the proposals further. The system of paying dentists through sessional payments, set out as an option in the Green Paper, can be tested as a part of this pilot scheme.

The Government remain committed to an accessible, high quality NHS dental service and believe that the measures now proposed will provide stability and security for NHS dentistry. They will ensure the correct balance between the prevention and treatment of disease, deliver increased quality of care for patients and promote better use of resources by targeting areas of greatest need.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were deregistered by family health services authority area for the periods (i) 2 July 1992 to 31 March 1993, (ii) 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 and (iii) since 1 April 1994. [18575]

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each family health service authority area, and in total, requested help in finding a dentist (i) between 2 July 1992 and 31 March 1993, (ii) between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994 and (iii) since 1 April 1994. [18576]

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library. Family health services authorities consistently report that they can help patients to find national health service dentists.

Prescriptions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to include mental illness in the list of medical conditions which confer exemption from prescription charges; and if she will make a statement. [17714]

Mr. Malone: None. The list of exempt conditions was, and still is, limited to those which

> "need continuous medication for"

life

> "long periods and which admit no discretion"

by doctors

> "as to identification of individuals".

The list has been reviewed a number of times since 1968. No changes have been made.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total *(a)* amount raised from prescription charges *(b)* the expenditure on the system of NHS prescriptions for medication within the NHS and *(c)* the difference between *(a)* and *(b)* for each financial year since 1979–80. [18252]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Total (a) annual income from prescription charges collected by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors and from the sale of prepayment certificates by family health service authorities; (b) annual expenditure on the family health services drugs bill and dispensing fees; and (c) the difference between (a) and (b) in England 1979–80 to 1993–94

£ million

Year	*(a)* *Income from prescription charges and prepayment certificates*	*(b)* *Expenditure on FHS drugs bill and dispensing fees*[1]	*(c)* *Difference between (a) and (b)*
1979–80	39	790	751
1980–81	71	974	903
1981–82	87	1,125	1,038
1982–83	103	1,290	1,187
1983–84	110	1,431	1,321
1984–85	121	1,551	1,430
1985–86	128	1,657	1,529
1986–87	148	1,787	1,639
1987–88	158	1,972	1,814
1988–89	177	2,236	2,059
1989–90	189	2,461	2,272
1990–91	206	2,640	2,434
1991–92	215	2,920	2,705
1992–93	242	3,299	3,057
1993–94	265	3,628	3,363

Total (a) annual income from prescription charges collected by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors and from the sale of prepayment certificates by family health service authorities; (b) annual expenditure on the family health services drugs bill and dispensing fees; and (c) the difference between (a) and (b) in England 1979–80 to 1993–94 *£ million*

Note:

[1] Includes the cost of prescriptions written by general medical practitioners and general dental practitioners and the remuneration paid to community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors for dispensing them. Excludes the cost of prescriptions written by hospitals for out-patients and dispensed by community pharmacists.

NHS Executive Business Plan, 1995–96

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available about the role of the NHS executive and its main objectives and tasks in the coming year. [19336]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national health service executive has produced a business plan for 1995–96 which describes the executive's role, its principal objectives and tasks and the context in which these objectives will be carried out. Copies of the plan will be placed in the Library.

Caller Line Identification

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which ambulance services have access to caller line identification; which have plans for its introduction; which have requested caller line identification but have been denied access; and if she will make a statement. [17707]

Mr. Sackville: Caller line identification is not yet available to ambulance services.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to change the regulations concerning women doctors and the NHS pension scheme; and if she will make a statement. [17710]

Mr. Malone: None.

Out-Patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS in England of the non-attenders to out-patient appointments in 1993–94. [17711]

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available.

Glaucoma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated number of people over 17 years of age with glaucoma in the United Kingdom. [17872]

Mr. Sackville: It is estimated that in England for all ages there were 101,000 patients suffering from glaucoma who consulted a general practitioner during 1991–92. Less than 0.5 per cent. of these were under 24 years of age. Source: Morbidity Statistics from General Practice, Fourth national Study.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Sight Tests

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had from the British Medical Association and the Association of Optometrists on the effect of eye examination charges on those aged over 65 years. [18258]

Mr. Malone: The Association of Optometrists and the British Medical Association have written to me with a copy of their joint document, "Free Eye Examinations for the over 65s", which we are studying.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to assess the effect on the elderly of charges for eye examinations; and if she will make a statement. [18170]

Mr. Malone: None. Elderly people who are in receipt of income support, family credit or disability working allowance are entitled to a free national health service sight test, and those in receipt of a low income who have difficulty in paying for their optical costs, can claim help under the NHS low-income scheme.

Occupational Health

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will indicate the measures her Department undertakes to address occupational health; and if she will make a statement. [18256]

Mr. Sackville: "The Health of the Nation" White Paper, Cm 1986, identified the workplace as an important setting for the promotion of good health. The Department has set up a multi-disciplinary steering group to devise a practical means of encouraging employers to undertake voluntary health promotion activities. In addition, the health at work in the national health service programme has been running successfully now for nearly three years.

Guidance on "Occupational Health Services for NHS Staff" HSG(94)51 was issued to NHS employers on 6 December 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research into myalgic encephalomyelitis has been conducted in each of the last five years; and at what cost. [18573]

Mr. Sackville: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC has been funding a study at the Institute of Psychiatry, the estimated cost of which is £91,000, to investigate chronic fatigue in general practitioners' attenders. The researchers at the institute are attempting to find ways to help people with chronic fatigue cope with their disease and regain their health. The MRC is always willing to receive and consider soundly based research proposals in competition with other applications.

Additionally, there is much basic science which is relevant to identifying and understanding possible mechanisms of chronic fatigue syndrome, such as neurotransmitters, immunology, which is taking place but which is not necessarily directly identified as related to CFS. The Department of Health also keeps in touch with research being funded by bodies such as the Linbury Trust.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the incidence and causes of, and departmental policy towards, myalgic encephalomyelitis. [18574]

Mr. Sackville: We recognise what is increasingly being referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome as a potentially debilitating and distressing complex. Unfortunately, the causes of CFS are not understood, nor is there a generally agreed method of treatment. While a number of definitions, disease descriptions or diagnostic criteria have been proposed, there is still no general consensus amongst the medical professions or among patient groups as to which should be used. This hampers research, and studies on the prevalence of the condition. There is no diagnostic test for CFS and diagnosis depends upon the patients symptoms/signs falling into one of these disease descriptions. Until these matters are resolved, there is no possibility of establishing the true incidence of CFS.

The national task force on CFS, PVFS—post viral fatigue syndrome—and ME has produced a report; the task force is autonomous of the Department. With a view to securing progress and promoting the development of a professional consensus, the chief medical officer has invited the Conference of Colleges to consider the report. The views of the Conference of Colleges will be of much assistance to the Department in helping to determine the best way forward.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans she has to improve access; and if she will make a statement. [18587]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health is clearly committed to improving access for disabled people to all departmental buildings. For example, we are currently considering the recommendations of an independent access audit report which we commissioned on Richmond house. We are also mindful of the need to consider wider access issues, including the availability of information and publicity material.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will name the green Minister for her Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18641]

Mr. Sackville: The green Minister for my Department is the Baroness Cumberledge, the Under-Secretary of State.

My Department is committed to sound environmental stewardship and its significant achievements over the past year are listed in paragraph 5.92 of the departmental report 1995, Cm 2812, copies of which are available in the Library.

My Department has contributed to the digest on green housekeeping in Government Departments which is being prepared for publication by the Department of the Environment.

The Government have recently published an account of its achievements in "This Common Inheritance 1995" Cm 2822.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many qualified doctors were employed three years ago and currently by the Benefits Agency medical service; and how many more he expects to employ to cope with the introduction of incapacity benefit. [17721]

Mr. Hague: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical service is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about doctors employed by the Benefits Agency Medical Services.

All the doctors employed by Medical Services are fully qualified registered medical practitioners who have several years experience. Three years ago (1992) the Department of Social Security employed 211 Medical Officers. As at January 1995 the Benefits Agency employed 182 Medical Advisers (previously known as Medical Officers).

The Benefits Agency Medical Services has already recruited 91 additional doctors for Incapacity Benefit and is expecting to recruit a further 60 from a second recruitment exercise which has just been completed, making a total of 151. The additional 151 doctors have been recruited initially on two year fixed term appointments.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the Benefits Agency medical service *(a)* three years ago and *(b)* currently; and what estimates have been made of costs over the next three years. [17720]

Mr. Hague: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical service is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the cost of the Benefits Agency Medical Services.

The internal record of Medical Services show costs in the year 1991/92 were £60m.

It should be noted that three years ago the costs of Medical Services were included in Benefits Agency central budgets. Not all the costs of the Medical Services were separated from the costs of other Benefits Agency Directorates. For example, this figure does not include accommodation costs, administrative staff costs, bulk purchased supplies, support services etc. It does however include costs of medical evidence obtained in connection with Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and War Pensions which have since been re-allocated to the appropriate directorate or Agency.

The cost of the Benefits Agency Medical Services for the current year is £38m. The drop in the costs is as a result of the devolution of costs of medical evidence in connection with Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and War Pensions to the appropriate directorate or Agency.

The estimated cost for the year 1995/96 is £60m. This figure includes the re-allocation of administrative support costs into Medical Services from elsewhere in the Benefits Agency; the costs of the additional volume of claims being reviewed for the new Incapacity Benefit; and the additional volume of claims expected for disability benefits.

It is projected that the costs of the Benefits Agency Medical Services over the following two years will be £70m per year. The projected rise takes into account the increased volumes of claims being reviewed for Incapacity Benefit.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a regional and national breakdown of the sums of money recovered by the compensation recovery unit accompanied by a breakdown of the distribution of amounts of money recovered. [17812]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for a breakdown of the sums of money recovered and distributed by the Compensation Recovery Unit.

Information relating to regions could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

I have provided, at Annex A, a national breakdown by benefit of the monies recovered and allocated in respect of the various benefits during the 1994/95 financial year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit	*Amount recovered and reallocated £000s*	*Percentage of total amount*
Invalidity Benefit (IVB)	51,912	47.1
Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)	17,270	15.7
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB)	12,511	11.4
Income Support (IS)	7,999	7.2
Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	6,601	5.9
Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA)	5,237	4.7
Sickness Benefit (SB)	4,391	3.9
Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)	1,520	1.4
Mobility Allowance (MobA)	1,039	0.9
Attendance Allowance (AA)	876	0.8

Benefit	*Amount recovered and reallocated £000s*	*Percentage of total amount*
Unemployment Benefit (UB)	355	0.3
Constant Attendance Allowance (CAA)	245	0.2
Exceptionally Severe Disablement Allowance (ESDA)	62	0.05
Disablement Working Allowance (DWA)	54	0.04
Retirement Allowance (RA)	5	0.004
Family Credit (FAMC)	0.6	0.0005
Total	110,081	

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of all statistics collected on the work of the compensation recovery unit. [17813]

Mr. Roger Evans: Statistics for the 1994–95 year will be placed in the Library today. Thereafter, statistics collated on a quarterly basis will be placed in the Library regularly.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when Mr. Barry Natton of Nab Wood, Noctorum road, Birkenhead, will receive a reply from the disability living allowance centre in Blackpool to a letter he wrote on 10 March 1994 and on which he sent reminder letters on 6 September 1994 and 5 January 1995. [18577]

Mr. Hague: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Frank Field, dated 5 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding correspondence from Mr Barry Natton to the Disability Benefits Unit.

Unfortunately we have not been able to find any trace of the specific correspondence referred to within the Parliamentary Question despite extensive searches.

I am concerned that there is an outstanding issue still to be resolved with the Benefits Agency. I have therefore arranged for a member of staff to visit Mr. Natton at his home to afford him opportunity to discuss any aspect of the case.

I am sorry that my reply cannot be more helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women aged 60 years or more residing in the Clyde coast and Cowal area have had their invalidity benefit payments suspended while Commissioner Skinner's decision has been pronounced upon by the English law courts and the European Court of Justice. [16699]

Mr. Hague: The administration of invalidity benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 4 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about suspensions of Invalidity Benefit (IVB) payments in the Clyde Coast and Cowal area.

Information has been provided relating to those customers resident in the area administered by the offices of the Benefits Agency's Clyde Coast and Cowal District, which does not necessarily correspond with county or borough boundaries.

The latest information available is based on the number of cases identified at 31 March 1994. At that date 480 IVB cases had payment suspended in whole or in part.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of Social Security how many women aged 60 years or more residing in *(a)* the Clyde coast and Cowal area of Scotland and *(b)* the rest of Scotland, England and Wales have had the suspension of invalidity benefit set aside on the grounds of hardship. [16700]

Mr. Hague: The administration of invalidity benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 4 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about suspensions of Invalidity Benefit payments in the Clyde Coast and Cowal and other areas of Scotland; in England, and in Wales.

Information has been provided relating to those customers resident in the area administered by the offices of the Benefits Agency's Clyde Coast and Cowal District, which does not necessarily correspond with county or borough boundaries.

The numbers of customers who have had suspensions of IVB lifted in the areas in question are as follows:

Area	*Number*
Clyde Coast and Cowal Area	15
Rest of Scotland	249
Wales	26
England	704

The figures were obtained from a clerical count of affected cases maintained by BA offices within each area. The information provided is the latest available and is based on the position at 31 March 1994.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of invalidity benefit in each of the area directorates of the Benefits Agency and in each Benefits Agency district in each area, at the latest date for which figures are available. [17719]

Mr. Hague: The administration of invalidity benefit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 4 April 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Invalidity Benefit (IVB) recipients.

The information requested is provided in the tables attached at Appendices 1–4, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

The statistics relating to numbers of recipients were obtained from a 100% clerical count of cases within the offices of each BA District at 28 February 1995, and represent the latest information available.

The figures include a very small number of customers who are entitled to IVB but are not actually receiving the benefit; for example, because they are receiving an overlapping benefit payable at a higher rate.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing, for each year since 1987 *(a)* the total amount of cash losses due to irrecovable payments of pensions, etc., income support and family benefits recorded during the year, *(b)* the total amount of errors in benefit payments recorded and *(c)* the total savings for the year from anti-fraud initiatives.

Mr. Roger Evans: *[pursuant to his reply 16 December 1994, Official Report, col 933–36].* I am advised that Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, is writing again to clarify his reply. I am arranging for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library together with any additional information.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 4 April 1995:

I am writing to clarify the information provided to you in my letter of 16 December 1994 in response to your Parliamentary Question of 8 December in which you asked for information about benefits cash losses, errors, and savings from anti-fraud initiatives.

Unfortunately, erroneous information was included in the table attached to my reply as Appendix A. The discrepancies relate to the details given on losses due to irrecoverable payments of supplementary benefit/income support for the years 1992/93 and 1993/94. I have attached a revised table giving the corrected figures.

I am sorry that my reply contained erroneous information and for the fact that it has taken so long to identify this. I apologise for any confusion this may have caused.

Appendix A—corrected

Losses due to irrecoverable and unrecovered overpayments of income support and family benefits

Year	Supplementary benefit/income support £000s	Family benefits £000s
1986–87	31,987	3,234
1987–88	32,024	2,718
1988–89	41,112	3,333
1989–90	40,211	3,901
1990–91	28,608	3,417
1991–92	32,974	3,908
1992–93	46,612	4,073
1993–94	55,821	3,730
Total	309,349	28,314

Source:
1986–1991: vote 2 Supplementary benefits/income support. 1986–1991: vote 3 Family benefits. 1991–1994: vote 1 Amalgamated pension benefits/income support/family benefits.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will consider issuing new guidelines to benefit offices for use when they process an application from a 16 or 17-year-old claiming estrangement from his or her parents; [16878]

(2) what is his Department's policy of ensuring that steps are taken to contact parents if a 16 or 17-year-old claims income support claiming estrangement from his or her parents; [16880]

(3) if it is his Department's practice to require benefit offices to inform parents of the reasons given by a 16 or 17- year-old child when claiming estrangement in pursuit of a claim for income support. [16879]

Mr. Roger Evans: We will be issuing an amendment to the guidelines on claims for income support under the severe hardship provision. Claims to income support are confidential, but benefit offices should ask young people to provide evidence in support of their claim where they say they are estranged. Offices should make careful inquiry into the circumstances and seek to contact the parents direct if such action would be appropriate. If the young person declines to co-operate, the office should consider whether it has enough evidence on which to make a judgment as to the existence or otherwise of severe hardship.

Pensions Bill

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes the amendments made to the Pensions Bill *[Lords]* in another place have made to the figures in tables 1, "Estimated Cost of National Insurance Benefit", and table 2, "Estimated Financial Effect on the National Insurance Fund" of the proposed changes which appear in the Government Actuary's Report on the Pensions Bill *[Lords]* (Cm 2714); and if he will publish amended tables. [17723]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The main effects on the national insurance fund of the Pensions Bill *[Lords]* and amendments to it in another place were set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill published on 21 March 1995.

The estimated expenditure effects of the amendments to paragraph 5 of schedule 4 assume that "the best 44 years" rule in the calculation of SERPS is intended to operate in the same way as the original "best 20 years" rule. This amendment would have no effect on the national insurance fund before 2022. Thereafter, costs would rise to reach around £1 billion in 2030, £1.9 billion in 2040 and £2.5 billion in 2050. Versions of tables 1 and 2 from the Govnerment Actuary's report on the Bill allowing for this amendment are given in the table.

As drafted, the actual effect of the clauses providing for the treatment of pension rights on divorce would depend on how they are interpreted by the courts. The estimate of £25 million in 2010–11 given in the financial memorandum to the Bill represents the maximum possible increase in the cost of NI benefits resulting from these amendments. Given this uncertainty, the figure is not included in the table.

Table 1

Estimated cost of National Insurance benefits

(£ billion at 1994–95 prices)

	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31	2040–41	2050–51
EXISTING SCHEME						
Retirement pensions:						
Basic pension	29.8	33.7	39.8	46.9	48.2	46.6
Earnings-related pension	4.2	9.2	14.5	18.7	19.5	19.3

Table 1
Estimated cost of National Insurance benefits

(£ billion at 1994–95 prices)

	2000–01	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*	*2040–41*	*2050–51*
Widows' benefits:						
Flat-rate	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
Earnings-related	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Incapacity benefits:						
Flat-rate	5.1	6.2	6.6	6.3	5.9	6.0
Earnings-related	0.6	0.1	—	—	—	—
Other benefits	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Total	42.2	51.7	63.4	74.2	76.0	74.2
AFTER PROPOSED CHANGES						
Retirement pensions:						
Basic Pension	29.8	33.6	35.2	41.9	44.5	42.3
Earnings-related pension	4.2	8.4	10.9	13.0	12.1	12.4
Widows' benefits:						
Flat-rate	0.7	0.6	1.2	1.1	0.9	1.0
Earnings-related	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Incapacity benefits:						
Flat-rate	5.1	6.2	7.2	6.9	6.4	6.5
Earnings-related	0.6	0.1	—	—	—	—
Other benefits	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Total	42.2	50.8	56.4	64.8	65.8	64.2

Note:
Individual components may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Table 2
Estimated financial effect on the National Insurance Fund of the proposed changes

£ billion at 1994–95 prices

	2000–01	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*	*2040–41*	*2050–51*
Benefit changes						
Changes to state pension age:						
Basic retirement pension	—	–0.2	–4.7	–5.0	–3.9	–4.3
SERPS	—	–0.03	–1.7	–1.9	–1.8	–2.6
Widow's pension	—	+0.02	+0.6	+0.6	+0.5	+0.5
Incapacity benefit	—	+0.03	+0.6	+0.6	+0.5	+0.6
Other NI benefits	—	0.0	+0.1	+0.1	+0.1	+0.1
Changes to graduated retirement benefit, increments and dependency conditions	—	0.0	+0.1	+0.1	+0.1	+0.1
Inclusion of family credit and disability working allowance in earnings factors	0.0	0.0	+0.01	+0.06	+0.1	+0.1
Changes to SERPS calculation	0.0	–0.6	–1.3	–1.5	–1.0	–0.2
Changes to contracting out SERPS expenditure	0.0	–0.1	–0.7	–2.4	–4.7	–4.2
NI contribution changes						
SPA change	—	0.0	–0.1	–0.1	–0.1	–0.1
Changes to contracting out:						
assuming 4.6 per cent. rebate	+0.4	+0.6	–0.1	–0.8	–1.1	–1.1
assuming 4.95 per cent. rebate	+0.9	+1.1	+0.4	–0.3	–0.6	–0.6

Notes:

1. The above figures break down the total change in benefit expenditure shown in Table 1 into the effect of each separate proposal in the Bill. The sum of these changes may not agree with the total change in Table 1 due to rounding.

2. Positive figures denote higher expenditure or lower contribution income. Negative figures denote lower expenditure or higher income. The estimates therefore show the effect on the financial position of the National Insurance Fund.

3. All figures for future years should be read in conjunction with paragraphs 32 to 33 of the Government Actuary's Report regarding uncertainty.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17611]

Mr. Hague: The available information for expenditure by this Department, other than that incurred by the Department's agencies and other non-departmental public bodies, is as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
(a) TV Advertising	1,355,000	2,486,000
(b) Radio Advertising	322,000	Nil
(c) Press Advertising	2,194,168	2,510,139
(d) Other Promotional Activities	9,204,000	7,723,000
(e)	13,075,168	12,719,139
(f)	0.5 per cent.	0.2 per cent.
	1994–95 estimates	*1995–96 estimates*
All advertising including recruitment advertising	7,924,752	7,815,000
Proportion for recruitment	1 per cent.	Estimate not available

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who will cease to receive incapacity benefit because they have reached state pension age during the first year of operation of invalidity benefit. [18072]

Mr. Hague: In the first year of operation, it is estimated that around 100,000 people will cease to receive incapacity benefit on reaching state pension age.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, column *559*, relating to unemployment benefit, for what reasons a local councillor is regarded as being unavailable for paid work within social security regulations; [17956]

(2) on what grounds *(a)* convicted criminals who are subject to community service orders are deemed to be available for work and *(b)* elected local councillors who are registered as unemployed are deemed unavailable for work for the purposes of receiving unemployment benefit. [18283]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no deeming provisions which relate specifically to convicted criminals who are subject to community service orders or to elected local councillors.

Questions of doubt regarding a claimant's availability are referred to an adjudication officer.

Guidance on the determination of these questions is contained in the "Adjudication Officers Guide" volume 10, paragraphs 86030 et seq, a copy of which is in the Library. Specific reference is made to councillors and convicted criminals at paragraphs 86083 and 86087.

National Insurance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to prevent the avoidance of national insurance by payment of salaries in the form of antiques and works of art. [17830]

Mr. Lilley: I shall act whenever necessary where there is evidence of devious practice whose main objective is to avoid national insurance contributions.

I have today laid regulations—SI 1995/1003—which, by using existing powers, adds to schedule 1A of the Social Security (Contributions) Regulations 1979 payments by way of assets including vouchers for which trading arrangements exist and vouchers for those assets. The regulations also provide for the valuing of these items. These changes come into effect from 6 April.

In this way I am removing from the list of exclusions from NI contributions a range of schemes by which employers may have attempted to avoid payment. I have asked the Contributions Agency to continue to monitor closely any further efforts to develop practices whose main aim is to avoid NI contributions.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18514]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18516]

(3) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18512]

(4) How many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred to answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18515]

(5) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18511]

(6) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*. [18513]

Mr. Hague: The information is a matter of public record but could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. The available information for the years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 is as follows:

Pursuant letter sent to Member to correct an answer to a parliamentary question

Session	*Number sent*
1992–93	19
1993–94	21
1994–95 (up to Tuesday 4 April)	7

Holding replies sent

Session	*Number sent*
1992–93	44
1993–94	37
1994–95 (up to Tuesday 4 April)	35

Parliamentary questions answered

Session	*Named day (or priority)*	*Ordinary*
1992–93	1,574	1,731
1993–94	933	1,432
1994–95 (up to Tuesday 4 April)	620	710

"I will write" answers to questions placed in the Library rather than in the *Official Report*—that is, when it is too late for answers to be provided before the summer recess or prorogation:

Session	*Number*
1992–93:	22
1993–94:	17
1994–95:	NIL

A small proportion of questions have also been placed in the Library in each parliamentary Session because the answer was too long to be printed in the *Official Report*.

Written questions referred to Next Steps Agencies

Session	*Number*
1992–93:	359[1]
1993–94:	333[1]
1994–95:	150[1]

Note

[1] These figures have been provided using the POLIS database. It is not possible to guarantee that this is a truly comprehensive answer.

Fraud

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of fraudulent claims for one-parent benefit were discovered for each year since one-parent benefit was introduced. [18266]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken for the winding up of an occupational pension scheme to be completed. [18552]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is not available, but it is not uncommon for the process to take at least two years and it can exceptionally take up to 10 years.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many occupational pension schemes are currently involved in a winding up process. [18551]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information is available only in respect of Inland Revenue tax approved occupational pension schemes with at least two members. As at 3 April 1995, approximately 4,760 occupational pension schemes were in the process of winding up.

Source: Pension Schemes Registry.

"Living Together" Rule

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria are applied when assessing benefit entitlement to define whether a man and woman are living together as husband and wife with regard to *(a)* definition of a stable relationship, *(b)* financial support, *(c)* sexual relationship, *(d)* presence of children and *(e)* public acknowledgement of their relationship. [18267]

Mr. Roger Evans: Decisions about benefit entitlement are made by adjudication officers. Where necessary, this incudes decisions about whether a man and a woman are living together as an unmarried couple. Guidance on the factors to be taken into account is issued by the chief adjudication officer. The adjudication officer will normally consider whether the alleged couple share normal household tasks, how long the couple have been together, whether they share bills and other household expenses, if other people regard them as a couple, and whether there are children of their union or they share responsibility for child care. Information about a sexual relationship is not requested, but, if volunteered, will also be taken into consideration.

Decisions are made on the facts of the individual case. The criteria do not represent a rigid formula, and the presence or absence of any single factor will not by itself determine the decision.

Social Fund

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on his proposals for changes to the social fund funeral payments scheme; and if he will make a statement. [19209]

Mr. Roger Evans: We are now considering the Social Security Advisory Committee's report. On the basis of the recommendations in it, we propose to introduce a social fund funeral payments scheme which specifies necessary disbursements and covers their reasonable costs. We are also proposing a ceiling on the amount payable for funeral directors' charges. The precise specification of the eligible funeral directors' charges is currently under discussion with interested outside organisations. We will lay the SSAC report before the House along with our detailed response and the necessary amending regulations in due course. In the meantime, the current social fund provision for help with a simple dignified funeral for people in receipt of a qualifying benefit will remain in force.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18649]

Mr. Burt: My appointment as the Minister with responsibility for green issues within the Department took place in the autumn of 1994.

I have recently instructed the Benefits Agency to set up a pilot environment management scheme to promote good practice throughout the Department.

I attended a meeting of Green Ministers in December 1994 and discussed issues which included; sustainable development, the Rural White Paper, transport and green housekeeping.

I have not provided a direct input to consultations on the Environment Bill.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18590]

Mr. Hague: The Department has an on-going programme to ensure that disabled customers and staff have access to our buildings and services. A wide range of measures have already been taken to improve access, including surveys, building adaptations and the provision of equipment and services. The Department is also committed to providing access to information in a format which suits the customer, for example, in braille, tape or video. We will continue to build on this approach.

The Disability Discrimination Bill, which will apply to all Government Departments, contains new rights for disabled people in employment and creates a right of access to goods, facilities and services. It also establishes the National Disability Council to advise the Government on eliminating discrimination against disabled people.

Disability Discrimination Bill

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 March to the hon. Member for Ealing, North, (Mr. Greenway) *Official Report*, column 66, if he will list those organisations of and for the disabled and any other organisations which have made representations on the questions of disability legislation, and the number of letters received from the public and hon. Members on the subject; and what is the proportion in each category which supports the Disability Discrimination Bill. [18626]

Mr. Hague: I have received a wide range of representations on the question of disability legislation expressing a range of views, including support for and opposition to the Government's proposals. A detailed analysis of the correspondence could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

An analysis of the content of those letters which were specifically responses to the Government's consultation document "Disability on the Agenda" is available in the Library.

War Widows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the annual cost of paying war widows a pension for life regardless of their marital status and other income or savings. [18155]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that the additional gross cost would be about £220 million in a full year. That estimate does not take into account savings in other benefits which would normally be offset against the war widow's pension.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Officers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fire officers are employed full and part time in the Home Office; who pays for them; what is the cost to public funds; what has been the cost to public funds, with particular reference to the palace and its estate, of the work of these fire officers in the Palace of Westminster; and how many officers are deputed to oversee the Palace of Westminster. [18087]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Twenty-six staff, all of them former or serving members of the United Kingdom fire service, are currently employed in the Crown premises inspection group of Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate. They are all employed full time. Their duties are to inspect all Crown-owned or Crown-occupied premises in England and Wales which may need to be certified under the requirements of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and to issue fire certificates where appropriate. They are paid by the Home Office. Their total salary cost is £693,000 at 1994–95 prices. The fire service inspector who is head of the group is responsible for the necessary certification of the Palace of Westminster, but he has been assisted with this work by other members of the group.

Certification however deals only with those specific fire safety matters which are within the scope of the Fire Precaution Act 1971. Other fire safety matters generally are overseen by the fire safety manager appointed by the palace.

The Crown premises inspection group has been involved with work connected to the certification of the Palace of Westminster over a number of years and I regret that it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the total cost of the work.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to establish extradition relations with Libya. [18429]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government have no plans at present to establish extradition arrangements with Libya.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18584]

Mr. Howard: The Department has a continuing commitment to meet the needs of its disabled staff, customers and visitors. In doing so, it takes into account the programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity in the civil service for disabled people; many of the measures taken to improve access for staff also benefit disabled customers and visitors.

Measures over recent years have included the installation of a ramp in a listed building with steps to the main entrance and a survey to identify further areas where accessibility could be improved; wherever feasible action was taken. An audit of facilities for disabled people in central London buildings has also been carried out. The majority of buildings in the Home Office estate have toilets accessible to wheelchair users and car parking spaces reserved for disabled drivers. Access for disabled people is taken into account in the design stage of new buildings and renovations.

Induction loops are available for use in the public enquiry office in the immigration and nationality department, in all United Kingdom passport offices, and a further two induction loops are currently being purchased for use in conference rooms in the central London estate. Accommodation staff in IND have participated in accessibility training at the centre for accessible environments. An information pack on disability has been made widely available to staff in the Department.

Disability awareness seminars have been run for staff, covering such matters as access, equipment, disability etiquette, management of disabled staff and awareness of the social context of disability.

Continuing consideration is being given to producing information in accessible formats. Arrangements are in place across the Department to translate material into braille and large print. The UK Passport Agency has staff trained to use sign language in all its regional offices, and the use of minicoms with the "Typetalk" service is also available.

The needs of disabled staff and visitors are kept under regular review through departmental action groups. Future plans include the provision of leaflets listing facilities for disabled people in the main London buildings.

Green Policies

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18640]

Mr. Howard: My right hon. and noble Friend the Baroness Blatch succeeded my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) as Home Office green Minister in June 1994.

The Home Office green Minister sponsors the Home Office green housekeeping strategy which sets out the Department's policy on conserving natural resources and reducing environmental pollution. The strategy is supported by action plans incorporating recycling and energy efficiency schemes and a range of other green housekeeping initiatives.

The Home Office green Minister has corresponded with the Secretary of State for the Environment on matters relevant to this remit.

Home Office input to the Environment Bill is confined to criminal policy issues and will be made by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean).

Mr. Raghbir Singh

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will place in the Library and make available to the hon. Member for Walsall, North the full documentary reasons for deportation proceedings against Mr. Singh; [18712]

(2) if he will set out the reasons that deportation proceedings are being taken against Mr. Raghbir Singh Johal; [18696]

(3) what account was taken as to whether anything in the journal edited by Mr. Raghbir Singh Johal could be constructed as incitement to criminality in the United Kingdom when the decision was taken to deport him. [18697]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Mr. Raghbir Singh was detained on 29 March following a decision to deport him for reasons of national security and other reasons of a political nature, namely the fight against international terrorism. It would not be appropriate to comment further on the grounds for deportation.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations have been made to him over the deportation proceedings against Mr. Raghbir Singh Johal. [18717]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Three representations have been received on Mr. Raghbir Singh's behalf.

Horserace Totalisator Board

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the duties, hours of work and salary of each member of the Horserace Totalisator Board; [18771]

(2) if he will review the salary, terms and conditions of the chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board. [18772]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Board members of the Horserace Totaliser Board are part-time public appointments for which the renumeration is £8,085. The post of chairman of the Tote is full time; the current salary for this post is £97,735 a year. The duties of board members include attending regular board meetings and Tote functions, advising on and participating in the board's policy and commercial decision-making process.

My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 28 February, *Official Report*, column *547*, that Lord Wyatt would be reappointed, on the same conditions, for a further two-year term. At the same time, a review will be conducted of the Tote's future status.

Mr. Tarsend Singh Purewal

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been held and questioned by the authorities over the murder of Mr. Tarsend Singh Purewal. [18698]

Mr. Maclean: Seven suspects were arrested on 29 and 30 March. Following questioning, six of these have been released on police bail and a seventh has been served with a deportation order. Two other suspects were arrested on 24 January and released shortly afterwards.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those held and questioned by the authorities over the murder of Mr. Tarsend Singh Purewal were *(a)* United Kingdom citizens and *(b)* Indian citizens lawfully resident in the United

Kingdom; and how many of those are now subject to deportation. [18716]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Four were British citizens and three were Indian nationals, against one of whom deportation action is being taken.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects charges to be brought in the case of the murder of Mr. Tarsend Singh Purewal; and if he will make a statement. [18711]

Mr. Maclean: A major police investigation into the murder of Mr. Tarsend Singh Purewal is continuing. The bringing of charges is a matter for the police in the light of that investigation.

Closed Circuit Television

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department into which parliamentary constituency each of the successful bids under the CCTV challenge scheme falls. [18710]

Mr. Maclean: The information is contained in the table.

List of winning bids by constituency

Constituency	*Bid*
Tynemouth	Whitley Bay town centre
Tyne Bridge	Team Valley Industrial Estate, Gateshead
Tyne Bridge	Gateshead town centre
Durham North	Chester-le-Street town centre
Bishop Auckland	Bishop Auckland town centre
Redcar	Skippers Lane Industrial Estate, Cleveland
Stockton North	Mill Lane Primary School and Community Centre, Stockton
Blackpool North; and Blackpool South;	Blackpool town centre
Penrith and the Border	Penrith town centre
Stalybridge and Hyde	Hyde town centre, Tameside
Rochdale	Rochdale town centre
Denton and Reddish	Tameside Business Development Centre
City of Chester	Chester city centre extension
Wigan	Wigan town centre
Carlisle	Carlisle town centre
Ribble Valley	Clitheroe town centre, Lancashire
Ellesmere Port and Neston	Neston town centre, Cheshire
Bury North	Bury town centre
Lancaster	Lancaster city centre
Morecambe and Lunesdale	Morecambe town centre
Harrogate	Harrogate town centre
Wakefield	Outwood Grange School, Wakefield
Don Valley	Balby Street School, Doncaster
Don Valley	Lower Don Valley Industrial Estates, Sheffield
Bridlington	Driffield town centre, Humberside
Keighley	Keighley town centre, Yorkshire
Scarborough	Scarborough town centre, car parks and beach
Kingston upon Hull East	Sutton Fields Industrial Estate, Hull
York	York city centre
Doncaster Central	Scawsby Community Centre and Playing Field, Doncaster
Skipton and Ripon	Boroughbridge town centre, North Yorkshire
Brigg and Cleethorpes	Brigg town centre, Humberside
Harrow East; and Harrow West	Harrow town centre
Havant	Havant town centre
Wycombe	High Wycombe town centre
Rugby and Kenilworth	Rugby town centre
Hereford	Hereford city centre
Solihull	Solihull town centre and car parks
Mid-Staffordshire	Lichfield town centre and car parks
Leominster	Ledbury High Street, Worcestershire
Worcester	Worcester city centre
Shrewsbury and Atcham	Shrewsbury town centre
Staffordshire South East	Tamworth town centre
Stratford on Avon	Stratford upon Avon town centre
Chelmsford	Chelmsford town centre
Cambridgeshire North East	Ely town centre
Peterborough	Peterborough town centre
Stevenage	Stevenage town centre and car parks
Kettering	Kettering town centre
Hertfordshire North	Hitchin town centre and Letchworth business area
Harlow	Harlow town centre
Norfolk South West	Thetford town centre
Suffolk South	Hadleigh and Sudbury town centres
Holland with Boston	Boston town centre
Holland with Boston	Kirton town centre, near Boston
Erewash	Ilkeston town centre, Derbyshire
Leicestershire North West	Moira town centre, North-West Leicestershire
Holland with Boston	Donington town centre, Lincolnshire
Loughborough	Loughborough town centre
Uxbridge	Hillingdon shopping area
Spelthorne	Sunbury Cross Shopping Centre and car park, Spelthorne
Islington North; and Islington South and Finsbury	Islington car parks and entrance to Underground
Brentford and Isleworth	Hounslow town centre
Erith and Crayford	Erith town centre, Kent
Walthamstow	North Walthamstow Industrial Estates
Richmond and Barnes	Richmond town centre, Surrey
Knowsley North	Kirkby Railway Station, Merseyside
Lewes	Newhaven town centre, East Sussex
Surrey North West	Egham town centre, Surrey
Eastbourne	Eastbourne town centre, Sussex
Thanet South	Sandwich town centre, Kent
Medway	Rochester Industrial Business Estate, Kent
Dartford	Dartford town centre, Kent
Tonbridge and Malling	Tonbridge and Malling town centres, Kent
Chertsey and Walton	Addlestone town centre
Banbury	Banbury railway station, arts centre and sports centre
Wokingham	Wokingham town centre
Basingstoke	Basingstoke town centre
Chesham and Amersham	Chesham town centre
Portsmouth South	Fawcett Road Shopping Area, Portsmouth
Ashford	Ashford town centre, Kent
Dover	Dover town centre
Folkestone and Hythe	Folkestone town centre and residential areas
Maidstone	Maidstone town centre
Mansfield	Mansfield shopping centre
Harborough	Market Harborough town centre
Gainsborough and Horncastle	Gainsborough industrial estates
Cornwall North	Bodmin town centre
Cirencester and Tewkesbury	Cirencester market place, car parks and bus station
Falmouth and Camborne	Falmouth town centre
Cornwall North	Newquay tourism areas
Truro and St. Austell	Truro town centre
Salisbury	Salisbury town centre

List of winning bids by constituency

Constituency	*Bid*
Torbay	Torquay town centre
Westbury	West Wiltshire mobile CCTV system
Gloucester	Gloucester city centre
Tiverton	Tiverton Business Park
Tiverton	Tiverton town centre
Woodspring	Crown Glass Shopping Centre, Nailsea, Bristol
Bournemouth East	Boscombe shopping area, Bournemouth
Bristol West	Clifton car parks and shopping centre, Bristol
Clwyd North West	Colwyn Bay town centre
Torfaen	Cwmbran town centre
Swansea East; Neath; Aberavon; Gower; and Swansea West	West Glamorgan mobile CCTV system
Rhondda	Ystrad residential area, Rhondda
Pembroke	Haverfordwest town centre

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation for the statutory regulation of closed circuit television systems; and if he will make a statement. [18140]

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to do so.

Criminal Justice Units

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects every police division in London to have a criminal justice unit. [18709]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he expects criminal justice units to be in place for every police division within this financial year.

Police Stations (Access)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many London police stations are wheelchair accessible; and what proportion this is of the total. [18707]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that 79 police stations within the Metropolitan police district are accessible by wheelchair, 43 per cent. of the total.

Senior Police Officers

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if police officers holding the ranks of assistant chief constable and chief constable on 1 April will be entitled to transfer to fixed-term appointments on or after that date if they wish to. [18978]

Mr. Howard: The Police (Amendment) Regulations 1995 provide for the conditions of service of officers in this position to be varied by agreement between the officer concerned and his or her police authority. I hope that police authorities will be ready to agree to a variation in all cases where such an officer seeks to transfer to a fixed-term appointment.

Immigration (Complaints Audit Committee)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the first annual report by the complaints audit committee of the immigration and nationality department; and if he will make a statement. [19123]

Mr. Howard: A copy of the report has been placed in the Library. It is a helpful document and I welcome the committee's findings and conclusions. All 14 recommendations will be carefully considered. Some have already been implemented.

Interception of Communications Tribunal

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the appointment of the President of the Interception of Communications Tribunal. [19124]

Mr. Howard: Her Majesty has been pleased to reappoint the hon. Mr. Justice Macpherson of Cluny as president of the tribunal established under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 for a period of five years.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18498]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further 5, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18494]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18496]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18495]

(5) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18497]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer. [18493]

Mr. Howard: The number of parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer received by this Department in each year since 1979–80 are given.

Parliamentary year	*Number of questions*
1979–80	2,039
1980–81	1,092
1981–82	1,098
1982–83	855
1983–84	1,817
1984–85	1,584
1985–86	1,430
1986–87	812
1987–88	1,730
1988–89	1,525
1989–90	1,455
1990–91	1,273
1991–92	700
1992–93	2,526
1993–94	2,255
1994–4 April 1995	1,113

The further information requested is a matter of public record, but could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors underlie the recent rise in the number of women prisoners; and what types of crimes these women have committed. [18215]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Both the male and female prison populations have risen since 1993 and the same broad factors have contributed to the increased numbers of both men and women in prison. These factors are a rise in the numbers sentenced to custody by the Crown court; a rise in the numbers sentenced to custody by magistrates courts; and a rise in the remand population. In part, the increase in the numbers of offenders sentenced to custody can be attributed to the implementation of the provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 1993 in August 1993 which amended the sentencing framework established by the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The table sets out details of the sentenced female prison population by broad category of offence for 30 June 1993 and 28 February 1995:

Type of offence	*30 June 1993*	*28 February 1995*
Violence against the person	216	270
Sexual	15	10
Burglary	39	50
Robbery	77	90
Theft and handling	207	250
Fraud and forgery	64	90
Drugs	308	330
Other	125	130
Offence not recorded	74	160
Total	1,125	1,380

In addition, on 28 February there were 10 females in prison for fine default, 26 in prison for non-criminal offences and 511 on remand. This compares with 24 fine defaulters, 29 non-criminal prisoners and 402 remand prisoners on 30 June 1993.

Identity Cards

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to gauge opinion on the introduction of a national identity card scheme. [18427]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We intend publishing, later in the spring, a Green Paper on identity cards which will canvass views on possible options for a national identity card scheme and will serve as a way of assessing the level of public support for the introduction of identity cards.

Croydon Magistrates Court

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases of common assault Mrs. Jean Pearch, JP, has heard at Croydon magistrates court *(a)* in the last 12 months and *(b)* since she was appointed to the court; and how many have resulted in an imprisonment sentence for a first-time offender; [18213]

(2) how many cases of common assault have been heard by Croydon magistrates court in the last 12 months; and how many have resulted in imprisonment sentences for first time offenders. [18210]

Mr. Maclean: Information is not collected centrally, by this Department, on the number of cases heard by individual magistrates.

According to information held centrally by this Department, of the 122 defendants proceeded against for the offence of common assault at Croydon magistrates court in 1993—latest available—82 were convicted, of which one received a custodial sentence.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn 1995.

Transfer Grant

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what evidence he based his decision to withdraw the right of same-gender partnerships to permanent transfer grant as outlined in the Home Office staff handbook; and if he will place copies of this evidence in the Library. [18144]

Mr. Howard: The transfer manual made no such change. There never was such a right.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department of the asylum applications determined during the year 1994 how many were applications made *(a)* before and *(b)* after the coming into force of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; and for each of these categories, how many applications were *(a)* granted refugee status, *(b)* granted exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* refused. [18233]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is provided in the table.

Decisions in 1994, excluding dependants, on applications for asylum[1] *made before and after the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 (26 July 1993)*

Number of principal applicants

	Pre-Act applications	*Post-Act applications*	*Total*
Total decision[2]	[4]3,560	[4]14,445	20,990
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	275	550	825
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[3]	1,165	2,495	3,660
Total refusals	(4)2,120	(4)11,400	16,505

Decisions in 1994, excluding dependants, on applications for asylum(1) made before and after the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 (26 July 1993)

Number of principal applicants

	Pre-Act applications	*Post-Act applications*	*Total*
Refused asylum and ELR after full consideration	2,120	10,535	12,655
Refused on safe third country grounds	—	865	865
Refused under para. 180F of the immigration rules(4)	—	—	2,985

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.

[1] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

[4] Figures for refusals under para 180F—failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim—are not available split between pre and post-Act cases.

Prisoners

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what preventive measures he is proposing to reduce *(a)* the number of people entering prisons and *(b)* the number of prisoners re-entering the prison system. [18214]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Within the legislative framework provided by Parliament, it is for the courts to decide which individuals should be remanded into custody and which should be given custodial sentences. The Government do not believe that the courts should be prevented from sending to prison those who in their view ought to be there.

Two of the six gaols in the Prison Service three-year corporate plan relate to rehabilitation. These are to provide positive regimes which help prisoners address their offending behaviour and allow them as full and responsible a life as possible; and to help prisoners prepare for their return to the community. In working to achieve these goals, the Prison Service provides inmate development and pre-release training; sex offender treatment programmes; a more general programme addressing offending behaviour; jobsearch preparation courses and prison jobclubs; training for a wide range of national vocational qualifications; other constructive activities in prison workshops; and opportunities for work experience through the pre-release employment scheme.

Detainees

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females whose identity is in doubt are currently being detained at Campsfield house; and what is the longest current period of detention. [18071]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are currently detained at Campsfield house *(a)* one male and *(b)* one female whose identities are in doubt. The longest current period of detention of such a person is six months and two weeks.

Boot Camps

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the visit sponsored by his Department to the United States in May 1994 to look at boot camps; when he intends to publish the findings and conclusions; and what response he has made. [17985]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total cost of the visit by prison officials and a social services inspector was £16,443. The findings and conclusions were presented to Ministers as advice and it is not proposed to publish them. I have asked the Prison Service to bring forward proposals for a pilot regime to be set up in a young offender institution in this country, based on the more positive aspects of boot camps and on approaches that are known to be successful with young offenders. When my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received and considered them and agreed the way forward, an announcement will be made.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17727]

Mr. Howard: We appreciate the potential benefits of electronic mail and the information super-highway, and we are investigating how the Home Office's business activities might be enhanced by exploiting these technologies. Home Office Ministers do not yet have Internet addresses, and only a few members of staff in the scientific specialisms currently use Internet e-mail in their work. However, testing is in hand to widen access to Internet facilities, and some Home Office statistical information has already been made available to the entire Internet community via the CCTA government information service—www.open.gov.uk. The publication of Home Office e-mail addresses on the Internet is dependent on the outcome of current development work.

Repatriation Assistance

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have made inquiries to the international social service about applying for financial assistance to return to their country of origin, in each year since inception; if he will break down these figures by age, gender and intended country of destination; what proportion of actual applications were accepted by the ISS; and how much on average was paid to each applicant, in each year since inception. [17715]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The international social service of the United Kingdom operates, on behalf of the Home Office, the voluntary repatriation scheme established under section 29 of the Immigration Act 1971. Grants are not paid to applicants. Assistance is given in the form of payment of fares and incidental expenses including the transport of a small amount of personal effects.

The following table shows the number of inquiries to ISS about assistance to return to country of origin, in each year since its inception to the end of March 1995, with the proportion of applications accepted and the average amount of financial assistance in relation to each successful applicant:

Number of inquires, successful applications and amount of financial assistance per applicant: 1972 to 1995

Year	*Enquiries*	*Proportion of accepted applications Per cent.*	*Average financial assistance £*
1972–73	57	14	1,535
1973–74	271	28	1,666
1974–75	245	32	1,386
1975–76	274	42	1,441
1976–77	520	24	1,138
1977–78	493	29	1,542
1978–79	435	32	1,910
1979–80	273	48	1,535
1980–81	266	40	1,678
1981–82	901	20	1,848
1982–83	575	27	1,379
1983–84	420	44	1,422
1984–85	430	23	1,350
1985–86	407	29	1,176
1986–87	306	29	1,316
1987–88	250	43	1,364
1988–89	174	49	1,034
1989–90	153	61	1,126
1990–91	137	61	1,029
1991–92	140	68	1,390
1992–93	159	57	1,370
1993–94	278	37	1,850
1994–95	226	68	1,711

The information requested on age, gender and the intended country of destination of people making enquiries to ISS is not routinely recorded and such data that survives could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

However, the following table provides a breakdown of the country of destination of those receiving assistance under the scheme:

Numbers and country of destination of those given assistance: 1972 to 1995

Country	*Number*
Algeria	5
Antigua	2
Argentina	7
Aruba	1
Australia	32
Bangaladesh	34
Barbados	79
Belize	2
Bolivia	1
Canada	15
Chile	8
China	3
Dominica	43
Egypt	6
Fiji	12
Gambia	5
Ghana	50
Grenada	43
Guyana	51
India	83
Iran	1
Jamaica	1,356
Kenya	17
Malaysia	10
Malawi	3
Mauritius	42
Morocco	5
New Zealand	4
Nigeria	148
Oman	2
Pakistan	37
St. Kitts	2
St. Lucia	29
St. Vincent	25
Seychelles	20
Sierra Leone	7
Somalia	7
South Africa	26
Sri Lanka	12
Sudan	1
Tanzania	3
Trinidad	64
Turkey	1
Uganda	132
USA	9
West Samoa	6
Yemen	2
Zanzibar	3
Zimbabwe	89

Police Funding

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what allowance is contained in the police funding formula for the abnormal costs in Gloucestershire as a result of the Frederick West investigation and the cost of policing royal households. [17646]

Mr. Maclean: The formula was never intended to take account of specific, large-scale criminal investigations in individual police force areas. If the impact of a particular operation looks likely to threaten the efficiency of a force, consideration can be given to special grant. Protection commitments are taken account of in the formula both by the element for existing police establishments which is included, and by an additional allocation for certain security-related commitments.

Community Sentences

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his definition of a soft option; and, based on his definition, what percentage of community sentences are based on this option. [17503]

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A community sentence is a soft option if it does not provide sufficient punishment for the offence committed. The 1995 national standards published on 9 March should ensure that no community sentences provide soft options.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotions materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17623]

Mr. Howard: Spending by the Home Office on advertising has been as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
(a) Television advertising	4,156,322	7,347,834
(b) Radio advertising	210,420	261,878
(c) Newspaper advertising	1,122,620	602,966
(d) Other promotions including outdoor and cinema advertising	1,855,273	1,132,5[illegible]8
(e) Totals	7,344,635	9,345,[illegible]96

(f) Of these totals, the amount spent each year on recruitment advertising was:

1992–93—£1,386,787
1993–94—£1,590,980
1994–95—£2,904,999

The latest estimates for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are as follows:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £
(a) Television advertising	6,237,727	5,000,000
(b) Radio advertising	303,998	200,000
(c) Newspaper advertising	3,094,264	2,000,000
(d) Other promotions including outdoor and cinema advertising	576,140	Nil
(e) Totals	10,212,129	7,200,000

(f) The proportion of the total estimated for 1995–96 spent on recruitment is £2,000,000.

Terrorism, India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* convicted and *(d)* acquitted over offences relating to the funding of terrorism in India in each year since 1992. [17304]

Mr. Howard: Information is not held centrally in the form requested, but I am not aware of any cases in these categories.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the investigations carried out on behalf of the charity commissioners, in each of the past three years, into complaints of the irregular expenditure of funds by organisations registered by the Sikh community living in the United Kingdom, in respect of which the charity commissioners have concluded that the irregular expenditure was directed to the funding of terrorism in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* India. [17241]

Mr. Howard : In the past three years, no investigation carried out by the Charity Commission or anyone acting on its behalf has resulted in this conclusion.

Miss Phillipa Drew

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Ms Phillipa Drew, director of custody, will leave her post later this year; and to what extent her departure relates to the transfer of Mr. Marriott, former governor of Parkhurst prison. [17214]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 5 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Miss Phillipa Drew's transfer within the Home Office.

In line with plans developed last year this is a routine career development move for Miss Drew, who by the Summer will have spent three and a half years int he Prison Service. The move is entirely unrelated to any decision in respect of Mr. Marriott.

Havelock Road, Southall Gurdwara

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what findings the charity commissioners have made in respect of irregular expenditure of funds held by the Havelock road, Southall Gurdwara; over what period; and in respect of which individuals. [17244]

Mr. Howard: Havelock road, Southall Gurdwara is the property of a registered charity called Sri Guru Singh Sabha. The commission has no evidence to substantiate any allegations of irregular expenditure.

Prison Officers' Shopping Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of shopping visits made by prison officers on behalf of prison inmates during the week of 19 March. [17231]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 5 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about shopping trips by prison officers for prison inmates.

The situation has not changed since my recent reply to your Question of 23 January (col. *48*). The practice of prison officers undertaking private shopping trips at the behest of prisoners was stopped last year. I have no evidence of any such shopping trips taking place in the week beginning 19 March.

Hospitality

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total expenditure of his Department on hospitality since his appointment; and what were the figures for each of the previous five years. [16763]

Mr. Howard: The provisional figure for expenditure on hospitality by my Department, including its executive agencies, from 1 April 1993 until 28 February 1995, which includes the period since my appointment to this office on 27 May 1993, is £88,044. Expenditure on hospitality in each of the previous five years was as follows:

1992–93: £55,651

1991–92: £28,094

1990–91: £30,080

1989–90: £28,630

1988–89: £26,192

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1985 the number of Metropolitan police officers who were charged with disciplinary offences following a successful civil action against the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for a wrongful act by an officer; and, in respect of each charge, whether the offence was proved and what punishment was imposed.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 March 1995]:* From 1988 to 1994 the numbers of disciplinary charges following successful civil actions where the damages or settlement sum was in excess of £10,000 were as follows:

Year of successful civil action	*Number of cases*
1988	0
1989	1
1990	2
1991	0
1992	3
1993	1
1994	1
Total	8

The breakdown of cases is as follows:

Number of officers	*Substantiated/ Not substantiated*	*Outcome*
Case 1 (Includes one case from 1989 and one associated case from 1990) Eight officers involved in action, five had criminal proceedings brought against them		
Three officers	Substantiated	Dismissed
Two officers	Ancillary matter Substantiated	Dismissed
Three officers	Not Substantiated	
Case 2 1990		
One officer	Ancillary matter Substantiated	Reprimanded
Case 3 1992		
One officer	Substantiated by PCA Tribunal	Reprimanded
Case 4 (Involves one case from 1992 and an associated case from 1994)		
Seven officers	Substantiated	Dismissed
Case 5 1992 (three officers involved, one subject to formal disciplinary action)		
One officer	Substantiated	Dismissed
Case 6 1993		
One officer	Substantiated	Fined
One officer	Substantiated	Cautioned

Information prior to 1988 or where the settlement sum was less than £10,000 is not available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Custodial Sentences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the number of refusals by courts to impose prison sentences because of the danger of exposure to illegal drugs in prison by convicted criminals. [18158]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Sentencing is a matter for the courts in each case. The statutory criteria for passing a custodial sentence do not require the courts to form a judgment on reports of conditions in particular prisons. Decisions on where a prisoner should serve his sentence are taken by the Prison Service, and take account so far as possible of the circumstances of the prisoner and his or her offence. Reducing drug misuse is one of the Prison Service's key priorities. A new Prison Service drugs strategy will shortly be issued to all establishments.

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department had made of their effectiveness. [17453]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* There are 12 public inquiry points within the Home Office, including two in the Prison Service and six in the UK Passport Agency. The information available from existing records is as follows:

	Cost to establish £	*Cost to operate* £	*Cost to publicise* £	*Calls received*	*Date began*
Queen Ann's Gate	2,000	103,000 per annum	Nil	No record is kept	1976
Prison Service:					
(i) victim helpline	8,400	1,000 per annum	Nil	27 per month	5 December 1994
(ii) prisoner location service	n/a	5,700 per month	Nil	5,000 per months	pre 1970
Passport Agency offices (6)	200,000	1,000,000 per annum	25,000 per annum	2,100,000 per annum	pre 1970
Immigration and Nationality Department (3)	93,500	543,000	Nil	3,800,000 (since points established)	since 1988

Notes:

1. The costs for establishing the enquiry points relate to current equipment.

2. The figure of operating costs for the Prison Service's victim helpline reflects estimated monthly expenditure from mid-April onwards. [The scope for publicising the service is under consideration.]

The Department considers these inquiry points to be essential for the provision of information to the public. The scope for improving the service provided is kept under review.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Belmarsh have been denied recreation facilities and association rights; and how many prisoners are protesting at their conditions. [17665]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Max Madden, dated 5 April 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many prisoners at Belmarsh prison have been denied recreation facilities and association rights; and how many prisoners are protesting at the conditions.

No prisoners have been denied recreation facilities or association rights, other than those subject to disciplinary sanctions on Rule 43 and two prisoners who escaped from Whitemoor.

Prisoners who have escaped or attempted to escape are required to wear prison clothing that has yellow patches on the jacket and yellow stripes on the trousers, to make them more readily identifiable. Two of the Whitemoor escapees are refusing to wear this clothing when out of their cells, at which time they will only wear a blanket. While they insist on taking this action they cannot be given access to normal recreation facilities or association.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18327]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* Some 545 posts in the Prison Service have been, or are in the process of being, contracted out. These are mainly involved in court escort work. No posts in the other executive agencies have been contracted out in this period.

The number of staff in the Prison Service and the Forensic Science Service has increased over the last two years. The number of staff in the Fire Service college has fallen from 202.5 in March 1993 to 188.5 in March 1995. In the case of the UK Passport Agency, the number of full-time permanent staff has decreased from 1,292 to 1,263 but permanent part-year appointments have increased from 120 to 190.

Fingerprints

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities have decided to withdraw the automatic fingerprint recognition system; how many of these authorities no longer keep paper records and now have no way of checking fingerprints; and if he will make a statement on the implications for public safety. [18150]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* The AFR consortium, which represents 36 police forces in England and Wales, has decided to terminate its existing contract for the provision of automated fingerprint recognition facilities and to make new arrangements. All the police forces concerned retain paper records. My Department is monitoring the implications of these developments for the effectiveness of the police service in consultation with the AFR consortium.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take regarding the future organisation and level of criminal injuries compensation.

Mr. Howard *[pursuant to his reply, 9 March 1995, c. 443]:* The Judicial Committee of the House of Lords delivered its judgment today.

We are naturally disappointed at the judgment, which we are studying carefully. However, we will, of course, act in accordance with the law as determined by their Lordships.

The judgment relates to the method of introduction of the tariff scheme, not its merits. The Government remain firmly committed to the tariff approach. They believe a tariff scheme is the only sure way to bring the costs of the scheme under control and to provide a better service to the blameless victims of violent crime.

We therefore intend to introduce as soon as practicable a Bill inviting Parliament to give statutory force to a new tariff scheme as quickly a possible.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made by the Church Commissioners to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans the Commissioners have to improve access; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners recognise the need to facilitate access for the disabled and we have made a number of improvements to our main office premises, namely No. 1 Millbank, SW1—built in 1906 and listed Grade II*. These include the provision of an invalid WC suitable for wheelchair use, ramps within the building where a change of level occurs and handrails where necessary. All internal doors can accommodate wheelchairs. The entrance to our office is staffed at all times and the needs of disabled visitors can be attended to immediately.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cross-border Co-operation

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border, and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Environment and (2) any of its agencies. [17056]

Mr. Moss: A copy of a list of north-south economic co-operation projects involving the Department of the Environment and its agencies is available in the Library.

The Department and its agencies also liaise informally and co-operate with various bodies in the Republic of Ireland on a wide variety of issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border, and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Health and Social Services and (2) any of its agencies. [17054]

Mr. Moss: The Department and the Social Security Agency maintain regular contact with officials in the Departments of Health and of Social Welfare in the Republic of Ireland on a range of issues of mutual interests. Also, cross-border co-operation is on-going between health boards in the border areas. Regular bilateral meetings take place on a north-south basis between Health Ministers in both jurisdictions and from time to time social security matters will also be the subject of discussion at ministerial level.

A list of north-south economic co-operation contacts and projects involving the Department of Health and Social Services and its agencies has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border, and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Economic Development and (2) any of its agencies. [17055]

Mr. Ancram: A list of cross-border projects involving the Department of Economic Development and its agencies is available in the Library.

In addition, officials of the Department and its agencies liaise informally with a number of bodies in the Republic of Ireland on a range of matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border, and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Agriculture and (2) any of its agencies. [17057]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland formally co-operates with the Republic of Ireland in the administration of the Foyle Fisheries Commission, in the operation and maintenance of the Shannon-Erne waterway, and is formally represented on the Advisory Board of the International Fund for Ireland, the Interreg Monitoring Committee, and liaises on rural development matters.

There are regular, on-going contacts between the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland and corresponding Irish Departments on matters of mutual interest. In addition, a list of north-south economic co-operation projects involving the Department is available in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland basis, (ii) cross border and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Finance and Personnel and (2) any of its agencies. [17058]

Sir John Wheeler: The Department of Finance and Personnel jointly administers the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland Interreg programme with the Department of Finance, Dublin. Occasional contacts are also made between the two Departments on civil service personnel management issues. A list of cross-border projects involving the Department and its agencies is available in the Library.

In addition, the International Fund for Ireland was established jointly by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 as an independent international organisation with the objective of promoting economic and social advance and encouraging dialogue between unionists and nationalists throughout Ireland. The fund has a variety of programmes which it operates and administers on a cross-border basis.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border; and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Department of Education; and (2) any of its agencies. [17059]

Mr. Ancram: A curriculum development project—the European studies project—was set up in 1986 by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and England. The project, which embraces over 300 schools in 14 European jurisdictions, is now funded jointly by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Regular liaison takes place between the two Departments on all aspects of the project.

A list of cross-border projects involving the Department of Education and its agencies is available in the Library.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* relationships, *(b)* joint bodies and *(c)* contacts presently exist on (i) an all-Ireland, (ii) cross-border; and (iii) a north-south basis through (1) the Northern Ireland Office and (2) any of its agencies. [17060]

Mr. Ancram: Article 2 (a) of the Anglo-Irish agreement established an intergovernmental conference, which is supported by a joint secretariat and which deals, among other matters, with the promotion of cross-border co-operation. A range of contacts on matters of mutual interest take place, at the appropriate level and as the need arises, between Ministers and officials of the NIO and of the Irish Government.

Other contacts with Irish Government officials may be established at various levels as the need arises: the Northern Ireland Forensic Science Laboratory, when investigating cases with a cross-border element, and the emergency planning branch, on issues relating to disasters and civil emergencies, have such contacts from time to time.

Drugs

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 665, on drugs, if he will list the number of occasions and dates when meetings took place between *(a)* Northern Ireland Housing Executive senior executive and appropriate RUC level, *(b)* Northern Ireland Housing Executive regional level and appropriate RUC level and *(c)* Northern Ireland Housing Executive district level and appropriate RUC level on this matter; and what was the outcome of these discussions. [17642]

Sir John Wheeler: There is regular and effective liaison between the RUC and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at all appropriate levels; this is not restricted to drug investigations.

Local liaison is in response to all relevant issues and problems as they arise and the arrangements are not structured as asked. There is no central record of the contacts. The sub-divisional commanders in the respective operational areas are the primary point of contact.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17605]

Sir John Wheeler: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since 1979–80; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17606]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested on non-departmental public bodies is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

The administration of the next steps agencies is a matter for the chief executive of each agency. The Social Security Agency cannot identify separate SSA costs from the Department of Health and Social Services total. I have asked the remaining chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 30 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding the advertising.

The Compensation Agency has not incurred expenditure on advertising or other promotional materials and activities in any year since its creation on 1 April 1992. It is not anticipated that any expenditure will be incurred in the years 1994–95 or 1995–96.

Letter from P. Devlin to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 31 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about spending by NDPBs and Agencies on advertising and other promotion materials and activities.

Since its inception in April 1993 the NI Child Support Agency has spent a total of £10,294.27 on advertising and other promotion materials and activities. The information requested in relation to the specific categories is as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Television Advertising	Nil	Nil
Radio Advertising	Nil	Nil
Newspaper Advertising	£2,974.85	£1,391.80
Other Promotion	Nil	Nil
Materials and Activities	£5,927.62	Nil
Total	£8,902.47	£1,391.80
Proportion of total spent on Recruitment Advertising	33 per cent.	100 per cent.

The Agency has at present no plans to spend monies on advertising or other promotional activities in 1995–96.

I hope you find this information useful.

Letter from J. B. Watson to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 30 March 1995:

I am responding to your recent parliamentary question in which you asked for spending on various forms of advertising and other promotion materials and activities.

The Agency has not advertised on television or radio. The table below shows actual and estimated expenditure on other activities since the Agency was established in April 1992.

(Figures in £000)

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95 (estimate)*	*1995–96 (estimate)*
Newspaper Advertising	10	3	7	10
Other promotional material and activities	—	—	1	2
Total	10	3	8	12

Costs for recruitment advertising are not met by the Agency.

Letter from Brendan Magee to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 31 March 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question about advertising and promotional materials costs incurred by this Agency, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland.

The Agency was established on 2 August 1993. Since then the only advertising costs incurred have been:

	£
1993/94	
Newspaper Advertising	325.20
Total for 1993/94	325.20
1994/95	
Newspaper Advertising	1,071.21
Campaign against Vehicle Excise Duty Evasion	15,000.0
Publicity for DVLNI Information Line	15,000.0
Total for 1994–95	16,071.21

No recruitment advertising costs were incurred during the period and we have no plans for any advertising expenditure for 1995/96.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Letter from D. W. Gallagher to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 31 March 1995:

Advertising and Publicity (Written PQ No. 509): The Rate Collection Agency

Further to your recent Parliamentary Question, I have been asked to provide relevant information relating to the Northern Ireland Rate Collection Agency. For ease of reference I have outlined the details on the attached schedule and have commented briefly below.

The Rate Collection Agency was established in April 1991 as a Next Steps Agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. The Agency is responsible for the collection of rates in Northern Ireland, and the administration of the Housing

Benefit scheme for owner-occupiers. Expenditure on advertising and publicity in both 1990/91 and 1991/92 related to promotional materials designed to mark the launch of the Agency and increase awareness of the activities of the new body among both Agency staff and the general public. The expenditure in subsequent years was associated with the RCA contribution towards a publicity campaign to promote public awareness and uptake of Housing Benefit. No expenditure on advertising and publicity was incurred during 1994/95. However, extensive newspaper advertising will be required during 1995/96 to advise the public of the reorganisation of the local office structure of the Rate Collection Agency.

I hope that you will find this information helpful.

Expenditure on advertising and publicity—RCA

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Promotion materials and activities	7,100	2,800	1,600	—	—
Radio and television advertising	—	—	3,000	4,000	—

Letter from J. F. Codd to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 30 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your Question about spending by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland on advertising since 1979/80. In the absence of the Chief Executive I am replying on his behalf.

Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland was launched as a Next Steps Agency on 1 April 1992 and we have no financial information for the years prior to that date. The figures for spending in the years 1992/93 and 1993/94 and the estimated figures for 1994/95 and 1995/96 are as follows:

	1992/93	*1993/94*	*1994/95*	*1995/96*
a.	None	None	None	None
b.	None	None	None	None
c.	None	None	None	None
d.	£1,100	£2,500	£3,250	£3,500
e.	£1,100	£2,500	£3,250	£3,500
f.	None	None	None	None

Letter from D. J. Bell to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 31 March 1995:

REFERENCE: RECENTLY TABLED PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION FOR ANSWER ON 5 APRIL 1995

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question relating to expenditure by the Valuation and Lands Agency on television, radio or newspaper advertising or other promotional materials since 1979–80.

The Valuation and Lands Agency and its predecessors the Valuation and Lands Office and the Valuation Office have not incurred any expenditure within the period since 1979–80 on advertising or promotional materials.

I trust this information is sufficient for your purposes however if I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 4 April 1995:

Your recent parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding expenditure on advertising has been passed to me for reply on behalf of the Training and Employment Agency.

The breakdown of figures you requested is as follows:

Year	*Television advertising*	*Radio advertising*	*Newspaper advertising*	*Promotional material and activities*	*Total*
1990–91	183,780	—	210,055	226,539	620,374
1991–92	48,815	—	115,781	178,282	342,878
1992–93	120,480	15,000	240,500	292,076	668,056
1993–94	43,175	16,218	142,234	292,164	493,791
1994–95 (actual)	181,254	13,919	137,816	282,477	615,466
1995–96 (estimate)	182,365	13,978	138,652	284,222	619,217

Recruitment advertising is a matter for the Civil Service Commission and is not delegated to the Agency.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18534]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18533]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested at only disproportionate cost.

Abortion

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the abortion rate for residents of *(a)* Greater Belfast and *(b)* Northern Ireland during each of the years 1990 to 1994; and were the comparable figures for England, Wales and Scotland. [18617]

Mr David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many abortions *(a)* paid for and *(b)* not paid for by the NHS were carried out on residents of Northern Ireland in premises in England and Wales in each year since 1990. [18866]

Mr. Moss: I shall write to the right hon. and hon. Members as soon as possible.

Industrial Development, South Devon

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what progress has been made on the identification of sites for industrial development in South

Down by the Industrial Development Board and the Department of the Environment and Planning Service. [18555]

Mr. Ancram: Ten sites have been identified as having potential suitability for industrial development in Downpatrick. Two are being surveyed to determine their suitability as Industrial Development Board industrial estates. The reports are expected at the end of May.

Roads

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial allocations have been made from EC structural funds, 1994–99 towards new roads infrastructure in the Downpatrick and Craigavon divisions; and if he will make a statement. [18556]

Mr. Moss: No financial allocations have been made from EC structural funds 1994–99 in respect of roads infrastructure in the Downpatrick division. In the Craigavon division, grant of £1,845,000 from the EC structural funds 1994–99 has, to date, been paid in respect of work on the Newry by-pass stage II.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the projects in the major road works programme with the appropriate costings for the 1995–98 period which was recently approved; and if he will make a statement. [18558]

Mr Moss: The major works programme for roads is reviewed annually and the latest programme, covering the period April 1995 to March 2000, is as follows:

	Total estimated cost £ million
New starts in 1995–96	
Purdysburn Road, Belfast: stages 1B and 2	2.1
Ballymaconaghy Road, Belfast: stage 2	0.6
A5 Maheramason	0.9
Omagh Through-pass: stage 2B	2.3
Motorway Emergency Telephone System	5.3
A5 Burndennett	1.3
Church Street/Scotch Street, Downpatrick	1.7
New starts in 1996–97	
Anne Street/Thomas Street, Dungannon	0.8
Balmoral Avenue/Malone Road, Belfast	0.4
Northern Distributor, Ballymena	2.2
A29 Carland Bridge, Dungannon	2.2
A26 Antrim/Ballymena Dualling: stage 2	2.7
A5 Leckpatrick	0.8
Balloo Road, Bangor	0.5
New starts in 1997–98	
Comber By-pass: stage 2	2.9
Belfast Inner Ring Road (Southern Section)	2.5
A5 Garvaghy	0.4
Strand Road, Londonderry: stage 2	1.8
A2 Limavady By-pass: stage 1 (Earthworks)	2.5
A8 Belfast-Larne Road Dualling: stage 1	2.5
A2 Shore Road, University of Ulster/Ravenhill	3.8
No schemes are programmed to start during 1998–1999	
New starts in 1999–2000	
A6 Toome By-pass	1.4
Belfast Inner Ring Road (South/West Section)	4.0
Limavady By-pass: stage 2 (Bridgeworks)	2.2
A26 Windyhall Dualling Coleraine	0.6
Northway, Portadown	0.8
A1 Fourmile/Buskshill Dualling, Newry	3.3
Comber Road/Portaferry Road; Newtownards	0.6
A5 Bready	0.4
A5 Ballyfatton	0.2

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place with representatives of the EC task force and the European Commissioner responsible for the peace and reconciliation fund about the allocation of funding towards roads infrastructure in Craigavon and Downpatrick roads division; and if he will make a statement. [18559]

Mr. Moss: None. There will be an opportunity to consider specific projects when the programme has been agreed with Brussels.

Carlingford Lough Ferry Project

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards funding the Carlingford lough ferry project; and if he will make a statement. [18557]

Mr. Moss: The east border region committee, which is sponsoring the scheme, has been advised to apply for assistance from the EC under the Interreg initiative.

The Commission has just recently approved the joint Interreg programme for 1994–99. Application forms for assistance should be issued soon.

Cattle Plague

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of cattle plague were reported in each year since 1985. [18612]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Young Offenders Centre, Millisle

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost of the clothes provided for the inmates at the young offenders centre in Millisle for each of the last five years. [18618]

Sir John Wheeler: The cost per year to provide clothing for the young people at Lisnevin was as follows:

Financial year	*Amount £*
1989–90	6,843
1990–91	5,995
1991–92	10,464
1992–93	10,029
1993–94	9,614
Total	42,945

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will break down the repair costs for the young offenders centre at Millisle in each of the last five years. [18620]

Sir John Wheeler: The costs of repairs on-going maintenance at Lisnevin training school over the period 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1994 are as follows:

Financial year	*Cost of repairs/ maintenance* £
1989–90	5,706
1990–91	1,781
1991–92	[1]14,167
1992–93	5,167
1993–94	[2]17,421
Grand total	44,242

[1] Includes the cost of removing two temporary building.

[2] Includes the cost of laying flags around dormitories and installing fans in common rooms.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the repairs required to the young offenders centre in Millisle after the latest disturbance at the centre. [18621]

Sir John Wheeler: The latest disturbance at Lisnevin occurred on 23 November 1994. The following schedule sets out the cost of repairing damage following that disturbance:

	£
Building	962
Plumbing	2,207
Electrical	113
Carpet	2,157
Furniture	1,175
Fire Alarm System	308
Painting	450
Total	7,372

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to build a swimming pool at the young offenders centre in Millisle; and what is the estimated cost. [18621]

Sir John Wheeler: There are no plans at present to construct a swimming pool at Lisnevin training school.

Out-patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to the NHS in Northern Ireland of the non-attenders to out-patient appointments in 1993–94. [17713]

Mr. Moss: Information is not available in the form requested. It is normal practice to allow for non-attendance in the number of appointments made, and consequently the costs incurred in providing clinics are fully utilised. Any remaining issues concerning continuing treatment of non-attenders are addressed by the consultant responsible.

Green Policy

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of the functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18648]

Mr. Moss: I am green Minister for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, but all my ministerial colleagues share our common objective of promoting sustainable development in all areas of national life.

"Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy", CM 2426, presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister in January 1994, set out our overall approach and targets. Progress on these has been reported on more recently in "This Common Inheritance 1995", CM 2822, report which was published last month. Commitments 554 to 613 relate specifically to Northern Ireland and are listed towards the end of the report, which outlines progress and further action for 1995 and beyond.

The whole Government are committed to the objective of sustainable development, and I am in regular contact with all ministerial colleagues in the NIO, as well as other green Ministers.

While I am taking a keen interest in the Environment Bill, its provisions do not relate to Northern Ireland.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims were made in Northern Ireland (1) for set-aside and (2) in total under the arable area payments scheme in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) in 1994–95 of *(a)* between £0 and £5,000, *(b)* between £5,001 and £10,000, *(c)* between £10,001 and £15,000, *(d)* between £15,001 and £20,000, *(e)* between £20,001 and £25,000, *(f)* between £25,001 and £50,000, *(g)* between £50,001 and £75,000, *(h)* between £75,001 and £100,000, (i) between £100,001 and £150,000, *(j)* between £150,001 and £200,000, *(k)* between £200,001 and £1 million and *(l)* over £1 million; and what is his latest estimate of the number of claims that will be made in 1995–96 in each value band. [18629]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Set-aside scheme—Northern Ireland

	Set-aside			*Arable area payments*		
£	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96 (Est.)* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	[1]*1995–96 (Est.)* £
0–5,000	112	194	200	2,971	2,767	2,800
5,001–10,000	7	16	15	57	96	100
10,001–15,000	—	—	—	23	47	50
15,001–20,000	—	—	—	5	10	10
20,001—25,000	—	—	—	2	6	10
25,001—50,000	—	—	—	9	8	10
50,001 upwards	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Final figures will not be available until after 15 May 1995.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hectares of land were set aside under the arable area payments scheme in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is his estimate of the number of hectares of land that will be set aside in 1995–96. [18627]

Mr. Ancram: Some 1,231.02 hectares were set aside in 1993–94 and 2,062 hectares in 1994–95.

It is not possible to estimate the number of hectares of land that will be set aside in 1995–96 until after 15 May, which is the closing date for the integrated administration and control system applications on which farmers make their claims for arable area payments.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of payments under the arable area payments scheme in each Northern Ireland area in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; what is his estimate of the cost of payments in 1995–96; and how much in each year represent payments for set aside. [18628]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

County	*1993–94 payments* £	*of which set aside* £	*1994–95 payments* £	*of which set aside* £
Antrim	673,272	14,744	912,248	42,835
Armagh	313,822	17,933	397,127	31,407
Down	1,756,480	137,475	2,552,338	275,465
Fermanagh	1,136	—	1,565	—
Londonderry	924,525	57,244	1,329,571	136,736
Tyrone	342,716	10,256	414,999	23,294
	4,011,951	237,652	5,607,848	509,737

It is not possible to estimate cost of payments in 1995–96 until after 15 May, which is the closing date for integrated administration and control system applications on which farmers make their claims for arable area payments.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18589]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland civil service and its agencies are aware of the problems associated with access for disabled people. To that end, all new Northern Ireland civil service general office premises are constructed in conformity with the requirements of the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) which govern the provision of access, wheelchair space and toilet facilities for disabled persons. In leased properties, such facilities are provided so far as the physical constraints of the premises permit.

Additionally, over the last three years, work has been undertaken to have similar facilities installed, again so far as physical constraints permit, in existing buildings whether owned or leased. Most major existing premises have now been modified.

Funding is also provided to Disability Action, a local voluntary organisation to enable it to employ four access officers specifically recruited to work to improve access for disabled people.

Door-to-door transport schemes are provided for disabled people in Belfast and Londonderry.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has provided direct entrance facilities suitable for wheelchair users and unassisted entry through the installation of ramps and wider doors where possible. Where this has not been possible, all security and reception staff have been trained to assist people who have a disability.

The Housing Executive has also made special provision for the access and employment of people with disabilities. It continues to review these services and consults Disability Action as appropriate.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans exist to restructure loan stock introduced by Government in 1989 as part of the privatisation arrangements of Harland and Wolff Holdings plc. [19248]

Mr. Ancram: Arrangements have been made to replace the Government's existing £60 million unsecured interest-free loan stock repayable by 2019 in the company with a commercially based, interest-bearing and partly secured stock of £6.6 million repayable half-yearly over 10 years. This amount represents the discounted value of £60 million. The arrangements have been concluded following lengthy and detailed negotiation with the company after an approach from the directors, who sought a restructuring of the existing stock on the grounds that this was unduly constraining the commercial, operational and financial freedom of the company in the private sector. Adequate legal safeguards continue to be retained by the Government within the revised convenants and other material conditions of the new stock in relation to the company's continuing commitment to shipbuilding and the provision of employment opportunities in Northern Ireland.

Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18331]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* None of the jobs in the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments that have been transferred to agencies in the past two years have been taken over by contractors; 349 have however disappeared. The breakdown is as follows:

Agency	*Jobs disappeared*
Training and Employment Agency	302
Valuation and Lands Agency	28
Ordnance Survey for NI	19

Public Information Telephone Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the public information telephone inquiry lines operated by his Department, in each case indicating the costs of establishing, operating, and publicising these lines and the number of calls made to them up until this point; when they were established; and what assessment his Department has made of their effectiveness. [17748]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

Junior Doctors

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the average and maximum weekly number of hours on duty and on call for junior hospital doctors. [17385]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The standard working week for junior hospital doctors is 40 hours. The majority of them also contract for a number of additional duty hours, which vary according to their contract of employment.

The maximum weekly hours of duty for junior hospital doctors including additional duty hours, are laid down in the "New Deal". From 1 January, these are 56 hours and 64 hours for those contracted to work full and partial shifts respectively, 72 hours for those contracted for on-call rotas in hard-pressed posts and 83 for those on on-call rotas in non hard-pressed posts. From 1 January, no junior doctor should actually work more than 56 hours a week regardless of their contracted hours.

The census in Scotland on juniors' hours as at 31 December 1994 shows that the average contracted hours of full-time juniors who contract for additional duty hours was 71 hours a week. The maximum contracted hours was 108. The maximum contracted hours shown was 108, but this figure relates to posts in remote areas where the actual working hours are less than 56 hours per week.

Average hours of work, as opposed to contracted hours, are not held centrally. However, the 23rd report of the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration, a copy of which is in the Library, contained the results of an independent survey of junior doctors and dentists in Britain which indicates that average hours of work were, in October 1993, 53.4 a week.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Internet electronic mail addresses of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each Minister in his Department; and if he will make a statement on his Department's approach to the information super-highway. [17736]

Mr. Lang: External electronic mail can be sent to and from the Scottish Office using the international X.400 service, to which there are many subscribers in the United Kingdom. All ministerial private offices have access to this service. My Department is investigating linking its existing internal electronic mail system to the Internet to allow Internet electronic mail access. It already uses the Internet to disseminate information about educational research in Scotland, and is investigating making available a wider range of information using CCTA's world wide web server. In addition, a number of officials in my Department access the Internet to obtain information on a variety of subjects in support of their business. My Department is co-operating with other Departments and agencies to investigate the use of broadband interactive communications for the delivery of more effective and efficient public services in Scotland, and to help ensure that businesses in Scotland are aware of the commercial opportunities arising from the use of these services.

Disabled People

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proposals he has to improve the adaptability of existing district and sheriff courts in relation to the needs of people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [18042]

(2) if he will list the sheriff courts which provide independent access for disabled citizens both in terms of access and egress and freedom of movement within such buildings; and if he will make a statement; [18040]

(3) if he will list the sheriff courts which have *(a)* sound enhancement systems for those citizens with impaired hearing, *(b)* lavatories for disabled people and *(c)* accessible refreshment facilities for disabled people; and if he will make a statement; [18043]

(4) if he will list the sheriff courts which do not comply with those building regulations which determine access and freedom of movement criteria for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [18041]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The detailed information requested is shown in the table. District courts are the responsibility of the district and island councils.

All new sheriff court houses are designed to ensure that disabled people have access to all public areas. A long-term programme of building improvements is being implemented, a major purpose of which is to improve access and facilities for the disabled at existing court houses.

Disabled facilities

	Independent access to					
Sheriff Courts	*Public offices*	*Toilets*	*At least one courtroom*	*Restaurant*	*Sound enhancement*	*Induction loops*
Aberdeen		*	*			
Airdrie	*	*	*		*	*
Alloa	*	*	*			*
Arbroath		*				*
Ayr	*	*			*	*
Banff						*
Campbeltown	*	*	*		*	*
Cupar				*		
Dingwall						
Dornoch						
Dumbarton		*			*	*
Dumfries	*	*	*		*	*
Dundee					*	
Dunfermline	*	*	*		*	*

Disabled facilities

			Independent access to			
Sheriff Courts	*Public offices*	*Toilets*	*At least one courtroom*	*Restaurant*	*Sound enhancement*	*Induction loops*
Dunoon	*	*			*	*
Duns						
Edinburgh	*	*	*	*	*	*
Elgin	*	*	*			
Falkirk	*	*	*	*	*	*
Forfar	*	*	*		*	*
Fort William						
Glasgow	*	*	*	*	*	*
Greenock	*	*	*		*	*
Haddington						
Hamilton				*	*	
Inverness						
Jedburgh	*	*	*			*
Kilmarnock	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kirkcaldy	*	*	*		*	*
Kirkcudbright	*	*		*	*	*
Kirkwall						
Lanark					*	*
Lerwick	*	*				
Linlithgow	*	*	*		*	*
Lochmaddy						
Oban		*				
Paisley	*	*	*		*	*
Peebles						
Perth	*	*	*		*	*
Peterhead		*	*			*
Portree						
Rothesay	*	*			*	*
Selkirk	*	*	*		*	*
Stirling	*	*	*		*	*
Stonehaven					*	*
Stornoway						
Stranraer					*	*
Tain						
Wick						*

* Independent access.

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for 1992–93 and 1993–94, separate figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotion materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising; and what are his latest estimates for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17607]

Mr. Lang: Details on expenditure on information publicity are set out below:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
Television	831,000	934,000
Radio	120,000	80,000
Press	415,000	511,000
Other promotional activities	1,072,000	755,000
Total	2,438,000	2,280,000

The estimated outturn for expenditure on information publicity for 1994–95 is £2,254,000 and the estimate for 1995–96, £3,171,000.

Recruitment advertising is done through the press and expenditure for 1992–93 and 1993–94 was £318,000 and £253,000 respectively. The estimated outturn for recruitment expenditure in 1994–95 is £135,000 and the forecast for 1995–96 is £126,000.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80, and how many such questions received a substantive answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18473]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18474]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report;* [18475]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question. [18476]

Mr. Lang: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18478]

Mr. Lang: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18477]

Mr. Lang: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. However, I understand that figures are available from POLIS for next step agencies by parliamentary Session from 1992–93 onwards.

NHS Staff (Tayside)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representative of the health board and health trusts in Tayside to discuss morale among NHS staff in that area. [18143]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State for Scotland has no plans at present to meet representatives of the health board and health trusts in Tayside. There are, however, regular meetings between Scottish Office officials and representatives of health boards and NHS trusts, including Tayside.

Microscopes in Schools

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he is sending to the Royal Microscopical Society in respect of its proposal that there should be a microscope in every school. [16376]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State has not received any representation from the Royal Microscopical Society about the provision of microscopes in schools.

The value of microscopes is recognised in the national guidelines for environmental studies 5-14. These include microscopes in the range of equipment which schools should have available to provide for the reasonable needs of pupils and teachers in their investigative activities. However, the choice of equipment for schools is a matter for education authorities.

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had, and with whom concerning the present condition and future of the Gourock Ropeworks of Port Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [17303]

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has had no recent discussions on this matter. However, as the question relates to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland, I have asked the agency's director and chief executive, Mr Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member.

The reply will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy deposited in the Library of the House.

Letter from Graeme Munro to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 5 April 1995:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for written answer on 5 April asking what recent discussions he has had about the Gourock Ropework building. The question relates to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland and I have been asked to reply. The terms of this letter will be reproduced in the Official Report and a copy of it will also be deposited in the Library of the House.

Historic Scotland has recently had contacts both with Scottish Homes and Bellway Homes about the Ropeworks building. As you will be aware, a feasibility study prepared by the company last year concluded that both building and site were ideal for a scheme of conversion and re-development for residential accommodation. Given such positive conclusions it was right and proper that this avenue for putting together a scheme for the re-use of this listed building should be explored carefully and extensively. It is now clear, however, from discussions which I have had with Scottish Homes that a package of assistance to make the scheme viable cannot be put together.

Government policy with regard to listed buildings is that no worthwhile building should be demolished unless it is demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that every effort has been exerted by all concerned to find practical ways of keeping it. I am now satisfied that the concerted efforts to find a practical use for the building, encouraged by Historic Scotland, have fulfilled this policy commitment.

The position concerning demolition is clear. In order to demolish a listed building such as the Gourock Ropeworks, listed building consent is needed. To date no application for such listed building consent has been received by Historic Scotland.

European Social Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students have benefited from the European Union's social fund provision, enabling them to undertake courses in *(a)* universities and *(b)* colleges of further education. [17260]

Mr. Kynoch: The estimated numbers of beneficiaries based on application by universities and further education college for European social fund in 1994 in Scotland are as follows:

	(a) Universities	*(b) FE Colleges*
Objective 1	77	932
Objective 2	386	5,180
Objective 3	1,365	1,631
Objective 5b	0	1,102
All objectives	1,828	8,845

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidlines he has given to universities and other colleges concerning the training allowances given to mature students by way of the European Union's social fund. [17262]

Mr. Kynoch: The guidelines issued annually to all potential applicants for European social fund including universities and colleges set out the items of expenditure which are eligible for assistance. The guidelines cover how the allowances to students and other trainees are to be treated.

Well-woman Centres

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has offered to fundholding general practitioners about the purchasing of treatment and care from well-woman centres; and if he will make a statement. [17261]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No specific guidance has been issued to GP fundholding practices on this subject.

Unitary Authorities

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on indicative grants for the new unitary authorities. [17263]

Mr. Kynoch: To assist the shadow councils with their financial planning for 1996–97, it is proposed to prepare illustrative 1995–96 grant aided expenditure assessments and, in terms of section 24 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, and subject to the approval of the House, notional 1995–96 budgets for each of the councils. We also plan to issue to them provisional non-housing capital allocations.

Wildlife Offences

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what central records he maintains concerning criminal offences and activity in relation to *(a)* wild birds and *(b)* other wildlife; and if he will make a statement. [17264]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office holds statistical information, provided by Scottish police forces, on the following offences in relation to wild birds and other wildlife.

(a) Categories of crimes and offences including offences in relation to wild birds:

Offences involving birds

(b) Categories of crimes and offences including offences in relation to other wildlife:

Cruelty to animals (excluding dogs, birds)

Offences involving animals (excluding dogs or birds or elsewhere classified)

Salmon and freshwater fisheries offences

Sea fisheries offences

Possession of salmon or trout unlawfully obtained

Poaching and game laws

Offences under Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 and Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1982.

Housebuilding

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people employed in the housebuilding industry; and what were the figures in *(a)* 1981 and *(b)* 1989. [17265]

Mr. Kynoch: Information is available only for the construction industry as a whole. In December 1994, the number of employees in employment in the construction industry in Scotland was 119,200. The corresponding figure for December 1981 was 133,600, and for December 1989 was 132,800.

Drug Abuse

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the change in local government upon the work of those employed in anti-drug abuse programmes; and if he will make a statement. [17266]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The important and continuing role of local authorities in tackling drug misuse was reflected in the report of the drugs task force, led by my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State. They will be represented on the local drug action teams, which are now being set up throughout Scotland, with responsibility for developing a strategic plan addressing all aspects of the drug misuse problem in their areas. In recent guidance, we have emphasised the importance of drawing the new shadow local authorities into the activities of the drug action teams to facilitate the strategic planning process and to ensure that local government continues to play its full and vital part in the response to drug misuse at local level.

Out-patient Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the secretary of State for Scotland how many non-attenders to out-patient appointments there were in 1994; and what was the cost to the NHS. [17704]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional figure for new out-patient appointments where the patient failed to attend in 1994 is 134,207. Corresponding information for return out-patients, and information on the resultant cost to the NHS of non-attenders is not centrally available.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions the Crown Office has had with Mr. Ron Smith of Scottish Woodlands Ltd., Castle Douglas, about a red and orange tarpaulin found at Lockerbie, before Christmas 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made clear in relation to the Lockerbie case, as in any other case, it is not appropriate for the investigating or prosecuting authority to give details of investigative steps which have been taken.

Correspondence

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 26 January to the general manager of Lothian health board concerning general practitioner fundholding. [18206]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter for the acting general manager of Lothian health board. However I understand that the information requested by the hon. Member will be supplied shortly.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Caithness and Sutherland NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18174]

(2) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Raigmore hospital NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18175]

(3) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Royal Alexandra hospital NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18176]

(4) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Southern General hospitals NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18177]

(5) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the West Lothian NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18178]

(6) when the hon. Member of Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Stobhill NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18187]

(7) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Yorkhill NHS trust concerning performance-related pay; [18179]

(8) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a response to his letter of 24 February to the chief executive of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust concerning performance-related pay. [18186]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter which should be pursued with the chief executive of the individual trust concerned.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will write to the chief executives of Scotland's NHS trusts and the general managers of Scotland's health boards reminding them of their duties to respond to correspondence from hon. Members timeously. [18190]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble Friend the Minister of State has asked the NHS management executive to remind chief executives of NHS trusts and the general managers of health boards of their duties in relation to correspondence from hon. Members.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18652]

Sir Hector Monro: I am the green Minister at the Scottish Office. All significant environmental initiatives taken by the Scottish Office are reported in the annual series of White Papers "This Common Inheritance"—the most recent, Cm 2822, was published on Wednesday 29 March. Many are also highlighted in the annual departmental reports.

I am also fully involved in consideration of the Environment Bill, in particular the provisions setting up the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of payments *(a)* for set-aside and *(b)* in total under the arable area payments scheme in Scotland in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95; and what is his estimate of the cost of payments in 1995–96. [18633]

Sir Hector Monro: Payments which have been made to farmers in Scotland under the arable area payments scheme in the scheme years 1993 and 1994 are as follows:

	(a) Set-aside £	*(b) Total AAPS payments* £
1993	16,195,029.92	93,287,405.44
1994	22,792,098.25	115,593,078.84

The cost of payments in the 1995 scheme year will depend on the amount of valid claims made and on the green pound–ecu exchange rate at 1 July 1995.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares of land were set aside under the arable area payments scheme in Scotland in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95; and what is his estimate of the number of hectares of land that will be set-aside in 1995–96. [16661]

Sir Hector Monro: Payments were made in respect of 80,661.09 hectares and 77,252.12 hectares of land set aside in the scheme years 1993 and 1994 respectively. Figures are not yet available for the 1995 scheme year.

Flooding (Strathclyde)

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the measures he has taken to assist local authorities and other institutions in the aftermath of the floods within Strathclyde earlier this year. [17600]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* The measures taken under my responsibility in response to the Strathclyde flooding include:

£100,000 supplementary capital allocation to Renfrew District Council in 1994–95, to provide temporary accommodation for those made homeless;

£150,000 supplementary housing capital allocation to Strathkelvin District Council in 1994–95 to undertake flood abatement works at Lennoxtown;

£200,000 supplementary capital allocation to Glasgow District Council in 1994–95 to undertake urgent housing repairs;

£1.365 million supplementary capital allocations to Strathclyde Regional Council in 1994–95 for urgent repair work on non-housing services;

authorising Renfrew District Council to carry forward unutilised capital consent of up to a maximum of £1.85 million from 1994–95 for expenditure in 1995–96;

authorising Strathkelvin District Council to carry forward unutilised capital consent of up to a maximum of £0.53 million from 1994–95 for expenditure in 1995–96;

£2.5 million additional capital allocations in 1995–96 for remedial work on housing to Renfrew District Council and Strathkelvin District Council;

£10,000 contribution to Clyde River Purification Board study on the cause and extent of the recent flooding; and

> an increase of £180,000 in the 1995–96 non-housing capital consent allocation to Renfrew District Council to meet the cost of repairs to the Linwood Sports Centre.

In addition, the Government scheme of special financial assistance, known as the Bellwin scheme, has been activated.

A draft national planning policy guideline on planning and flooding has recently been issued for consultation.

Prescriptions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *174*, (i) how many pre-payment certificates were issued and (ii) how many prescriptions were dispensed on presentation of a pre-payment certificates, in each financial year since 1979–80 and for each health board in Scotland. [18254]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available. The number of pre-payment certificates issued is not held centrally. Prescriptions dispensed on presentation of pre-payment certificates are not separately identified.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, further to his answer of 21 March, Official Report, column *174*, how many prescriptions for which no charge was made were issued excluding items issued on prescription on presentation of a pre-payment certificate, in each financial year since 1979–80 and for each health board in Scotland. [18253]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available. Prescriptions dispensed on presentation of pre-payment certificates are not separately identified.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been *(a)* the amount raised from prescription charges within the NHS in Scotland and *(b)* the expenditure on the system of NHS prescriptions for medication within the NHS in Scotland; and if he will give the difference between *(a)* and *(b)* in each year since 1979–80. [18261]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for the financial years 1979–80 to 1993–94 is set out in the table. The information shows *(a)* the annual income from NHS prescription charges paid by patients in respect of drugs and appliances dispensed by community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers and the sums collected in respect of the sale of prepayment certificates; *(b)* the net ingredient cost of the drugs and appliances and the remuneration paid to community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers for dispensing these drugs and appliances; and *(c)* the difference between *(a)* and *(b)*.

£ million

Year	*(a) Annual income*	*(b) Annual expenditure*	*(c) Difference between (a) and (b)*
1979–80	4.38	99.94	95.56
1980–81	7.87	120.63	112.76
1981–82	10.27	137.57	127.30
1982–83	11.89	155.86	143.97
1983–84	12.87	172.02	159.15
1984–85	14.03	183.56	169.53
1985–86	15.62	195.30	179.68
1986–87	19.00	211.91	192.91
1987–88	18.25	235.98	217.73
1988–89	19.82	262.59	242.77
1989–90	21.69	292.82	271.13
1990–91	23.03	320.89	297.86
1991–92	25.51	359.55	334.04
1992–93	27.87	402.78	374.91
1993–94	30.51	435.97	405.46

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was raised through the levying of prescriptions charges by each health board in Scotland in each financial year since 1979–80. [18188]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for each health board for the financial years 1979–80 to 1993–94 is set out in the tables. The amounts of revenue shown include NHS prescription charges paid by patients in respect of drugs and appliances dispensed by community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers. NHS prescription charges recovered from patients under health board post-dispensing checking arrangements are also included.

The amounts shown do not include the sums collected in respect of the sales of pre-payment certificates which are not deemed to be the payment of a charge under the NHS (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Scotland) Regulations 1989, as amended.

Health board	*1979–80* £	*1980–81* £	*1981–82* £	*1982–83* £	*1983–84* £	*1984–85* £	*1985–86* £
Argyll and Clyde	361,984	654,993	839,544	978,013	1,050,524	1,139,261	1,244,913
Ayrshire and Arran	344,877	543,678	805,826	863,823	916,197	983,569	1,097,596
Borders	77,866	143,945	180,320	215,894	234,704	261,627	305,637
Dumfries and Galloway	115,805	184,775	260,017	309,078	340,806	364,014	411,166
Fife	281,440	450,802	638,069	741,875	811,065	874,511	977,389
Forth Valley	221,844	398,973	517,782	604,889	664,162	713,950	789,965
Grampian	379,213	696,876	907,565	1,112,691	1,216,002	1,381,119	1,599,033
Greater Glasgow	789,443	1,398,192	1,743,182	1,960,743	2,102,009	2,220,729	2,344,749
Highland	142,481	261,926	337,880	394,090	433,661	462,513	516,948
Lanarkshire	480,368	861,032	1,103,182	1,261,896	1,362,351	1,471,735	1,601,002
Lothian	562,167	909,458	1,283,843	1,500,822	1,633,670	1,774,271	1,999,526
Orkney	12,892	23,175	30,774	37,365	38,331	43,098	70,018
Shetland	21,622	42,291	45,832	46,375	44,717	50,399	59,086
Tayside	301,176	544,606	678,014	817,992	873,748	966,408	1,091,185
Western Isles	17,812	30,756	45,661	48,592	52,460	57,889	63,731
Total	4,110,990	7,145,478	9,417,491	10,894,138	11,774,407	12,765,093	14,171,944

Health Board	*1986–87* £	*1987–88* £	*1988–89* £	*1989–90* £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Argyll and Clyde	1,541,503	1,401,971	1,619,931	1,664,327	1,739,909	1,909,549	2,034,494	2,165,136
Ayrshire and Arran	1,258,265	1,343,944	1,363,265	1,493,341	1,599,391	1,720,195	1,825,740	1,992,347
Borders	357,926	361,707	418,690	432,012	460,828	507,546	566,992	639,116
Dumfries and Galloway	529,758	506,040	591,008	616,088	650,903	731,447	790,551	889,771
Fife	1,290,751	1,127,660	1,224,895	1,367,947	1,451,579	1,634,243	1,752,818	1,799,866
Forth Valley	998,607	920,575	1,059,355	1,088,334	1,165,445	1,300,438	1,401,513	1,596,432
Grampian	1,841,974	2,043,973	2,006,440	2,205,824	2,399,868	2,694,810	3,039,443	3,331,274
Greater Glasgow	2,840,176	2,525,368	2,694,145	2,847,550	2,945,034	3,142,277	3,307,852	3,500,011
Highland	639,028	570,729	715,553	765,988	847,790	959,670	1,042,665	1,119,967
Lanarkshire	1,935,899	1,769,306	1,918,087	2,115,452	2,115,476	2,359,297	2,520,036	2,742,741
Lothian	2,539,710	2,352,445	2,550,357	3,037,177	3,031,138	3,337,516	3,626,777	4,053,025
Orkney	80,435	75,240	85,649	87,711	105,903	119,597	240,408	164,042
Shetland	73,169	73,797	79,223	83,269	105,137	103,192	113,651	130,688
Tayside	1,369,588	1,289,796	1,399,856	1,536,510	1,658,357	1,830,338	2,011,229	2,206,634
Western Isles	69,369	79,929	71,498	77,870	86,351	87,519	99,184	114,418
Total	17,366,158	16,442,480	17,797,952	19,419,400	20,403,109	22,437,634	24,373,353	26,445,468

A9

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what objections have been made to the proposed design of the Logie Easter-Garrick bridge stretch of the A9; and what response has he given. [18563]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Draft statutory orders were published in October 1993 and five objections were received, one of which has been resolved. The remaining four objections relate to the provision of facilities for cyclists. The Scottish Office continues to seek resolution of these objections.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimated completion date for the Logie Easter–Garrick bridge stretch of the A9. [18564]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In his statement on 24 May 1994, my right hon. Friend announced that he expected that work would start on the improvement of the A9 between Logie Easter and Garrick bridge before March 1997 subject, among other things, to completion of the statutory procedures. Because of outstanding objections, these procedures remain incomplete and a programme for construction has not been determined.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he first proposed a route action plan for the A9 north of Dornoch bridge. [18565]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A route action plan approach to the A9 north of Dornoch was initially raised at a meeting with a delegation from Highland regional council in January 1991.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Highland regional council following the proposal for a route action plan for the A9 north of the Dornoch bridge; and what reply he gave. [18566]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has received no representations from Highland regional council. However, since the question of a route action plan was first raised, my officials have been in regular contact with officials from the regional council.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he issued the terms of reference for the route action plan north of the Dornoch bridge. [18567]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following the submission of draft proposals for the action plan in January 1992 and after a series of discussions with Highland regional council, a brief for the route action plan was issued to the regional council in January 1994.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive proposals to implement a route action plan; and if he will make a statement. [18568]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highland regional council is to submit an interim report on the route action plan by December 1995. This will describe the extent of congestion on the existing road, the nature of the existing constraints to free flow of traffic and the options which will be examined for testing. The interim report will be analysed to produce a programme of works to be included in the route action plan.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to obtain a European regional development fund grant under objective 1 funding for the improvement of the A9 between Helmsdale and the Ord of Caithness; and if he will make a statement. [18569]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: An application for ERDF objective 1 funding would be premature at this time. Consideration will be given to lodging an application in due course.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is currently giving to the improvement of the A9 at Berriedale; and if he will make a statement. [18570]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The case for improvements at Berriedale Braes will be examined as part of the A9 route action plan.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Highland regional council about upgrading the A9 at Berriedale. [18571]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has not received recently any representations from Highland regional council about the upgrading of the A9 at Berriedale. However, Berriedale lies within the scope of the A9 north of Dornoch route action plan study currently being carried out by Highland region and as such my officials have been in regular contact with officials from the regional council.

Temporary Contracts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people he expects to employ in (i) his Department and (ii) all executive agencies for which he is responsible on temporary contracts of *(a)* 51 weeks or *(b)* less than 51 weeks duration in the next three years, in each case specifying the number of employees who had previously been employed in a similar position on the same contract.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 March 1995]:* During the next three years, I intend to continue our normal policy of employing some staff on a casual basis to fill temporary vacancies which arise seasonally, or to meet a temporary increase in demand. It is not possible to predict how many will be employed on this basis, although we would not expect it to differ signifcantly from previous years.

Historic Scotland

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To aks the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the key performance targets he has set for Historic Scotland for 1995–96. [19122]

Mr. Lang: I have set Historic Scotland the following key performance targets for 1995–96:

	Target
Protecting Scotland's Built Heritage	
Number of monuments scheduled	360
Weighted number of listed building resurvey units	170
Percentage of scheduled monument consent cases resolved within 12 weeks	80 per cent.
Percentage of listed building consent cases resolved within 28 days	97 per cent
Number of historic building repair projects newly assisted by grant	145
Total value of grant-assisted repairs in progress	£31 million
Backlog of conservation of monuments in care	[1]reduce
Promoting and presenting the Building Heritage	
Number of visitors to monuments in care	2.4 million
HS market share compared to other paid visitor attractions in Scotland	20.5 per cent.
Percentage of satisfied visitors (based on surveys)	90 per cent.
Average retail spend per visitor	£0.94
Agency Management	
Percentage efficiency gains/savings on all non-grant expenditure	1.5 per cent.
Total agency income	£9.1 million

Note:

[1] A measure to show the percentage reduction in the conservation backlog will be developed for 1997–98, following the quinquennial survey of the estate in care in 1996.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each health board area in Scotland *(a)* the number of patients treated by dentists and *(b)* the number of patients treated by a dentist who did not make any payment for their treatment for each financial year since 1985–86. [15531]

Lord James Douglas-Hamiliton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The information is in the tables. Information for earlier years is not available.

Table 1

Courses of dental treatment—by health board in Scotland

Health board	*Year ending December 1987*[1]	*Financial year 1988*[1]	*1989*[1]	*1990*[1]	*1991–92*[2]	*1992–93*[2]	*1993–94*[2]
Scotland	2,989,148	3,054,905	3,144,689	3,373,802	2,484,539	2,569,298	2,647,088
Argyll and Clyde	258,537	263,704	271,769	292,528	206,277	211,504	212,294
Ayrshire and Arran	250,239	250,350	254,617	321,693	187,757	190,798	185,868
Borders	72,514	74,807	78,839	85,142	65,622	66,926	67,664
Dumfries and Galloway	88,106	92,049	94,113	100,253	71,512	69,524	64,684
Fife	208,259	213,290	220,942	234,936	160,124	163,676	173,970
Forth Valley	150,978	157,174	160,965	170,660	130,389	137,191	144,446
Grampian	292,001	292,106	303,233	306,831	267,042	277,380	287,776
Greater Glasgow	513,945	527,965	537,454	576,003	441,154	459,004	470,973
Highland	101,489	104,525	111,009	126,897	94,050	96,023	94,009
Lanarkshire	300,227	306,231	309,381	316,006	219,558	226,420	236,699
Lothian	458,153	471,551	490,115	510,014	396,777	414,624	436,028
Orkney	8,147	8,231	8,598	8,979	7,438	7,604	7,486
Shetland	5,551	6,445	7,604	8,722	6,589	6,470	7,505
Tayside	268,986	275,142	284,822	304,920	222,697	233,545	250,004
Western Isles	10,029	9,347	9,239	8,228	7,553	8,609	7,864

[1] 1987 to 1990 information is for all courses of treatment for adults and children.

[2] 1991–92 onwards information is for all courses of treatment for adults and for courses of treatment for children where an item-of-service fee was paid. Since October 1990 most treatment for children has been provided under capitation arrangements and is not counted as individual courses of treatment.

Table 2

Courses of dental treatment where no patient charge was paid—by health board in Scotland

Financial year *Health board*	*1988–89*[1]	*1989–90*[1]	*1990–91*[1]	*1991–92*[2]	*1992–93*[2]	*1993–94*[2]
Scotland	1,529,429	1,581,655	1,196,154	777,773	854,629	933,652
Argyll and Clyde	140,761	146,968	109,311	72,294	80,985	89,228
Ayrshire and Arran	141,165	143,430	108,525	65,558	71,480	77,712
Borders	28,210	29,861	22,210	14,255	15,563	16,616
Dumfries and Galloway	44,191	45,672	31,226	17,371	17,293	18,868
Fife	108,594	112,357	80,831	44,147	47,183	52,124
Forth Valley	79,549	81,128	61,271	39,882	43,424	47,026
Grampian	111,280	113,543	85,181	61,382	64,677	70,219
Greater Glasgow	299,536	131,121	255,779	185,849	208,212	220,979
Highland	50,653	52,342	41,419	26,324	27,126	29,584
Lanarkshire	173,641	175,227	126,792	79,394	86,461	94,743
Lothian	207,967	219,537	163,853	104,530	117,025	131,791
Orkney	2,810	2,875	1,844	1,318	1,225	1,234
Shetland	1,080	1,357	1,370	1,188	1,267	1,656
Tayside	136,157	140,172	103,695	69,109	69,951	79,150
Western Isles	3,835	4,065	2,849	2,172	2,757	2,722

[1] 1988–89 to 1990–91 information relates to all courses of treatment for adults and children.

[2] 1991–92 onwards information relates to all courses of treatment for adults and to courses of treatment for children where an item-of-service fee was paid. Since October 1990 most treatment for children has been provided under capitation arrangements and is not counted as individual courses of treatment.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each health board area in Scotland the average amount paid in charges by a patient receiving dental treatment for each financial year since 1985–86. [15538]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* The information is in the table. Information for earlier years is not available in this form.

Average amount paid in charges by dental patients[1]*—Scotland*

Health board	*1988–89*[2] *£*	*1989–90*[2] *£*	*1990–91*[2] *£*	*1991–92* *£*	*1992–93* *£*	*1993–94* *£*
Scotland	16.90	22.00	23.60	24.34	23.59	23.37
Argyll and Clyde	17.00	22.50	25.00	25.06	24.69	24.52
Ayrshire and Arran	17.00	22.00	23.30	24.04	22.40	22.51
Borders	12.30	16.20	17.30	17.55	18.36	18.38
Dumfries and Galloway	15.90	21.00	21.50	22.49	21.40	21.82
Fife	15.50	20.50	22.30	22.99	22.47	22.26
Forth Valley	17.70	23.00	24.50	24.96	24.05	23.44
Grampian	15.90	20.50	21.50	22.22	21.82	21.30
Greater Glasgow	19.10	24.90	26.90	27.80	27.03	26.90
Highland	19.50	24.60	26.60	26.87	25.21	23.95
Larnarkshire	17.70	23.20	25.50	26.83	25.56	24.86
Lothian	16.60	21.70	23.10	23.68	23.03	22.88
Orkney	11.20	15.10	15.00	16.42	17.47	18.41
Shetland	15.70	19.20	19.10	19.66	22.42	27.09
Tayside	15.70	21.10	22.50	22.98	22.34	22.64
Western Isles	14.00	19.60	21.50	27.51	26.75	24.56

[1] Total amount paid by patients divided by the total number of courses of treatment for patients who paid a charge.

[2] Figures for 1988–89 to 1990–91 are rounded to nearest 10p.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to his answer on 21 March, *Official Report*, column *174*, what was the number of *(a)* deregistrations from NHS dentists to enter private contract by agreement, *(b)* deregistrations attributable to a dentist leaving a practice and *(c)* NHS registered dental patients, in respect of each health board area in Scotland and in respect of each year since 1991–92. [16369]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The information requested about deregistrations is not available centrally. Information about the numbers of NHS registered dental patients in each health board area since 1991–92 is contained in the table.

Dental patients registered at 31 March by health board in Scotland

		Financial Year	
Health Board	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Argyll and Clyde	213,990	212,219	207,647
Ayrshire and Arran	221,072	200,998	198,376
Borders	52,771	53,897	53,238
Dumfries and Galloway	74,290	71,220	68,292
Fife	167,285	171,475	170,690
Forth Valley	129,146	133,441	131,571
Grampian	246,479	259,362	260,173
Greater Glasgow	458,557	474,592	464,351

Dental patients registered at 31 March by health board in Scotland

Health Board	*Financial Year* *1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Highland	102,894	99,161	92,670
Lanarkshire	233,418	242,743	240,001
Lothian	374,659	389,764	385,702
Orkney	5,525	7,267	7,961
Shetland	7,034	7,004	7,823
Tayside	207,270	216,441	217,565
Western Isles	8,294	8,511	8,756
Scotland	2,502,684	2,548,095	2,514,816

Council Housing

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants, and subsequently repossessed, by local authority area, in each of the last five years. [16000]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 March 1995]:* Information on the number of repossessions of dwellings bought under the right-to-buy scheme is not available. However, I understand from figures provided by the Council of Mortgage Lenders that 1,791 properties in total were repossessed in Scotland in 1994, which represents 0.22 per cent. of the total number of properties with mortgages outstanding. This is around half the proportion for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Special Advisers

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what facilities in terms of *(a)* access to telephones, *(b)* use of equipment, *(c)* use of offices, *(d)* access to ministerial meetings, *(e)* sight of correspondence, *(f)* attendance at inter-departmental meetings and *(g)* access to civil servants are available to specialist advisers in his Department. [15612]

Mr. Ian Lang *[holding answer 23 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 27 March, *Official Report*, column *435*.

Ferry Services

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the timetable to be followed in advertising, explaining the appeal procedure, setting a deadline for receipts of objections and, where appropriate, holding a public inquiry into the proposed withdrawal of any ferry service, under the terms of the Railways Act 1993; and if he will make a statement; [16716]

(2) what is the remit of the rail users consultative committee, in respect of the right to call public inquiries into the proposed withdrawal of any Scottish ferry service, under the terms of the Railways Act 1993; and if he will make a statement. [16720]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads on 28 March, *Official Report*, column *534*.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he had given to the rail users consultative committee over its powers, under the Railways Act 1993, to call public inquiries into the proposed withdrawal of any ferry services; what subsequent representations he has received for the RUCC; what plans he has to hold further discussions with the RUCC over the matter; and if he will make a statement. [16717]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* The Scottish Office wrote to Mr. Lawrence Kemp, the acting chairman of the rail users consultative committee for Scotland, on 17 February about the statutory provisions in connection with its functions in relation to ferry services and drew attention to the need for the committee to seek its own legal advice. I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads will be writing shortly to Mr. Kemp with a full statement of the Government's understanding of the position. I have received no further representations and have no plans to hold further discussions given my hon. Friend's intention to write.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the contractual and financial implications that would arise, in respect of the toll-funded Skye bridge project, from the continuation of a parallel ferry service in competition with the road bridge beyond the date of the bridge's opening to traffic, and if he will make a statement; [16718]

(2) what discussions he has had with Highland regional council over the contractual and operational implications which would arise, in respect of the toll-funded Skye bridge project, from the continuation of a parallel ferry service in competition with the road bridge beyond the date of the bridge's opening to traffic; and if he will make a statement. [16719]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 March 1995]:* My right hon. Friend decided to proceed with the planning and construction of the bridge to Skye on the understanding that the ferry service would be withdrawn once a bridge was provided. This was fully discussed with, and accepted by, Highland regional council. Since there is no intention that the ferry service would continue, no discussions have taken place with Highland regional council on the contractual, financial or operational implications associated with the continuation of a ferry service and no assessment has been made of these matters.

Employment Costs

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average annual cost of employing *(a)* a hospital consultant, *(b)* a senior registrar, *(c)* a registrar (career), *(d)* a registrar (SHO3), *(e)* a senior house officer, *(f)* a house officer, *(g)* a qualified nurse and *(h)* an ambulance paramedic. [16696]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 March 1995]:* In Scotland, the average cost of employing *(a)* a hospital consultant was £63,862, *(b)* a senior registrar was £42,671, *(c)* a registrar (career) was £36,038, *(e)* a senior house officer was £30,052, *(f)* a house officer was £21,046, *(g)* a qualified nurse was £20,555.

The information has been calculated over a 12-month period based on the nine months from 1 April to 31 December 1994. It cannot be broken down to show the average cost of a registrar (SHO3) or an ambulance paramedic.

ENVIRONMENT

Advertising

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each non-departmental public body and agency for which he has responsibility and, for each, list separate figures for the spending by that body or agency on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* other promotional materials and activities, *(e)* the totals in each year of *(a)* to *(d)* and *(f)* the proportion of *(e)* that was spent on recruitment advertising for each year since 1979–80 or for each year of its existence if it has been created since then; and what are his latest estimates of *(a)* to *(f)* for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [17616]

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of my Department's non-departmental public bodies can be found in "Public Bodies 1994", published by HMSO and available in the Library of the House. Information back to 1979 is not available.

There was no expenditure by executive NDPBs or agencies in 1994–95 on either *(a)* television or *(b)* radio advertising and there are no plans for such expenditure during 1995–96.

The Department is responsible for promotional and advertising expenditure by advisory NDPBs and tribunals.

Information is not kept in the format requested to answer *(c)*, *(d)* or *(f)* and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have set a budget which would exceed the cap set for those authorities if the Government were to confirm its pro-capping criteria. [18061]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) by the Secretary of State for the Environment on 4 April.

Latham Report

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the recommendations of the Latham report; and from which organisations; [18059]

(2) how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the recommendations of the Latham Report; and from which organisations. [18056]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received some 150 letters from all sections of the construction industry—particularly from specialist contractors. They have been uniformly supportive of the recommendations of the Latham Report.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which recommendations of the Latham report he plans to implement. [18057]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have already made my Department the lead Department for progressing the recommendations in the report. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has established a scrutiny of Government's own procurement designed to ensure that Government can be a best practice client. We have established and received the report of the review implementation forum and, on its advice, my right hon. Friend has established a construction industry board, chaired by Sir Michael Latham, which brings together all parts of the industry, its clients and relevant government departments. Also on the advice of RIF that there was majority support for the legislative proposals in Sir Michael's report, my right hon. Friend has announced that he intends to publish detailed consultation documents on these matters. The majority of the Latham report recommendations are, however, directed at others and we have been active in urging all parts of the industry to address those recommendations.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to bring forward legislation on construction standards. [18055]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Amendments to part L and part F of the building regulations will come into effect on 1 July 1995.

Consultations on possible amendments to part M are currently under way.

My right hon. Friend hopes to issue consultation papers shortly on the legislative proposals in Sir Michael Latham's report "Constructing the Team" HMSO: July 1994.

Telecommunications Development Planning Guidance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what planning guidance he issues regarding *(a)* increasing the number of and *(b)* the positioning of electricity, radio and telephone (i) tower construction and (ii) overhead pylons in the open countryside; and if he will make a statement. [17895]

Sir Paul Beresford: Planning advice on telecommunications development is given in planning policy guidance note 8, "Telecommunications", December 1992, which was supplemented in 1994 by a circular letter to local planning authorities on the prior approval procedure for the appearance and siting of radio masts of up to 15m in height. Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

On electricity pylons, all proposed overhead lines in England and Wales, apart from those to supply individual properties and a few other minor developments, require the consent of the President of the Board of Trade under the Electricity Act 1989. Department of the Environment circular 14/90 explains the procedure which electricity supply companies have to follow before putting up an overhead line.

Environmental Reporting and Disclosure

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department was represented at the meeting on guidelines for environmental reporting and disclosure by multinational companies sponsored by the United Nations conference on trade and development, held in Geneva on 13 to 17 March; and if he will obtain a copy of the report of the meeting and place it in the Library. [17884]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of Trade and Industry arranges representation at UNCTAD's intergovernmental working group of experts on international standards of accounting and reporting. The

UK delegate to the sessions on environmental reporting at ISAR's meeting on 13 to 17 March was Professor Keith Maunders of the university of Hull. I will arrange for a copy of the report of the meeting, when it is available, to be placed in the Library.

Electrical Contracting Industry

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on Government policy towards the electrical contracting industry. [18058]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It is our policy to help the electrical contracting industry succeed in its domestic and overseas markets.

Bristol Development Corporation

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reasons Argent Estates gave for withdrawal from the Bristol development corporation's Quay point development; and if he will make a statement. [18066]

Sir Paul Beresford: Bristol development corporation informed my Department that Argent Group had decided to withdraw its interest in the development of Quay point.

The reasons for this withdrawal are a matter for the company.

Climate Change Programme

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment if he has revised the carbon savings target he set for "The Energy Savings Trust in Climate Change—the UK Programme". [17971]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to him on 28 March, *Official Report*, column *605*. The trust is currently reviewing its plans. It estimates that the programme of activities already established and financed will save about 0.3 million tonnes of carbon in the year 2000. Further schemes will make additional contributions, but they are not yet established. The Government are updating the carbon dioxide chapter of their climate change programme, and this will include an assessment of the likely contribution of energy efficiency. The Government will continue to reflect the key role of the trust, and the targets it sets itself, in the programme; but they will not set targets for the trust.

Earth Tremors, Stoke-on-Trent

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate the extent and causes of recent earth tremors in Stoke-on-Trent. [17898]

Sir Paul Beresford: The extent of earth tremors in Great Britain is monitored by the British Geological Survey. Eleven separate small events were recorded at Stoke-on-Trent and one at Newcastle-under-Lyme between the 20 and 28 February, 1995. None of the existing monitoring instruments is located sufficiently close to the centre of the activity to determine the cause. It is not proposed to install additional monitoring equipment since, while this might identify the origin of subsequent tremors, if any occur, it would not identify unambiguously the cause of those which have taken place already.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers *(a)* he has and *(b)* other authorities have to investigate the causes of a house collapse at Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent; and if he will make a statement. [17888]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for the Environment has no responsibility to investigate the causes of a house collapse. While the local authority has powers to take action to secure public safety, in the event of an emergency, under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Building Act 1984, these powers do not extend to investigation of the causes of a house collapse. The secure and safe occupancy of a site is a matter for the landowner under the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984. The Coal Authority has responsibility, under the Coal Industry Act 1994, to have regard to securing the safety of members of the public in respect of hazards arising from the physical legacy of coal mining for which it has responsibility. This is in addition to the more specific responsibilities it has in the area of coal mining subsidence.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish an inquiry into possible links between earth tremors, former mining operations, and a house collapse in Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent. [17889]

Sir Paul Beresford: It would not be appropriate to establish an inquiry, since the Coal Authority is currently investigating this incident to determine whether there is any relationship to the physical legacy of coal mining.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many parliamentary questions requesting an ordinary written answer were received by his Department in each year since 1979–80; and how many such questions received a substantiative answer within 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18523]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department in each year since 1979–80 requesting a priority written answer or answer on a named day, were answered within three days; how many received a holding reply; and how many of those which received a holding reply then received a substantive answer within a further five, 10, 15, 20 days or longer; [18524]

(3) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has given a reply to a parliamentary question which has resulted in the information requested being placed in the Library and not printed in the *Official Report*; [18525]

(4) how many times in each year since 1979–80 his Department has written to a right hon. or hon. Member correcting an answer to a parliamentary question; [18526]

(5) how many parliamentary questions to his Department were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence; [18527]

(6) how many parliamentary questions to his Department that were transferred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental public body or agency for which he has responsibility received an answer which was not printed in the *Official Report* in each year since 1979–80 or for each year that the body or agency has been in existence. [18528]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is a matter of public record but it could be extracted only in the form requested at disproportionate cost.

Lambeth Council

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when his Department became aware of Lambeth council's failure to finalise accounts for each relevant financial year between 1979 and financial year ended 1993; and on what date his Department took action in each case; [18402]

(2) what information his Department received as to the failure of Lambeth council to finalise accounts for any financial year between 1979 and financial year ended 1993; and what action his Department took in each case. [18405]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities are required, under regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1983, SI 1761, to make up and balance accounts for each financial year by no later than six months after the end of that financial year; and, under regulation 15, to publish a statement of accounts no later than nine months after the end of the financial year. Failure to meet these deadlines is a matter for the local authority concerned and the district auditor. My Department is not involved.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when his Department first became aware of each audit report in the public interest that has been issued since 1979 with reference to Lambeth council; and what action his Department has taken in each case; [18407]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with the district audit service of the Audit Commission with respect to each audit report issued in the public interest on the subject of Lambeth council; and what action his Department has taken on each of them. [18404]

Mr. Curry: Since 1979, 10 public interest reports have been issued by the district auditor at Lambeth. The Department became aware of them as public documents. It is the responsibility of the audited body to respond to public interest reports, and to take any necessary action. The Department has no direct role in the process.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department first became aware of the contents of each management letter sent to Lambeth council since 1979; and what action his Department took in each case. [18403]

Mr. Curry: The management letter is not a public document, unless an authority chooses to make it so, and any consequent action is between the audited body and its appointed auditor. The auditor is prevented by law from disclosing to the Government or anyone else information obtained in the course of his or her duties.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates and nature of notices served on Lambeth council with reference to the management and accounts of the council direct labour organisation; and what was the response in each case. [18406]

Mr. Curry: On 22 March 1993, five notices were served on the authority for accounting deficiencies and failure to provide accounts. Overall, these notices covered building maintenance work, highway and sewer maintenance work, refuse collection, street cleaning, ground maintenance work, building cleaning and vehicle maintenance. Subsequently, four directions were issued to the authority on 23 July 1993. Their details are as follows:

Building maintenance; to re-tender all the work by 1 April 1994 and seek the consent from the Secretary of State before assigning any of the work to its direct labour organisation; a prohibition on carrying out housing maintenance work being undertaken by the private sector; a prohibition on carrying out work on non-educational public buildings; and a complete prohibition from carrying out the work from 1 July 1994 unless outstanding accounts were provided by 31 December 1993. The work was re-tendered in 63 contracts, the authority obtained consent to assign 12 contracts to its direct labour organisation in March 1994 and the accounts were supplied.

Highway and sewer maintenance—a prohibition on carrying out the work from 1 April 1994 except for winter emergency work.

Refuse collection and street cleaning—a complete prohibition on carrying out the work from 1 July 1994 unless outstanding accounts were provided by 31 December 1993. The accounts were provided and the direct service organisation continues to undertake the work.

Ground maintenance, building cleaning and vehicle maintenance—a complete prohibition on carrying out the work from 1 July 1994 unless outstanding accounts were provided by 31 December 1993. The accounts were provided and the direct service organisation continues to undertake the work.

On 28 February this year, two further notices were served on the authority for financial failure in respect of ground maintenance work and building cleaning in the year 1993–94. We have received the authority's responses and are considering whether to proceed to directions.

Water Industry

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the proportion of profits obtained by the privatised water industry which have been *(a)* retained for investment in its core business, *(b)* distributed to shareholders and *(c)* invested in businesses other than the provision of water and sewerage services. [18561]

Mr. Atkins: This information is published in the annual reports and accounts of the individual water companies.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the Regulator of the Water Industry has adequately protected the consumer interest; and if he will make a statement. [18562]

Mr. Atkins: The Director General of Water Services, Mr. Ian Byatt, has a statutory duty to ensure that the functions of water and sewerage companies are properly carried out and that they are able to finance these functions. He must also protect customers' interests, promote economy and efficiency and facilitate competition where appropriate. Mr. Byatt has carried out these duties successfully and effectively.

Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) to what extent draft unitary development plans should be taken account of in determining planning decisions and appeals; [18341]

(2) what guidance he gives to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* inspectors with delegated powers, where planning applications or appeals run counter to draft unitary development plans but are to be determined before the development plan process is finalised; [18342]

(3) what action is open to local authorities where it appears that planning applications contrary to a draft unitary development plan are being submitted in an attempt to determine issues in advance of the UMP inquiry where this would have the effect of prejudging the inquiry. [18343]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department's policy is set out in paragraphs 32–34 of PPG1.

As far as possible, decisions should be taken in the light of current policies. However, it may be justifiable for a local planning authority to refuse planning permission when a development proposal raises matters that should be settled in the development plan context. The weight to be attached to a draft plan will increase as successive stages in the development plan process are reached, having regard to any conflicts with existing plans, and whether there are objections.

Prematurity cases call for careful judgment about the scale of the impact of the proposed development, and its significance in relation to the emerging development plan. The objective of our policy is to safeguard the development plan processes, while at the same time ensuring that development is not delayed without good cause.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what criteria he uses for deciding which planning appeals to delegate to inspectors; [18340]

(2) for what reasons he delegated to an inspector responsibility for the recent planning appeal at Oxclose farm, Sheffield. [18344]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 transfers responsibility for determining appeals to planning inspectors unless the Secretary of State decides to intervene and recover jurisdiction. The criteria for recovering jurisdiction are set out in the Government's response to the fifth report from the Environment Committee, Session 1985–86, "Planning: Appeals, Call-In and Major Public Inquiries", Command 43. The proposal at Oxclose farm did not meet any of these recovery criteria. The appeal therefore remained to be determined by an inspector.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of whether the inspector's decision on the planning appeal at Oxclose farm, Sheffield, conforms to guidance notes PPG6 and PPG13; [18338]

(2) what assessment he has made of whether the introduction of guidance notes PPG6 and PPG13 in their current form made a difference to the outcome of the recent planning appeal at Oxclose farm, Sheffield. [18339]

Sir Paul Beresford: All inspectors are expected to take account of guidance notes PPG6 and PPG13 where they are relevant. It is established practice that I do not comment on individual cases.

Polling Organisations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 March, *Official Report*, column *365*, if he will list those polling organisations which have been employed by his Department and give in detail the research undertaken by those organisations. [18259]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information available is provided in the table below. The table lists all surveys of the public which were conducted in the two financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 by external organisations employed by the Department of the Environment, and which included questions seeking public opinion.

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Researchers*
Evaluation of 'Right to Buy' Publicity Campaign	To evaluate publicity campaign	April 1993	MORI
'Right to Buy' Campaign Evaluation—follow-up stage	Follow-up to above survey	May 1993	MORI
Helping the Earth Campaign Evaluation Research 1993–94—Waves 4 and 5	To evaluate the 'Helping the Earth' campaign	July 1993	BMRB
Landlords Research	To inform policy making	July 1993	SCPR
Public Attitudes to the Environment	To inform policy	July 1993	NOP
Customer Survey: Study of Appellants' and Local Authorities' Experience of the Hearings System	To assess customer satisfaction with the hearings of appeals procedures	September 1993	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants
Helping the Earth—Literature Evaluation	To evaluate literature campaign	September 1993	MAI
Ventilation in Homes	To evaluate the effectiveness of Building Regulations	October 1993	PAS
Helping the Earth Radio Campaign	To assess the effectiveness of campaign	October 1993	RSGB
Rent Policies of LAs in England	To monitor and inform policy	November 1993	Inlogov
The Nature of Demand for Housing in Rural Areas	To investigate people's housing experiences in rural areas	December 1993	Birmingham University
Flat Service Charges and Right to Buy	To monitor and inform policy	December 1993	MORI
Monitoring the Actions of Failed Grant Applicants	To monitor and inform policy	January 1994	PAS
Rent to Mortgage Leaflet follow-up	To establish tenants opinion and action taken towards buying their home	February 1994	NOP
Public Attitudes to Planning (and Development)	To inform policy and promote the planning system	February 1994	Prism Research
Helping the Earth Campaign, Pre and Post Monitor	To assess campaign effectiveness	February 1994	COI
Study of Lodgers Scheme	To inform policy making on Lodgers scheme	March 1994	The London Research Centre
Recreational Cycling Market Research	To assess customer satisfaction	April 1994	COI

Title	*Objectives*	*Fieldwork start date*	*Researchers*
Ventilation in Homes	To evaluate the effectiveness of Building Regulations	April 1994	Public Attitudes Surveys Ltd.
The Environmental Effects of Dust from Surface Mineral Workings—pilot survey	To define reasonable dust levels	May 1994	Over Arup and Partners
Vacant Dwellings in the Private Sector	To determine the scope for bringing vacant dwellings back into use	May 1994	University of Wales and MORI
Home Improvement Agency Client Survey	To review the work of Home Improvement Agencies	June 1994	SCPR
Research into the Role and Operation of Homes	To evaluate policy	August 1994	MORI
'Wasting Energy Costs the Earth' Campaign Evaluation	To establish attitudes to and action on energy use in the home	September 1994	NOP
The Environmental Effects of Production Blasting from Surface Mineral Workings (Pilot Survey)	To define reasonable working levels for production blasting	September 1994	Vibrock Ltd.
Customer Survey: Study of Customer's experience of the inquiry procedure	To assess customer satisfaction	October 1994	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants
Review of Council's Tenants Charter	To assess customer awareness, views on contents and usefulness of the Councils Tenant's Charter	October 1994	MORI
Houses in Multiple Occupation: Establishing Effective Local Authority Strategies	To asses customer satisfaction	November 1994	Public Attitudes Surveys Ltd.
Testing the Planetary Caretaker Pack	To explore children's reactions to Environmental Information Packs	March 1995	NOP

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the measures taken, facilities offered and adjustments made in his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to facilitate access for disabled people; what plans he has to improve access; and if he will make a statement. [18588]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department is committed to providing and improving access into and around its buildings for staff and visitors with disabilities. Where the physical characteristics of existing buildings allow, accommodation officers make arrangements to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities on advice from the departmental disabled persons officer.

Facilities already provided include wheelchair ramps, lifts with tactile buttons, car parking facilities and assistance where necessary. Induction loops are available for people with hearing difficulties and arrangements can also be made for sign language interpretation at meetings or interviews.

Green Policy

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which Minister attended when the green Ministers last met; which items were discussed; when they will next meet; and what items are on the agenda for that meeting. [18657]

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I attended the last meeting in December 1994.

The items discussed were:

the UK annual report 1995: "This Common Inheritance" (now published, Cm 2822), the town and country quality initiative, the Royal Commission on environmental pollution report on transport and the environment and the proposed rural White Paper. The UK round table on sustainable development and departmental green housekeeping strategies were also discussed.

A further meeting will be held shortly and the agenda is presently being considered.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the green Minister for his Department and list *(a)* the green initiatives taken by that Minister in respect of the Department's functions, *(b)* the representations made by the Minister in respect of functions carried out by other Departments and *(c)* the input made by the Minister into consultations on the Environment Bill. [18639]

Mr. Gummer: I am the principal green Minister for the Department of the Environment, but all my ministerial colleagues share our common objective of promoting sustainable development in all areas of national life.

"Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy", Cm 2426, presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister in January 1994, set out our overall approach to these issues, and lists large numbers of individual initiatives, objectives and targets. Progress on these has been reported more recently in "This Common Inheritance 1995", Cm 2822, published last month. Paragraphs 1.9 to 1.12 of that report list the following nine areas to which we are giving high priority this year together with the following priority aims for each one:

Climate Change: to review the objectives and measures in the UK's climate change programme, and to consider how it should be extended beyond 2000 so as to make an appropriate UK contribution to the global effort.

Air Quality: to implement an effective strategy for improving general levels of local air quality and for managing episodes of poor air quality on the basis of the strategic policies set out in "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge".

Freshwater and the Sea: to maintain and where appropriate improve the quality of UK drinking water, rivers and bathing and coastal waters; and to participate constructively in European negotiations on the further improvement of drinking water (including on the issue of lead) and surface waters, and the protection of groundwater; while taking carefully into account what water consumers and others can reasonably afford.

Biodiversity: to develop the UK's biodiversity action plan into an effective programme for the protection of habitats and species, with specific costed targets for key habitats and species.

Fish stocks: to examine options for improving the EC common fisheries policy taking account of the advice of the Government's panel on sustainable development, and to reflect on its recommendation for the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on the oceans;

Waste: to carry forward public consultations on a new waste management strategy which would encourage everyone firstly to reduce waste and then to reuse or recycle, or recover energy in preference to disposing of waste, and to seek Parliament's approval for statute-based producer responsibility schemes for the reuse, recovery or recycling of products and materials.

Rural Development: in preparing rural White Papers for England and Scotland to take a fresh look at economic, social and environmental policies which impact on rural areas.

The Built Environment: to improve the quality of the built environment, to raise awareness that good design matters and is affordable and to help ease development pressure in particular by taking forward ideas prompted by the quality in town and country initiative.

Transport: recognising that unconstrained traffic growth would have unacceptable consequences in terms of pollution, carbon dioxide production, noise and disturbance, to develop appropriate national and local strategies and measures for reducing the need to travel and to encourage more sustainable and environmentally acceptable patterns of transport—focusing particularly on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

The whole Government are committed to the objective of sustainable development and I am in regular contact with all my colleagues on the implications of this, including in particular the Chancellor of the Exchequer; the Foreign Secretary; the Home Secretary; the Secretary of State for Transport; the President of the Board of Trade; the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

I have taken the lead inside and outside Government in the preparations for the Environment Bill, and look forward to introducing it to the House of Commons shortly after Easter.

Social Index

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the net gain or loss in Liverpool arising from its position on the social index; and what were the corresponding figures for Westminster and Wandsworth. [18943]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The contributions of the combined economic and social indices to the 1995–96 standard spending assessments are:

Liverpool: £12.411 million;
Westminster: £20.290 million;
Wandsworth: £10.305 million;

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment where Liverpool ranks on the social index; and what rankings are given to *(a)* Westminster, *(b)* Wandsworth, *(c)* Bath, *(d)* Brighton and *(e)* Norwich. [18942]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The ranking for the combined economic an social indices in 1995–96 are:

Liverpool 17
a) Westminster 12
b) Wandsworth 16
c) Bath 86
d) Brighton 29
e) Norwich 47

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how economic disadvantage is taken into account in the economic and social services standard spending assessment; what ranking Liverpool receives on the social index ; what ranking it receives on the index of local conditions; which of these is used to determine standard spending assessments; and what consideration he is giving to referring to both indexes in making the calculation. [18936]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The SSAs for personal social services includes an other social services index; the all other services district level SSA includes an economic index and social index. These two indices should be considered together. The constituents of these indexes are set out in the Local Government Finance Report, England, 1995–96.

In the social index alone, Liverpool has a ranking of 81. Liverpool has a ranking of 17th for the combined economic and social indices, and second for the authorities outside London. Liverpool ranks sixth in the index of local conditions. The economic and social indices are not comparable with the index of local conditions which is designed for a different purpose.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to remove the capping criteria on local government spending. [18237]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. Capping ensures that all authorities play their part in the restraint of public expenditure, and protects taxpayers from high council taxes. We have taken powers to reduce excessive budgets and excessive increases in budget and have made it clear that we will not hesitate to use them should it prove necessary to do so.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the average standard spending assessment in England over the last two years; what is the figure in Liverpool; what is the Liverpool standard spending assessment as an average per head of population; what is the corresponding figure for inner London boroughs; and what is the average standard spending assessment per head of population in Tower Hamlets and Hackney. [18941]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures requested are shown below:

	1994–95	*1995–96*
Standard spending assessment for England (£ per head)	£782	£798
Standard spending assessment for Liverpool	£419m	£423m
Standard spending assessment for Liverpool (£ per head)	£875	£887
Average standard spending assessment for inner London boroughs (£ per head)	£1,090	£1,141
Standard spending assessment for Tower Hamlets (£ per head)	£1,481	£1,535
Standard spending assessment for Hackney (£ per head)	£1,305	£1,295

Notes

The figures have not been adjusted for changes in function. The £ per head figures for England are not comparable with those for Liverpool or London authorities primarily because of the inclusion in the former of SSA elements for police and fire.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consultation takes place with local government before the annual standard spending assessment formula is determined; and if he will make it his policy to publish information requested by local government about next year's standard spending assessment before the consultation period has been completed; [18937]

(2) how many local authorities came to see Ministers this year about the standard spending assessment; and what changes to the standard spending assessment methodology have been proposed as a result of the meeting with those authorities. [18938]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There are annual discussions with the local authority associations in the local government finance settlement working group. In particular, a technical sub-group of officials from the associations and relevant Government Departments meets approximately 10 to 12 times between March and September each year to consider possible changes in methodology. An annual report of this sub-group's work is published and discussed at the consultative council on local government finance, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend. In December, provisional standard spending assessments are published and sent to all local authorities together with an explanation of any proposed changes in methodology and the underlying data which has been used. There is a formal period of consultation during which local authorities may make representations. In the light of this consultation, final standard spending assessments are calculated and sent to local authorities.

The information which is provided to local government at all the key stages in the annual cycle is discussed with the local authority associations. Wherever practicable, we seek to meet local authority requests for information.

Department of the Environment Ministers met 90 delegations from local authorities during consultation on the provisional local government finance settlement. In addition, nine police authorities had meetings with Home Office Ministers. As a result of representations made during consultation, there was only one methodology change, concerning the application of the area cost adjustment within the police formula, but a number of the issues raised will be examined in the next settlement and have been included in the programme of the technical sub-group mentioned above.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the ratio between the change in the level of resources provided through the area cost adjustment over the last year and *(a)* the level of inflation and *(b)* overall changes in the standard spending. [18947]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The total contribution of the area cost adjustment to standard spending assessments rose by 7.9 per cent. between 1994–95 and 1995–96. In 1994–95, however, the SSA for the receiver for the Metropolitan police was based on his budget. This included those extra costs which, from 1995–96, are reflected in the area cost adjustment. Excluding these, the increase in the total area cost adjustment contribution was 1.3 per cent. This compares with an overall increase in SSAs between 1994–95 and 1995–96 of 2.4 per cent. The projected increase in the GDP deflator for 1995–96 is 3.25 per cent.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reserves were held by each county council at 31 March 1994 under the headings *(a)* the reserves for local management of schools, *(b)* earmarked reserves, *(c)* free balances and *(d)* total reserves.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on Monday 13 March, *Official Report*, column *421*. No further breakdown into earmarked reserves and free balances is available.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the values at the end of each financial year since 1985 for each of the North Yorkshire district councils. [18814]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: For districts in North Yorkshire, average right-to-buy values are given below, in £s for each financial year, before any discount:

	1985–86	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Craven	19,071	20,643	20,938	25,222	32,583	45,488	41,135	39,633	39,775
Hambleton	19,151	21,794	23,624	29,956	39,790	46,972	45,747	45,474	n/a
Harrogate	17,709	20,420	20,830	24,659	34,086	42,210	43,361	41,910	41,715
Richmondshire	19,245	20,593	21,957	26,104	30,503	37,288	41,856	40,079	38,204
Ryedale	19,810	21,878	22,658	27,928	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scarborough	19,557	19,877	20,137	24,173	32,310	38,028	39,939	43,448	41,042
Selby	19,600	20,600	21,800	23,997	31,212	31,940	38,625	41,165	41,075
York	19,418	20,802	22,537	27,161	39,035	43,627	43,809	42,522	40,938

Average right–to–buy prices represent the values of dwellings that have been sold and may not be representative of the stock still in council ownership. They represent a measure of vacant possession value rather than tenanted market value. Some values in the table are not available because data is no longer collected following the authority's transfer of dwellings to a housing association.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further consideration he is giving to the appointment of a trouble shooter to spearhead the objective 1 programmes on Merseyside. [18935]

Sir Paul Beresford: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities in Great Britain are in receipt of objective 1 funding; and what account is taken of this designation in determining standard spending assessments. [18940]

Sir Paul Beresford: Within Great Britain the only city eligible for funding from the European Commission under objective 1 is Liverpool.

The receipt of EC assistance is not taken into account in assessing the standard spending assessments of local authorities.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he is giving to the effect of the standard spending assessment on Liverpool's ability to identify funds to match against proposed objective 1 scheme; and what impact this is having on the city's ability to gain access to the objective 1 grants available. [18934]

Sir Paul Beresford: Standard spending assessments are the Government's assessment of what revenue local authorities need to spend in order to provide a common level of service. There is no direct relationship between SSAs and the ability of an area to match EC grants which are predominantly grants towards capital expenditure.

Matching funding for such grants is available from a variety of sources including domestic public expenditure programmes, UDCs, TECs, and the private and voluntary sectors as well as from local authorities' own resources.

Wildlife Controls

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to increase the use of DNA testing in the enforcement of wildlife controls. [18835]

Sir Paul Beresford: In my announcement of 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *1115-16* I promised to keep the House advised of the developments in the use of DNA tests.

The results of research commissioned by the Department and recent successful prosecutions based on DNA evidence have demonstrated the effectiveness of DNA testing as an aid to the enforcement of wildlife controls. We are therefore taking a number of steps to promote and extend its use as part of our commitment to improving the protection of threatened species.

We have today written to all police chief constables in Great Britain giving information about DNA testing, outlining the ways in which it can assist in the investigation of possible offences, and providing advice on its practical application. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library of the House. My Department is commissioning a study to establish what further guidance and other practical assistance we should provide on testing standards and procedures in this field.

We have allocated £40,000 to finance selective DNA tests to be commissioned by the Department's wildlife inspectorate. The results will provide a means of verifying the information held on the existing bird registration database.

On 20 July, I announced in my reply to the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), *Official Report*, column *319*, that my Department had funded research on the use of DNA testing to identify the parentage of birds. The results of this research are set out in Nottingham university's report "Genetic Variation in Birds of Prey—Phase IV", copies of which were placed in the Library of the House in December last year. As part of this project, the university has developed a number of genetic probes—"single locus probes"—which can be used to analyse blood samples, and greatly simplify the process of DNA fingerprinting. I hope that other laboratories will soon be in a position to use these probes to undertake DNA tests on wildlife to assist in the investigation of possible offences.

The Department also proposes to commission research into the scope for simplifying tests, and using genetic material such as feathers rather than blood.

The Department's working group to review the enforcement of wildlife controls—which I announced on 20 December in my reply to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), *Official Report*, column *1115-16*—is examining the use of DNA tests and the application of other forensic methods. The group will submit its recommendations to me by the end of July.

Substandard Properties, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties in *(a)* the council sector and *(b)* the private sector in Liverpool are classified as substandard dwellings. [18946]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities are requested to provide information on dwellings in their area which are unfit—that is, fail to meet all the fitness criteria in section 83 of schedule 9 of the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act—in their annual housing investment programme returns.

The latest available data relate to 1 April 1994, at which time Liverpool reported 3,393 unfit local authority dwellings in its area—8 per cent. of total stock—and 18,000 unfit private sector dwellings—excluding housing association dwellings; 15 per cent. of total stock. The private sector figure is based on a sample survey carried out in 1992.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to meet the representative bodies for the housing co-operative movement to discuss funding and strategy for the housing co-operative sector; [18839]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the views of tenants in housing co-operatives are adequately represented to Government. [18840]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: While there are no current plans to meet the representative bodies for the housing co-operative movement, I will be accepting the invitation from the all-party group on housing co-operatives, on behalf of the Minister for Housing, for a meeting to discuss funding and strategy. Tenants of housing co-operatives can of course feed their views into that group, as well as passing them on directly to the Housing Corporation or to Government.

Council Housing

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses were held by each of the district authorities in North Yorkshire at the end of each financial year since 1979. [18815]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities report the numbers of dwellings they own in their annual housing investment programme returns. The figures for 1979 to 1994 for each district in North Yorkshire can be found in the "HIP1 All Items Print" for those years, copies of which are in the Library.

The references of the relevant columns in prints for 1979 to 1993 are as follows:

1979 : B11
1980 to 1990 : A11
1991 to 1993 : A11 and A16

For 1994 the figures can be found in section A of the "1994 HIP1 All Items Print".

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the values of disposals of council-owned property by each of the North Yorkshire district authorities for each financial year since 1990. [18817]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested, as reported by each of the district authorities in North Yorkshire, is as follows. The figures for council house purchase are based on the values of dwellings without subtracting the value of mortgage lending by local authorities.

Capital receipts from the sale of council dwellings in North Yorkshire (excluding lending for council house purchase)

£ thousand

Local authority	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Craven	517	263	379	612
Hambleton	1,087	1,288	1,348	31,422
Harrogate	1,367	1,480	888	1,487
Richmondshire	812	1,035	833	1,100
Ryedale	27,319	0	0	0
Scarborough	2,228	1,565	1,306	1,645
Selby	1,721	1,281	1,133	1,575
York	1,973	2,001	2,183	3,009

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require Cherwell district council to consult further with its tenants before he considers any further proposals for the transfer of any of its housing to another landlord. [18777]

Mr. Curry: Whether the council should be required to carry out further consultation with its tenants is a matter which would need to be considered only when the council submitted an application for the Secretary of State's consent to transfer housing to a new landlord. No application from the council is before the Secretary of State.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of all tenants of Cherwell district council voted *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the proposed transfer of their homes to another landlord when they were consulted on this option. [18776]

Mr. Curry: In March 1994, separate ballots were held in the Banbury area and the rest of the district, and in each area the tenants were asked two questions. On the question whether they were in favour of the council transferring all its homes in their area to a new housing association, 31.4 per cent. of the tenants, taking the district as a whole, voted for transfer and 47.5 per cent. voted against. On the question whether they were in favour of their own homes transferring to a new housing association even if a majority of the tenants in their area decided to stay with the council, 27.6 per cent. of the tenants, taking the district as a whole, voted for transfer and 49.2 per cent. voted against.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has of the impact of the delay of the proposed transfer of housing from Cherwell district council to the Cherwell Valley housing association on the housing revenue account in Cherwell district in 1995–96. [18778]

Mr. Curry: I understand that Cherwell district council has decided to increase the rents of its remaining houses by an average of £1.62 a week in 1995–96, which is below the Department's HRA subsidy rent guideline of £1.82 a week.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold in each financial year since 1982 by each of the district authorities in North Yorkshire. [18816]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables showing the available information on the volume of total council house sales for each English local authority for every financial year since 1980 and a cumulative total to March 1994 are in the Library.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the total allocation to housing co-operatives by the Housing Corporation in 1995–96 reflects the proportion of the total Housing Corporation allocation that housing co-operatives were targeted to achieve in the Housing Corporation's Co-operatives strategy published in 1993; what steps he is taking to increase the funding to housing co-operatives; and if he will make a statement. [18838]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The total allocation for development made by the Housing Corporation to housing co-operatives in 1995–96 will be some £9.5 million. The corporation's co-operatives strategy made it clear that target investment levels were subject to co-operatives gaining funding on the same criteria as other housing associations. All housing associations including co-operatives bid for allocations from the Housing Corporation's approved development programme on a competitive basis. The successful bids are those which meet the priority needs identified by local authorities in their housing strategies, on the most cost-effective basis.

Pesticides

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department has taken to *(a)* reduce the use of agriculture pesticides and *(b)* set national pesticide reduction standards. [18875]

Mr. Atkins: It is the Government's policy to minimise the use of pesticides through the rigorous approval and review of products, through guidance to users and through research and development. Targets for reducing emissions of certain pesticides to the marine environment have been agreed by the international conferences on the protection of the North sea.

Anti-social Behaviour (Council Estates)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to help local authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour on council estates; and whether he will make a statement. [18837]

Mr. Curry: My Department has issued today a consultation paper on proposals to introduce a system of probationary tenancies for new tenants on council estates. Copies have been placed in the Library and the Vote Office.

Under these proposals, local authorities will be able, if they wish, to put new tenants on probation for a year. Authorities exercising this discretion will have to give probationary tenancies to all their new tenants. If tenants complete their probation satisfactorily, their tenancies will be converted into secure tenancies. If, however, tenants do not behave responsibly their authority will be able to terminate their tenancy at any time during the probationary period by serving a notice to quit.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is consulting separately on these proposals.

Pollution Report

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish the findings of the advisory committee for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. [18836]

Mr. Atkins: My Department is publishing the committee's interim report today. I am grateful to members of the committee for producing a useful and timely report. They have suggested a challenging set of recommendations for the inspectorate to improve further its capabilities as an efficient and effective organisation in the run-up to the creation of the Environment Agency. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has responded positively to the committee's views. I am today placing a copy of both the report and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution substantive response to the recommendations in the Library of the House.

Local Plan Process

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to respond to the consultation paper entitled "Improving the Local Plan Process", published in March 1994. [18976]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local plan process needs to operate more responsively and efficiently. There must be sound, up-to-date plans in place, capable of speedy review, if the plan-led system is to work well. The Government's aim is:

(i) in the short term, to give more impetus to current plan preparation, in order to achieve the maximum practicable area wide local plan coverage by the end of 1996; and

(ii) in the longer term, to speed up the entire process, so that local authorities are not discouraged from reviewing and updating existing plans because it is too time consuming and costly.

The consultation paper prompted over 300 responses, which we have carefully considered.

We are already implementing the straightforward proposals, such as those concerned with the better management of the process, in liaison with the local authorities associations and the Planning Inspectorate agency. The inspectorate is taking forward a number of initiatives, such as shorter inspectors' reports, the use of assistant inspectors and the development of advisory services.

In addition, we propose to introduce shortly:

(i) revised planning policy guidance, providing for local planning authorities to carry out more effective consultation on their plans at the pre-deposit stage; and

(ii) substantial revision of the Department's published code of practice on local plan inquiries, with the aim of helping planning authorities to manage the entire plan-making process more effectively and economically.

External Finance Limits

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes were made to the external financing limits for the urban development corporations, Urban Regeneration Agency, housing action trusts and docklands light railway in 1994–95. [19337]

Mr. Curry: External finance limits were increased by £1,250,000 from £90,715,000 to £91,965,000 for the housing action trusts, by £500,000 from £7,000,000 to £7,500,000 for Birmingham Heartlands development corporation and by £1,500,000 from £116,806,000 to £118,306,000 for the Urban Regeneration Agency. The external finance limit of the docklands light railway was reduced by £500,000 from £38,900,000 to £38,400,000. The remaining increases were met from identified savings on the urban programme.

Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the jobs that have been lost to agencies in his Department in the past two years that have *(a)* been taken over by contractors and *(b)* disappeared. [18324]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 4 April 1995]:* The Department of the Environment contains five agencies—the Planning Inspectorate, the Building Research Establishment, the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, the Buying Agency and the Securities Facilities Executive. The Planning Inspectorate's work is demand led and the agency has reduced its staffing level in line with falling appeals. No jobs have been contracted out or functions ceased. The Building Research Establishment has entered into a partnership agreement with a private firm to undertake its publications business. Four staff transferred to the new company and three others left the BRE. A number of staff transferred within BRE as part of a consequential reorganisation. The total number of staff employed by the BRE is dependant on the income it is able to generate. Staff numbers in the other three agencies have increased in the past two years to meet operational needs.

The Secretary of State is also responsible for the Ordnance Survey, where staff numbers have been reduced by 278 in the past two years. Only two posts were taken over by contractors. The other lost posts are the net effect of changes in operational activities and efficiency gains.

Local Inquiries

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the decision to hold the BNP bookshop inquiry at Crayford town hall; and if he will make a statement. [17796]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 3 April 1995]:* The provision of information on public local inquiries is the responsibility of the planning inspectorate. I have asked the inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. David Evennett, dated 31 March 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO. 117796/95/96

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the representations he has received about the decision to hold the BNP bookshop inquiry at the Crayford Town Hall.

In all, six representations have been received. Three were addressed to the Secretary of State, and all were referred to the Planning Inspectorate for reply.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 257**

SESSION 1994–95

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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